

# Film examines plight of refugees in SA

## Documentary created by centre to educate the public

Marvin Charles

**A** NEW documentary that traces how refugees in South Africa battle to overcome administrative obstacles is making waves.

The film was created by the Scalabrini Centre, an organisation that assists refugees and asylum-seekers. “We are a service supplier that offers six development and welfare programmes to migrants and local communities. And we have been looking at how the asylum-seekers system has been collapsing for a while, and we decided that people should be shown this,” said the spokesperson for the centre, Miranda Madikane.

The documentary, titled *Sanctuary Lost*, examines the background to the South African Refugees Act, which was implemented in 1998. Critics said the legislation made it more difficult for refugees to be granted asylum.

Also explored is the impact of the imploding refugee system, where large numbers of asylum applicants, corruption and limited capacity have resulted in refugees being stuck in an administrative limbo for up to 15 years.

The Scalabrini Centre tries to meet the needs of migrants and refugees, displaced people, seafarers and others affected by migration. “What we are generally hoping to achieve through this documentary is to get a conversation started around asylum-seekers, and educate the public more about this,” Madikane said.

The centre has constantly been vocal about the rights of refugees. It played an instrumental role in ensuring that the Department of Home Affairs was ordered to reopen the Refugee Reception Office in



**LONG BATTLE:** A scene from the trailer of the documentary *Sanctuary Lost*, made by the Scalabrini Centre.

Cape Town. “It still concerns us that they have not opened the refugee centre because what we are seeing are large numbers of asylum-seekers who do not have the right paperwork... and we will be taking it further,” Madikane said.

The Supreme Court of Appeal found the decision to close the refugee office

“substantively unlawful and irrational”, and ordered the department to reopen the office in the Cape Town metropolitan area by March 31 and to provide monthly reports on its progress in complying with the order. In response to a massive outcry from refugee advocacy groups, the department said it was waiting for the Depart-

ment of Public Works to provide suitable office accommodation.

The documentary combines expert, academic and refugee voices to try to make sense of the refugee landscape in the country.

It can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CbBHVeeyl-w&t=251s>