



GAUTENG PROVINCE

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEDIA STATEMENT

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SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT REPATRIATES EIGHT TRAFFICKED TEENAGERS FROM MOZAMBIQUE

The Gauteng Department of Social Development Social Workers are repatriating eight teenage boys from Mozambique back home.

The eight were found by the police during a raid initiated by the Department of Labour and Employment after it got information that a Chinese factory in Nigel was employing children and undocumented foreign nationals in January this year.

The children, who are between 13 and 17 years old, were placed at the Mary Moodley Child and Youth Care Centre in Benoni. The centre is run by the Gauteng Department of Social Development, and a case of child labour, poor working conditions, and employing undocumented minors was opened against the owner of an electrical supply company in Nigel.

After an inquiry, the Children's Court in Nigel confirmed the children's placement at the Department of Safety. Social workers interviewed them and they told them that they are Mozambican nationals and from Gaza province in Xaixai, Nbacunte Village. They reported that they came to South Africa on January 15, 2024, in a taxi with about 14 other boys from their village after being recruited by the Nigel company driver in Mozambique.

The driver of the taxi was reported to have come from the same village and asked young men and families who were interested in working in South Africa, Johannesburg. He informed the recruits and family members that there was no need for passports or documents.

Relieving their story to the Gauteng Department of Social Development Communication team, they said a minibus was driving around their village,

asking for those who wanted to come to South Africa for better opportunities. According to trafficked victims, inside the minibus, there were other children of their same age wearing expensive sneakers and iPhones, convincing them to come with them.

On Tuesday, the Social Workers managing the case went back to the Children's Court in Nigel to seek permission from the court to release them from their place of safety and allow them to repatriate them and hand them over to their counterparts in Mozambique, who will then reunify the children with their parents. This was made possible after the Mozambican consulate issued them with temporary travel documents and allowed a care-to-care process between the Social Development Departments in the two countries. This was facilitated by the Department of Social Development, International Social Workers Services. The children will be handed over to Social Workers at the Komatipoort Border Post.

Baby Makhumisani, a Social Work Manager from the Department's Nigel Office in Ekurhuleni, says repatriation of the children will also spotlight the problem of child trafficking as part of Child Protection Week awareness.

"The children are happy, and we are happy as a team because we managed to complete the matter."

"These children, who were placed in our institutions, were no longer happy since there was a language barrier. Sometimes Social Workers will receive calls from institutions complaining that they are refusing to eat their food".

Despite receiving new sneakers from the institutions, their hearts were no longer there; they wanted to be reunited with their families in Mozambique. However, after the magistrate gave them permission to be repatriated, the elder one was able to open up and compliment the Social Workers for their excellent work.

"At last, I am happy that I am going back to my family because the man who brought us here in South Africa lied to us. Everything he promised us was a lie", he said that adding in South Africa, everything comes easy.

"It is not like we are starving where we are coming from. Our intention was to work while studying, and we were going to buy ourselves Air Force sneakers and iPhones, but to our surprise, we were locked in a hall where we worked day and night. Instead, they paid us R75 a day, and they will open for us only on Sunday to buy ourselves food and toiletries. And one thing about South

Africa is that it is very cold, and we did not have warm clothes, but thanks to social workers who were able to get us warm clothes,” says one rescued boy.

Another boy who cannot be named to protect his identity says he was worried about his mother because she does not know that he was trafficked to South Africa.

“I was doing standard six, and this year I was supposed to be doing standard seven since in January we were already in South Africa. I did not have a chance. My reason to get into the taxi that day was because those boys were wearing expensive sneakers and carrying iPhones, and I knew my mother was not going to afford any of them. I am happy because, at last, I am going to be reunited with my family after such a long time. I will come back to South Africa, but as a responsible person with legal papers,” he says.

The owner of the factory was arrested, and he was released on bail.

The factory is still operating.

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Issued by the Gauteng Department of Social Development

For Media Enquiries, Members of the Media may contact Mr. Themba Gadebe, Office of the MEC of Gauteng Department of Social Development, Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment on 081 522 6616.