

WORLD REFUGEE DAY 20 JUNE 2007

Motherwell, Port Elizabeth



The Significance of World Refugee Day

The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), in partnership with the Department of Home Affairs, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and several non-governmental and community-based structures commemorated World Refugee Day in Port Elizabeth on 20 June.

The event was held in Port Elizabeth at NU1 stadium in Motherwell Township, under the theme “Promoting Tolerance and Acceptance through Diversity”, with a public event that created spaces for interaction between refugees and the host community.

This year’s World Refugee Day was a public call to all to uphold tolerance and understanding by reaching out a hand of friendship and good neighbourliness while standing in solidarity against the inhumanness of xenophobia.

South Africa is a signatory to the international legal framework on refugee protection, such as the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and the 1967 Protocol as well as the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.

These have been further translated and found expression in domestic legislation through the Refugees Act 130 of 1998. At the end of 2006, South Africa hosted approximately 223,470 refugees and asylum seekers, of which only 29,510 of these have been formally recognized as refugees.

World Refugee Day provides a formal opportunity for governments across the world to re-affirm the values upon which international agreements of refugee protection are based. It is also a time for all sectors of society to reflect on their role; to examine, form and strengthen partnerships on how best to find lasting solutions to the challenges faced by refugees.

In South Africa these challenges in the main part relate to access to refugee documentation that enables self-reliance and access to socio-economic services, mainly health and education. In addition to these issues, refugees are also subject to particular hardships such as family separation, exploitation, violence and generalised discrimination. They continue to bear the brunt of increasing intolerance, which has resulted in destruction of property and loss of lives as happened in areas of the

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

The Significance of World Refugee Day	1
Background and Activities	2
Speeches and Comments	3
About the SAHRC	4
SAHRC contact details	4

Eastern Cape of Duncan Village in East London, Uitenhage, Izinyoka and more recently Motherwell in Port Elizabeth. These issues are of serious concern to the SAHRC as they are contrary to the spirit of our Constitution that guarantees rights to all persons.

As a constitutionally mandated body the SAHRC works to promote and protect the rights of all people, and this includes refugees. As part of its mandate the SAHRC engages in community outreach work, through educational initiatives such as workshops, seminars and community dialogues; advocates and lobbies for a rights regarding regime; builds awareness and places issues onto the public agenda through the media; provides redress where there have been human rights violations and monitors the implementation of policies so that people can realise and enjoy their rights in their daily lives.

BACKGROUND AND ACTIVITIES

Promoting tolerance and acceptance through diversity

In February 2007, conflict erupted between the local residents of Motherwell township and Somali traders which resulted in the loss of livelihood and lives.

Spearheaded by the SAHRC, working in partnership with other stakeholders such as the Department of Home Affairs, UNHCR, and Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Council, interventions in the form of mediation and peace building efforts were initiated in affected communities. This resulted in the stabilization of the conflict. The SAHRC continues to be involved in ongoing effects to ensure smooth integration of refugee communities in Eastern Cape and the country at large.

As a result of this, Motherwell was uniquely placed to host World Refugee Day under the theme of promoting tolerance and fostering understanding between local communities and non nationals in a stand against the inhumanity of xenophobia. World Refugee Day 2007 commemorations took place at the NU1 stadium in Motherwell, Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape.

Activities

The day kicked off with a solidarity march lead by the South African Police Service (SAPS) band from the NU9 bus depot to the NU1 Stadium. At the NU1 stadium, the days' events were formally opened through interfaith prayers. Executive mayor, Cllr Nondumiso Maphazi welcomed stakeholders and appreciated the significance of hosting the event in Motherwell and Eastern Cape.

Stakeholders presented formal speeches in which they reflected on the significance of World Refugee Day and their vision for the rights of refugees. The 3000 strong crowd was also entertained by cultural youth groups and artists, interspersed between stakeholder speeches. To end the formal proceedings stakeholders signed a pledge and reaffirmed their commitment to tolerance and good neighbourliness.

The diverse crowd was provided with packed lunches and in keeping with the observance of diversity and respect for culture and religion, halaal food was also available. The day's events ended with a Solidarity soccer match between local community players and Somali youth.



Somali Soccer team



Youth Drama group doing sketch on refugee rights



Crowds attending the World Refugee Day Commemoration

Minister of Home Affairs Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqokula

We are all aware of the tensions that some communities have experienced in relation to the presence of foreigners, particularly of those who indeed are refugees. These tensions cannot be wished away, and we should not seek to ignore them

Instead, we must all be asking ourselves (local councillors, religious leaders, schools, sports and youth groups, the media, community and opinion leaders) what it is we are doing to encourage interaction, understanding, tolerance and acceptance.

Tolerance and acceptance of foreigners is surely part of a larger picture within our own society. Tolerance and acceptance of diversity, of those who are not like us are values which are at the heart of our Constitution and at the heart of what we are trying to achieve as a country. They are values enshrined in our Constitution precisely because they were denied to so many of us for so long in the land of our birth. Denied even to the extent that some were forced to flee, becoming exiles and refugees. These values of tolerance

and acceptance of diversity must start in our own homes and tolerance and acceptance between the diverse peoples of our own country is surely the basis for our interaction as a nation as we move forward together.

