

# INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies  
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge  
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja  
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

## THE GAMBIA: POPULATION MOVEMENT

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### *The Situation*

On 4 and 5 May 2002, an influx of refugees from the Casamance region of Senegal began entering the western portion of The Gambia. Refugees were reported to be fleeing from fighting between Senegalese armed forces and the Casamance separatist movement. The government action was reportedly provoked by excessive banditry in the region.

By 6 May, a total of 1,425 refugees were registered, the bulk originating from border villages in Senegal seeking refuge in the following Gambian villages: 800 in Kartong, 200 in Darsilam, 250 in Berrending, and 175 in

Siffoe. The majority of refugees are women and children, constituting over 30% and 60% (respectively) of the full caseload. Refugees continue to arrive at about 50 per hour making the estimated total at the time of writing this report to be over 2,000. In the rush to flee the fighting some children have been separated from their families; over 50 in Kartong alone.

Ongoing conflict as well as security checkpoints mounted by Senegalese forces near the Gambian border preclude a return of those who have already traversed into The Gambia. Keeping track of the exact number of refugees at any one time remains a challenge. The UNHCR Liaison Office in The Gambia was closed in December, 2001 posing a setback in terms of co-ordination and logistical support in providing relief to refugees. The border is porous and affected Senegalese villages are within walking distance of the host villages in the Gambia. Host communities, which include friends and family, are presently lodging most refugees. Relocation of all refugees to the government-established Kwinella transit camp, located 150 km east of Banjul is envisioned. However, Kwinella transit camp, a former seed warehouse, can only hold up to 500 people.



**The bulk of refugees are women and children**

The refugee situation is complex for a number of reasons. With a population of only one million, any influx of refugees into The Gambia has the potential for creating destabilization with far reaching consequences. In addition to the latest volley of refugees, there are already over 20,000 refugees from Sierra Leone as well as over 5,000 Casamance refugees in two camps situated in Kundam and Bambali, others resettled in towns and villages, representing close to three percent of The Gambia's population. The situation remains fluid and more refugees are expected.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent Action***



**Refugees at the Kartong Primary School in Kartona Villaae**

The Gambia Red Cross Society (GRCS) has mobilized 43 volunteers from the Western Division branch who, in collaboration the immigration department, continue to register refugees in host villages. Volunteers are trained in first aid and double as emergency response team members ready to afford first aid assistance as required. An ambulance has been dispatched to host villages in case a medical evacuation is necessary. In addition, as of 5 May, in Kartong, the GRCS, in collaboration with Concern Universal, began providing three portions of wet food to refugees on a daily basis. Over 450 blankets have also been distributed.

As UNHCR is no longer operational in The Gambia, GRCS has taken on an increased auxiliary role in assisting the government in its humanitarian response. The GRCS is a member of the National Relief and

Resettlement Committee under the Office of the Vice President of The Gambia, which include partners such as the Immigration Department, other security forces, and local and international NGOs.

A preliminary needs assessment has been completed by the GRCS. The GRCS will continue to register refugees in host villages. Both first aid and family tracing activities will also be carried out. The GRCS envisions providing relief to between 3,000-4,000 beneficiaries over a period of four weeks. Relief items include food, shelter, and personal hygiene items. Apart from the remaining 300 blankets, all relief items have been depleted. The available vehicles are old and in disrepair making them unsuitable for co-ordinating an operation of this scale.

The Gambian Red Cross continues to monitor the situation in co-ordination with Gambian government authorities and other participating NGOs with the aim of addressing the ongoing needs of the refugees and host communities.



**Kwinella Transit Camp shown here can only accommodate 500 people**

The GRCS, in its preliminary needs assessment, identified the following relief items as urgently required:

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>QUANTITY</b>
Rice (50 kg bag)	480 bags
Cooking oil (20 lt. drum)	200 drums
Canned fish	500 tins
Soap	2,000 bars
Tents (5 person)	100 units
Blankets	2,000 units
Fuel for vehicles (diesel)	1, 200 litres
Cooking utensils	150 sets
Candles	100 packets
Kerosene lamps	200 lamps
Kerosene	400 litres
Vehicle repair	CHF4,500

For a full description of the National Society profile, see [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)

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*For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.*

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