

■ DELAYS

Fears over refugee office

Advocacy groups concerned Department of Home Affairs will miss deadline for opening

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REFUGEE advocacy groups are wary that the Refugee Reception Office in Cape Town won't be opened as predicted by the Department of Home Affairs.

Initially, the office was supposed to be opened in March this year, but the department missed that deadline.

Miranda Madikane, the director of the Scalabrini Centre, said: "As per the Supreme Court judgment the department should be issuing monthly updates as to their process and planning for the reopening. We have only

received reports inconsistently, and the few reports we have received have been tardy, scant in detail, copy and paste from previous reports with no updates or changes made to planning deadlines not yet achieved, and addressed to other individuals.

"We do not feel confident in the department's sincerity to open the office as quickly and efficiently as possible."

Madikane said the Scalabrini Centre and Somali Association of South Africa, along with the Legal Resources Centre, had launched an application to the high court seeking the appoint-

ment of a special master to ensure compliance with two orders issued by our courts.

Home Affairs disregarded a court order last year instructing it to reopen its refugee reception office in Cape Town by March 31.

The country has five Refugee Reception Offices; however, the department suspended the services to first-time applicants in two of these offices.

The office building is open for renewal permits for asylum seekers who registered at the Cape Town office prior to its closure in June 2012.

The Department of Home Affairs

maintained its defence and said it was waiting on the Department of Public Works to provide suitable office accommodation.

Home Affairs spokesperson Thabo Mokgola said: "Let me put it on record that the department has no intention to disregard the judicial directive and we will duly respect the judgement. In this regard, we have commenced with plans to comply with the order. We have allocated a budget within the ambit of the current base line. We have prioritised the funding and filing of key posts to get the centre operational."