



Each Refugee Camp is different. And yet, there are strikingly some similarities among them. Of the first two camps I visited one was located outside the Rand Airport in Germiston, and one in Boksberg (suburbs of Johannesburg, SA). Both camps were using United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR tents that are intended to house two families per tent. Both camps had regular feeding schedules (around 10:00am and 6:00pm), Both Camps had their parameters surrounded with fence – topped off with coils of razor wire. Both camps had rows of portable toilets and accessible drinking water. And, both camps collectively and unfortunately were where nearly two thousand five hundred refugees, primarily from Zimbabwe and Mozambique were calling their home in South Africa.

The following is a snapshot summary of these two camps.

The camp by the Rand airport has a stated population of 1,700. After weeks of private schooling by unpaid refugee teachers, the government has agreed to bus the school age children to schools in the community. In doing so, they did not provide school uniforms thereby reinforcing the foreign status of these children and their locations.

There are approximately 190 pre-school children and they are now getting some pre-school education near the entrance of the camp. Basic education is also being provided for those illiterate who chose to participate.

On this day, the first clothing distribution in six weeks was organized by the refugees and distributed among their families. The camp was relatively clean. Trash was to a minimum; areas around the tents were orderly, designated areas were setup for access to hot and cold water, and toilet units were in multiple locations and emptied on a daily basis.

Some refugees had setup small stands to sell items such as eggs, crackers, soap, etc. A haircut (barber) shop had been setup, and many of the tents had small fires (or locations for fires) outside to cook small items or heat



water. Most laundry was being done and while there were cloths lines, many of these were placed under the trees. As such, most of the clothing was being draped over the razor wire surrounding the camp.



Meals were distributed from two meal lines to feed the refugees. These two meals were being funded by the SA government. The lines were orderly, and a horse ridden security guard provided additional stability to the crowd as people progressed through two large tents. The meal consisted of up to six slices of bread, a hotdog, or cold meat, and up to two pieces of fruit (apples, oranges, bananas). The fruit was fresh – no brown spots and good color to the fruit.



The camp director indicated that overall the moral inside the camp to be good, but indicated that alcohol was an ongoing problem. The camp director stated that he had been told that the camp would close by the end of July. However, he also stated that the SA government has yet to setup any reintegration policy for those in the camps. This lack of policy (he believes) will result in the camp(s) being open longer.

The second camp I visited was the Boksberg Refugee Camp. This campsite is new. It replaced one that had been located in an area contaminated. Accordingly, the director of the camp had the knowledge to setup the camp in the most efficient manner.

The Refugee Camp has a stated population of 705 with 197 being children. It has been fortunate in that they have had the same director for the past 6 weeks. This camp director was equally receptive to NGOs and the Church being on the grounds. The camp was clean – even more so than the one at the Rand Airport.



The school children were also being transported to school (by bus) from this location and also without school uniforms. There was no mention of pre-school education, nor did I see pre-school children (of any magnitude) within the camp as we visited it. This camp had a clinic on site. And, the camp director stated that the SA government was providing counseling services, and that he was personally following up with the refugees to ensure that the government was fulfilling their stated obligations.

This camp director also stated that he had been told that the camp would close by the end of July. This lack of policy (he believes) will result in the camp(s) being open much longer. With some levity, he noted that they did have one certainty. They could clearly state the weather! See Photos. Missing from this modern weather stone is the nightly temperature that hovers around 30 degrees and may reach mid-fifties in the day. Even with multiple blankets the nights are cold.



With the end of July tomorrow, the camps remain open. Each day the local press adds another column to the ongoing struggles that Refugees face. Then, the next day they seem to equally report on a tiring attitude of the problem and that many South Africans just want the problem over. Still, for many within the Methodist Church, the work to assist these refugees and how best to address this ongoing refugee crisis and the complex needs of the refugees, the Church and their member's work is just beginning.