

CAMBODIA: REPATRIATION

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The Disaster

After the factional fighting in Phnom Penh in July, clashes and skirmishes between CPP forces and troops loyal to Prince Ranariddh continued in the far north of the country, resulting in a large number of internally displaced people in four provinces: Battambang, Siem Reap; Preah Vihear and Kampong Thom. An estimated 22,000 persons fled the fighting in the Samrong and O'Smach area and took refuge approximately seven kilometres across the Thai border in the village of Chong Thom. A further 28,000 persons are reported to have fled across the border, following sporadic firefights and ambushes in the Samlot area of Battambang province in September and October.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Cambodian Red Cross (CRC) has signed a contract with UNHCR under which it is transporting families from the border to a reception centre in Sisophon and then to their respective communes and distributing food supplied by WFP at the centre. CRC will also be responsible for sanitation, security, water, electricity, kitchen facilities and monitoring. ICRC have set up a tracing service at the centre for those wishing to send messages to their families in Cambodia.

The voluntary repatriation of the first 1,000 persons to Cambodia began on 10 October. To date, 142 out of the first group of 250 persons were returned to their respective villages around the Cambodian town of Poipet; the remaining 102 Cambodians were taken directly to the reception centre where they received food rations and medical treatment before being returned to their villages and communes in Banteay Meanchey. This operation was supervised by the Deputy Secretary General of the CRC and monitored by the Federation Acting HoD. Three further repatriation trips are planned over the next two weeks, each conveying 250 refugees to the centre and then on to their villages in Battambang and Siem Reap provinces. No further voluntary repatriations are planned after 21 October as those Cambodians remaining in Thailand have not indicated that they are ready to return home.

The Federation together with CRC prepared an application to ECHO for ECU 145,000 to provide Emergency/Household Kits for 3,000 families over a three-month period. This figure was based on an estimate by UNHCR of those families currently taking refuge in Thailand who will eventually opt for voluntary repatriation. Each family will receive a kit while they are in transit at the reception centre. Each kit will consist of 11 items: sarong, mosquito net, blanket, kroma, mat, axe head, knife, bag, rice pot, plastic sheet, plastic water container.

Conclusion

The ongoing fighting and insecurity in the north of Cambodia remains a concern and a constraint for the safe repatriation of the vast majority of those Cambodians remaining in Thailand.

The Federation delegation will continue to assess and monitor the situation, assist and support the CRC and co-operate and liaise with ECHO, WFP and UNHCR to ensure a co-ordinated approach.

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