

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC: REFUGEES FROM DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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The Disaster

Following the outbreak of fighting in the north-western Equator Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in late-December 1998 and early-January, 1999, a total of 7,500 refugees crossed the river to the Central African Republic seeking shelter, assistance, and protection in the capital city Bangui (5,000 refugees) and in the Mongoumba District (2,500 refugees). The refugees have been registered, and 3,000 have received shelter and assistance in a transit camp in Bangui while another 2,500 are accommodated with friends and relatives in the city. The refugees located in Mongoumba District were gathered in 5 sites.

Latest Events

The planned transfer of 300 refugees from Bangui to a camp in Boubou near Bossangoa (300 km away from the capital) took place, and adequate plots of land were allocated to promote self-sufficiency over the next three months. The situation of the remaining refugees located in Bangui is deteriorating as the resources of the host families and friends are diminishing.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Central African Red Cross Society (CARCS) distributed food to the refugees in Bangui until February 20 when UNHCR decided to close the transit camp. Many of the refugees however continue to come to the CARCS Headquarters requesting food. During the month of February the following items were distributed in Bangui and Bossongoa: 6,000 kg of rice, 8,550 kg of wheat flour, 440,040 kg of canned fish, 283 kg of beans, 280 kg of sugar, 150 kg of salt, 1,068 pieces of soap, 200 locally made beds, 30 family tents, 150 blankets, and one mill for manioc.

CARCS volunteers have cleared the camp site in Boubou (Bossongoa) and distributed food and non-food items to the newly settled refugees. 36 family latrines have been built, and 24 more are expected to be completed in March. 195 patients have received medical treatment in the dispensary opened in the camp in Boubou. A kindergarten is being built for children under school age.

A medical team joined the public health centre in Mongoumba District to help the staff cope with the additional work load. 2 caesarean sections have been performed, 2 cases of fractured limbs have been treated, 967 children have been vaccinated, with a total of 7,590 patient consultations. In Mongoumba,

where the refugees have settled 55 pit wells have been treated in order in order to avoid cholera and other water borne diseases.

Interagency coordination is strong, with UNHCR leading the operation and assisting with logistics and transport to Boubou, WFP is providing a portion of the food supplies, UNICEF is coordinating water supplies in Bangui, UNDP is providing technical support, MSF manages the dispensary in the camp in Bangui and the Italian NGO Coopi distributed food in the district of Mongoumba (until February 25). CARCS is participating with all the agencies involved in the operation. Pending the identification of more durable solutions for this group of refugees, efforts will continue to increase the efficiency of the delivery of assistance until end of 1999.

Outstanding Needs

The refugees located in Boubou only receive canned food which needs to be supplemented with fresh vegetables and cereals. As soon as the construction of the pitwell in Boubou is completed, seeds will be distributed to women's groups who will receive training on how to grow vegetables. The primary health care for children and women is an essential service which requires ongoing support.

In Bangui, the resources of the local population will soon be exhausted, tensions are already rising, and the situation will be aggravated by the coming presidential election campaign which is expected to start soon. Those refugees still located in Bangui therefore need to be persuaded to move to Boubou where the living conditions are more favourable.

The CARCS urgently requires an additional CHF 93,383 in order to cover the costs for medicines and the medical care (CHF 18,500), the water/sanitation component (CHF 2,600), the kindergarten facilities (CHF 1,500), volunteers (CHF 39,833), logistics (CHF 23,700), and administration (CHF 7,250) .

External Relations

The Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee continues to hold regular meetings, with the participation of local and national authorities.

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