

CAMBODIA: REPATRIATION

2 February 1999

appeal no. 3/1999

situation report no.1

period covered: 22 January - 2 February

Cambodians are returning from refugee camps in Thailand faster than expected when the appeal was issued. The returnees have few if any possessions and urgently need the household kits scheduled for distribution as part of the appeal. However donor response to date is only 13%.

The context

With growing stability in Cambodia, plus the approaching planting season, the anticipated mass return of 37,000 Cambodian refugees from camps in Thailand has begun. The Cambodian government requested the UNHCR to organise the return and has appointed the Cambodian Red Cross (CRC) as the UN agency's counterpart.

Latest events

Since the launching of the Emergency Appeal ten days ago (on 22 January 1999) the volume of both spontaneous and organised repatriation has increased considerably. The CRC's Siem Reap branch reported as many as 10,000 returnees having arrived in four communes in the Anlong Veng district (largely from Phu Noi camp in Thailand). Meanwhile organised repatriation, under the auspices of UNHCR, has seen 2,457 people return during January.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Distribution of food and household kits •

The CRC has procured 2,000 household kits (containing 17 items) and, given adequate funds, will procure a further 2,000 within the next few days. Of these initial 2,000 kits, 500 have been pre-positioned in Siem Reap and a further 400 in Banteay Meanchey. (Since the beginning of repatriation in October 1997, a total of 3,878 kits have been distributed.)

Meanwhile, the CRC supported by funds from UNHCR, continues to provide transport and camp management and has distributed 21.4 metric tonnes of World Food Programme food (rice, salt, canned fish and cooking oil) to newly registered returnees.

Joint Assessment Team Mission •

From 25 to 29 January the International Federation took part in an assessment team (with UNHCR, WFP and CRC) to Mondul Kiri province in north-eastern Cambodia. The team interviewed 200 refugee

families as well as the local population and confirmed that priority needs are food, land, agricultural implements and seeds. In view of the expected onset of the rainy season in late April and the need for farmers to prepare the land, these needs are now urgent.

The assessment also found that returnees had little or no livestock (apart from a few chickens), almost no tools for building shelters or working the fields, and were suffering from a variety of health problems (including chronic malnutrition, malaria and diarrhoea).

Longer-term needs are therefore likely to include water and sanitation, health care, psychological trauma services and other reintegration assistance such as family reunification.

Outstanding needs

While the emergency needs remain as highlighted in the Appeal, the large number of returnees arriving daily is adding to the urgency of the operation. Of particular concern are the families arriving spontaneously, who desperately require very basic assistance to re-establish themselves. It is crucial that these families receive household kits, which contain, among other things, mosquito nets (the numbers of which may be increased due to the prevalence of malaria), water containers and plastic sheeting. Furthermore, there is still a need to carry out a thorough assessment of the longer term situation facing the returnees.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

In-country co-ordination has been considerable. Extensive co-ordination has been ongoing with both the government of Cambodia and with the main agencies (UNHCR & WFP). Additionally there have been co-ordination meetings with ICRC, IGOs and NGOs. Copies of the Emergency Appeal have been sent to the main international aid agencies and embassies in Phnom Penh. A press release was issued from Kuala Lumpur to news agencies and the operation was mentioned in an Update sent mostly to Bangkok-based journalists covering Cambodia. The Kuala Lumpur information delegate and the Cambodia head of delegation accompanied by the Cambodian Red Cross Director of the Communications Department are currently at the CRC-managed reception centre in Sisophon.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Repatriation of the 37,000 refugees targeted by the Appeal is now taking place faster than expected as returnees return spontaneously to northern Cambodia. These people have very little to sustain themselves and are highly dependent on external support. However, response to the Appeal has been very slow (approximately 13% covered) and funds are now urgently needed to continue this operation. The International Federation has released CHF 250,000 from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) but continues to seek funds for this critical operation.

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