Urgent Human Rights Commission Monitors Meetings

(Scalabrini Tuesday, 26 August 2008 14h00)

Minutes from Participants:

James Williams:

Many questions and issues were raised - below is more of a summary of what was said from the Province:

Situation: 3314 people officially 'in the system' as displaced (3269 in Cape Town). It was recognized that the numbers are inaccurate.

All the community halls to close at end of August; all camps will be consolidated to Youngfield, Blue Waters, and Harmony Park, though changes in Youngsfield will be minimal. 300 UNHCR family tents (each 8 person) are being assembled in the three sites.

Bussed movement will begin Thursday and end Monday (1st September) to coincide with Ramadan. Movements will be on a zone-by-zone basis. Individuals do not have the right to choose a site; however, most camp and site populations will be kept together.

A meeting was held yesterday (25th) with the Joint Refugee Leadership Committee. Mediators are now speaking to all sites and will continue in the coming days. Information is being released orally, including dates; attendees at the meeting asked for printed versions (e.g. posters) of information, at least. There will be a Province and UN press briefing tomorrow somewhere at 12h00.

The schedule of moves is not going to be made public; we asked for it to be made so. A contact list has been asked for from Province with emergency and other telephone numbers for volunteers and others to use during the moves.

The remaining camps will be run differently: (1) by a larger Venue Operation Center (VOC) which will consist of twelve members, controlled by Disaster Management, with individuals assigned to specific matters (education, food, different health needs, security, etc.); (2) a new access control card will be issued at some point; security and access will be significantly increased in the future. The cards may be tied to food distribution. Further, a set of camp rules and regulations has been drafted, and a draft Code of Conduct for all volunteers and observers. A UNICEF officer has been assigned to track education matters arising.

Considerable time was spent on the issue of how people will be moved. The position of Province: People have the right not to move; however, the existing sites that are closing will not be recognized as official safety sites and all state-provided resources will stop being provided, though it was not specified when, including, when tents and toilets will be taken down.

Armed police will be present during the moves in a substantial number, and a security scenario plan has been drafted, including procedures for dealing with 'other consequences'. It was expressed that the presence of the police may be very distressing and invoke feelings of being criminalized, that the police have not always used appropriate actions thus far, and have been perpetrators of xenophobia. It was felt that dignity and sensitivity must be paramount. Where possible, police will not move individuals - rather, mediators and camp and other staff will coordinate it. Various suggestions were made on more appropriate procedures, such as using safety monitors and marshals and fewer, unarmed police, or separating out times between the date of the move and the arrival of the police for those remaining.

Province expressed the usefulness of civil society in the process, but it was unclear what role that includes. The Province said it would be useful if civil society groups issued statements outlining their position on the process.

Other issues raised: all meetings should be minuted, job descriptions of all VOC personnel should be shared.

Ali Davis' Additions:

No one is moving to Youngsfield, all people are being moved to Bluewaters and Harmony Park. The moves on Thursday will focus on Community Halls with the exception of a few sites in Khayelitsha who had made an agreement to stay through Sunday. Soetwater will be moved over a period of two days (though they did not say when that would commence- it is not listed as one of the moves scheduled for Thursday).

If you would like more information on the move, please contact the provincial mediators in your area.

The 'Zones' are the zones that were delineated for the Registration process that the Department of Home Affairs undertook.

The new Access control cards are meant to be issued to residents of the camps before the new residents arrive. They are using the lists that camp managers currently have as their registration for the new cards, there seems to be a feeling that these lists are, more or less, accurate. They have not fully outlined this process though they have agreed not to mention the words 'reintegration' or 'repatriation' during the process.

For those who decide to stay in a camp that has been moved, it has been suggested that government follow current eviction protocol.

It has also been suggested that all civil society organizations draft codes of conduct for staff or volunteers who work with refugees, thus far only the UN and SAHRC have codes of conduct.