

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

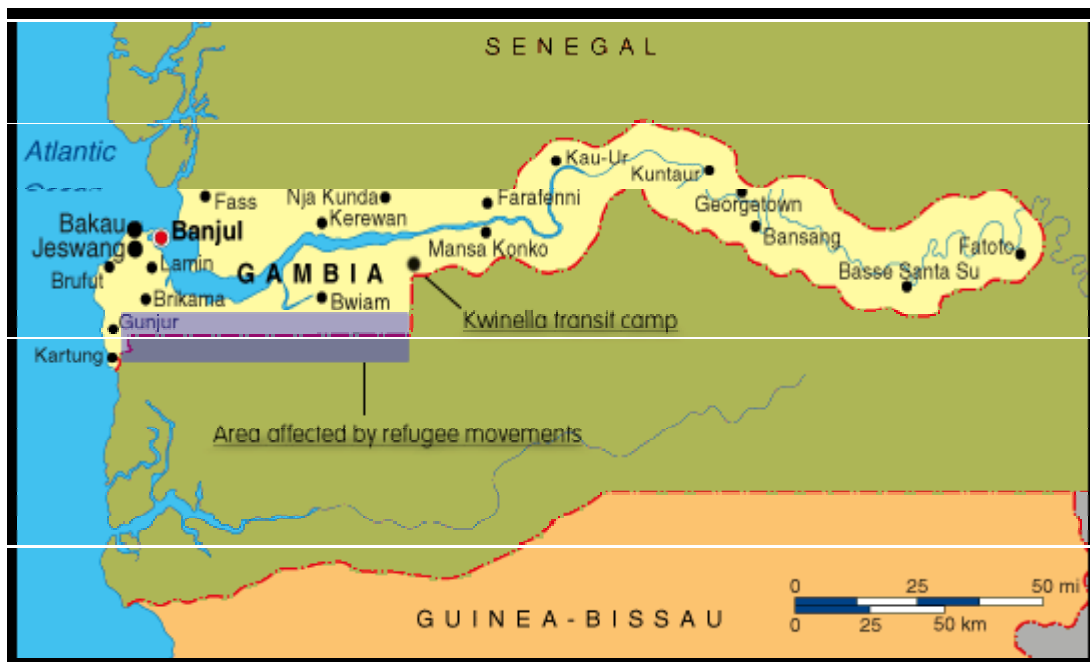
THE GAMBIA: POPULATION MOVEMENT

13 June, 2001

Information Bulletin N° 1

DREF Allocated: None

This Information Bulletin is intended for information only. The Federation is not seeking any funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.



The Situation

The latest incident in the 19-year-old conflict between the Casamance separatist movement, *Movement des Forces Democratique de Casamance* (MFDC) and the Senegalese government has led to an influx of refugees into the western district of neighbouring Gambia. According to AFP, fighting commenced on the 17 of May and has since continued sporadically. The government justified attacks on suspected MFDC positions citing excessive banditry in the region. At the time this report went to press, the number of registered refugees was 3,487. The bulk of refugees came from border villages in Senegal to the following Gambian villages: Sifoe, Darisalami, Dimbaya, Jiborah, Omortoh, Bessi, Somita, Sibanor,

Janack, Oupuot, Djifanga, Kusamai, Suoi, Tambakounda, Kanilia, Kayimo, Karunelia, Kalokoto ad Dobong.

In response to the situation, WFP donated approximately 5 tons of cornmeal. UNHCR plans on carrying out an assessment in co-ordination with the Gambian Red Cross Society (GRCS). Both UNHCR and WFP have committed 20,000 USD each towards assistance to the refugees. Other relief agencies providing assistance include the Anglican Mission Development Ministry (AMDM), Concern Universal, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Gambian Food and Nutrition Association (GAFNA), as well as Gambian government bodies represented by the Minister of State, Permanent Secretary for the Interior and the Director of Immigration. All are members of a co-ordinating committee which is responsible for dealing with this latest refugee crisis. UNHCR has assumed the role of lead agency. A contingency plan is being drafted which will include a matrix assigning specific sectors of activity per agency (i.e., food, shelter, hygiene).



The refugee situation is complex for a number of reasons. In addition to the recent refugees from Casamance, already there are over 20,000 refugees from Sierra Leone as well as over 5,000 Casamance refugees in five other camps situated in Sifoe, Kitty, Arankoli, Kunda, Kwinella and Bessi. Close to three percent of Gambia's total population of 1 million are refugees.

Keeping track of the exact number of refugees at any one time remains a challenge. The border is porous and the affected Senegalese villages are within walking distance of host villages in The Gambia. Refugees cross back and forth across the border. The security level in home villages of refugees, however, precludes a mass return for the moment. Host communities, which include friends and relatives, have been providing the bulk of assistance to date. As this is the planting season, and the host communities have been living on their food reserves until the next harvest season, the arrival of these refugees has been depleting food reserves all the quicker.

The government established Kwinella transit camp - a seed warehouse that can hold up to 500 people located 150 km east of Banjul - to house refugees who wandered into the village of Kanilia. Gambian authorities felt that refugees in Kanilia were a breach to national security as it is the home village of the President. At the time this report went to press, there were 176 refugees relocated to the transit camp. Few refugees have expressed interest in being relocated to the transit camp on grounds that they do not know whether essentials will be provided, and it is not walking distance to their homes across the border. Apart from providing some shelter and a well, Kwinella transit camp offers few other facilities.

Refugees are unwilling to return home. Some have lost their homes, others livestock and seed stocks, still others all three. Some fear returning, as family members are embroiled in the conflict. No expeditious resolution of hostilities is envisioned.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The GRCS was first to be called upon by the Gambian government to use its wide volunteer base to register refugees at the border. The GRCS also conducted a rapid needs assessment to determine how food and non-food items would be distributed. Other services provided by the 45 active Red Cross volunteers included giving first aid to 25 individuals and providing family tracing services for 5 families.

The needs assessment, conducted by the Disaster Preparedness and Response Officer revealed that most refugees are accommodated in host villages which have become congested, and their resources over stretched. Consequently, the GRCS has provided assistance to both refugees and host communities.

The GRCS had the following relief stocks at hand: 2,500 blankets, 60 mats, plastic bowls and pans, and some first aid material to volunteers. Materials have been distributed at Kwinella transit camp and host villages. Cooked food has been provided to 730 refugees at a immigration post on the border.

In its needs assessment, the GRCS identified the following relief items as most needed:

Mattresses	1000 pieces
Hurricane lamps	200 units
Kerosene	300 litres
Rice	200 (50 kg bags)
Cooking oil	100 drums
Sugar	200 bags
Canned meat	500 units
Canned fish	500 units
Soap	300 bars
Salt, spices, firewood	550 CHF
Fuel, accommodation, transport fares	1,100 CHF

The Federation has assisted the Gambian Red Cross response by provided funds to purchase and deliver 200 50-kg bags of rice - the staple crop - enough to feed refugees for about a week. The rice was purchased and 40 bags were sent to Kwinella transit camp, the rest portioned out to host villages. The GRCS decided on a distribution system in host villages whereby each family head hosting refugees was directly given a specific amount per refugee (10 kgs per person per month).

The Gambian Red Cross continues to monitor the situation in coordination with UNHCR, WFP, Gambian government authorities and other participating NGOs with the aim of addressing the ongoing needs of the refugees and host communities.



For a full description of the National Society profile, see www.ifrc.org

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All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.

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