

Restricted access hampers humanitarian aid in N. Darfur: Oxfam

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February 14, 2013 (KHARTOUM) - Tens of thousands of people who have fled fighting in the largest displacement in Darfur in recent years face a severe shortage of clean water and sanitation services, Oxfam warned Thursday.

In a press statement extended to *Sudan Tribune*, the agency called for a key road to be opened and for authorities to allow a full assessment of needs by humanitarian aid agencies in the El Sireaf, Garra Zawia and Kebkabyia areas of North Darfur following fighting in the Jebel Amir area.

North Darfur has recently witnessed a number of tribal conflicts and remains one of the most troubled states in the region, with different rebel groups regularly clashing with forces from the Sudanese army.

The latest crisis unfolded in January following violent clashes between members of the Arab Abbala and Beni Husein tribes over control of gold mines in the region, sparking a new wave of internal displacement.

"Tensions in the El Sireaf area are still high and have the potential to spread more widely. We are worried that there will be more displacement and we are already struggling to meet the needs of those who have already been forced to flee their homes," Oxfam's Sudan country director, El Fateh Osman, said in the statement.

It's estimated that at least 90,000 people have been displaced by inter-tribal fighting in the Jebel Amir area of North Darfur's El Sireaf locality, famed for its gold production. The UN has said that the displacement from the Jebel Amir area in the past weeks has been more than the total number displaced in 2012.

"People are really in a panic and very fearful of more violence. Those who have been able to flee are not sure when they will be able to return to their home areas, many of which have been destroyed in the fighting", Oxfam's humanitarian coordinator for North Darfur, Hamouda Kanu, said.

"They have inadequate shelter for this colder time of year and are forced to defecate in the open. This could lead to the spread of disease."

WORSENING CRISIS

Oxfam and its partner the Kebkabiya Smallholders Charitable Society (KSCS) said they had been working to truck drinking water and construct additional latrines, as well as providing other essential aid items to those affected.

However, the partner organisation says humanitarian access has so far been limited, with many people still not receiving any assistance.

Oxfam said the road linking Kebkabiya to El Sireaf town must be immediately opened to allow for further aid supplies to be transported to the area in order to help prevent the crisis from worsening.

Last year's poor harvests in North Darfur have left people particularly vulnerable and Oxfam has warned that areas affected by the new surge in fighting may also experience food shortages, with many crops in the area destroyed in the conflict.

Osman said the latest crisis was stretching resources, with Oxfam struggling to meet the demands of those affected by the violence.

"The world has moved on from this entrenched conflict and humanitarian work is already severely under-funded. We are struggling to meet already existing needs even as more are pushed into crisis," he said.

"This conflict in Darfur is now 10 years old and we need to see a renewed effort to bring about stability and peace in this devastated area", he added.

In a statement released earlier this month, US State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland called on the Sudanese government to grant UN agencies "unrestricted access to all areas of Darfur" to deliver aid to needy civilians in the region.

Meanwhile, in comments made last Sunday on the situation in Darfur, a UN independent expert on the situation of human rights in Sudan, Professor Mashood Adebayo Baderin, said there remains major challenges regarding the improvement of human rights and security, particularly in North, South and Central Darfur due to armed incidents in those areas.

The United Nations has estimated that around 300,000 people have died during the 10-year conflict in Darfur, while some 2

million people have been displaced.

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