

THE GREAT LAKES REGION: MASS DISPLACEMENT

November 4 1996

Preliminary Appeal No: 19/96

Background

The latest developments in the unfolding drama in the Great Lakes region point toward the bleakest scenario of all: widespread conflict in a region which is home to more than one million refugees. Enormous population movements have already been triggered in the last two weeks, and more are to be expected for the coming days. International aid agencies were confronted with the difficult choice of ensuring the safety of their staff versus the continuation of highly needed assistance to hundreds of thousands. The extent of the security problem led in most cases to complete evacuation of premises and relocation of international staff, and the collapse of all the assistance structures which had been put in place during the last two and a half years.

Latest events

At the time of writing the Great Lakes region is the centre of a multi-faceted, unpredictable crisis.

Zaire (Goma, Bukavu) •

As all means of communication have been lost it is impossible to contact the Zaire Red Cross volunteers and assess how the situation is evolving in the surroundings of Goma and Bukavu. According to UNHCR, it is likely that Kahindo and Katala camps have actually emptied and that refugees are on their way to Mugunga. If that is the case, Goma will soon see the concentration of over 700,000 refugees on the mountainsides around the town. Practically nothing is known about the fate of refugees in Bukavu whose access to food, water, sanitation, shelter and health care is extremely limited and likely to become nil in the near future. The risk of epidemics is very high and the escalation of hostilities may well provoke further mass displacements.

The International Federation fears that the situation in Goma and Bukavu has already passed the point of no return and that a catastrophe comparable to the events following the 1994 genocide is looming. Through the Red Cross Society of the Republic of Zaire, the Federation is approaching Zairian government in order to be allowed to carry out exploratory missions west of Goma and Bukavu. At the same time, the Head of the Federation's Rwanda Delegation is trying to re-establish contacts with the Zairian Red Cross branches in Goma and Bukavu, who, according to sources, have maintained some level of activity. Accessing the refugee population from other locations and providing external support to the National Society are seen as the only possible means to limit the consequences of the disaster.

Zaire (Uvira, Fizi) •

According to UNHCR there are up to 350,000 people (including Burundian refugees and virtually the entire Zairian population of Uvira) heading south on the western shore of lake Tanganyika. By now they should have reached the area of Fizi, from where they could be trying to cross the lake and seek refuge in Tanzania. Against enormous constraints UN agencies, ICRC and MSF are trying to reach the area to carry out an assessment.

Rwanda •

The political implications of the latest developments of the Kivu situation seem to indicate that a mass repatriation of the Rwandese refugees is an unlikely prospect. Nevertheless, this remains the preferred option for UNHCR and even if the number of refugees who have returned to Rwanda is so far negligible the possibility of a large-scale movement cannot be totally ruled out.

Uganda •

The escalating conflict in haut Zaire is prompting an increasing number of Zairian refugees to cross into south-western Uganda. As of today, over 20,000 have settled in two camps in the Kisoro region and these are being assisted by the Uganda Red Cross with the support of the Federation. It is likely that this number will grow substantially over the next few weeks.

Burundi •

The population of the small camp of Katumba, 16 km from Bujumbura on the lakeside road to Uvira, has been growing by 2,500 per day and there are indications that this rate will continue for some time. The camp hosts Burundian returnees from nearby Zaire and was originally intended to be a transit camp where people could stay for a few days before returning to their communes of origin. Their length of stay is on the increase and the present holding capacity (10,000 people) has already been surpassed. The Federation and the Burundi Red Cross are concentrating on infrastructure, on distribution of food on arrival and of "return packages". At the same time, the two organisations are caring for a small camp in the outskirts of Bujumbura hosting nearly 1,000 Zairian refugees.

Zambia •

Last minute information speaks about over one thousand refugees having reached the southern shores of lake Tanganyika. If the number of people fleeing insecurity seven hundred kilometers from the north and reaching Zambia by boat will be on the increase, the Red Cross will have to respond in yet another operational area.

Congo •

The Kivu crisis is having heavy repercussions in the capital, Kinshasa. Ethnic Tutsi are reportedly being chased by the local population in retaliation for the Kivu events and a few tens have already crossed into Brazzaville. The Congolese Red Cross, who have started assistance and emergency preparations, foresees that a much larger influx will take place during the next week.

The needs

The evolution of the various possible scenarios are still confused due to the dearth of information available. It is impossible for the time being to detail how the Federation and its

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partner Societies will respond to the immanent catastrophe. There is, however, a strong sense of urgency as the size of the disaster will require that substantial resources be mobilized.

Three main strategic options are being considered at the present:

- general preparedness for a quick gear-up of the operational capacity in Burundi, Uganda, Congo, Zambia, Zaire (Fizi area), Uganda (Kigoma area) according to the evolving situation;
- attempt to establish operational bases west of Kivu, foreseeing the possibility of mass displacements towards the inland from Goma and Bukavu;
- support to the Zairian Red Cross branches in Goma and Bukavu (modalities being currently discussed) .

The extent of the humanitarian challenge, combined with the major losses suffered in both Bukavu and Goma has rendered existing stocks totally insufficient. The "in kind" needs of this appeal have been calculated based on UNHCR and Federation estimates for a target figure of 500,000 beneficiaries (refugees or returnees). Existing stocks in the region and in the pipeline have been subtracted to give actual requirements.

As far as food is concerned, the Federation will pursue its strategy of not assuming direct, long-term responsibility for the procurement and transport of large quantities of bulk food. Ready to be operative according to the models established in the Kivu region as well as in Ngara (final distribution of food after the Extended Delivery Points through National Society volunteers), the Federation is appealing for 1,000 MT of maize and 350 MT of beans just to replenish the emergency stocks lost in Goma during the recent events.

Needs in terms of transport capacity -vehicles, but especially air cargo- are likely to be great and have been adequately catered for in the appeal budget. The same is true for personnel costs.

Conclusion

The Federation and its partner Societies in the Great Lakes region need further support in order to respond to an enormous and complex emergency. This preliminary appeal is intended to initiate the process of resources mobilisation and will be followed by detailed plans of actions as soon as more information will be available.

For further information, please contact the Federation Secretariat

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BUDGET SUMMARY

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IN CHF

ANNEX

NEEDS IN KIND (OR CASH)

Hospital tents: 5 units	17,000.00
Warehouse tents: 11 units	176,000.00
Construction material (planks, poles, nails)	345,000.00
Blankets: 57,600 units	345,000.00
Mats: 49,500 units	395,000.00
Maize: 1,000 MT	207,000.00
Red kidney beans: 350 MT	208,000.00
Biscuits (High protein): 90 MT	140,000.00
WHO emergency health kits: 824 units	120,000.00
Kitchen sets: 85,000 boxes	3,485,000.00
Lorries: 6 units (local purchase Nairobi)	540,000.00
Cars: 2 units (local purchase Nairobi)	56,000.00
Sat phone: 3 sets	60,000.00
Tools	20,000.00

TOTAL NEEDS IN KIND (OR CASH) 6,114,000.00

NEEDS IN CASH

Miscellaneous supplies	155,000.00
Transport, storage & vehicle costs (incl. plane hire)	1,285,000.00
Personnel	370,000.00
Travel & communications	46,000.00
Information	35,000.00
Administrative, office & general expenses	38,000.00
Secretariat operational support	250,000.00

TOTAL NEEDS IN CASH 2,179,000.00

TOTAL APPEAL CASH & KIND

8,293,000.00