These are surely values we all seek to make reality as we build our society. These are values we must embrace because they are at the core of the whole idea of equality which is the foundation of our democracy and our society.

SAHRC Deputy Chair, person, Dr Zonke Majodina

In her presentation the Commissioner strongly condemned attacks on the Somali community and their businesses. She traced the SAHRC's long standing involvement and intervention during conflict between local communities and Somali communities going back to 1999 in the first attack in Uitenhage. She added that the Commission has continued to mediate and ensure that peace is restored in these communities.

Further she appealed to the Motherwell Community to treat refugees with respect and in accordance with the constitution.

UNCHR Regional Representative Ebrima Camara

“Every year, millions of people around the world are on the move in search of a better life. Some leave home looking for work or higher paying jobs. Others are pursuing educational opportunities or just want a change of climate. Yet for many, leaving homes and their homelands is not a choice.

Refugees are the people who take to the road against their will. Chased out of their villages and towns and separated from their families by conflict or persecution, refugees move only in search of safety.

Today, World Refugee Day is the occasion to remember those tens of millions of refugees and others who have been forcibly displaced, and to recall what makes them different. In an age of increasing globalization, when more and more people are on the move, refugees are not unique because they are away from home. What sets them apart is that they cannot return there.”

“The event has changed people's minds.”

Comment by Somali Community Leader.

Premier of the Eastern Cape, Mrs Nosimo Balindlela

It is difficult to comprehend the hardships and persecution from which many refugees have fled. The situation in which they find themselves is often unbearable and they are willing to sacrifice everything for safety and security in an unknown land.

As the world becomes a smaller place and as we all become part of the global village, it is important to recognise the theme of this year's commemoration - “Promoting Tol-

erance and Acceptance through Diversity”. Tolerance and acceptance is the key.

Recognising that we have different backgrounds, different cultures and different views – the fact remains that we must all adopt an approach of accepting global diversity within our midst. Just as the Xhosa, the Zulu, the Indian and the Afrikaner live side-by-side, so too must we adopt and accept the heritage, culture and values of our brothers and

sisters from countries like Somalia, Rwanda, the DRC and Zimbabwe.

South Africans hold the spirit of Ubuntu within their very souls. It is this spirit that has made us such a strong and proud nation. The notion of Ubuntu highlights the very being of people and the concept that “I am because we are”. This spirit must become part of our daily interaction with all people across the global divide.”

ABOUT THE SOUTH AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

MISSION STATEMENT

The SAHRC is a national institution established to entrench constitutional democracy through the promotion and protection of human rights by:

- Addressing human rights violations and seeking effective redress for such violations
- Monitoring and assessing the observance of human rights
- Raising awareness of human rights issues
- Educating and training on human rights



BASIC INFORMATION

Q. Who are defined as refugees?

A. Refugees are people who are outside their country and cannot return owing to a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group.

Q. Do refugees have the same rights as South Africans?

A. Refugees are entitled to the same rights as South African citizens, with just a few exceptions as set out in our constitution.

Q. Does the South African Human Rights Commission assist those who are not South African?

A. Yes, through a special programme focusing specifically on non-nationals.

EASTERN CAPE

Suite 22, 7th Floor, Allied Building
Govan Mbeki Avenue, Port Elizabeth
Tel: (041) 582 2611/4094
Fax: (041) 582 2204

FREE STATE

1st Floor, NBS Building, 2 Elizabeth Street
Bloemfontein
Tel: (051) 447 1130
Fax (051) 447 1128

GAUTENG (HEAD) OFFICE

29 Princes of Wales Terrace
Corner of York and St Andrews Street
Parktown, Johannesburg
Tel: (011) 484 8300
Fax (011) 484 71 49

KWAZULU-NATAL

First Floor, 136 Victoria Embankment,
Durban
Tel: (031) 304 7323/4/5
Fax: (031) 304 7323

LIMPOPO

1st Floor, Office 102, Library Garden
Square, Corner of Schoeman and Groble
Street, Polokwane
Tel: (015) 291 300
Fax: (015) 291 3505

MPUMALANGA

4th Floor Carltext Building, 32 Bell Street,
Nelspruit
PO Box 6574, Nelspruit
Tel (013) 72 5870/8292
Fax (013) 752 6890

NORTHERN CAPE

45 Mark and Scott Road,
Ancorley Building, Upington
Tel: (054) 332 3994/4
Fax (054) 332 7750

NORTH WEST

170 Klopper Street, Rustenburg
Tel: (014) 592 0694
Fax: (014) 594 1089

WESTERN CAPE

7th Floor, ABSA Building,
132 Adderley Street, Cape Town
Tel: (021) 426 2277
Fax: (021) 426 2875