



UNHCR Sudan Operations

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*Refugee Returnees in Damazin, Blue Nile State, Eastern Sudan.
Photo: Arsenie Coseac, UNHCR.*

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Executive Summary

UNHCR held its Regional Strategy Meeting for the Repatriation and Reintegration of Sudanese Refugees in Addis Ababa, and agreed upon key operational directions, including voluntary repatriation targets for 2008 and 2009. It was also concluded that UNHCR would focus its attention more towards reintegration assistance for returnees next year.

The preparation for the 2009 UN and Partners Work Plan for Sudan continued. UNHCR remained highly involved as co-lead in the Protection/Human Rights/Rule of Law sector countrywide and as focal point for the sector in several regions (Blue Nile State, Darfur, East and Khartoum/North). UNHCR will be placing projects in nine sectors for an amount of US\$120 million.

Khartoum

UNHCR continued active engagement in the formulation of a SGBV Working Group to focus attention on the issue in Khartoum State and to advocate for the strengthening of referral mechanisms for SGBV victims.

South Sudan

An influx of Congolese refugees to South Sudan occurred as the result of attacks by armed groups. Initial estimates put the number of arrivals at 5,000, but ongoing verification will likely bring the number to around 2,000. UNHCR worked with partner agencies to provide emergency assistance and ongoing protection to the refugees.

UNHCR and South Sudanese government officials undertook a 'Come and Tell' visit to the Fugnido and Sherkole refugee camps in Ethiopia.

Eastern Sudan

1,345 new arrivals from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia entered Eastern Sudan during September. Twenty-one refugees being smuggled across the Atbara River drowned after their overloaded boat capsized. UNHCR is looking into the complicated issue of restriction of movement and smuggling of refugees.

Darfur

The conflict continued to cause new internal displacements across the region, in addition to new refugee influxes from Chad. Lack of humanitarian access, chiefly for security concerns, hindered missions to assess new displacement in rural areas of North Darfur. UNHCR and other actors continued to undertake joint protection monitoring and needs assessment missions to camps and other rural areas of South and West Darfur.

In the framework of the Protection Working Group, UNHCR, other agencies and UNAMID discussed the lessons learned from the Kalma incident of August 25 in order to enhance measures to prevent and better respond to protection of civilians in camp situations.

General Developments

The Regional Strategy Meeting for the Repatriation and Reintegration of Sudanese Refugees took place in Addis Ababa on 15-16 September. The wide-ranging discussions covered key issues on protection, resource prioritization, movement corridors, information campaigns, registration, verification and monitoring, as well as issues in the countries of asylum. The meeting was chaired by Ms. Marjon Kamara, Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa, and included senior managers from UNHCR offices in Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Egypt. The Retreat was followed by meetings of the Technical Working Committee and Tripartite Commission on Return and Reintegration from Ethiopia and was attended by representatives of ARRA, COR, SSRRC and UNHCR Sudan and Ethiopia.

Planning figures for the upcoming repatriation season were agreed upon, with UNHCR determined to redouble its efforts to meet repatriation targets for this year (80,000 returnees). Over the last several years, a large proportion of the UNHCR budget and staff capacity has been focused on assisting Sudanese refugees to voluntarily repatriate. In 2009, UNHCR plans to adjust its operations to meet the protection and reintegration needs of returnees and ensure that their return is sustainable.

As co-lead for the Protection, Human Rights and Rule of Law sector for the 2009 UN & Partners Work Plan, UNHCR continued to steer the preparation of the sector strategy in co-operation with UNMIS. Thorough and inclusive consultations were organised amongst UN agencies and NGOs, under the auspices of the Protection Working Groups, to elaborate assumptions, planning and strategies for the upcoming year. The overall focus in 2009 will remain advocacy and direct interventions with authorities, communities and individuals to ensure the protection of civilians and promote respect for human rights, with a particular focus on women, children, displaced populations and other individuals with specific needs.



