

CAMBODIA: REPATRIATION

15 March 1999

appeal no. 3/1999 (revised)

situation report no.2

period covered: 03 February - 15 March

The repatriation of 37,000 Cambodian refugees in camps in Thailand is continuing smoothly and should be completed by the end of March. Returnees are receiving initial assistance in the form of food and household kits and plans are being formulated to provide food for work and water and sanitation services. Recent assessments point to the need for longer term support to facilitate resettlement and reintegration in the four north eastern provinces: the budget of this appeal has therefore been increased to CHF 2,042,000.

The context

The last Cambodian refugees are crossing the border from neighbouring Thailand back into Cambodia. The findings of a joint assessment (conducted by WFP, UNHCR, the Cambodian Red Cross and the Federation) confirmed that the priority needs for resettlement are food, land, agricultural implements and seeds. Due to the approaching rainy season in late April, farmers are expected to begin preparing the land ready for the planting season.

Latest events

Of a total of 37,000 persons registered in the three camps in Thailand in late 1998, less than 10,000 remained as of 3 March in the two camps in Trat and Surin provinces. The others have already returned to Cambodia, either through organised transport or spontaneously. Phu Noi camp in Sisaket province was closed and handed over to the Thai authorities on 14 February.

Repatriation from Phu Noi camp began on 12 January and finished on 2 February. In a total of seven organised journeys, a total of 4,096 people (according to the UNHCR) -- mainly former Khmer Rouge soldiers and their families -- were transported first to the reception centre in Sisophon and thereafter to the destination of their choice. Out of an estimated 15,261 people in Phu Noi camp, 4,000 chose to return to their places of origin in the north-eastern provinces.

Others have gone back to Anglong Veng in Siem Reap or other destinations in Cambodia. Another 11,165 people from the camp crossed the border spontaneously and went to Anglong Veng. Local authorities together with UNHCR, WFP, CRC and other agencies present in Siem Reap province have been addressing the initial needs of the spontaneous returnees.

Major movements from Chong Khao Phlu camp in Trat province began on 12 February after a new road was opened. UNHCR provided cash for families who organised their own transport, 16 kms across the border to Samlot in Battambang province. The usual initial assistance of food and household kits, was distributed to the returnees at a specially organised distribution point. About 200 families are returning on a daily basis from Trat province. The UNHCR, WFP and the Cambodian Red Cross (CRC) are uniting their efforts to facilitate movements from the province. Approximately 6,000 people are still in the camp, waiting to return during the coming weeks.

Movements from Huay Cherng camp in Surin province continue as usual through the CRC managed reception centre in Sisophon. Only about 2,500 people remain in the camp and according to the UNHCR they will have left and the camps will close by the end of March if everything continues as planned.

There is considerable concern about the presence of mines on the repatriation routes. UNHCR is funding the demining activities of demining agencies such as CMAC and HALO Trust.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Movements/Transport •

The CRC was appointed by the Council of Ministers in December 1998 as the official counterpart of the UNHCR to implement the repatriation operation. The reception centre in Sisophon is managed by the CRC with funds made available by the UNHCR. The CRC continues to provide transport to all returnees coming through the reception centre in Sisophon. Final destinations are mainly in the provinces in the north-west but movements take place also to all other provinces and municipalities -- a total of 23 destinations all over the country. Recently 4,000 returnees, (ethnic minorities from Phu Noi camp) were transported to the north-eastern provinces they left over 20 years ago. The CRC organised the transport in co-operation with the UNHCR.

Household kits/Food-for-work/Food-for-activities •

Initial assistance in the form of food and household kits is provided by the CRC in co-operation with the Federation. World Food Programme (WFP) supplies the food (rice, fish, oil etc.) for the initial 50 days after return, and will fund food for work or food for activities after the initial support. The CRC Disaster Management Department, supported by the Federation, is in the process of finalising the project proposal on food-for-work/food-for-activities together with the WFP, especially in Monduliri where rains are expected in April.

Household kits will be also given to families in the receiving communities in order to strengthen the reintegration process. Purchase of the kits is done in Phnom Penh by the CRC Logistics Service, based on three quotations from various suppliers. Distribution of kits takes place at four main distribution points: *in Phnom Penh* to returnees heading to the north-eastern provinces, in Samlot for returnees coming directly across the border from the camp in Trat province, at the Sisophon reception centre for returnees from the camp located in Surin province and in Anglong Veng to the returnees who spontaneously crossed the border from Phu Noi camp in January.

The current household kits are funded by ECHO. The Belgian Government will also contribute 3,150 kits through the Belgian Red Cross. The composition of the kit was revised in January; another mosquito net and soap was added, plus some agricultural tools and rice or vegetable seeds.

