

ARASA
AIDS & Rights
Alliance for
Southern Africa



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4 June 2008

MEC Marius Fransman
MEC of Transport and Public Works
9 Dorp Street
Cape Town
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Per fax: 021 483 2217

Dear MEC Fransman

TRANSPORT ARRANGEMENTS FOR DISPLACED PEOPLE IN THE WESTERN CAPE

1. We write to you on behalf of more than 50 organisations who met on Saturday 31 May 2008 to coordinate a community-based response. Those present ranged from national bodies such as the regional, AIDS and Rights Alliance of Southern Africa (ARASA), national organisations such as Cosatu and the South African Council of Churches (SACC) to community-based organisations including many displaced people in the Cape Metro and other parts of the province.
2. Over 20,000 people in the Western Cape have been displaced to date due to the xenophobic violence against refugees, immigrants and even visitors from African countries that erupted in the Western Cape. Many of the displaced have fled the province, others have returned to their communities, but approximately at least 10 000 people remain in camps and shelters on the outskirts of the city.
3. We want to offer all the possible assistance to ensure reintegration based on a guarantee of safety, United Nations access to explain the rights (including that of return to home or repatriation to a third country) to those who desire it. In this context, we want to raise the question of freedom of movement and access to safe transport for displaced people.

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND ACCESS TO SAFE TRANSPORT

4. A large proportion of displaced people (both from camps and shelters) are staying far away from their places of work, schools and health centres. Public transport, including minibus taxis and the trains are often dangerous for any

immigrant, asylum-seeker, refugee, non-national visitor and permanent resident particularly those from African countries.

5. There are several reports of people being attacked on the trains. People living at the various sites fear using minibus taxis. This happened before the wave of xenophobic violence and has occurred on many occasions in individual instances over the years.

SCHOOL, WORK AND REINTEGRATION


6. People in the sites need to be able to travel to their places of work everyday and to also travel from the various camps across the city. At the moment people are isolated within the sites and they have inadequate freedom of movement.
7. There are children of school-going age in many of the camps and shelters who have no access to education due to a lack of safe transport.
8. At many of the camps, such as Soetwater, where 3,500 displaced people are staying, there is no public transport available for displaced people to use. Many have lost all of their possessions due to the attacks. Due to the lack of transport, they are also at risk of losing their jobs which they desperately need as a source of income. Or, they are unable to recover their possessions.
9. For those who wish to reintegrate in our communities, there is no transport access or reliable communication on the degree of safety in communities. There are families dispersed across shelters and the city who cannot be visited because of a lack of transport.

REQUEST FROM CIVIL SOCIETY

10. We appreciate the work done thus far by various government agencies despite many deficiencies. To improve transport and freedom of movement issues, we request the following:
 - 10.1. That, MEC Marius Fransman (Transport and Public Works) convene a meeting of Metrorail, Golden Arrow, the various Taxi Associations and the South African Police Service (SAPS), Metro Police and any other stakeholders to urgently devise a plan that will allow for people to travel safely from each site and camp to their places of work and to other places.
 - 10.2. Central to the plan is the additional security on all train lines where any non-national is vulnerable to attack and on all other major transport routes.
 - 10.3. A joint statement calling on all commuters to resist any attempts at xenophobic harassment or attacks, and, to support the rights of all people (including those who are targets of xenophobia) to safety and security.
 - 10.4. A budget dedicated to transport for those who are displaced in shelters and camps. Most of the displaced people have lost all their money or have not been able to return to work and thus are not be able to pay for transport. Some kind of arrangement for transport vouchers needs to be made with the Province and the City for people needing to travel to and from all the sites (including the shelters and the camps).

In our view, your urgent intervention is needed to ensure that safe and secure transport is arranged. We are willing to assist in every way possible but the state has the resources and the constitutional duty to provide and facilitate such transport.

Yours faithfully



Zackie Achmat (Deputy Secretary-General, Treatment Action Campaign)
Fatima Hassan (Senior Attorney, AIDS Law Project)
Evan Abrahamse (COSATU)

CC:

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