

Baptists aid displaced migrant workers in South Africa

June 6, 2008

WASHINGTON—Baptists in South Africa have come to the aid of refugees displaced by ethnic violence.

More than 60 immigrants have been killed and about 700 injured in violence that erupted in Johannesburg, Cape Town and other cities in recent weeks. Some nationals have accused the immigrants of taking away jobs and housing from South Africans.

Migrant workers from Somalia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Ghana, Uganda, and the Cape Verde islands, have been among those attacked. An estimated 50,000 migrants from Zimbabwe and Mozambique left the country due to the violence.

“We started to get desperate calls from people linked to our ministry,” about the needs of persons who have been displaced, said Dave Stemmett of the Baptist Refugee Center in Cape Town. He reported that there are “1,500 displaced refugees on the streets near our local rail station.”

Several churches are housing persons displaced by the violence.

“At present, we are housing and feeding around 250 people in three venues,” Stemmett reported.

After government authorities opened camps, “many of the people in our care were bussed to these places,” he said “We were able to close down a number of our more temporary shelters as well as those in more vulnerable areas.”

The governments has transported about 10,000 people to a camp outside

Johannesburg.

But facilities used by the refugee center are being strained.

“We need to come up with long-term solutions,” Stemmett said. “It is winter in South Africa and very cold and wet in Cape Town right now.”

The Baptist Refugee Centre is challenging churches in South Africa to adopt displaced migrants.

The Baptist Union of South Africa appealed to its congregations to assist pastors “who are currently ministering to the victims of the violence.” The Baptist Union, in an open letter, stated that the pastors “are fulfilling an important biblical role and need your support.”

The letter also called on South African Baptists to “pray continuously and earnestly for this crisis within our country,” and that “perpetrators of the violence will be brought to justice.” More than 1,300 have been arrested.