

# **SENEGAL, GAMBIA, GUINEA AND CAPE VERDE: POPULATION MOVEMENTS FROM GUINEA-BISSAU**

28 October 1998

*appeal no. 19/98*

*situation report no. 02 (focus on Guinea)*

*period covered: 16 August - 14 October 1998*

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*The International Federation continues to support newly formed branches of the Red Cross Society of Guinea (RCSG) which are providing assistance to refugees from Guinea-Bissau sheltered in five remotely located camps. Training seminars and information materials about the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement are being provided for the new branches.*

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## ***The context***

Following an outbreak of heavy fighting in Guinea-Bissau in early June, up to 300,000 people fled the capital, Bissau, for safe areas in the countryside. An estimated 11,000 moved across international borders into neighbouring Senegal, Guinea and by ship to Cape Verde. Many among these groups were citizens of neighbouring countries and were able to lodge with relations. However, Guinea-Bissau refugees in Guinea have had to rely on the generosity of local communities for shelter and food. With the breakdown of peace talks in Abidjan in mid-September, it is unlikely that any large-scale movement of refugees will take place in the near future.

Guinea already hosts several hundred thousand refugees of Liberian and Sierra Leonean origin, many of whom have been in the country for several years.

## ***Latest events***

Initial Government figures indicated that up to 10,000 refugees/returnees had crossed the border in early July, most having made the exhausting journey from Bissau by foot. Their condition was poor: some women gave birth on route. According to latest information, backed up by continuing RCSG registrations, there are some 5,500 refugees and displaced in the reception zone (prefectures of Koundara, Gaoual and Boke.) Ninety per cent of these refugees are considered to be nationals of Guinea-Bissau. Thousands are said to have moved further into Guinea, towards large towns like Labe where they have families to support them. Little is known of the day-to-day situation in rural Guinea-Bissau. The few people who ventured back to the capital report widespread damage to homes and residential areas. Current figures for refugees/displaced are as follows:

Boke	717
Koumbia	1,371
Saraboido	510

Sansale	1,000*
Kamabi	300*
Malenta	300*
Gaoual	800*
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,509</b>

\* Estimated figure

### ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

The International Federation's Appeal of 10 July 1998 attracted the support of German Red Cross (loan of 500 tents) and Danish Red Cross (donation of 6,300 blankets). Following consultations between the delegation in Conakry, the RCSG, local authorities and refugees, 200 tents and 3,000 blankets were sent to Boke, Saraboido, Foulamouri, Koumbia and Sansale as an initial emergency response to the influx. The tents have been erected, and six blankets allocated to each family group. Other blankets have been donated to homeless refugees as well.

A further 240 tents are being sent to the refugee zone this week, along with 1,400 blankets. It should be stressed that the zone is highly inaccessible -- a journey of 90 kilometres can take eight hours to accomplish, even in a 4WD vehicle. To visit the five existing camps from Conakry takes at least one full working week.

The authorities in Gaoual have asked that a camp be established there for the 800 refugees currently living with local families. The local Red Cross branch is currently assisting with a census and a decision on whether or not to establish a camp there will be taken based on that census. There is also reported to be some 300 refugees living in Malenta, two hours drive away from Gaoual, but a visit there has yet to take place. In Kamabi, near Saraboido, authorities spoke of a substantial concentration of refugees. An on-the-spot visit was made, a refugee numbers were found to be smaller than reported (possibly 300, not more).

All camp sites have been identified with the collaboration of local authorities, and prepared by the refugees themselves, supervised by RCSG technicians. One site in Boke was decreed to be unsuitable by the authorities with the unfortunate result that 50 tents had to be dismantled and transported to another site. In general, there are sources of potable water within 400 metres of each camp.

Camp population: (figures for week starting 20 September – first week of installation of tents):

Boke	0#
Sansale	180*
Saraboido	210
Koumbia	200
Foulamouri	120

#: Camp being relocated (was 240); \*: Estimate

Plans are proceeding to install latrines in each camp, and to dig/reinstall wells as necessary. In the coming days, the head of the RCSG's health department will visit the camps to determine the needs in this sector and establish health posts as required.

## ***Outstanding needs***

Although food aid is not a part of this operation it is clear that some support will have to be offered if food shortages are to be avoided next year. The seed reserve for next year has already been eaten, and as this region serves as the breadbasket for the areas of Bas and Moyen Guinea, the consequences of a poor harvest this year and no seed reserve for next year could be extremely serious. An increasing realisation of this fact is already starting to weaken the excellent relations that exist between the refugees and the host population.

The loan of tents and donation of blankets is sufficient for the present needs. Any further influx from Guinea Bissau would overwhelm the fledgling Red Cross branches in the refugee zone. A careful eye should be kept on the situation across the border and contingency plans made for further influxes.

Dissemination materials are urgently needed: the branches are keen to know all they can about the Red Cross movement and pass that knowledge along to refugee and indigenous populations. A request for materials from the delegation to the Secretariat has been made.

## ***External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media***

The Red Cross is the only agency working in the refugee zone, and to date only five visits have been made there - two by the National Society, one by the development delegate and two by the field delegate assigned to the region. As the refugees are still not assembled in distinct centres, exact numbers are difficult to ascertain, given the nature of the terrain (remote jungle). The UNHCR has not made any census, and originally doubted the existence of refugees. World Food Programme has agreed to visit the refugee zone this week, following contacts with RCSG/Federation. The newly established relations with local authorities are good, apart from the case in Boke, which has been resolved to the satisfaction of all sides.

Branches of the RCSG did not exist in the North of the country before the refugee influx (although the emblem is well-known and respected, in part due to the Movement's response to the 1983 earthquake near Koumbia). Enthusiasm is high but basic knowledge is low, although training seminars are ongoing, particularly in Boke.

The HoD was interviewed on BBC French World Service and Radio France International concerning the Guinea Bissauan refugee operation in the past week.

## ***Contributions***

See Annex 1 for details.

## ***Conclusion***

The operation is proceeding well, although expectations have been raised among the refugees and host communities that further aid will follow. Distribution of tents and blankets should be completed by mid-October, and work on latrines and wells by the end of the month. A final report will follow in early November.

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