Published on *Treatment Action Campaign* (http://tac.org.za/community)

Caledon Square refugees running out of shelter: Mayor's response is callous and racist

By *moderator*
Created *2008/06/11 - 1:06pm*
11 June, 2008 - 13:06 ? moderator

Caledon Square refugees running out of shelter: Mayor's response is callous and racist

- Plea to Mayor Helen Zille and other state authorities: Open community centres for displaced people including:
    - Sea Point Civic Centre, Good Hope Centre, Cape Town Civic Centre or similar for the 170 people making up the Caledon Square Group;
    - Woodstock Community Hall, Salt River Railway Institute or similar for over 100 people staying at the Tennyson Street Mosque;
    - Muizenberg Civic Centre or similar for the 50 people staying at the old TAC office at 34 Main Road.
- Mayor is refusing to open community halls in white areas.

A tragedy is unfolding in the centre of Cape Town. The Caledon Square group is made up of about 170 people displaced by the recent xenophobic violence.Thirteen of them are children. The group is led by Deo Kabembe. Mr Kabembe has lost his small business in Phillipi as a result of the violence. Others in the group have lost their panel beating businesses. Some in the group work in the Central Business District (CBD). Most of the group have fled the terror in Zimbabwe and civil wars in Rwanda, Burundi, the DRC and Uganda. Many have refugee status in South Africa. At all times the group has acted with the utmost dignity and restraint.

On the first few nights after the xenophobic violence erupted in Cape Town, the group slept outside Caledon Square Police Station. Fortunately it did not rain and the weather was relatively warm. They then stayed four nights in Weizmann school hall in Sea Point. Since then, the Treatment Action Campaign and members of the Jewish community raised money to shelter the group at a venue called the Train Lodge in the city centre. That funding is now running out and at present there is no money to continue sheltering the group.

The Caledon Square Group has three demands:

(1) They want to be sheltered in the CBD or surrounding suburbs.

(2) They want the UNHCR to assist them to return to their countries of origin.

(3) They want compensation for their lost businesses, homes and livelihoods.

They do not want to leave the CBD or its surrounding suburbs for several reasons: (1) They are afraid of moving back to centres in communities where xenophobic gangs purged them. (2) Most of the group either work or are looking for work in the CBD; they need to remain close to the city centre. (3) Most of them come from countries in which gross human rights violations took place in refugee camps and so they do not want to move to the refugee camps established by the city. (4) The conditions in the refugee camps, such as Soetwater, Silwerstroom and Blue Waters are appalling. (5) They are receiving extensive support from the Sea Point community and moving far out of the CBD will make further support impractical.

They have been wronged and it is the duty of the state to accommodate them. So far only community centres in African and a few coloured areas have been opened. Even these only continue to remain open as a result of a court order sought by the province against the city. The city is intent on moving all displaced people to the refugee camps and keeping community centres, especially ones in white and coloured areas, closed. The mayor has refused to open Sea Point Civic Centre or the other places that have been suggested. This is despite a petition by over 400 people who are friends, parents and students of Weizmann School in Sea Point pleading with the mayor and the premier to open the Sea Point Civic Centre. The school is willing to make its hall available for essential civic centre activities that might need to be moved. Only stubborn "kragdadigheid", reminiscent of the apartheid Government's leaders, a ppears to be guiding the mayor's decision to keep the civic centre closed.

The likelihood that the Caledon Square Group will end up sleeping outside in the cold and rain increases daily.

Displaced people staying at the Tennyson Street Mosque in Salt River and the old TAC offices in Muizenberg are in similar predicaments.

We therefore call on the mayor to stop her racist and callous policies. Open more community facilities, including in white suburbs.

- Immigrants and Refugees

- Immigrants and Refugees

Source URL (retrieved on *2016/10/28 - 10:19pm*): http://tac.org.za/community/node/2343