

# The horror continues - 24 Nov 2008

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I received an email this week from someone who has been involved in the refugee camps that were set up to deal with the recent xenophobia crisis in South Africa. The camps are now closing, but that doesn't mean that the problem has gone away. As far as it is from our borders, the crisis in DRC has already started to send refugees to our door. This weekend a family arrived from DRC - going straight to the closed refugee camp at Blue Waters.

Millions of people are being displaced by the resurgent conflict in DRC - most of them flooding over the border to neighbouring Burundi - but - as this weekend shows - people will also head here. The person who sent the email thinks that the problem will become so intense that South Africa will need intervention from the UNHCR to set up full refugee camps here.

With the refugees come their health problems. Cholera and malnutrition are rife - the former being all the more worrying because it is a communicable disease. Because we do not have the correct procedures set up for dealing with refugees as they enter our country, health screening is not in place. This will have repercussions both on the refugees themselves and on our local population as the communicable diseases of disaster spread.

We need a humanitarian approach to these problems. Much of the rest of Africa is a disaster zone - neighbouring Zimbabwe is only the tip of the iceberg. We cannot live in isolation, hoping to shore up our defenses against all comers. We need a sensible and compassionate approach to the plight of refugees - one that helps the refugees and protects our own population.

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