



The plight of African refugees in South Africa: An emergency response from IMADR and the International Alliance of Women

Report by Helene Sackstein (IMADR Advisor) FEATURE STORY

As I attended the triennial Congress of the International Alliance of Women (IAW) near Johannesburg, South Africa, I had the opportunity to meet two young refugee women, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Somalia, who had come to present a plea for help during the Congress. As they were francophone, I helped them formulate a resolution for the Congress as well as a press release. Through them, I met the Director of Our Voice, a local NGO dealing with refugees and displaced persons, with whom I discussed a possible action on the part of international NGOs in support of his efforts. He subsequently assembled a large documentary file, which has since been used for the submissions to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) discussed below. I subsequently went to visit the shelter described in this article, as well as an isolated campground where eight families had erected protective huts with discarded pieces of plastic and cardboard.

The 2008 xenophobic attacks in South Africa, which saw thousands of foreigners being assaulted, dispossessed and even killed, shocked the entire world and have been well covered by the press. The victims were essentially refugees or asylum-seekers from various conflict zones on the continent, such as the DRC, Somalia and, of course, a huge proportion from neighbouring Zimbabwe, whose nationals have finally benefited recently from a special regime, leaving all other nationals still in limbo.

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