



Home Affairs – no hope

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THE peak travel season is nearly here, and travel professionals fear that Home Affairs' attempt to alleviate congestion at major airports caused by biometric capturing will do little to prevent the pending chaos.

The Board of Airline Representatives South Africa (Barsa) recently made an appeal to the DHA to suspend biometric capturing at airports during the peak season because of the lengthy delays experienced by travellers as a result of a shortage of trained immigration officials.

But, the DHA has no such plans nor is it authorised to employ more immigration officials to cope with the numbers expected.

Instead, director general **Mkuseli Apleni** says the department will look at extending the opening hours at some ports of entry to 24 hours. He also said that at certain ports such as OR Tambo International, additional staff would be redeployed from areas where they are not busy in order to help existing capacity cope with the extended hours.

Ultimately the plan is for the airport to operate with a full staff complement and all counters open from around December 8 to January 10.

June Crawford, ceo of Barsa, says that should all 80 plus immigration stations at OR Tambo be manned for 24 hours throughout the peak travel period, then the measures planned by Home Affairs should alleviate the

problem. She says it is unclear where the manpower will come from.

The Tourism Business Council of South Africa's (TBCSA) is investigating opportunities where it can intervene over the short term. Ceo, **Mmatsatsi Ramawela**, told *TNW* that even if this involves monetary assistance to employ more immigration officials, the TBCSA believes it can mobilise its members. But, at a meeting between the TBCSA and DHA, the two bodies were unable to agree.

UBC debacle

Meanwhile, the November 30 deadline originally set for the pilot of the printing of parents' details in children's passports (see *TNW* August 3) will not be met. The DG could not confirm when exactly the project would now be piloted. He says people should not apply for new passports for their children as this would see the Home Affairs office inundated, but should only apply if their child's passport is no longer valid.

Although the DHA has now replaced the name "unabridged birth certificate" with "birth certificate" in the immigration regulations, effective November 1, Apleni stresses nothing has changed procedurally. Thus, a birth certificate with both parents' names on is acceptable.

June says that as long as the birth certificate requirement is up to the discretion of immigration officials as mentioned in the draft

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regulations, Barsa will continue to advise its members to check that passengers travelling with minors have birth certificates.

The TBCSA has been invited to share its recommendations

on the UBC requirement with the Immigration Advisory Board. Though the Council is still working on this, Mmatsatsi says she is encouraged by the Department's willingness to listen. ■