The total number of household kits distributed to date since the beginning of repatriation on 10 October 1997 is 8,957 kits.

Water/Sanitation Component •

As part of the ECHO funded component, a water/sanitation (W/S) element will be implemented in all three main resettlement areas (West: Battambang/Samlot, North: Siem Reap/Anglong Veng, North-east: Mondulhiri, Ratnakiri, Kratie, Stung Treng). A subcontract will be developed with organisations having the requisite capacity and technical expertise to implement the water/sanitation component. Assessments will be carried out in all resettlement areas and suitable water sources for safe drinking water will be established. Requirements for latrines and hygiene education will be looked into and a plan of action for implementation of the component will be prepared as soon as possible after the arrival of the Water/Sanitation Delegate on 7 March.

Human Resources/Capacity building •

A Federation Relief/Logistics Co-ordinator arrived in the country on 14 February, initially for three months, in order to support the CRC Logistics Service, to strengthen its logistics capacity and to assist in co-ordinating the repatriation operation.

The Regional Water Sanitation Officer in Kuala Lumpur is currently with the delegation for a two week period to give further support to the programme.

The CRC monitoring capacity in W/S will be built up at both the NHQ and the provincial level by the W/S delegate through training workshops and on the job training.

Assessments •

The Federation and the CRC participated with WFP and UNHCR in two joint assessments of general needs in the north-eastern provinces among the ethnic minorities and the receiving communities in Mondulhiri and Ratnakiri. Programmes and activities for initial support for resettlement and reintegration are being planned by WFP, UNHCR, CRC and the Federation with other partners interested in supporting the reintegration process as described above. Relevant Ministries and local authorities have been informed and involved in the process in every area and at all levels.

Longer term needs of returnees and the receiving communities in the north-east •

A programme proposal for short, medium and long term needs in the social welfare/health sector was drafted, based on the needs identified through the assessments. The Federation is now negotiating with the UNHCR for the initial funding for this programme until the end of the year. It is expected that the UNHCR will cover the programme costs to the end of 1999 and some other donors will be mobilised later, together with the UNHCR, for longer term funding, initially for two years.

Outstanding needs

After an early limited response to the Emergency Appeal, significant support from ECHO and donor Red Cross societies (American, Belgian, British, Canadian, Japanese, Icelandic), has now fully covered the costs of the current operation. However, following the recent assessment missions, which point clearly to longer-term reintegration requirements, the CRC and the Federation have deemed it necessary to expand the operation in this direction. Accordingly, the Appeal budget has been revised to CHF 2,042,000.

In addition, an estimated amount of CHF 1,200,000 will be required for the social welfare needs in north-east Cambodia. An application for this amount is currently under consideration by UNHCR.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Co-operation between the main participating agencies (UNHCR, WFP, CRC, the Federation) has enabled repatriation to evolve positively, despite some difficulties. An Emergency Response Group Meeting took place twice this year and was chaired by the CRC. It was decided that such meetings should be organised on a regular basis for co-ordination, co-operation and information sharing purposes.

There has been continued communication with the government of Cambodia: a consultative meeting was organised in February between the two Governments of Thailand and Cambodia, the UNHCR and the CRC. The Federation, ICRC, WFP, UNDP and the Personal Representative to the UN Secretary General were invited to the meeting as observers.

UNHCR is ensuring that the repatriation routes and arrival points are clear of mines and unexploded ordinance, especially in the northern and north-western provinces. Halo Trust and CMAC are providing a rapid assessment and an operational plan of the principal repatriation routes. UNHCR is also funding demining activities in Samlot area in order to speed up the resettlement process there.

There has been extensive collaboration with the Cambodian Family Development Services (CFDS) as mentioned above. World Concern have been responsible for expansion of shelters and latrines in the reception centre in Sisophon. Medecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) is actively involved in the health sector. Refugees International is monitoring the repatriation and advocating the initial needs of the returnees. Relevant UN agencies and other international organisations have been widely consulted by the Red Cross during the assessments.

Co-ordination and co-operation, especially with the Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Planning, is crucial in order to ensure a sustainable development process from a national perspective in the resettlement areas as well as to ensure the implementation of the repatriation activities in a planned and well co-ordinated way in the long term.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The CRC, in conjunction with UNHCR, WFP and the Government of Cambodia, has been able to respond rapidly to the needs of the returnee population. Not only has the CRC been able to make a critical contribution to the emergency phase of the operation, but it has taken the initiative of supporting both rehabilitation needs (such as water and sanitation) and longer term social welfare needs in the remote north-eastern provinces. The continued success of the operation is also the result of excellent co-ordination with UNHCR, WFP and government and the timely financial and technical guidance from ECHO and other donors. This operation has enabled returnees to return, to begin the process of resettlement and reintegration and to have the necessary support in the longer term.

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