



African Diaspora Forum - P.O Box 212 Isando 1600, Johannesburg

Fax: 086.664.84.14 - Cell: 083.514.73.67 / 082.744.59.35

E-mail: africandiasporaforum@gmail.com

LIVING TOGETHER, THE WAY FORWARD

**A PROPOSAL BY ADF (AFRICAN DIASPORA
FORUM)**

**FOLLOWING THEIR WORKING WITH GLENANDA/RIFLE
RANGE/R28 REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS**

8 August 2008

AFRICAN DIASPORA FORUM IN A NUTSHELL

OUR MEMBERSHIP

- The African Diaspora Forum is open to all willing individuals and organisations sharing the objectives of the Forum. Its originality consists in the union of a number of organisations representing African migrant communities living in South Africa.
- So far 19 African countries are represented in the Forum: Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Malawi, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

OUR OBJECTIVES

- To work for an integrated society that is free of xenophobia and all other kinds of discrimination;
- To promote and consolidate a Pan African forum for African residents of whatever nationality to work together to build one common voice on common issues, and a shared feeling of belonging to Africa
- To facilitate and develop relationships, exchanges and mutual understanding between South Africans and non South African residents in South Africa (in particular, but not exclusively, through the organisation of pan African cultural events; through the participation in civil society organisations at the local level – such as community policing forums, civics, street committees, etc.);
- To make sure that xenophobic statements in public discourses and policies do not remain unchallenged; and to work with South African institutions (at the national, provincial and local level) to promote integration between all African communities and to dismiss those discriminatory policies that fuel xenophobia.

OUR STRENGTHS

- Consisting of representatives (group or individuals) of various African communities, the Forum has specific language and cultural skills that can be used to facilitate communication as well as to organise cultural events;
- The forum can rely on extended networks of migrants within South African society and mobilise them for specific reasons (support to persons affected by xenophobia, organisation of pan African events of cultural or political nature, etc.);
- The forum has important organisation skills as many of its members are currently community leaders;
- The forum is open to anyone sharing the objectives mentioned above, but its specificity is its inclusion of various African communities; and its knowledge of the issues and challenges experienced at the grassroots level.

OUR CONTACT

Marc Gbaffou +27.83.514.73.67 - Rayban Sengwayo +27.71.430.37.29

Email: africandiasporaforum@gmail.com

BRIEF PRESENTATION OF ADF MEMBERS WORKING WITH GLENANDA /RIFLE RANGE /R28 REFUGEES

Miriam Davids, ADF Coordinator, also working for the Gauteng Department of Education, from South Africa

Marc Gbaffou, ADF Chair, chair of the Ivorian Community in South Africa, Deputy Chair of the Yeoville Stakeholders Forum

Dr. Judith Hayem, ADF International Affairs Representative, also Senior Lecturer in Anthropology and specialist of South African workers, at the University of Lille 1 (France).

Cyprian Ikani, ADF member, from Nigeria

Eddie Mazembo Mavungu, ADF Deputy PRO, chair of FOCAS, a federation of Congolese organizations

Nanou Mazambo Mavungu, ADF member, from the DRC

Ali Nailuwa, ADF member, from Malawi

Rayban Sengwayo, ADF PRO, also organiser of many carnivals in Gauteng.

OUR EXPERIENCE IN THE FIELD

THE CASE OF THE GLENANDA/RIFLE RANGE REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS OUTSIDE LINDELA, ALONG THE R28 (23d of July 2008 to 1st of August)

1) How we got there

Since the xenophobic attacks, while continuously working on the organization of the Pan-African carnival in Alexandra as a means to start dialogue, ADF has committed itself to keeping in touch with the people who took refuge at the police stations (Cleveland, Jeppe, ...). ADF has consistently visited the displaced in camps when they were moved down there (Glenanda/Rifle Range, Germiston, Midrand) and tried to engage them so as to help them find a solution to their situation. This has never been an easy process, nevertheless in Glenanda ADF had already helped the Tanzanian Embassy to repatriate most of its nationals wishing to leave South Africa back home. In order to do so, ADF has organised the registration of Tanzanian people at Glenanda camp and their signing that they wanted to leave.

On Sunday 22nd of August, while visiting various camps, ADF was refused entry at Rifle Range and told that the situation was becoming very tense inside, following the incidents with Home Affairs representative around the issue of registration, a few days before. The manager of the camp mentioned that people might be removed to Lindela soon. People from the camp standing at the gate also told ADF that a lot of intimidation was going on inside the camp. When hearing on the news that 800 people had been taken away to Lindela the following Wednesday, ADF members went to Glenanda only to find that the tents had indeed been removed and that people were now at Lindela. They drove to Lindela at night and came across a crowd of men, women, babies and children with heavy luggage getting out of the repatriation center, in the dark and walking along a dirt road to access the nearby road, namely the R28 going from Krugersdorp to Randfontein. They settled there in front of an Engen fuel station.

