

UNHCR appeals for funds to scale up emergency refugee operations in South Sudan

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Juba, 12 June 2012 - UNHCR today appealed for donor support to scale up emergency response operations in Unity and Upper Nile states.

Speaking to members of the press in Juba, Mireille Girard, UNHCR Representative in South Sudan, stated that refugee numbers had exceeded the planning figures set out in the emergency appeal which was launched earlier this year. "Our capacity to respond to this emergency is being challenged every single day. We are anticipating a major scale-up to respond to the rapidly growing population of refugees from Sudan."

Regarding the surge in refugee numbers, Girard noted that 70,000 new arrivals had entered the country since April. "We had anticipated there would be up to 60,000 refugees in Unity state. We have already crossed the 50,000 mark and if the present trend of 800 new arrivals per day continues, we should reach the planning figure before the end of June. In Upper Nile state, we planned for 75,000 refugees. Already, we are counting 105,000 with reports that up to 15,000 could cross the border in the coming days."

The UNHCR Representative noted that there had been no let-up since the emergency started in July last year. "Refugee settlements are in remote areas with virtually no infrastructure. Our priority has been to relocate refugees to safer sites away from border areas. We have established five settlements in Unity and Upper Nile states where refugees are receiving protection and basic services. We had to open up new supply lines through Ethiopia. WFP reprioritized the allocation of food stocks at great cost to ensure that refugees were fed. As the refugee population grew, we encountered critical gaps in water supply, particularly in Jammam settlement."

Girard noted that challenges are increasing with the rains. "We intend to establish new settlements close to the River Nile to ensure adequate supplies of water. Authorities in Upper Nile state have undertaken to provide new sites. We will require heavy machinery to maintain road access to and within all refugee settlements. We are launching an airlift of non-food items by mid-week."

The UNHCR Representative said the most immediate needs before the full onset of the rainy season had been computed as USD 40 million. She noted that the emergency appeal of USD 111 million for South Sudan was funded at a modest USD 34 million, which have already been expended. She thanked the donors who contributed the funds, adding that to cover the shortfall UNHCR had activated emergency reserves which enabled it to secure immediate relief support. The funds from the emergency reserve are now depleted.

Describing the current situation, the UNHCR Representative expressed concern about the increased rate of arrival from both Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states. She noted that refugees from both provinces were citing bombings, ground fighting and depletion of food stocks. "During my recent visit to Hofra, the refugees I met were weak from having survived on leaves and roots, and drinking untreated water from open sources as they travelled on foot for weeks to escape the conflict. Severe cases had to be hospitalized."

Regarding ongoing operational responses, Girard noted that road conditions had deteriorated to the extent that tractors with trailers had to be used to transport the most vulnerable to safety from border areas. She described how the 32,000-strong group of new arrivals had been moved from Elfoj to Hofra, and then to Kilo 18 even as drilling efforts continued in the refugee settlements in the quest for sustainable water sources. She confirmed that two new boreholes in Yusuf Batil were producing water in sufficient numbers to cater for over 20,000 refugees, and more were being drilled. Girard announced that the final movement of refugees from Kilo 18 to Yusuf Batil has commenced; 2,000 people are being transported every day.

In Yida, the UNHCR Representative noted that expedited procedures have been put in place for new arrivals.

"The priority is to check their nutrition status and ensure that those who are malnourished receive urgent treatment." Girard remarked that the burgeoning population was putting a strain on water and sanitation infrastructure. She said water and sanitation activities (wells, latrines and hygiene promotion) are being upgraded amid concerns about congestion and risk of disease.

"We need additional boreholes. The water table in Yida is good. We are working to complete these interventions before the roads are completely closed. Together with WFP we are pre-positioning food and non-food items in order to avoid costly airlifts. We are confident that stockpiles will be ready on time." Girard was referring road conditions which will deteriorate

drastically rendering ground access impossible as the seasonal rains set in.

The Representative reiterated UNHCR's continuing concerns about refugee security in Yida. She recalled that the settlement had been bombed and shelled directly twice during attacks in Jau, the disputed border area. She conceded that UNHCR could not force refugees to move.

"We will continue to advocate for refugees to relocate to areas where the risk of attack is lower. On the other hand, as long as refugees choose to remain in Yida, we will continue to provide life-saving assistance and basic services to maintain conditions of dignity."

South Sudan is currently hosting over 150,000 refugees from Sudan. Over 105,000 of these are in Upper Nile State, while over 50,000 are in settlements further west in Unity State.

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