

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC: REFUGEES FROM DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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The Disaster

Following the recent increased fighting in the northern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) towns of Gemena, Libenge, Boyabo, and Zongo (all located in close proximity to the border with the Central African Republic), some 5,000 refugees have arrived in the CAR's capital of Bangui (and its surrounding areas) in search of shelter and assistance. While approximately 2,000 refugees are currently residing with friends and families, the remaining 3,000 refugees have been provisionally transferred to a temporary site in Bangui and are in need of immediate assistance. The influx continues, and because the resources of the host families are limited, the refugees have approached the Central African Red Cross Society (CARCS) requesting food and medical assistance. Still more refugees are reportedly living with no assistance in the nearby town of Mongoumba. The government's health services have appealed for assistance in order to cope with those in need of immediate medical assistance.

The government of the CAR is co-ordinating with UNHCR to register the refugees, and has decided to transfer them to a more permanent site in Bossangoa (300 km's away from the border) where refugees from Chad had previously been located in 1993. This site consists of 3 villages, allowing the three different ethnic groups amongst the current refugee population to be separated. UNHCR as lead agency is in charge of providing protection, transport, and shelter; UNICEF is providing vaccines, jerry cans and a water tank; WFP is providing food. MSF has indicated that one health dispensary will be established.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Since the arrival of the refugees on 2 January, 1999, the CARCS has mobilised 500 volunteers to organise the reception of the refugees, assisting in settling them in the site, preparing meals for the children and the mothers with babies, as well as distributing 500 blankets and 40 plastic sheets allocated from the CARCS' emergency stock. Under the supervision of a nurse, first aid and transport of the sick to the hospital was provided. 2,500 pieces of soap have been distributed, and the CARCS' volunteers together with the refugees themselves are cleaning the camp, combining this activity with information and education about hygiene and basic health. Before the transfer of the refugees to Bossangoa, CARCS will have finalised a vaccination campaign for the under-five age group, and will have completed a nutritional survey amongst the children.

CARCS is working in close co-ordination with UNHCR, WFP, MSF, UNICEF, UNDP and the government. Once the move to Bossangoa has been accomplished, WFP will continue to provide food assistance consisting of vegetable oil, wheat flour, sugar, and canned fish (both for the dry ration as well as for supplementary feeding of the children), UNHCR will provide shelter and cooking utensils, and

MSF will remain in charge of one of the dispensaries in the 3 villages. The CARCS has been requested to manage the camps, including the following activities:

- { Hygiene and sanitation (building 60 latrines);
- { First Aid assistance, including establishing a dispensary particularly for mothers and children, continuing the vaccination campaign, and starting health education, especially concerning HIV/AIDS;
- { Distribution of food and non-food item.

Health services in Mongoumba will also be re-enforced with one medical doctor, a mid-wife and a nurse for 2 months.

The operation has initially been planned for a 6-month period. Contingency plans for a larger influx are being updated. Depending on how events in the DRC evolve, a joint CARCS/Federation evaluation will be carried out after the initial 3-months in order to evaluate the operation, and (if necessary) to re-adjust the objectives.

Needs

Following discussions with WFP, in order to provide a balanced and varied diet of 2,000 Kcal/day/adult to the refugees, the following quantities of food will be procured by the CARCS on the local market:

- { 9.55 MT of rice;
- { 4 MT of beans;
- { 5,000 bags of manioc;
- { 10 MT of Soya.

Additionally, 1,500 blankets, 5,000 mats, 5,000 mosquito nets and 100 baby diapers (available locally) are needed. For the dispensary medical services, 2 WHO emergency kits are requested, cash for the local purchase of generic medicines, and some basic furniture for the dispensary. For the hygiene and water/sanitation activities, tools and materials are needed for the construction of latrines, well rehabilitation/construction, and drain digging. While the preliminary budget is estimated at CHF 334,000, at this time the Federation does not intend to launch an appeal. However, CHF 150,000 will be released from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) in order to allow the CARCS to continue their activities.

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