People were frightened and confused and said that following two nights outside the repatriation centre, they had been told to get moving and leave. Considering the fact that they had proper documents: government therefore told them that they were “free to go”. We convinced the people to stay together and organize for the night, as they were 45 k from Johannesburg without any transport (cosatu strike on that day) and no money in an insecure area. Therefore, they organized a camp on the side of the road. Before leaving the site Judy addressed them in French and English (many people could only speak French and addressing them as such did help a lot to bridge communication) promising to get back the following morning so as to try and find a way forward. This is how we engaged with them initially

2) What we did with the displaced

Engaging the people

The first thing was to engage the people ie, on the one hand, introduce ourselves and what we could or could not do without ever promising things we could not deliver; on the other hand, let the people introduce themselves as well.

We therefore started the exercise by asking people how they had got there, what was their view on the situation, and how did they see the way forward. This proved very important because:

- Firstly, by listening to the people we showed them that we actually regarded them as adults and proper interlocutors on the issue they were facing (instead of only regarding them as people 'to help, support, work for' which might emphasize their sense of helplessness);

- Secondly, it allowed us to get a clear picture of their political stand in the situation. They were not necessarily right in what they wanted.

- For instance, they had refused to sign for the new ID and to give their fingerprints for lack of understanding of the process. Most of them had Refugee (section 24) or Asylum Seeker status (section 22) because they did not understand why they should lose their 2 years rights in South Africa for a 6 months permit only.

- They also wrongly believed that UNHCR would provide them access to a third country like Canada or United States or France. Many were initially adamant they wanted to "go out of South Africa that very night!", as if we could transport them in a minute.

- Finally, they did not want to move or be accommodated elsewhere before they knew what was going to happen to them in the long run.

This latter view appeared to be a real political stand. They insisted on a two-steps solution. IE not only be removed to yet another camp or shelter but knowing what was going to happen to them next in terms of either repatriation or reintegration and they also insisted on staying together as long as possible and especially as family and friends, men and women together with their kids. They were very worried about the people still inside Lindela. Some women had their husbands inside. Some men had their kids and wives inside. The people on the R28 therefore insisted they would only move when reunited.

The point in 'engaging' the people here therefore meant not only discussion and dialogue but looking for solutions which were feasible, reasonable and acceptable on both sides (ours and theirs), considering as a starting point the reality of the situation, the tools at hands, and the actual conditions of people sleeping along the road in winter in South Africa, with kids and babies. This is what we kept on trying by engaging R28 people regarding their moving off the road, their indicating if they wanted to go or stay in South Africa, and ways to make these solutions actual.

Need for translation

Translation of discussions and information in several languages (especially French, English, and at time Lingala, which were the main languages spoken at the R28) proved absolutely essential in order to build trust.

We systematically addressed people as a group (when possible with a loudhailer) so as to avoid any kind of divisive rumours. Everybody got the information at the same time and we systematically answer questions put to us in both languages simultaneously. Therefore nobody could say that we were favouring that or this group, that family or another. This proved all the more important when the information came from other stakeholders such as SAPS, NGOs, Disaster Management, etc.

One might wonder why we did not try to identify leaders – for instance national group leaders - instead of using the complicated exercise of addressing a group of several hundreds people. This was attempted in several camps especially Glenanda and Accacia in order to have people registered and it failed and created tensions. Indeed, the identified “Peace marshals” could not necessarily convinced their ‘own people’ to sign for the ID (they lacked positive arguments or explanations to do so) and thereafter were intimidated, criticized and sometimes worse simultaneously by their own group for ‘working with the enemy’ and the camp manager ‘for organizing resistance’ (conversations with several terrified ex-peace Marshals at R28).

On the opposite, **addressing people as a group allowed individuals to make their own mind and at some point to come to us individually or as a family** either to seek more information or to indicate their own decision to stay or go. This was obvious when we started the registration process. People came to our car and queued peacefully one would tell us he wanted to go, the next one wishes to stay. It was not a reason to fight anymore.

Build and secure trust

Building trust has proved essential. It entails a long process and a daily face-to-face with the people. Each time we mentioned our coming back, we did come back. It also meant being absolutely public at all times in regards to what we were doing, what we had managed or failed to do, etc even when the news were bad.

We also made sure that it was clear to the people who we were talking to on their behalf. IE talking to SAPS or Disaster Management did not mean we agreed to them removing people forcefully from the road it only meant that those were stakeholders which could not be ignored. Each time we translated for stakeholders we asked them to introduce themselves precisely.

