

# 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

## UGANDA: CONGOLESE REFUGEES

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The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 181 countries.

### In Brief

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### The Situation

During the past week, Uganda witnessed an influx of more 10,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Based on testimonies collected by Uganda Red Cross Society<sup>1</sup> volunteers on the ground, these refugees escaped fighting between rival armed groups in the neighbouring DRC. The refugees entered the southwestern Kanungu District, through Ishasha village. Ishasha is located only three kilometres away from the border along an unmanned border post. Apparent insecurity in this village near Lake Edward pushed some 7,000 people to either return to DRC or seek shelter further inside the country. There is a clear sense among humanitarian organizations on the ground, including the UN, that should the fighting continue, large numbers of Congolese may cross the border into Uganda in the coming days.

Authorities have been requested to set up an army and police post in order to prevent the security situation from deteriorating and appealed to the Uganda Red Cross to create a transit camp that will enable the provision of humanitarian assistance along with a smooth registration and transfer of refugees towards camps inside the country.

<sup>1</sup> Uganda Red Cross Society – refer to <http://www.ifrc.org/where/country/check.asp?countryid=176>

## **Uganda: Congolese Refugees; Information Bulletin no. 01/2005**

Thousands of Congolese civilians are presently camped at Ishasha, Kanungu District and Nkondo in Hoima District several hundred kilometres along the border to the north. In Ishasha nearly 3,000 refugees have no shelter and spend days as nights under the open sky. Those who made it to Nkondo are camped in a school on the shores of Lake Albert. Their situation is equally precarious since they will have to vacate the premises.

Only a week ago, there were an estimated 5,000 refugees at Nkondo and 11,000 at Ishasha, mostly women and children. Uganda Red Cross reports that people are in bad physical and psychological conditions due to the long distances covered by foot carrying the few belongings they managed to salvage. Sanitary conditions in the two locations are very poor. Host communities are fearful that epidemic diseases may break out. It was reported that one woman had already died at Ishasha.

There has so far been scanty provision of relief assistance to these refugees. The local community and authorities have received well the refugees but had little or no material assistance to offer. UNHCR provided logistics in terms of transport and basic humanitarian assistance and the World Food Programme (WFP) put forward dry rations of biscuits for distribution by Red Cross volunteers at the transit centres.

### **Red Cross and Red Crescent action**

The Ugandan Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugees sent an evaluation mission to both locations. The findings are to be compiled with data from a Red Cross branch rapid assessment. The Red Cross volunteers from the nearby Hoima and Rukungiri branches are involved in relief activities from the early moment of the refugee influx in Nkondo and Ishasha.

The Ishasha and Nkondo refugees are to be relocated to Kyaka II Refugee Settlement, an UNHCR run camp, further inland. The camp hosts at present little less than 9,000 refugees, most of them Congolese, but has the capacity to receive 15,000-20,000 people.

The national society is ready to scale up its response should the situation continue to deteriorate. It takes into account three potential case scenarios.

- The first scenario expects that the present lot of refugees continues coming as the situation unfolds in the DRC and there is need for the establishment and management of transit centres at Ishasha and Nkondo for at least three months.
- The second scenario eventuality assumes that there will only be one single influx and some refugees will return to DRC while others will be relocated to designated refugee camps inside Uganda. That would entail that a one time relief distribution is being provided by the national society.
- The third scenario estimates that the situation inside the DRC will deteriorate and another group of refugees will cross the Ugandan border in the near future. This would mean maintaining a Red Cross presence at the borders as well as establishing a contingency relief stock, possibly in Mbarara, safely located further away from the border but close enough to enable rapid dispatch of aid.

Currently the Uganda Red Cross is evaluating the possibility to respond to the government appeal to create a refugee transit center in Ishasha. An alternative would be to establish a base in the vicinity of the camps where refugees are to be transferred in order to avoid that large numbers of people are blocked on the border. The needs may be for food and non-food items, temporary shelter, water and sanitation facilities and medical care. A further in-depth assessment will be conducted by the Uganda Red Cross.

The Red Cross could also be involved in the provision of non-food items, temporary shelter, water and sanitation and medical care. If requested volunteers can be engaged in food and non-food items provided by WFP and other humanitarian organizations.

Uganda Red Cross is coordinating all activities with the International Federation's regional delegation and its East Africa Sub office, the ICRC, the Government of Uganda (through the Office of the Prime Minister), the Ministry of Disaster Preparedness and Refugees, Kanungu Local District Authorities, and UN agencies (OCHA, UNHCR and WFP).

## **Uganda: Congolese Refugees; Information Bulletin no. 01/2005**

The Uganda Red Cross has a well-functioning Disaster Preparedness and Response Programme which has acquired experience from the South Western Refugee implemented alone during the last four years. The national society is successfully implementing an IDP programme in Northern Uganda that was launched in 2002. These two current and past refugee and IDP operations by the Uganda Red Cross have created adequate capacity to carry out similar operations.

The Rukungiri Red Cross branch is one of the most active among the national society's 45 Uganda Red Cross branches. It has a 20-member volunteer Red Cross Action Team (RCAT) fully trained and rehearsed in disaster management which can be called at short notice for service. The Red Cross Centre is equipped with computer, radio base station and a motor cycle. The Rukungiri and nearby Kihhi towns have mobile telephone connections and have a full time connection to the national electricity grid line.

The Uganda Red Cross will continue to closely monitor the situation in cooperation with partners. Pending any developments on the ground, the assistance to be provided by the national society will be defined and communicated to partners in due course.

*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.*

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*For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal: East Africa sub-regional programmes 2005 Annual Appeal no. 05AA004 (which includes Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda) – refer to [http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf\\_appeals.pl?annual05/05AA004.pdf](http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_appeals.pl?annual05/05AA004.pdf)*

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