

BURUNDI, RWANDA, TANZANIA, UGANDA & ZAIRE: RWANDAN AND BURUNDIAN REFUGEES

23 August 1996

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Summary

Apart from the dramatic events in Burundi, July proved a month of comparative calm in a region torn apart by the mayhem of recent years. Red Cross National Societies, supported by the International Federation continued their vital, day-to-day activities on behalf of the victims, distributing food and non-food items, administering health and sanitation programmes and ensuring smooth running of the camps.

The context

More than two years after the terrible events in Rwanda plunged the Great Lakes region of East/Central Africa into crisis, the Federation continues to provide essential services for over 672,000 refugees in Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zaire. The Federation is also assisting the Rwanda Red Cross to re-establish itself and to restore traditional support programmes to the community.

Latest events

Tanzania

During a fairly stable reporting period, with very few, minor security incidents disturbing the normal course of a mainly 'care and maintenance' operation, the most significant developments occurred on the other side of the border, in Burundi. However, to the surprise of some, the number of people seeking asylum in Tanzania decreased during the last week of July, with no sign of the massive population displacement feared immediately after the recent coup. It is difficult to establish at present whether this turn of events is due to better conditions inside Burundi or more careful control of the border. All agencies, including the International Federation, continue close monitoring the situation, while reviewing contingency plans for a possible scale-up of operations in Kigoma.

Zaire

Compared to the previous month, July was also a quiet period in Goma on the security front. The drastic, generalised deterioration feared by many at the end of June did not take place and

the few incidents that occurred - including an ambush on the northern axis road which left 29 civilians injured - proved merely a continuation of the prevailing unpredictable conditions. Meanwhile, the repatriation of refugees to Rwanda remains practically at a standstill, with less than 800 going back from Goma and just a few from Bukavu.

Burundi

Massacres (98 victims at Teza and 341 in Gitega province during the month), the forced repatriation of almost 15,000 Rwandese refugees from the camps of Kibezi and Ruvumu between 19 and 23 July, the threat of a foreign military intervention, demonstrations against President Ntibantuganya, and, subsequently, Major Pierre Buyoya's *coup d'etat*, marked one of the most feverish periods in the history of the small African country. Surprisingly, at the end of a tumultuous month, the situation in Bujumbura was reported as calm, with the borders closed for only 24 hours, the sudden interruption of the forced repatriation in Ngozi and a particularly mild reaction, initially at least, from the international community.

Rwanda

The events in Burundi, especially the mass forced repatriation from Ngozi, had important repercussions in Rwanda. International Federation delegates and Rwanda Red Cross officials visiting the southern province of Butare, which had received almost 15,000 returnees over a period of one week, reported conditions of 'endemic poverty' and 'generally enhanced vulnerability'. At the same time, a number of incidents in the northern province of Gisenyi saw the Rwandan army responding to alleged 'infiltration' from nearby Zaire and led to fears of a drastic deterioration in the situation.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Tanzania

(Benaco camp, 162,000 refugees; Lukole camp, 20,000 refugees)

In Benaco and Lukole camps, food arrangements continued to plan with distributions of 3,000 metric tonnes (MT) during the month. More than 5,600 people were treated in the out-patients departments of Lukole dispensary, 480 of whom were admitted as in-patients. The referral hospital received some 760 patients. Activities undertaken by health information teams (HITs) and traditional birth attendants during the month included almost 2,500 health education lessons and some 2,300 home visits, with 1,140 referrals. During the month, the four mother-and-child health clinics in Benaco and Lukole handled over 1,800 consultations and administered 3,840 vaccinations; some four million litres of water were treated and distributed and maintenance carried out on around 17,800 working latrines.

Zaire

North Kivu (Kibumba camp, 204,000 refugees; Kahindo camp, 114,000 refugees)

Over 4,000 MT of food, including corn soya blend, maize, pulses, vegetable oil and salt, were distributed during the review period; among non-food items handed out were 4,760 tarpaulins, 10,250 blankets and more than 4,000 pieces of clothing. Kibumba hospital handled some 820 consultations, with hospitalisation for around 500 patients. The four dispensaries in Kibumba camp coped with an average of 1,400 consultations per week.

South Kivu (Kashusha camp, 38,000 refugees; Nyamirangwe, 21,000 refugees)

Population figures in Kashusha camp went down by a quarter following a UNHCR census. Officials from both the International Federation and UNHCR are confident that the new

figures correspond to reality. Almost 650 MT of food were distributed in July. Non-food distributions included soap (11,830 kg), blankets (10,500 pcs) and firewood (3,320 stères). An average of 2,400 consultations per week were reported by the two dispensaries.

Burundi

(Magara and Rukuramigabo camp, totalling 70,000 refugees at the end of July)

While the closure of two camps, sharply reducing the number of beneficiaries, resulted in some lessening of the workload, there was no let-up in the overall challenge since the International Federation/Burundi Red Cross (BRC) are the only agencies in a position to assist those refugees being forcibly repatriated. Distributions during the month included more than 1,370 MT of food, 1,860 stères of firewood and various quantities of other non-food items. During the most acute phase of the repatriation crisis, Red Cross volunteers provided drinking water and emergency food rations to almost 8,000 people held in a football stadium for 36 hours, before being transported back to Rwanda.

Despite the dramatic political events, the International Federation/BRC pursued planned development activities (including a third training session for volunteers) and started some small-scale projects, targeting the local community in Ngozi - distributing soap to orphanages and water to hospitals, centers for handicapped etc.

Rwanda

At the end of July, over 16,000 people were reported to have crossed the border with Zaire, seeking refuge in Gisenyi prefecture. Of these, only 13,500 were found to be living in Umubano camp during a head-count performed by the local Rwanda Red Cross (RRC) branch, possibly indicating a high integration rate. The International Federation/RRC, with over 100 volunteers and one expatriate delegate in place, officially assumed responsibility for food and non-food distributions at the end of June. During July, for the first time, the RRC distributed some 310 MT of food to 33 secondary schools in a sole capacity. In addition good progress was reported on the shelter and anaesthetic nurses training programmes.

Uganda

With effect from 26 June, the management of Kisoro camp - approximately 200 km south west of Mbarara, where 2,500 Zairian refugees had settled earlier in the month - was transferred from UNHCR to the International Federation/Uganda Red Cross. Procedures are in place to handle camp management, relief, logistics, health (including water/sanitation) and construction. Work progressed well in the two small settlements of Orukinga and Nakigale in southern Uganda (7,300 refugees in all) with almost 110 MT of food and 1,600 bars of soap distributed over two months and relevant social and health care services also provided.

Contributions (See Annex 1 for details).

Conclusion

Caution must remain the watchword. The comparative calm during the review period, events in Burundi notwithstanding, may prelude a return to more volatile times in the months that lie ahead.

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