*A young refugee recently repatriated to Sudan from Ethiopia.
Photo: Arsenie Coseac, UNHCR*

Khartoum

There are many challenges in collecting data and preparing statistics on Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) in Khartoum. There is a lack of proper referral and coordination systems and limited activities and partners to prevent and respond to SGBV. UNHCR has been involved in the creation of an SGBV Working Group for Khartoum State to address these challenges, fill existing gaps and focus attention on the issue. A preparatory meeting was held on 2nd September and was attended by a number of UN Agencies and NGOs.



*Internally displaced children at Jebel Aulia settlement, south of Khartoum.
Photo: Arsenie Coseac, UNHCR*

South Sudan and Blue Nile State

The situation on the ground in some areas of South Sudan remained challenging and volatile. There was renewed insecurity along the Sobat River corridor, with reports that a large armed group crossed into this area from Jonglei state. Transportation on the river is vital for UNHCR to be able to reach populations of concern in the Nassir area. In addition, heavy rains across the region caused severe flooding and made travel extremely difficult or impossible in some areas. Weather conditions also resulted in numerous flight cancellations. A landmine was discovered 400 metres from the UNHCR/GTZ way station in Nimule and was referred to UNMAO/MAG, confirming the threat that mines present to the returning population and host communities. UNHCR continued to undertake its planned activities in South Sudan despite these challenges.

Population Movements

At the beginning of October, there was an influx of Congolese refugees into Yambio County, Western Equatoria, close to Sudan's border with the Democratic Republic of Congo. Although the number of

arrivals was originally estimated at 5,000, the ongoing verification exercise is likely to confirm a figure closer to 2,000. Local authorities and aid agencies operating in the area reported that the refugees fled to safety in South Sudan following attacks by armed groups believed to be LRA fighters. An SSRRC/UNHCR/UNDSS assessment mission was undertaken and identified concerns about the proximity of the refugee settlements to the border, the likelihood of LRA attacks and abductions of civilians, poor living conditions and the diminishing stocks of food held by the local population. UNHCR started working with partner agencies, particularly WFP and UNICEF, to provide rapid emergency assistance to the refugees.

Voluntary Repatriation Update

As of 27 September 2008, the repatriation of Sudanese refugees to South Sudan and Blue Nile State reached a cumulative total of 294,461, of which 137,631 returned under the organized and assisted self-repatriation programme. Since 1 January 2008 the total number of persons returned through organized means supported by UNHCR was 60,676, of whom 59,114 persons (97%) were organized and 1,562 persons (3%) were under the assisted self-repatriation programme.

Come and Tell Visit

UNHCR and South Sudanese government officials undertook a 'Come and Tell' visit to the Fugnido and Sherkole refugee camps in Ethiopia. The visit provided a valuable opportunity for refugees to voice their concerns directly to Sudanese government officials about conditions of return in Sudan, whilst also allowing the delegation to address these concerns and gain a clearer understanding of what the refugees expected from the South Sudanese government in terms of security and disarmament, the provision of social services and basic infrastructure.



Refugees meeting SSRRC delegates at a 'Come and Tell' visit to Fugnido camp in Ethiopia.

Photo: Mohan Mani Lamsal, UNHCR

The delegation met with over one hundred refugees, including members of the Central Committee, the Youth Committee and the Women's Association. Refugees were informed about the current situation as well as reintegration and development prospects for areas of return in South Sudan. Many refugees stated that

they were convinced of the need to repatriate, whilst some expressed reservations about the security situation and lack of social services.

Protection

In preparation for the planned joint screening by UNHCR, WFP, ACROSS and SSRRC, UNHCR verified the list of Ethiopian Anuaks at Lologo settlement. UNHCR, in partnership with ACROSS and the Anuak Refugee Community Leaders, is establishing a temporary Self-Help Refugee School for the children in the camp. Full community participation took place to ensure awareness and ownership of the project amongst the refugees.

