

# **BURUNDI, RWANDA, TANZANIA, UGANDA AND ZAIRE: RWANDAN AND BURUNDIAN REFUGEES & RWANDA COUNTRY OPERATIONS**

4 June 1997

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*With the fall of Kinshasa to the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL) and the exit of President Mobutu Sese Seko the Great Lakes region has seen a significant political change. The leader of the newly-named Democratic Republic of Congo, Laurent Kabila has banned political activities and demonstrations, in the wake of his decision not to give former Prime Minister Etienne Tshisekedi a post in Cabinet. Elections, a key demand of the UN and many Western nations, will not be held for at least two years. Red Cross activities in the region are stepping up due to the continuing population movements -- at the time of writing some 120,000 refugees managed to escape rebel advances and started to cross into some neighbouring countries.*

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## ***The context***

The Red Cross Societies of Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zaire, with the support of the International Federation, provide assistance to refugees, displaced people, returnees and vulnerable groups who have been placed at risk by conflict, war and disease in much of the Great Lakes region. The operation, and hence the scope of this situation report, has changed radically since the Appeal was drawn up in late 1996.

## ***Latest events***

### **Democratic Republic of Congo**

- On Friday 16 May President Mobutu relinquished power and left Kinshasa. The next day Laurent Kabila declared himself President of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the new name for the country. The take-over did not trigger the all-out final battle that had been anticipated by some (although over 200 died during and after the fall of Kinshasa), but sparked the movement of a new group of refugees into neighbouring countries.
- The death of 91 refugees in a crush on an ADFL train from Biaro to Kisangani on May 4 brought condemnation from the Rwandan Government of the UN, which in turn accused the ADFL of overcrowding the wagons. Although humanitarian organisations had difficulties with the numbers

arriving at Kisangani, UNHCR managed to reach its target of airlifting 2,000 refugees per day to Rwanda. Access to refugees still hiding in the forest is still sporadic and difficult.

### **Rwanda**

- Confrontation between ex-Forces Armees Rwandaises/Interahamwe and Government forces persists, especially in the north-east. Attacks on individuals and soft targets (schools, priests) continue. On 11 May six people were killed in Nyakizu -- the first attack in Butare prefecture which up till now had been spared from the violence.
- Over 45,000 returnees have entered Rwanda by road/rail/air since the new influx started in mid-April. On arrival they are brought to the central transit centre at Runda, are screened, registered and leave for their home villages within 24 hours.

### **Burundi**

- More than 800 people have been killed recently in the Southern part of the country where fighting between government troops and rebels has intensified. Peace negotiations in Rome are not expected to yield great results. Bujumbura is still calm, although some fighting is ongoing 15 km from the city. The five Northern provinces where the Federation and the Burundi Red Cross operate are calm. Although the economic sanctions imposed on the country in 1996 by the region were softened by the partial lifting of bans on medicine, food, agricultural products, educational and construction material, they still have a strong effect. The problem of internally displaced persons, especially in 'regroupement' camps remains unsolved. The country is also facing a louse-borne typhus epidemic with almost 24,000 cases reported up to 15 May.

### **Tanzania**

- Western Tanzania still receives the brunt of the fall out from instability in Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo/former Zaire. Refugee camps along the Burundian border receive a daily average of up to 600 new refugees. Ongoing drought in the Northeast of the country affecting 610,00 people has prompted the government and Action by Churches Together to launch an appeal to assist the stricken population.

### **Congo**

- Approximately 20,000 Rwandan refugees including groups of armed elements crossed the Zaire river in the latter part of May. Most were in a precarious state of health through malnutrition and consumption of polluted water. The Congolese authorities have confirmed their willingness to accept these refugees but want to have the ex-FAR/Interahamwe separated from the other refugees. UNHCR has been asked by the government to repatriate these refugees in the shortest possible time.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

### **Democratic Republic of Congo •**

National Red Cross teams were highly active, supporting refugees wherever they could be reached and more recently removing the dead from the streets in Kinshasa. The Federation has a delegation in place (HOD, Logistics, Relief, Development, DPP ) to support the National Society in the following programmes:

