

The Johannesburg Migration Advisory Committee (JMAC)

31 August 2010

Statement by Executive Mayor of Johannesburg, Cllr Amos Masondo, on the occasion of the 2nd meeting of the Johannesburg Migration Advisory Committee (JMAC), Braamfontein Recreation Centre, Braamfontein – Johannesburg

THE Johannesburg Migration Advisory Committee (JMAC) held its second quarterly meeting today 14th September 2010 to consider reports on recent xenophobic attacks in the City as well as proposed regulation of migrants in Johannesburg.

JMAC was established by Council in February 2009 to bring together relevant role players to draft and oversee the City's strategy for the integration of migrants into all aspects of society in Johannesburg.

The Committee is chaired by the Executive Mayor and also includes Members of the Mayoral Committee, heads of relevant departments and Municipal Entities as well as representatives of institutions with specific expertise in the field of migration. Amongst these are the national departments of Home Affairs and Foreign affairs, the Gauteng provincial departments of Housing and Social Development, the South African Police Service, UN High Commission for Refugees, Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce, Cosatu, the South African National NGO Coalition, Lawyers for Human Rights, the Africa Diaspora Forum and other organisation representing migrant communities as well as academics and experts in the field.

These meetings take place on quarterly basis (every three (3) months). They take place against the background of the City's Migrant Policy that was adopted by the Mayoral Committee in May 2007 which states the City's objective as seeking to ensure that social exclusion is addressed through an inclusive approach towards all people who live in Johannesburg. What are some of the key milestones to date?

Much earlier, in April 2007, the City established a Migrants Help Desk to assist in addressing some of the issues affecting foreign nationals.

The Helpdesk provides the following services:

Advice on how to access government and other services;

Co-ordinate the City's support for migrants;

Provide relevant information;

Ensure Community networks; and

Together with foreign nationals identify and address key concerns and challenges.

The City has also adopted the Anti-Xenophobia and Towards a Common Citizenship Programme which forms part of the long-term strategic interventions aimed at addressing the social attitudes to xenophobia, the effects of human trafficking and increasing tolerance to migrants.

We have interacted with various foreign nationals and their organisations

We co-hosted a workshop with the South African Migration Project (SAMP) on 21 August 2006

We also co-hosted a workshop [the third Hague International Migration Workshop] from 13-15 August 2008

Today's meeting discussed reports on xenophobic incidents that occurred in the City following the 2010 World Cup. You will recall that prior to the World Cup there were a number of media reports that envisaged major increases in xenophobic incidents after the World Cup.

The City took a number of pro-active measures on this issue including the establishment of a Joint Operations Committee consisting of City departments and representatives from local police stations. Plans were then drafted and risk profiles of City wards were compiled. This was done in anticipation of an outbreak of xenophobic violence.

The City has also had in place plans dealing with a range of issues such as temporary shelters, logistics, emergency relief, security and public order and some liaison with foreign embassies. The committee held regular meetings during this period to assess the situation on an on-going basis and to share intelligence information.

We also launched a pro-active series of community dialogues with communities involving labour, civic organisations, NGOs, faith based organisations and organised business to talk about the City's inclusive approach to migrants. These workshops are still continuing throughout Johannesburg.

At these dialogues addressed widely-held perceptions and erroneous claims that migrants are crowding out local communities or taking away economic opportunities. We also discuss positive aspects of migration including the contribution that migrant communities make to Johannesburg rich culture of diversity.

The reports we received show that incidents of xenophobia occurred predominantly in the period of the 18th to 27th of July 2010 and were in the main confined to areas such as Kya Sands and Cosmo City. As a result of our extensive advanced planning and excellent co-operation the incidents were kept under control and to a minimum. These were in the main relatively minor.

Today's meeting also considered proposed steps to regulate the provision of shelter to migrants. The lack of managed shelter in the City has, in the past led to undesirable situations such as that which existed at the Central Methodist Church in the Johannesburg CBD area.

Together with the various stakeholders, we have developed regulations, informed by the following objectives:

To put in place a data collection system that will enable the City to collect accurate statistics on migrants moving in and out of the City for effective development purposes;

To establish measures aimed at minimising the development and provision of unsafe living quarters to migrants;

To facilitate the integration of migrants into local communities and access to services like health, electricity and water, transitional shelter, banking and education to give effect to their basic human rights.

The City also intends to introduce a system for the registration of properties and facilities where migrants are being housed. To achieve this, the proposed regulations will provide for the following measures:

Effective monitoring through law enforcement to ensure that such facilities keep the required registers in terms of the Immigration Act;

Monitoring to ensure that the existing public health by-laws are adhered to;

Regular reports to the City detailing the extent to which existing legislation pertaining to the housing and sheltering of migrants are adhered to;

Consultation with relevant local and international organisations to determine the state of these housing facilities as well as individual development plans for each of the people housed; and

The creation and maintenance of a comprehensive database of migrants moving in and out of the City to enable us to fine tune our planning and delivery of services.

These measures will be introduced in a consultative manner to ensure that it will not raise fears or concerns of potential victimisation. At the same time we also have to ensure that the data is comprehensive and credible to enable us to plan and allocate whatever available relevant resources.

A credible system of registration will also eradicate the exploitation of migrants by unscrupulous landlords and ensure that such housing facilities meet the required minimum standards.

The City of Johannesburg will continue to be informed by an understanding that local government has a responsibility to ensure that all those who live within its jurisdiction and abide by the South African laws are helped to build a decent quality of life. In our view, the migrants can play a very important role as active participants in their own development.

Thank you

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