

Rights groups slam Home Affairs

Marvin Charles

REFUGEE rights groups have slammed the Department of Home Affairs over the reasons it provided for why the Refugee Reception Office (RRO) could not be opened in Cape Town.

“Instead of complying with the court order, (Home Affairs) is pretending to be compliant when they are not, and attempting to evade responsibility by blaming the Department of Public Works for their own inaction,” said Marike Keller from Sonke Gender Justice’s policy development and advocacy unit.

They have accused the department of failing to comply with the Supreme Court of Appeal order to open the centre.

“By failing to comply with these court orders, (Home Affairs) has not only shown a brazen disregard for South Africa’s judicial processes, which are the cornerstone of our democracy, but also its apathy towards the plight of asylum seekers and refugees,” Keller said.

The Supreme Court of Appeal found the decision to close the Cape Town RRO “substantively unlawful and irrational” and required the department to reopen and maintain a fully functional RRO in the Cape Town metropolitan area by March

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31 and to provide monthly reports on its progress in complying with the order.

“Passing responsibility onto the Department of Public Works, and implicating them in the delay in Cape Town, shows the sheer lack of accountability and transparency on the part of the Department of Home Affairs. We reject this reasoning,” Sonke Gender Justice said.

In a statement released this week, Home Affairs said it was waiting on the Department of Public Works to provide suitable office accommodation.

“To this end, we have engaged the Department of Public Works who, in turn, have issued a procurement instruction to their regional office in Cape Town. Public Works have provided a project execution plan on April 6.”