

MPs grill home affairs over refugee backlog

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PARLIAMENT'S watchdog on home affairs is seeking answers as to why the department has not opened its two refugee reception offices.

Yesterday, MPs grilled the department on the refugee reception office and why they had failed to open the offices in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. This was despite a court ruling to open refugee centres.

"Once public works hands over the tender installation, then we as home affairs can come in and do our installation of equipment and furniture, this process will take eight weeks to do," acting director-general at home affairs, Thulani Mavuso, said.

The department has constantly maintained it was waiting on the Department of Public Works to provide suitable office accommodation.

MPs gave home affairs officials a grilling on what progress the department had made so far.

Advocacy groups Sonke Gender Justice and The Scalabrini Centre have recently decided to bring forward contempt of court proceedings against the Department of Home Affairs.

The Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA) found the department's decision to close the refugee reception office to new applications for asylum unlawful and irrational, and ordered the department to reopen and maintain a fully functional office in the Cape Town metropolitan area by March 31.

It further ordered the department provide monthly reports on its progress in complying with the order.

The Nbaya case, launched in 2015 through the Legal Resource Centre on behalf of asylum seekers, relates to the renewal of the permits of asylum

seekers at the refugee reception office.

This should happen even if they lodged their applications at other refugee reception offices around the country.

In this case, the Western Cape High Court found that the department's policy of refusing to renew asylum permits from other offices was unlawful and ordered it to renew the permits of asylum seekers residing in Cape

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Town or to be informed of any decision relating to his or her application through the Cape Town refugee reception office.

"We never had a problem supplying monthly reports, we have concluded a discussion with the two groups to supply a report this week," Mavuso said.

Portfolio manager of Public Works Reggie Ncobo said: "We have commenced with the procurement process, there were two options explored as a procurement model which the regional office has identified as state owned property in Maitland.

"The idea is for permanent and interim and thereafter we will be advertising a tender process."

The department said the refugee centres would be opened next year.