

GUINEA: REFUGEES FROM SIERRA LEONE

21 October 1998

appeal no. 20/98

situation report no. 2

period covered: 7 September - 1 October 1998

This report on the emergency Appeal for refugees from Sierra Leone also contains the latest information regarding the outbreak of cholera in Guinea, first reported by the International Federation on 2 September in an Information Bulletin, as well as the effects of famine in the country's north-east.

The International Federation and the Red Cross Society of Guinea (RCSG) have intensified efforts to improve sanitation conditions in the camps accommodating refugees from Sierra Leone. The cholera epidemic in Guinea's capital city, Conakry, has stabilised but the disease has spread to outlying regions, and of most concern to areas where the refugee camps are located.

The context

Violent fighting between the Economic Community of West Africa State Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) troops and the RUF rebel forces continues in north-eastern Sierra Leone. More than 200,000 refugees have fled to the southern and south-eastern part of Guinea (prefectures of Guékédou, Kissidougou, Faranah) since March, increasing the total number to an estimated 380,000. This region is unable to cope with this influx of refugees and is requesting assistance from the different humanitarian agencies already present in the region. The refugees are accommodated in over 90 camps, the largest of which - Fangamadou, Koundou, Nongoa - are in the border region which is very exposed and vulnerable to frequent rebel incursions. It has been difficult to allocate and target humanitarian assistance properly as the refugees move between camps which are in close proximity to the border.

Latest events

A cholera epidemic which gave signs of letting up in Guinea's capital, Conakry, partially as a result of the sustained efforts of the teams of Red Cross first aid workers has flared up again in the region of Forecariah and in the region of N'Zérékoré. This situation is a source of real concern as improvements in the health conditions in all the camps for refugees from Sierra Leone are increasingly running behind schedule. There is still only 1 latrine for 80 persons, instead of the standard 1 for 20. The outbreak of cholera in the camps could be disastrous.

Famine has come on the heels of insufficient rain in the prefecture of Mali, in north-eastern Guinea, resulting in some deaths and threatening thousands more. A preliminary assessment mission has shown that 8,500 persons are very seriously threatened and 20,000 others may well also be shortly if no measures are taken. This situation is the result of the drought that prevailed in 1997 and 1998 in this

poor, enclaved farming and stock-breeding region, completely lacking in infrastructure. The Guinea authorities have been able to bring 15 tonnes of food for all the victims in this extremely difficult-to-reach zone.

The WFP, the Federation and the RCSG have decided to work out emergency programmes to be submitted to donors later this month.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Refugees from Sierra Leone w

Latrine-construction programme: 72 latrines are now operational in Gbengbe camp (accommodating 1,440 persons), bringing the camp up to the standard number of 1 latrine for 20 persons. Thirty-six others will be operational in week 41 at Fangamadou - Mangue camp. Sixty are programmed at Fangamadou-city camp which needs at least 200. The latter is a joint RCG/MSF/GTZ operation. A total of 984 latrines still need to be built to reach the planned objectives.

Pulley-well programme: 3 wells have been sunk at Gbengbe camp. The idea of sinking traditional wells in Fangamadou-Mangue camp had to be abandoned as the ground-water level is too deep to be drilled by hand.

Camp activity programme: fifteen RCSG first aid workers are already providing basic first aid assistance to the camp population.

Establishment of community centre at Guékédou programme: Several discussions have been held between the members of the RCG, the Federation, the health directorate, the town of Guékédou and other partners to gradually define each body's spheres of activity and means of intervention in the project.

Sanitation programme for the city of Guékédou (clean-up activities, construction of latrines, water sanitation): How this project will be carried out in the long-term, gradually handing over all the financial and logistics aspects to the city still needs to be defined so as to ensure this programme has a solid basis and all the partners involved are firmly committed.

Cholera programme w

With 100 first aid workers in the field and 10 others working round-the-clock at the cholera emergency treatment centre in Conakry, the Red Cross is little by little bringing this epidemic under control. Thanks to this major effort, the situation in the capital has stabilised, but new outbreaks of the disease are now affecting other regions of the territory. The Red Cross has so far provided supplies for the treatment centre and distributed 5,000 leaflets, overalls, boots, pails, basins, floor cloths, gloves, brooms, brushes, vaporizers, disinfectant, bleach and meals for the first aid workers.

The Red Cross will now direct its prevention campaign to the interior of the country, principally Forest Guinea, which currently accommodates more than 380,000 refugees.

Outstanding needs

Refugees from Sierra Leone - The specific needs identified in the last situation report have been satisfactorily met thanks to a contribution of DM 541,000 from the German Red Cross. However, further contributions are requested to meet the full objectives of the 1998 appeal.

Needs related to the famine situation and the problems arising from the spread of cholera will be defined and budgeted this month based on the findings of the various assessments under way.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Several meetings were held this month with partner agencies and donors including UNHCR, WFP, GTZ, MSF, Ministries of Health and Interior, and diplomatic missions.

Media contacts during the reporting period included BBC and RFI, as well as a TV appearance by the National Society's President together with the ICRC.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The region of Guékedou continues to be affected by the influx of refugees from Sierra Leone, currently estimated to total 380,000. In light of the grave economic problems confronting the villages with a high proportion of refugees and the many camps with insufficient sanitation, it is urgent to begin implementing community programmes to benefit the refugees and the native population. Partners in the field continue to be overwhelmed by the scope of the needs to be met and, unfortunately, cannot yet satisfactorily respond to this overload of work.

With an outbreak of cholera threatening the region where the camps are located, Red Cross intervention in the fields of sanitation, social welfare, and prevention related to community health would be greatly appreciated in the field.

A detailed assessment report is expected from the field on the famine situation.

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