

GUINEA: REFUGEES FROM SIERRA LEONE

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Continued fighting in Sierra Leone during the reporting period increased the influx of refugees fleeing to Guinea. An estimated 380,000 people have taken refuge, of which the International Federation and the Red Cross Society of Guinea have targeted 200,000 for immediate food, shelter and medical assistance. Cash is urgently needed to address water supply and sanitation needs in the largest and most isolated refugee camps.

The context

Violent fighting between the Economic Community of West Africa State Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) troops and the RUF rebel army forces continues to be part of the daily scene in north-eastern Sierra Leone. Approximately 200,000 refugees have fled to the southern part of Guinea (prefectures of Guékédou, Kissidougou, Faranag) since March increasing the total number to an estimated 380,000. This region, already considered to be one of the poorest in Forest Guinea, is unable to cope with this constant influx of refugees and has already requested assistance from the different humanitarian bodies present in the region.

The refugees are accommodated in over 90 camps, the largest of which - Fangamadou, Koundou, Nongoa - are isolated in the border region to which the Guinea government has forbidden access for reasons of national security. Nearly 200,000 refugees have not even received even the most basic food and non-food assistance. Their situation is critical.

Latest events

A cholera epidemic broke out in Conakry on 12 August 1998. More than one hundred cases were identified and treated (with 3 deaths recorded) by the end of August. Camp conditions in the Guinea Forest area are deteriorating as indicated in the newspaper, *L'Indépendant*, in its 27 August edition: "The living conditions in the refugee camps in Forest Guinea are deplorable. Three children die every day in Mossakondo camp, 8 kilometres from Kissidougou."

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Future areas of Red Cross assistance to the refugees in the region of Guékédou were defined during several meetings held by the Federation/Red Cross Society of Guinea with UNHCR, MSF, GTZ and ACF, held throughout the month of August. The identified activities for Red Cross programmes comprised:

- sinking wells and developing water points in the camps and surrounding villages;
- building latrines in the camps and villages;
- providing sanitation for the town of Guékédou the population of which has tripled with the arrival of the refugees;
- disinfecting wells and latrines in the camps and villages;
- creating a reception centre for orphans and disabled persons;
- organising camp and village activities including community-health information campaigns on prevention of cholera, diarrhoeal diseases and HIV;
- providing social assistance for the most vulnerable in the camps (single mothers and disabled persons)

Daily meetings between the National Society and the Federation's delegation in Conakry have enhanced the flow of information and coordination of relief efforts. The Federation has also opened a delegation in Guékédou with two field delegates.

An additional 100 volunteers have been trained to provide immediate assistance in the camps. The National Society co-ordinator has been assigned to Guékédou in order to recruit and train the volunteers and be the delegates' main contact person. 15,000 mats and 50,000 bars of soap have been stored at Guékédou, ready for distribution in the camps.

Outstanding Needs

Cash donations are most urgently needed to:

- sink 10 pulley wells in 10 villages
- sink 7 wide-diameter wells with hand pumps in 5 villages
- sink 10 small-diameter wells with hand pumps in 5 big camps
- sink 20 pulley wells in 10 camps
- build 3 latrines, each with a capacity for six, in the town of Guékédou
- build 100 simple latrines in camps and villages
- organize 10 refuse bins by purchasing 100 bins for the town of Guékédou
- purchase of 20,000 blankets
- purchase of disinfectant for the wells and latrines
- organize community-health campaigns in camps and villages
- build a home for orphans and disabled persons in the town of Guékédou

Cash is also needed to pay the per diems for the 100 first aid workers, 3 nurses, 1 doctor, a team of camp facilitators and 17 permanent office workers.

Equipment which needs to be purchased includes: 1 second-hand 4wd lorry, 1 desk top computer and 1 printer, 1 photocopy machine, 1 7.5-kw generator for the home, hi-fi equipment for camp activities, 1 camera and 100 RC aprons.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The Federation and the RCSG met with local authorities to discuss Guékédou's sanitation programme as well as the creation of a home to provide shelter and psychological care for orphans and traumatised children. Co-operation with the health and social welfare services of the prefecture of Guékédou is also ongoing. The Federation delegate and the GRCS took part on several occasions in working meetings with the Guékédou commune municipal council.

Almost daily meetings with colleagues at UNHCR, MSF, GTZ and ACF helped better orient Federation/National Society efforts to prioritise needs. Also, new social welfare co-operation structures are being worked out in weekly meetings with the members of the UNHCR.

Contributions

See Annex 1.

Conclusion

The region of Guékédou has been seriously affected by the continued influx of refugees, presently estimated at around 380,000. In view of the economic problems facing the villages with a high ratio of refugees, it is now urgent to launch community projects benefiting the refugees and the native population. Partners in the field have been overwhelmed by the scope of the needs still outstanding and have welcomed Red Cross intervention in the areas of sanitation and social welfare. There is a recognised urgent need for the Red Cross to make available its human and financial resources as well as its skills and experience in the region. For further information, please contact Africa Department tel. +41 22 730 44 18.

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