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South Africa: Displaced people should not be forcibly removed from temporary camps

Amnesty International today condemned the forcible removal by police of more than 700 people, including refugees and asylum-seekers, from the Glenanda ("Rifle Range Road") displacement camp near Johannesburg to Lindela Repatriation Centre.

The removals yesterday, 22 July, have placed those affected at imminent risk of expulsion from South Africa.

This followed an incident at the Glenanda site on 17 July in which the police used excessive force against residents, injuring 23 people who were shot at close range with rubber bullets. Amnesty International has called for a full investigation into this incident.

The removals on Tuesday happened after officials began to implement a registration and temporary residence permit system for the thousands of individuals still internally displaced by anti-foreigner violence which erupted in May in Gauteng, Western Cape, Durban and elsewhere in the country. Those removed at the Glenanda camp had apparently not registered and so did not have the new identity documents.

"The new registration process has led to confusion, increased tension and a reluctance among some people at the displacement sites to register. There's been a lack of good, clear information about the process and its implications," said Amnesty International.

"We have told the government of our concerns about the manner of the introduction of this new system, including the lack of clarity about the effect of the new permit on people's existing legal status. This is particularly crucial for those who have existing refugee or other legal rights of residence."

The organization also condemned the way officials had denied access to adequate food to those who failed to go through the registration process at the Glenanda ("Rifle Range Road") displacement camp. This constitutes a violation of South Africa's obligations under international law.

Amnesty International called on the South African government to uphold its human rights obligations and not forcibly return asylum-seekers and others in need of international protection to the countries they have fled.

Amnesty International delegates visited some of the sites for displaced people earlier in July and heard cases of individuals who had attempted to return to their former homes but had been verbally threatened or physically attacked.

"We appeal to the government not to precipitously close these sites. There is growing pressure on people in these camps to re-integrate back into local communities without there being a safe and sustainable

reintegration plan in place,” said Amnesty International.

“Many of these people are still suffering trauma from the violent attacks and property destruction in May. The government needs to explain much more fully to them what the implications of the registration process are, and to ensure their human rights are not violated.”

Background

On 23 May 2008 Amnesty International called on the South African government to take all necessary measures to protect the human rights of people at continuing risk of violent attacks and displacement from their homes on the basis of their perceived ethnic origins or status as “foreigners” or asylum-seekers.

See [AFR 53/007/2008](#)