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Health, Law and Human Rights Organisations Condemn Arrest of Migrants in Pretoria by Department of Home Affairs

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24 February 2008 Leading health, law and human rights organisations condemn the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) for arresting 143 foreign nationals in Pretoria on Thursday, 21 February 2008. These individuals, from various African countries were seeking refuge from violence in Itireleng, Pretoria and sought safety at the Laudium police station. Instead of being protected from such attacks, they were arrested and have since been transported to the notorious Lindela Holding Facility and are now facing possible deportation. The AIDS Law Project; the AIDS and Rights Alliance for Southern Africa; Bowman Gillfillan; the Central Methodist Mission; the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa; Lawyers for Human Rights; the Legal Resources Centre; Medecins Sans Frontieres; People Against Suffering, Suppression, Oppression and Poverty; the South African Council of Churches; Southern African HIV/AIDS Clinicians Society; the Treatment Action Campaign; the University of Cape Town Law Clinic, and the Wits Law Clinic came together this week in Cape Town to discuss the pattern of ongoing and endemic abuse of foreign nationals and refugees in South Africa by the SAPS, Home Affairs, and other government agencies. We are particularly disturbed that this recent action in Pretoria follows shortly after the brutal, unlawful raid on the Central Methodist Church over the night of 30-31 January by the South African Police Service (SAPS), in which 350 mainly Zimbabwean refugees were beaten, harassed and detained for several days in Johannesburg Central Police Station. We are therefore calling for immediate access to those arrested and now detained at Lindela. This incident is one in a series of abusive enforcement of immigration policies against people seeking humanitarian protection and refuge against economic and political repression in South Africa. We commit ourselves to continue to monitor the tenuous situation of migrants in South Africa to ensure that the enforcement of immigration legislation and treatment of migrants is consistent with the Constitution and international human rights law. For further comment, please contact: Sicel mpilo Shange-Buthane, Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa, 011-717-4047 or 076-569-8364 Fatima Hassan, AIDS Law Project, 083-279-9962

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