Push people to organize for themselves

Losing all your belongings, being attacked, hanging in camps or police station for days or weeks left people depressed, stressed and powerless or so they felt. It was important to break the sense of fatality by engaging, listening to them and also have them organized for themselves. Indeed, the displaced were eager to distribute the food themselves, pick up garbage, install the camp but also discuss in caucus, process their own list of people to go or stay. And as soon as they did so the whole atmosphere on the ground changed and eased.

Keep contact with other stakeholders at all times

We chose to keep contact with all stakeholders including those with a different view on the situation at all times. This obviously means that we did not endanger the people. But we realized quickly that there was no or very little coordination between SAPS and Home Affairs, Disaster Management and municipalities and other NGOs. In particular, the DM did not know who were the people, DDG ignored the rumour on the ground. NGOs all came with food but no clothing or vice versa. Therefore we tried liaise the people amongst them and make sure everybody was aware of the situation. This strategy proved a positive one: various stakeholders then agreed to give us immediate feedback on their actions (be their positive wait before removal or negative: intention to divide men and women forcefully), when we called them.

Liaise with national communities and embassies

As ADF, one of our main strength is the contact with national representative through the national communities. Making Embassies or High Commission aware of the situation of their national fellow-countrymen displaced in South Africa has proved very important. It must be said that though willing to help, most of the Embassies are unaware of the situation in the refugee camps and do not necessarily know who to call in order to get information. By writing to the Ambassadors, meeting them and having them on the ground at times, ADF helped them understand the situation and engaged them to step in and be on board as often as possible. This is something which could be emphasised in other camps situation. It allows embassies to issue travel documents for those who want to go home, (providing they have resigned their refugee or asylum seeker status).

As for the members of various national communities, ADF can TO SOME EXTENT engage them regarding the help they can give regarding temporary accommodation and job offers. Indeed, for those who want to be reintegrated, accommodation is needed. All the more so as financial support (2 months allowance) can only be given by the Jesuit Refugees Services in Johannesburg providing people can prove they are accommodated properly. Sharing a flat or using a garden cottage or even a backyard shack offered at a low price by fellow countrymen can be a kick start for the displaced.

We can also use that network of communities to try and set people back to work – ask people to think about it (not going door to door). Make everybody responsible on this issue. JRS can give skills to the people and say they are ready to help. However this dimension of reintegration proves the most difficult.

3) What we intend to do in the future

In the short term

If given the time and resource, ADF could work for the reintegration of displaced people currently in the camps in and around Johannesburg. We would start, as we did on the R28, by trying to understand the diversity of situations of the displaced, in order to find adapted solutions for different groups. For instance, knowing whether one is still working or not, or was working at the time of the events, makes an important difference. Knowing whether someone has got families or friends who could offer temporary accommodation (one week), so as to be able to benefit from the JRS subsidy, would also help. In cases where there are no such possibilities, broader public intervention might be necessary.

Liaise with other NGOs

R28 situation showed that there is a need to make other NGOs aware of what we are doing on the ground so as to avoid contradictory messages or actions as much as possible (ie: the launching of a court case against Government by Human Rights Law for detaining R28 men at Krugersdorp has paradoxically stopped the process of registration for reintegration or repatriation. In that specific case, SAPS was working on the issue from the police station and although not ideal that accommodation proved useful whereas after removing all charges from the R28 they were sent back to Lindela with a high risk of deportation).

Reciprocally we advise other NGOs to be as public as possible on their strategies and inform other stakeholders even if everybody does not necessarily share the same strategies.

Spread the news of the Carnival and explain its role as a healing process

ADF will try to make sure that the carnival idea spreads around – how this is supposed to work as a healing process. There is a lot of work to do in educating people about the rest of Africa – on both sides: South Africa *and* foreign nationals in South Africa. This must be done with kids at school but should spread to adults as well. The Carnival as it works currently in Alexandra proves an extraordinary pretext to engage schools learners and educators, but also local leaders and local businessmen and women, about what has happened, why it has happened, how to prevent it to happen again.

Unfold reciprocal misconceptions

ADF should also try and insist with local leaders (councillors, civics, CPFs, party representatives, etc.) and government employees (police officers) that they engage to meet some displaced and to unfold the situation. There are a lot of misconceptions on both sides but through discussions and by engaging it appears that misconceptions unfold and stereotypes are broken. This type of workshop has already taken place and should continue and expand. ADF might prove a facilitator there, while spreading African culture and knowledge around.

For more information on the Alexandra Pan African Carnival, and the workshops leading to it, please contact Dr Claire Benit-Gbaffou, ADF Secretary, 0839685444 / africandiasporaforum@gmail.com