

TAC members and displaced people protest outside Western Cape Provincial Government Building

By *moderator*

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About 400 people including TAC members and displaced refugees delivered the following memorandum to the Western Cape Provincial Government today:

Joint Civil Society memorandum to the Western Cape Provincial Government (PGWC)

Immediately following the xenophobic attacks in the Western Cape in May 2008, thousands of displaced foreign nationals sought shelter and safety in more than 85 sites across Cape Town. Some were cared for by faith-based organizations, and community organisations, others were provided basic food and shelter by NGOs. Thousands more were forced by their dire circumstances into the bigger refugee camps.

The City of Cape Town, under the leadership of the Democratic Alliance, insisted that these camps were the best way of managing the humanitarian disaster, refusing to open community halls and centres in the southern suburbs, central business district and Atlantic seaboard, i.e. historically white areas. **We condemn this racist and xenophobic response by Mayor Helen Zille. We condemn her spate of callous comments about refugees and immigrants and other displaced people. We further condemn her inefficient management of the refugee camps that she has established and the continuing undignified conditions at these camps.**

The PGWC, under the African National Congress, insisted that the management of the disaster was initially in the hands of the City until it declared a provincial disaster.

Lack of participation on behalf of these bodies, together with the lukewarm interest from the UNHCR has prolonged and exacerbated the crisis.

We condemn this lack of leadership displayed by the province.

Finally, after three weeks, a Province and City Joint Task Team was formed. **It is required to manage and coordinate the disaster.**

But still no resolution has been found.

While some displaced people have returned to their communities, thousands remain in the camps and private shelters. These figures are estimates only of the amount of displaced people still requiring humanitarian aid:

- Camps: 4214
- City Shelters: 1296
- Private (churches, mosques etc): 2761
- Total: 8271

Sustained relief has proved problematic: Within the camps, basic needs are not being met, and conditions are deteriorating, especially with the onset of winter. Tents have been destroyed in storms, camps have been flooded, and food and water supplies have been inadequate. Health care has been sporadic. Counselling needs have not been met, and stress and depression are widespread. Often, there are restrictions on movement, and access to transport is not freely available. Intimidation within the camps has been reported; lack of security has led to consistent fear in women and girls in particular. many children are not going to school.

Sustained humanitarian relief efforts have caused enormous strain on organizations not familiar with a humanitarian disaster of this magnitude. The level of relief required in formally managed sites was phenomenal: Very conservative figures put these at around 20 000 people in 80 sites in the first few days following xenophobia and displacement in the Western Cape. Non-Governmental organizations, faith-based organizations and community-based organizations, together with individual volunteers attempted to fulfill the task of the state by providing a full range of support including: health care, food, shelter, clothing, social support, basic sanitation and protection.

Our repeated and urgent requests to the PGWC have been met with mostly tardy and terse responses. Where appeals and suggestions have been made by NGOs and community-based organizations they have been ignored or deferred. Policies ill-equipped to cope with an unprecedented crisis have been used to deliver a response that has been consistently uncommitted and negative.

PGWC has not delivered proper services to the camps. There has not been enough food or counseling and camp people have been turned away from health clinics.

At a difficult but ultimately productive meeting with civil society on 24 June 2008, PGWC undertook to provide adequate shelter, food, sanitation, security and transport to displaced people within 48 hours. **We welcome this renewed commitment by the province.**

Our demands to the PGWC are:

- It must undertake to promote and preserve basic human rights, according to the Constitution of South Africa, to those individuals living in refugee camps and other sites. Displaced people must receive food, shelter, sanitation, health-care, transport and protection in a dignified manner, consistent with international norms and standards. We will monitor the situation to ensure that it meets its commitment to comply within 48 hours of 15:00, 24 June.
- South Africa, and in particular the PGWC, has many resources. We insist that if the PGWC is unable to apply these resources practically, they must make them available to organizations and volunteers willing to carry out relief work.
- Many displaced people still remain in refugee camps. We have always called for these camps to be closed, but only once displaced people have agreed to leave them and adequate, safe suitable alternative shelter is made available. The PGWC must work with the CCT to ensure that adequate food, shelter, sanitation, health-care, transport and protection is provided to the refugee camps and all other sites.
- PGWC has indicated to us that it is extremely difficult to adequately meet international norms for providing food, shelter, sanitation, health-care and protection in the refugee camps established by the CCT. We therefore call on the PGWC to step up pressure on the City to open more community halls, particularly in historically white areas, including Sea Point Civic Centre and several community halls from Woodstock to Simons Town and along or near the M4. But, nevertheless, the PGWC must improve food, shelter, sanitation, health-care and protection in the camps while camps are open.
- We call on the PGWC and the City to work more consistently with each other and to support communities with re-integration and resettlement options with the formal and direct involvement of the UN and its agencies.

- We ask that the Joint Task Team develop an urgent strategic plan for dealing with this disaster, and that they make this plan available to displaced people and those providing humanitarian aid, including the general public.
- We demand that where people voluntarily wish to be reintegrated that they will be offered protection and support, and that they receive appropriate compensation to do so.
- We demand that no-one be forced to reintegrate against his or her will, or be forced to leave the country against his/her will.
- We call for a blanket moratorium on deportations, and that PGWC seek to protect displaced individuals until the UNHCR, the Department of Home Affairs and Provincial Government can achieve a proper solution regarding repatriation, resettlement or reintegration.

We ask that these demands be met within a reasonable time-frame.

We call on the province to lead the response to this humanitarian disaster.

Organisations endorsing this memorandum:

Treatment Action Campaign

Social Justice Coalition

Amandla Publishers

Sonke Gender Justice Network

AIDS Law Project

PASSOP

Habonim DROR

Displaced Refugee Network

UWC School of Public Health

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