

NAMIBIA: INFLUX OF ANGOLAN REFUGEES

22 December 1999

Information Bulletin N° 1

The Disaster

The conflict in Angola has resulted in a refugee influx into Namibia. An average of 200 Angola refugees have been entering through Namibia's Rundu border area daily since Friday, December 10, 1999, with some 672 crossing into Rundu from 13 - 15 December 1999. Some of the refugees have established temporary shelters close to the Rundu police station, while others have been provided shelter at the Angolan consulate from where they are transported to the Osire refugee camp, about 230 kms from Rundu. There are currently 6,500 refugees at the Osire camp, situated about 2.5 hours drive from Windhoek. There influx has been accompanied by increased tension along the Angolan-Namibian border.

Government, Red Cross/Red Crescent and other agencies action

Government action

The government, UNHCR, and the Namibian Red Cross Society (NRCS) have located a site some 65 kms from Rundu where a transit camp will be established.

Red Cross Action

Out of the refugees who have arrived, 25 are Red Cross members with several trained in first aid and two nurses. A local refugee Red Cross committee with a chairperson, vice chairperson, and secretary will assist in information dissemination, water and sanitation projects, and first aid training. The Red Cross regional officer in Kavango region has been assisting the UNHCR.

UN agencies

The UNHCR has sent 60 tents to the Osire camp. Food supplies (dry rations of beans, maize meal, edible oil, sugar and salt have been sent to the border area. According to UNHCR, food supplies sent to the Osire camp will feed up to 8,000 refugees for a month. UNHCR has also announced the delivery of 3,000 blankets, 600 pots, 600 kerosene stoves, and 2,400 buckets for the refugees.

British High Commission

The British High Commission will fund the purchase of materials for the construction of 25 latrines at the Osire camp.

Co-ordination

The government of Namibia has established a refugee reception committee in Rundu, of which the NRCS is a member.

The NRCS has kept the ICRC and Federation informed about the situation. A Federation delegation went to Change in the Kavango region to review the situation on November 11, 1999.

Intended Operation

Needs assessment

Due to the rapidly unfolding events in the Canine region, the Secretary General of the NRCS led a headquarters team on 14 December to assess the condition of the refugees at the Osire refugee camp.

An ICRC delegate is currently in the country on a fact finding mission regarding the condition of prisoners of war, and similar persons.

Immediate needs

Health

The clinic which was established by the NRCS with British Red Cross funding for a target population of 2,000 requires extension. In addition to serving the needs of the approximately 8,000 refugees, the clinic also provides health services to surrounding communities. There is currently one nurse at the camp.

A doctor and 4 nurses are urgently needed to cope with the volume of work. An ambulance is required to transport serious cases to the nearest referral hospital which is accessible by gravel road some 116 kms away.

The main diseases among children under 5 are high fever with malaria, bronchitis, and pneumonia. Intestinal worms, suspected AIDS, stress, headache, depression, abdominal pain, and diarrhoea are the prevalent diseases among adults.

Water and Sanitation

These services will be updated to meet the increased demand.

Shelter

Namibia is currently experiencing unusual rains and there is an urgent need for shelter. The Osire camp was intended to accommodate 2,000 people. UNHCR has supplied 60 tents to the refugees, a further 180 tents will be arriving this month from South Africa, and more will be needed.

Food and nutrition

According to the NRCS assessment team, the food rations are inadequate. An assessment of the nutritional status of the refugees will be undertaken to determine appropriate action to be taken.

Non-food items

Most of the refugees left their homes in a hurry and require clothing, blankets, kitchen sets, and other domestic relief items.

Namibia Red Cross Capacity

The NRCS has limited experience in major refugee operations. The regional officer for Kavango divides time between assisting with the refugee situation and other ongoing Red Cross duties and activities.

Needs

The Namibia Red Cross is responding to the humanitarian needs of the refugees, and a and a Federation/NRCS assessment team will be sent to Osire as soon as possible. The government and UNHCR have indicated that the NRCS will be requested to manage the refugee camp. A formal request to this effect with a Memorandum of Understanding will be a precondition for the NRCS involvement. A Federation Relief Delegate with experience in camp management and a Health delegate are needed to

assist the Namibia Red Cross for at least 6 months. A camp manager and 4 nurses could be recruited locally to assist at the camp. The clinic should be expanded to meet the needs of the increased population.

Conclusion

The refugees fleeing the fighting in Angola into Namibia require urgent humanitarian assistance. Most of the refugees left their homes with virtually nothing, and the Federation is actively assessing the need for further assistance and action with UNHCR.

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