UNHCR organized a community-based protection training in Fangak County. The training was attended by 35 county officials, police, health workers, teachers, community/social leaders, youth, women and returnees. Attendees were trained in rule of law and HIV/AIDS. UNHCR, UNDP and DRC co-facilitated protection training on human rights, child rights, rule of law and customary court systems. 15 SSRRC staff, community leaders, chiefs, women leaders and local administration took part, representing the 5 payams of Yei County.

Monitoring and Assessment Missions

UNHCR conducted focus group discussions with community leaders during missions to Morobo and Yei counties. Participants detailed their concerns about the lack of potable water, health services, income-generating activities and education provisions. The discussions also highlighted alcohol brewing for income generation as a major cause of gender-based violence. The information was shared at the monthly Protection and Return Working Group meeting to facilitate effective advocacy and collaboration on these issues.

UNHCR undertook assessment missions to Lainya County, Central Equatoria and Litoba Boma, Kajo Keji. Of particular concern were the lack of medical personnel and drugs at the Kupera Payam Primary Health Care Unit and poor school standards. UNHCR followed up with the County Health Department and the American Refugee Committee International to provide basic medical supplies to the unit and is finalizing the recruitment of medical staff with the Ministry of Health. UNHCR seconded staff to the Ministry of Education to address the payment of teacher's salaries, which is a major factor in the declining quality of education in the region.

Health

UNHCR and Intrahealth organized a 3-day workshop in Juba in cooperation with the South Sudan Aids Commission to sensitize uniformed personnel on HIV/AIDS. Senior Commanders including Major Generals of the Police, Prisons and Wildlife Departments were given basic information on HIV/AIDS, encouraged to display positive attitudes towards people living with HIV/AIDS and made action plans for the formulation of HIV/AIDS policies at their workplaces.

UNHCR's implementing partner Sudan Health Association organized a training workshop in Kajo Keji on Appropriate Family Health Practices. The workshop was attended by 35 health workers, who were trained on family planning, primary health care, the roles of community health workers, antenatal care, malaria, malnutrition, HIV/AIDS and SGBV.

Programme/Protection Mission

UNHCR fielded a mission to the Blue Nile to review ongoing programmes in the region, highlight constraints and opportunities and prescribe recommendations to enhance programme delivery. The mission reached a number of conclusions. UNHCR will assign resources to fewer partners, based on competency, to introduce economies of scale and optimise programme and protection delivery. It will attempt to redress the current geographical imbalance of assistance, by extending assistance to areas with a high returnee population such as Balila, Gindi and Wadaga. Finally, the number of protection monitoring and joint assessment missions will be increased to ensure a common appreciation of operational requirements and facilitate a more coordinated response to the needs of returnees and host populations.

Eastern States

New Arrivals

N^{1,345} new arrivals entered Sudan: 901 Eritreans, 414 Somalis and 30 Ethiopians, and were received in Shagarab Reception Centre to undergo refugee status determination procedures. The cumulative total of new arrivals for 2008 now stands at 13,549. Refugees cited unchanged reasons for leaving their country of origin; compulsory military service and religious discrimination for Eritreans, political views for Ethiopians and war insecurity for Somalis.

While some families were among the new arrivals, the overwhelming majority were young single people from urban backgrounds. The profile of these refugees has meant that they are often ill-equipped to cope

with the camp environment. Many have been leaving the camps without completing the RSD process, in the hope of travelling to Khartoum or further afield.

Shagarab Incident

On 23 September, twenty-one refugees from Eritrea and Somalia drowned after their overloaded boat capsized in the Atbara River. The refugees were being smuggled across the river to reach Khartoum. Four Eritrean men were able to swim to safety and a Somali woman survived by clinging to a floating log. Bodies of the remaining passengers were recovered and buried over the following days. UNHCR is arranging task force meetings to analyze and address the issue of movement restrictions and smuggling of refugees.



