

CAMBODIA: REPATRIATION

**appeal no: 03/99
22 January 1999**

***THIS APPEAL SEEKS CHF 642,000
IN CASH, AND SERVICES
TO ASSIST 37,000 BENEFICIARIES FOR SIX MONTHS***

Summary

Encouraged by growing stability in Cambodia, the first of 37,000 refugees in camps along the Thai border have started to head for home. The Cambodian government has requested the UNHCR to organise their return and named the Cambodian Red Cross as the UN agency's counterpart. In this role the National Society will supply transport and distribute emergency household kits to the families on their return. In a second stage of the operation it will support the rehabilitation and integration of some 5,000 refugees in four north eastern provinces.

The Disaster

After fighting broke out in early July 1997 between supporters of the FUNCINPEC and Cambodian Peoples Party (CPP) in Phnom Penh and in the west and north-west of the country, some 45,000 displaced people crossed the border into Thailand, where they were given shelter in three camps administered by the UNHCR. The conflict was short-lived and repatriation started in October 1997. To date nearly 10,000 people have returned.

With the increasing political stability in Cambodia brought about by the disintegration of the Khmer Rouge, the remaining refugees are eager to return home and the Cambodian and Thai governments are anxious to repatriate them and close the camps. A trickle of spontaneous returns has begun and the first organised return, of 1,410 people, took place last week. This movement is expected to gain momentum very rapidly in the next few weeks. The co-ordination of the refugees' return has been entrusted to the UNHCR; the Cambodian government has appointed the Cambodian Red Cross (CRC) as the UNHCR's official counterpart. In the initial return phase the CRC will distribute household kits to each returning family, an estimated 9,632 families

While most of the refugees came from the western provinces of Battambang, Siem Reap, Preah Vihear and Kampong Thom, as many as 5,000 originate from four north-eastern provinces, Mondul Kiri, Ratanak Kiri, Strung Treng and Kratie, but were already internally displaced before they fled to Thailand. They have chosen to return to their original home -- an area they left as long as 20 years ago. The Cambodian Red Cross/ Federation will seek to assist this group, in a second phase of the operation, by providing support for their rehabilitation and integration into the local community.

The Response so far

Government Action w

Despite improvements in the political and security situation, the Cambodian economy and state finances have deteriorated in recent years and the government is not in a position to support the return and reintegration process financially (although it recently announced its intention to reduce its armed forces and police and to redirect expenditure to the social sector and rural development). To successfully reintegrate and rehabilitate returnees, support from the international community is essential.

The government-supported Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC) is planning to relocate 300 personnel from Kampot Province to Samlot District in Battambang by late February to de-mine the heavily mined route from Chong Khao Plu to Samlot, which is the most direct route for the refugees' return. There is concern that time is too short to fully de-mine the area.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action w

Since repatriation started in October 1997, the CRC, in accordance with its agreement with the UNHCR, has provided transport for the returnees from the Thai border to the Reception Centre in Sisophon and from there to the drop-off points. CRC and other organisations have monitored the rehabilitation of the returnees. In addition, the CRC as the key implementing partner transports food, and manages the Reception Centre and the extended drop-off points.

From the beginning of the operation the Federation has provided financial and administrative support to the CRC for purchasing and distributing Emergency Household Kits to all families arriving at the Reception Centre.

The CRC/Federation was also the chief partner of UNHCR during the repatriation of some 300,000 Cambodians from Thailand in 1992/93.

Other Agencies' Action w

The World Food Programme (WFP) will provide all returnees with 20 Kg. of rice, cooking oil and canned fish at their final destination. UNHCR is negotiating with WFP to consider Food-for-Work programmes for the returnees until the next harvest.

The Cambodian Family Development Service (CFDS) is assisting the most vulnerable groups in the western provinces.

Co-ordination w

UNHCR, in co-operation with the Cambodian government, will co-ordinate the repatriation operation.

The Federation delegation in Cambodia is in daily contact with the ICRC delegation, exchanging information and monitoring the situation.

The Intended Operation

Because of the constraints of crop cycles and seasonal flooding, the repatriation must take place as rapidly as possible. If the refugees are to be reintegrated into their original rural communities and resume farming as their livelihood they must be back home before the rainy season in order to plant the traditional wet season rice crop, by July at the latest. Farmers will need the tools to prepare the land (including rice nurseries) well in advance and families will need time to build a suitable shelter above the flood levels of the rainy season. During this season -- from April in the eastern provinces and from July in many other areas -- the majority of rural roads become impassable.

