

NAMIBIA: ANGOLAN REFUGEES

10 January 2000

appeal no. 36/99

situation report no. 1

period covered: 30 December, 1999 - 7 January, 2000

The conflict in southern Angola continues to cause insecurity in the Angola and Namibia border area, provoking a further influx of refugees to Namibia seeking protection and assistance. The Namibia Red Cross (NRC) and the Federation are in the process of finalising an assistance and cooperation agreement with UNHCR, but the operation requires immediate donor support to provide urgently needed assistance to the existing beneficiaries. Efforts are also focusing on reinforcing the capacity of the NRC.

The context

The renewed conflict between the Angolan Government army (FAA) and UNITA has resulted in a significant refugee influx from southern Angola to northern Namibia. The influx began in early December, and over 8,000 refugees have arrived to date. Taking into account the existing refugee caseload as well as the expectation that a significant number of refugees will continue to seek safety from the ongoing military action in Angola, the Federation, in support of the Namibian Red Cross (NRC), launched an appeal which makes provision for an eventual refugee caseload of 12,000.

The newly arrived refugees established temporary shelters in the Namibian border town of Rundu, and are being presently accommodated and registered at a transit centre 65 kms from Rundu before being transported to the Osire refugee camp, located 671 kms from Rundu and 250 kms from Windhoek, the Namibian capital. Another two transit centres will be established along the border to receive, temporarily accommodate, and register newly arrived refugees. With the fighting continuing, the possibility of repatriation remains remote. The current refugee population in the Osire camps stands at 7,440, with daily influxes of between 50 to 100 persons.

The Osire camp was first established in 1992, and the physical and sanitary conditions are poor. Originally established for some 2,000 refugees, the new influx of Angolan refugees has overburdened camp facilities, with a resulting overcrowding of tents, overwhelmed health services and facilities, a lack of sufficient water, and inadequate latrine coverage. The threat of an outbreak of disease or epidemics is a considerable concern. The rains which just started add to the already poor health and sanitary conditions. Food supplies, the responsibility of UNHCR and WFP, appear sufficient at present. A nutritional survey is planned for early January.

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The majority of the refugees appear to be women and children, with an exceptionally high number under 5, as well as pregnant women.

Latest events

Security has deteriorated along the border, with several shooting incidents reported including attacks on humanitarian workers, civilians and tourists. More transit areas have been identified, and the Government and UNHCR continue to co-ordinate protection and the delivery of humanitarian assistance. To date, 7,549 refugees have been registered in Osire camp, but the daily influx of 50-100 new arrivals per day continues and there are more refugees waiting in the transit areas ready to be transferred to the Osire camp. Some refugees that have crossed the border with their cattle (their basic livelihood) remain in transit areas. The Government has confirmed that those refugees may be allowed to stay in the transit areas while receiving assistance as needed. A refugee registration exercise will be undertaken by UNHCR and the Government by mid-late January. Basic needs, both in the transit areas and in the camp, are only partially being met at present, and more effective action will be needed in the future to meet the needs.

In a meeting held on January 6, the Government appealed for more international assistance. UNHCR have committed further staff to provide co-ordination and protection services in-country, and the Government have confirmed support for NRC and Federation involvement in the operation. A letter of intent is being finalised with UNHCR which will lead to a formal tripartite agreement between the NRC, the Federation, and UNHCR. This agreement may extend the present Federation appeal up to 12 months.

Based on reports that further refugees are expected, negotiations were initiated with the Government for opening a new camp. Potential sites are being discussed, and assistance to vulnerable groups will remain a focus, particularly in support services and protection/tracing.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

An allocation of CHF 150,000 from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) enabled assistance activities to be initiated, and a needs assessment carried out by the NRC and Federation in late December led to the launch of an appeal. As a result, the following interventions are underway:

- In response to the Federation's appeal, 700 family tents donated by British Red Cross and DFID arrived in Windhoek on 31 December. The NRC supervised unloading and transportation of the tents to their warehouse prior to distribution to the camp.
- w The Federation Regional Disaster Response Team consisting of a Relief Co-ordinator, Health Co-ordinator, Water and Sanitation Technician are due to be deployed to the field to work with NRC counterparts and Red Cross volunteers to carry out more in-depth needs assessments in shelter provision, health, water and sanitation, social services, and tracing activities.
- w Relief supplies from the Harare Regional stocks will be trucked to Namibia over the next week, including latrine slabs, generators, blankets, tools and water containers, cholera kit and other relief items. These items, allocated from contingency stocks in Harare, will be replaced in order to maintain the regional stocks).
- w Due to the remoteness of the transit areas and poor communications, a satellite phone has been delivered and installed. Because of the geographical distance between headquarters and branches further communications (satellite, radio, and e-mail) will also be necessary for the Osire camp management.
- w Prefabricated buildings for the extension of the clinic in Osire and for office and staff accommodation are being procured locally, and are expected to be delivered in the next 2-3 weeks. With the current water system delivering only 2-4 litres per person, a water survey is planned during the week of January 10-17 to determine ground water availability. Steps are underway to increase latrine coverage (currently only 5-10%), and to treat the fly infestation in the camp.

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- w A Federation Regional Delegate is working with the NRC to assist in co-ordination and setting up of procedures for the operation.
- w A Finance Delegate (provided by the Finnish Red Cross) will provide technical support to the NRC.
- w The NRC continues to monitor the situation on the ground and provide regular reports and updates to the National Society headquarters. A further 85 volunteers are being mobilised in addition to those already in place.

Outstanding needs

A more detailed assessment to be taken in mid-January will determine non-food item needs such as kitchen utensils, clothes, blankets, water and sanitation materials and medical supplies. The details will be communicated in the next situation report or revised appeal.

In terms of capacity building, a training programme will be implemented to strengthen NRC headquarters and branches. An ambulance is urgently needed for clinic referrals.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The NRC maintains a very positive relationship with the Government, particularly the Ministry of Home Affairs which supports the expanded role of the NRC and Federation operation, implemented under the UNHCR umbrella (as lead UN agency).

Various media (newspaper, radio and television) have regularly interviewed NRC staff and reported positively on Red Cross activities.

Contributions

An updated list of contributions will be provided in the next situation report.

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