*Newly arrived refugees at Shagarab I Refugee Camp.
Photo: Alexandra Fielden, UNHCR*

GIS Mapping

UNHCR completed a five-month mapping exercise of twelve refugee camps in Eastern Sudan. Having begun in April, the process has greatly improved UNHCR's knowledge and understanding of the physical layout of the camps, the services available and critical assistance gaps. The GIS team developed an address system for the refugee dwellings, which will be used for planning, resource allocation, registration, monitoring and reporting. Detailed camp mapping is of fundamental importance to the effective management and coordination of the camps, since it provides a visual tool to link core indicators such as infant mortality and access to water to geographical locations. UNHCR can then analyse this relationship to reveal localised problems in service provision, and thus better serve the specific needs of the refugee population.

Protection and Assistance

RSD interviews by CoR continued with a very high recognition rate. Rare instances of rejection obtained refugee status on appeal. In September, there were 520 individuals interviewed, with a cumulative figure of 4,806 in 2008. UNHCR and CoR arranged to carry out a head count to ascertain the number of pending cases, which is expected to be smaller than the arrival figures as a result of unauthorised movements out of the camp.

The refugee registration exercise in Kilo 26 camp was completed and the team entered Wad Sharife to begin the process of registering an estimated 30,000 refugees in the camp. Since the exercise began in March, UNHCR has registered 43,119 refugees in 11 camps in Eastern Sudan.

Health

In line with HIV prevention activities, 30 health workers from all camps were trained on Universal Precautions, guidelines designed to prevent transmission of HIV, hepatitis B, and other blood-borne pathogens when providing first aid or health care. UNHCR and UNICEF engaged in a discussion with the Ministry of Health concerning the implementation of Acute Watery Diarrhoea preparedness and response in the Refugee camps in Kassala state. Based on the guidelines and advice obtained from the Ministry, UNHCR will provide the necessary funding to control the spread of cholera and similar diseases in the camps.

Darfur

Lack of access, chiefly due to security concerns, continued to hinder missions to assess new displacement trends and other protection monitoring missions, particularly in rural areas of North Darfur. UNHCR and other actors undertook joint protection monitoring and needs assessment missions to camps and other rural areas of South and West Darfur.

Population Movements and Assessment Missions

Refugee influxes from Chad continued, with several hundred Chadian households reportedly crossing into Sudan at three points along the border. A series of missions were undertaken to the area, to profile the population and assess needs. Some 780 households were identified, representing a population of 4,000 individuals. Protection interviews identified inter-tribal clashes as the main reason for flight from Chad.

A number of internally displaced persons around Kafod (South Darfur) were reported to have returned to villages in the Tega and Wadi Garat areas. A joint UNHCR/CoR/WFP/CARE mission to Um Dukhun in West Darfur also found that many IDPs who fled to the area in 2007 have returned to their areas of origin to cultivate. Follow-up missions are planned to assess the number, nature, sustainability and protection situation of these returns.

Protection Situation in Camp and Rural Areas

In the aftermath of the events in Kalma on 25 August, UNHCR and other protection actors, including UNAMID, UNICEF, UNFPA continued to follow-up the situation of the civilian population directly affected. UNHCR and UNICEF conducted a joint mission to Kalma camp to document children's rights violations during the attack. Reportedly, 9 children were killed and 40 wounded during the shooting. The Protection Working Group (PWG) in South Darfur is advocating for increased UNAMID patrols in Kalma camp.

The volatile situation and the risk of repeated attacks on civilians emphasised the importance of consultations between the humanitarian actors and the military components of UNAMID to improve the capacity to guarantee protection of civilians. A dialogue started between the humanitarian actors and the peacekeeping forces to examine and agree on the respective roles in preventing and responding to attacks against civilians.

In West Darfur, UNHCR coordinated efforts with FAO, UNAMID and OCHA to strategise future support and interventions to allow communities to safely reach their farming areas to commence agricultural activities. This initiative is in line with UNHCR's protection strategy to increase attention on rural areas as an essential way to bring to an end the population's dependency upon humanitarian aid.