While they re-establish themselves, the refugees will need food support until they are able to harvest a rice crop. They will also need safe water/sanitation and housing.

Assessment of Needs w

A joint mission by UNHCR, WFP, CRC and the Federation is planned at the end of January to assess the situation in Mondul Kiri province in the north east where 1,800 returnees are expected to settle. The mission will consider basic needs such as food (including crop production), water supply, shelter, health care, landmines as well as issues of access to land and services. The use of small scale Quick Impact Projects (QIPS) will be considered. Other missions are being organised to the three other provinces.

Immediate Needs w

The Federation and the CRC will provide at least 9,500 emergency household kits to an estimated 9,632 families. CRC already has 1,953 kits in stock; a further 7,500 kits will be procured locally. Each kit will contain 17 items, including: a sarong, mosquito net, blanket, kroma (scarf), mat, axe head, knife, empty sack, rice pot, plastic sheet, soap and plastic water container. The kits will be procured, stored (where necessary) and distributed by CRC.

Anticipated Later Needs w

An estimated maximum of 5,000 returnees will resettle in four north-eastern provinces. The CRC, assisted by the Federation, has been requested by UNHCR to assist in responding to the medium to longer term needs of the most vulnerable -- both returnees and the local population -- in these areas. A detailed plan of action will be developed after the necessary assessments have been carried out. This phase of the operation will receive UNHCR support and will be detailed in a possible extension to this Appeal.

(Cambodian Family Development Service (CFDS) will follow up the medium to longer term needs of the most vulnerable in the north-western provinces.)

Although CRC has extensive experience in this area following the 1992/93 repatriation, it is likely to require additional institutional support in order to assist the most vulnerable. It is expected that the CRC Red Cross Volunteer (RCV) and Red Cross Youth (RCY) programmes, operational in other provinces, will be the vehicle for rehabilitation assistance.

Red Cross Objectives w

- { To provide transport, in co-operation with the UNHCR, for the repatriation of an estimated 37,000 Cambodian refugees from three camps in Thailand to their preferred destination. The CRC will also provide transport for rice and other food items that WFP will supply to returnees after their arrival.
- { To distribute 9,500 emergency household kits to returnee families.
- { After an assessment of needs, to support the installation and integration of 5,000 returnees -- particularly the most vulnerable groups of single headed households, single women, children, the disabled and elderly -- in the four remote north-eastern provinces of Mondul Kiri, Ratanak Kiri, Strung Treng and Kratie. This assistance will also benefit the local population of these provinces.

National Society/Federation Plan of Action

Emergency Phase w

Procurement of household kits will be done in the next six to eight weeks, although it will depend on the funding response to this Appeal. Distribution of the kits will depend on the rate of return of the refugees. The first 1,410 refugees returned to Cambodia last week (11 - 17 January) in transport organised by the CRC.

Phase Two w

Assessments in the north eastern provinces will begin shortly after the return of the refugees.

Capacity of the National Society w

The CRC has been involved in assistance to refugees almost non-stop for seven years and has acquired extensive experience, particularly in the organisation of transport and distributions.

A relief delegate will support the CRC for three months (with possible extension). The delegate will oversee the relief operation, assist in the assessment of the longer term needs in the north-eastern provinces and develop, where appropriate, a plan of action for longer term support. The delegate will also assist in reporting and in advising on the further development of the capacity the CRC logistics department and the capacity of the CRC provincial branches in the four north-eastern provinces.

Present Capacity of the Federation in Cambodia w

The Federation currently has a Head of Delegation and a Disaster Preparedness Delegate in Cambodia, assisted by ten local staff. The Regional Delegation in Kuala Lumpur will also provide technical support to this operation.

Budget summary

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Developments in Cambodia now offer a real opportunity of bringing to an end one of the region's most enduring refugee problems. The 37,000 refugees are themselves ready to return home. This Appeal seeks support for an operation that will see CRC/Federation providing a measurable and significant contribution to a major humanitarian situation -- one where CRC will play a lead role alongside UNHCR, WFP and the government of Cambodia. Donors are urged to respond to this Appeal as rapidly as possible.

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