

Guinea Conakry: Sierra Leonean refugees

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The Disaster

{ **Guinea**

A Sierra Leonean military vessel arrived yesterday in Conakry with 41 Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) soldiers and family members. The Guinea Red Cross Society (GRCS) took care of the families, while AFRC soldiers were detained by Guinean authorities. Another boat arrived at Boussoura port but only three refugees were registered: the others passengers were Guinean traders.

UNHCR's Guinea office reported the arrival of 605 refugees at Benti port, near the Sierra Leonean border, about 75 km south-east Forecariah. Of these, 314 moved to the established refugee camps in Forecariah.

{ **Liberia**

According to the BBC, the Liberian Minister of Information has stated that over 100,000 Sierra Leonean refugees have entered Liberia, fleeing the situation in Freetown. This figure conflicts with other sources: UNHCR mentioning 8,000 new arrivals and the Liberian Red Cross Society (LRCS) 18,000. The refugees are arriving by land, crossing the Liberian border near Kenema and joining other Sierra Leonean refugees in the Lofa region.

{ **Sierra Leone**

Security is still precarious. To ensure the safety of lives and property, the Nigerian-led West Africa peacekeeping force ECOMOG is now patrolling the capital and surrounding area. More Sierra Leonean soldiers are surrendering to ECOMOG along peninsula roads leading to the capital. No communication facilities are working, and no vehicles are moving except in Freetown and Waterloo.

In Kono, commercial enterprises and NGOs have been looted. Although the centre of the town is now said to be controlled by Civil Defense Forces (Kamojors), Revolutionary United Front soldiers are still present in the surrounding villages. Kono is recovering from a cholera outbreak and food and drugs are scarce.

In Freetown, many of those displaced during the fighting have now returned to their homes, while those whose houses were burnt down are being sheltered by relatives. The price of staple foods (rice) has dropped from SLL 140,000 to SLL 70,000.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Liberia

A LRCS assessment team which travelled to Vahun in the Lofa area reported 18,000 new arrivals, bringing the total estimated population of refugees there to 40,000. The Red Cross team also noted cases of chicken pox and cholera among the refugee population.

The Federation, as a first emergency response, is sending two trucks with 3,200 blankets, 1,600 jerrycans and 50 boxes of high protein biscuits to be distributed to the most vulnerable. The trucks, departing today in convoy from Monrovia, are scheduled to reach the refugees tomorrow.

Guinea

New arrivals are immediately given water by the Red Cross volunteers and, if needed, medical attention before being registered with the Guinean immigration authorities and UNHCR. Transport to a nearby shelter is followed by distributions of bread and tinned fish and a chance to recuperate on solid ground before the journey continues inland to a UNHCR refugee camp at Forecariah.

Sierra Leone

On Tuesday the Federation representative attended an interagency meeting convened by UNDP in Freetown. Security was one the main issues discussed. Although a relative calm has returned to the capital, there are still hazards in other parts of the country, particularly in the major risk areas of Bo, Kenema, Makeni and Kono where incidents involving attacks on expatriates have recently occurred.

The SLRCS, in close collaboration and consultation with the Federation Representative, will make a thorough assessment of the needs of the individuals/families whose houses were burnt and will provide them with household packages. The International Federation will facilitate and assist SLRCS as it supports clinics and hospitals, with in kind support from British and Swiss Red Cross.

The Federation Representative is currently providing technical advice to the National Society .

Needs

The Federation is compiling a list of specific needs from Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, to be made available shortly.

As mentioned in Information Bulletin No. 2, as this latest crisis in trouble-torn West Africa unfolded, the International Federation rapidly assigned an information consultant to the Guinea delegation to heighten awareness of the crucial role of the Red Cross Red Crescent in mitigating the suffering of those affected.

Pictures and text of key humanitarian activities can be viewed on the Federation's website: www.ifrc.org — click on 'Direct from the Field'.

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