**Assistance to 2,000 vulnerable persons** (children under five, pregnant and lactating women, elderly and handicapped) with high protein biscuits, soap and with 1,000 mt of maize from WFP in 20 supplementary feeding centres in Kinshasa;

**Distribution of 765 mt of maize** to Rwandan refugees in Mbandaka; the delegation facilitated this WFP donation to the National Red Cross Society;

**Health care and educational services** for 25,000 Cabindan refugees in the region of Matadi (Bas-Zaire);

**Planning the process of rehabilitation and institutional development:** the leadership of the National Society will visit all regional committees, starting on 16 June with Goma, Bukavu, Kindu and Kisangani, in order to evaluate the needs for rehabilitation in the regions both for the population and the Red Cross Society. They will concentrate their efforts on health and health-related projects. This process will also include efforts for regional general assemblies in preparation for the national general assembly of this Red Cross Society.

**Implementation of the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention programme** started in late March with a training workshop for staff of the then Zaire Red Cross Society, conducted by the regional DPP delegate. After this workshop six three-person teams went to six locations in the regions of Equateur, Bandundu, Kinshasa and Bas-Zaïre and passed on their training to 1,394 volunteers and office bearers in regional and local committees. This training proved crucial once the Rwandan refugees arrived in Mbandaka and the then Zaire Red Cross volunteers assisted them through registration, assessment of needs, distribution of food and non-food items, First Aid and basic health services in co-operation with the local authorities. This training programme will continue once access to all regions is again possible. The regional committees will be reinforced by the establishment of small DPP stocks in each region, a countrywide telecommunication system (pactor), as well as basic logistical means.

#### **Rwanda •**

In July, the delegation will attempt to reassess the security situation, in co-operation with UNHCR and other agencies. If conditions are good, extra elements of the original rehabilitation plan, including social support and the improvement of food security, will be budgeted for and started at the end of July. Meanwhile, Rwandan Red Cross Society (RRCS)/Federation rehabilitation activities continue with the construction of approximately 150 houses on a first site in Kibungo prefecture and construction due to start on a second site. More sites are being identified leaving more room for Participating National Societies' involvement in the project.

A basic agreement has been reached with the Ministry of Health on a strategy to start a nation-wide Community Based First Aid (CBFA) project.

#### **Burundi •**

A plan of action has been approved by the Federation to combat a typhus epidemic targeting 500,000 people following the worst outbreak in 50 years, affecting 24,000 people in six provinces. The Burundi Red Cross Society is training its volunteers on the distribution and use of permethrine and on the prevention of health hazards related to its use. Meanwhile, capacity-building activities continue. An assessment mission to study actual needs and possible Red Cross action is scheduled to take place in June.

#### **Tanzania •**

A new co-operation agreement was signed with the Tanzanian Red Cross Society (TRCS) giving it more operational responsibilities in joint TRCS/Federation operations. The co-operation agreement's main goal was to re-establish a partnership in which both parties felt they had ownership of the programmes involved. The next few months should be viewed as a transition period in which progressively more responsibility will be handed over to the TRCS. The Federation is not pulling out of the operation, nor abdicating its responsibility to support the TRCS. Similarly, the Federation is not abandoning its commitments to the Participating National Societies and Donor Agencies and assures them that their funds and contributions are used in accordance to the guidelines under which they were committed. The agreement has resulted not only in increased joint planning but also in a better team spirit in Lugufu. A similar evolution should be expected with regard to the Kasulu activities.

The Federation and the TRCS continue to operate refugee camps in Lugufu (46,000 Zairians) Myovosi (42,000 Burundians) and Mtabila (40,000 Burundians). The TRCS manages a camp for 90,000 Burundians in Lukole, under an agreement with UNHCR. The rainy season has made life

more difficult in all camps but especially Lugufu, which is the last on UNHCR's list for closure in the event of large-scale repatriation to the Democratic Republic of Congo. Installation of a water delivery system in Lugufu, improvements in the sanitation and vector control in all camps is being initiated.

