

■ REFUGEES

Cape Town reception office yet to open

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THE Home Affairs Department has yet to reopen the Cape Town Refugee Reception Office more than a year after it missed a court order to provide the service to first entrant asylum seekers.

The country has five refugee reception offices; however the department suspended the services to first-time applicants in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth in 2012.

The department's decision was taken to the Supreme Court of Appeal, which ordered it to reopen the Cape Town Refugee Reception Office in September 2017.

When the department appealed to the Constitutional Court, the matter was dismissed and the department was directed to comply with the 2017 Supreme Court of Appeal order by March 2018.

After the court deadline, the department undertook to ensure the offices were fully functional and processing new asylum applications before the end of the year.

It had stated that it was awaiting the provision of suitable premises from the Department of Public Works.

This week, Home Affairs Minister Aaron Motsoaledi said: "The date for the reopening of the Cape Town Refugee Reception Office is dependent on the finalisation of the lease agreement with the prospective landlord and the related project plan for refurbishment," he said.

Motsoaledi said this in a written response to a parliamentary question from DA MP Christopher Roos.

Roos asked about the date for the reopening of the facility. Roos also wanted to know the cause of the delays that led his department to miss the court deadline and steps taken to reo-

pen the office.

He also asked about interim measures put in place to allow new asylum seekers arriving in Cape Town to apply for asylum.

Motsoaledi said the Department of Public Works and the Department of Home Affairs have signed the lease contract for the facility, but they were waiting for the prospective landlord to do the same.

He blamed the delays in re-opening the office on the Department of Public Works procurement requirements in acquiring office accommodation for missing the court deadline.

There was a concurrence of the prospective landlord signing the agreement, and the development of the project plan for new office accommodation, Motsoaledi added. He also said applicants who were dependants of existing clients were allowed to apply at the Cape Town office.