Getting ready for the returnees

THE return of the exiles is one of the cornerstone demands of liberation movements in South Africa.

After February's unbannings, the first returnees began to trickle home.

Now, nearly six months later, those who have returned remain only a handful.

Most exiles are still outside the country, waiting for the go-ahead to return.

The key issue holding up their return is the security situation in SA and libcration movements have advised their members to stay put until their safety is guaranteed.

In preparation for large scale repatriation, the wheels have begun to be set in motion for a massive "operation homecoming".

Following a national consultation meeting attended by a wide range of organisations and religious groupings in Johannesburg in May this year, a national coordinating committee (NCC) was established to oversee the return of the exiles.

Consensus

The NCC includes representatives of the major denominations as well as the ANC, PAC and BCM.

While the movements hold different positions on negotiations with the government and the return of their members in exile, there is general consensus that all groups will cooperate with the NCC.

The NCC convener is the general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, the Reverend Frank Chikane.

The NCC is anxious not to be caught on the wrong foot, should SA's diaspora flood back.

Already the NCC has begun to establish task forces drawing in specialist service organisations to begin preparations for the return.

The NCC is about to set up an office in Johannesburg with a fulltime coordinator and administrative staff.

"We are preparing for the return of the exiles as if they will be arriving tomorrow," Chikane said.

"We do not want to find ourselves in a siuation in which they arrive and we are not prepared".

The logistics involved in the repatria-

Most exiles outside the country are still waiting for the green light to return, once their safety has been guaranteed. In the meantime, the wheels have been set in motion to facilitate their return. CHIARA CARTER reports:

tion scheme are enormous.

Chikane said that the NCC is presently redrasting a budget which is likely to run into billions for the project.

The NCC has approached governments throughout the world as well as the international religious community for funding.

The United Nations Commission on Refugees has been asked to assess the extent to which it can render assistance.

The South African business community will also be challenged to come up with funding.

According to Chikane, this will be done in consultation with the trade union movement.

The NCC has not yet decided on the involvement of the SA government in the project, a matter which Chikane described as a "thorny issue".

At present all are agreed however that the government will be expected to provide services like pensions, health and education for the exiles.

The breakdown of expenditure per person will depend on how many exiles

At present no one knows the exact numbers involved. Estimates range from 20 000 to 400 000.

This haziness is partly because many people who went into exile simply became invisible.

Some went into self-imposed exile for reasons not directly related to politics. These people do not have any contact with the liberation movements and have had no reason to declare themselves.

Others joined the external forces of the liberation movements, changed their names and "vanished".

Census

For security reasons they have not declared themselves.

The ANC is conducting a census into

shacks of the poorest of the poor — the

Blockombos squatters, people craving

for a little bit of space for their children

and themselves".



ACROSS THE OCEAN: ANC exiles in New York welcome Nelson Mandela with a song during his recent visit there



Reverend Frank Chikane

its membership abroad but the number of exiles is expected to far exceed ANC figures.

Commented Chikane: "We don't have a classical refugee situation. The vast majority of exiles never officially declared themselves refugees or went through the process of applying for refugee status. It is only after a general amnesty is declared that we will start getting a more accurate idea of the exact figures involved."

For the interim, the NCC is working on an estimate of 100 000 exiles.

The NCC has categorised exiles into seven different groups: members of the liberation movements, trained and armed soldiers of the liberation movements, non-aligned groups, defectors from the liberation movements, internal defectors, prisoners on both sides, conscientious objectors and those who left for other reasons.

Amnesty

For most of these categories protective guarantees are needed. These would include a general amnesty, the SA government becoming a signatory to the Geneva Convention and Protocols on Refugees, special protection for com- area in PE. batants and a protective monitoring group.

According to Chikane, no South African who wants to return will be refused assistance.

The key, he said, would be "need".

While some exiles will return on their own steam because they have the means to do so, others will need assistance all the way.

"We anticipate most of the exiles will be refugees in the sense that they left SA because of political reasons and harassment. However as churches we hold the view that we assist any South African living outside the country who wants to return," Chikane said.

The qustion of whether there will be a stggered return with armed forces waiting until last is, Chikane said, a matter for the liberation movements to decide.

The NCC envisages a series of pri-

mary and secondary reception points where staff will meet exiles and begin assisting them in what is likely to be a lengthy re-orientation process.

The primary reception areas will be entry points, including airports and border posts.

Secondary reception areas will cater for those who do not know where their relatives are or can't immediately return to their families.

Exiles will be sent to the reception areas nearest their homes. For example, someone whose family comes from Port Elizabeth will be housed in a reception

For exiles living in far away countries it is likely that church groups or the UN will set up points where exiles can go to begin the long journey home.

Adjustments

Chikane said the NCC was presenty investigating accommodation for the exiles but faced problems with the Land and Group Areas acts.

The massive adjustment which repatriation involves cannot be estimated.

The NCC is investigating questions like medical checkups, employment, counseling and helping build systems of support for exiles, some of whom have been out of the country for dec-

Just simple geography lessons will be essential for exiles to find their bearings in cities and towns which have changed face dramatically.

The committee anticipates immense cultural difficulties, including language, for the children born in exile.

Students

The NCC is presently advising high school, college and university students to finish their education abroad rather than return to the apartheid education

Said Chikane: "We will have to introduce people systematically to a new reality".

A major problem is the question of documentation and how people will prove that they are indeed South Afri-

Many exiles have changed their names and there are no records of them being South African. Others are children born abroad or the spouses of South African

Chikane described these as the "grey areas" which the committee will have to sort out.

LETTERS

Address all letters to The Editor, P.O. Box 13094, 7900 Sir Lowry Road



among the blacks.

I would gladly "invest" R1000 in such a venture.

SOUTH—the People's Paper—will be totally free and independent. DAVID KESSLER BELLVILLE

ON behalf of my organisation, I as chairperson am kindly looking for assistance in the following matters: sharing water for pigs; our cattle, goats and sheep are suffering from ticks; the reconstruction of schools because they have no windows etc. We have tried to consult the Transkei

government about this. They keep on

promising to help us but do nothing.

I hope this letter will be considered, as we are a struggling rural community. MNINIMZI GOBINGEQ SAYCO QOGODALA UNIT

QUEENSTOWN

Letters to the Editor must include the full name and address of the writer, even if a nom de plume is requested. The Editor reserves the right to shorten letters.

Township report moved me to tears

YOUR recent article on living conditions in Blockombos moved me to tears.

In the course of my work I have visited Khayelitsha, Crossroads and other townships, but we whites have constantly to be reminded of the harrowing, inhuman conditions in which our fellow citizens and human beings live.

As I wrote to a Cape Town newspaper some months ago, "How can we whites face our Creator when we allow, directly or indirectly, municipalities such as Kraaifontein, Dobsonville and many other to tear down the pitiful

I further wrote: "If this is Christianity, please save me from it.

"God save-us and our children from the retribution that must surely follow."

When you mention this to those who live in comfortable homes and enjoy life to the full, they tell you it is a worldwide problem.

But this is our country; we live here and we allow it to happen.

I have said it before: SOUTH must sink in terms of becoming a daily pathink in terms of becoming a daily pa-

among the blacks (including coloureds and Indians) as well as many whites. Businesses and industries that are reluctant to advertise will have to do so as

the majority of consumers is to be found

It will enjoy a tremendous readership COMMUNITY