The Red Cross will move ahead with an effort to manufacture and distribute treated mosquito nets in the camps, as recommended by UNHCR. The campaign benefits will be two-fold: mosquito control, and income generation for the beneficiaries who make the nets.

#### **Uganda •**

Kisoro camp was closed on 17 May, when the last 528 of 1,941 refugees were transferred to the Kyangwali settlement camp in Hoima district. At its peak last year some 10,300 refugees were in Kisoro. Transfer of refugees from Matanda camp (which hosted 181 refugees on May 13) will start within a few weeks. Nakivale hosts 2,677 refugees who are not yet planned for transfer. The last camp, Orukinga had 11,067 refugees on 13 May. Approximately 3,000 of these will soon be transferred to Kahunge.

#### **Congo •**

So far 20,000 refugees from Democratic Republic of Congo/former Zaire have crossed the river dividing the two countries. During Congolese Red Cross Society (CRCS) assessment missions dressing kits were left behind to allow local RC branches to continue their support to the refugees. A medical kit, plastic sheeting and high protein biscuits were sent with MSF to Matipotoko. Three barges were sent by the government to pick up refugees north of Brazzaville and bring them to a transit centre at Bilolo, where 25 CRC volunteers under the supervision of the national relief co-ordinator registered them, organised the camp, distributed blankets, plastic sheeting, tarpaulins and food aid and co-ordinated the different agencies involved: MSF for healthcare, Oxfam for water and Atlas for logistics. CRCS took up responsibilities for registration, camp management, distributions and education in health and sanitation. A contract between UNHCR, CRCS and the Federation for this operation is being finalised. The Federation's regional relief co-ordinator acts as facilitator for all relevant meetings, assessment missions and co-ordination.

#### **Central African Republic •**

Due to the events in Democratic Republic of Congo/former Zaire, the CAR received 7,000 refugees from Zaire and Rwanda. For the time being most of them are living in border villages. The CAR Red Cross Society has developed an emergency plan to cope with the influx of larger groups of refugees.

## ***Outstanding needs***

#### **Democratic Republic of Congo •**

With hostilities at an end, full support will be given to the rehabilitation of the country. Once the assessment missions to all regions are successfully accomplished, programmes and plans of action for rehabilitation with a focus on health and institutional development will be drawn up and presented to all interested partners for assistance. The operation for the 25,000 refugees from Cabinda will continue, the present support to displaced persons, refugees and vulnerable people will be closely monitored and if necessary expanded. The implementation of the DPP programme will continue. The implementation of all these programmes depends on the presence of the Federation's delegation in Kinshasa. The delegation, and the operation for the Cabindan refugees, need substantial strengthening.

#### **Rwanda •**

In Rwanda housing remains top priority, together with the re-establishment of the RRCS infrastructure. This effort should be linked to visible programmes for the community such as the

CBFA programme currently under way. A delegate for this programme has been requested and is urgently needed. A General Assembly is planned for August and financial support to help defray expenses is required. Finally, there is need for a resource development delegate who will help the RRCS in identifying income generating activities.

**Burundi •**

The priority of the programme in Burundi is capacity and institutional building of the National Society, non-food assistance to the most vulnerable and social programmes. Outstanding needs will be defined by a high level assessment mission in June.

**Tanzania •**

Outstanding needs in Tanzania include the expansion of the camp site at Kasulu to cope with the new influx of Burundian refugees; the installation of a water system and improvement of the distribution site at Lugufu; improvement of sanitation systems; setting up satellite Outpatient Departments and improving health education in both camps. Financial support for TRCS drought intervention efforts is still sought.

**Congo •**

In order to implement the plan of action with Congolese Red Cross a relief administrator, logistics delegate and donations for relief/medical items are needed.

## *Conclusion*

It is still too soon to have a detailed picture of what activities should be implemented in the coming weeks and months. One thing is certain: the scale of needs is such that prolonged support by donor societies will be needed to cope with the effects of the crisis and to contribute to stability in the region.

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