



African Diaspora Forum

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ADF JOINS FRENCH EMBASSY SA TO CELEBRATE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

The French Alliance in Pretoria on December 9 was the host of the celebration of this year's International Human Rights Day commemorated every year on December 10.

The Ambassador of France in South Africa, H.E. Elisabeth Barbier, welcoming guests, expressed her pleasure at the presence of many African migrant associations including the African Diaspora Forum (ADF). She said her country was bent on promoting the respect of human rights all over the world and to contribute to build a society free of exclusion.

Three short documentaries on challenges faced by migrants in South Africa were screened. They include 'Mine,' which painted the plight of Mozambique mine workers in South Africa whose relatives can't have their pension and other dues paid, 'I Belong' (part 2) a film on stateless persons and lastly a short film on the Xenophobic violence in KwaZulu-Natal early this year (April 2015) .

Participants who took part in the event under the theme, "our rights, our freedom always" then asked questions to a panelist of experts headed by Yacob Van Garderen of Lawyers for Human Rights.

An ADF member Kennedy Khabo Mabe who appreciated French Embassy's support to the ADF remarked that many don't understand how the government is working because several meetings, panel discussions have been held and suggestions made but never implemented by government. There were talks of a change of approach in the protection of the rights of migrants.

Some participants wanted to know the duration of an asylum seeking process and who between the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) and the United Nation High Commission for Refugees (UNHR) is the 'boss' in handling asylum seekers and refugee issues . "An asylum case takes 3 to 6 months to be handled. Home Affairs has to study your case. But due to a number of factors, it takes at times years. It is not only here in South Africa. It is not a matter of who is more powerful than who. It is a matter of good communication between the DHA and UNHCR. If there is an issue to sort out, we need to seat together and share ideas so that a solution can come from both sides with a good understanding between us," replied Yacob of Lawyers for Human Rights.

There were questions about the new immigration policy to be implemented by the government. Lawyers for Human Rights explained that it is a process which is underway. It emerged that the positive activities of migrant associations is what apparently caused government to review its immigration policies.

The audience picked holes with the issue of the fate of stateless persons after the South African courts and the DHA disagree to grant nationality to a Cuban kid born in South Africa. French Ambassador Elisabeth Barbier said there are laws which if implemented South Africa could be a better place in the world to live in.