

Contents

1. **DRC celebrates World Refugee Day, 20 June**
2. **IDPs in Ituri seek help**
3. **Return & reintegration of families in Dongo**



MTABILA REFUGEE CAMP, Tanzania

— For millions of uprooted people, World Refugee Day on June 20 is a day like any other spent waiting in remote camps and settlements for a chance to go home. The wait can take years or even decades, and usually requires an end to fighting in conflicts so obscure that they rarely make the pages of our newspapers.

When the guns finally do fall silent, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) helps refugees to pack up their meagre belongings and board trucks for the long journey home. But their problems are far from over. This week, along with EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Louis Michel, I am traveling to the Great Lakes region of Africa and to Liberia, where hundreds of thousands of people are making the brave choice to return to their devastated homelands. They join some 6

World Refugee Day in DRC, June 20

Kinshasa, June 20 (UNHCR) - June 20 is World Refugee Day. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Refugee Committees, jointly with UNHCR, partners and the host Government, celebrate this year's event under the theme 'I hope'. Activities in commemoration of this day have been arranged to take place at College Boboto in Kinshasa, the DRC capital, and at various other centres across the country. In a build up to the Day, on 17 June, a soccer team of refugees played a friendly match against UNHCR select. After a spirited fight by both sides that ended in 0-0 deadlock at pep time, UNHCR went on to win the match 3-1. Man of the Match who fired home the only goal for the refugee team collected a cash award. Victors received a silver trophy to loud drums at Stade Velodrome in Kintambo's suburb, 10 km from the city's central business district .

Something to celebrate

By **António Guterres**
UN High Commissioner for Refugees



High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres with displaced children.
UNHCR/H.Caux(August 2005)

million other refugees worldwide who have made the same decision over the past four years, contributing to a 31 percent decline in global refugee numbers since 2001.

This is good news, but what awaits these courageous people once they get home?

A recent survey of localities in the Democratic Republic of Congo to which refugees are supposed to repatriate following July elections showed that return is likely to be even more of a struggle than life in exile.

Here in the camps in Tanzania and in neighboring Uganda, refugees have shelter, food, water, medical care, and primary schools. Back home, in Congo's Equateur province, 90 percent of the population has no access to potable water. In South Kivu, 70 percent of return areas are accessible only on foot; 80 percent of schools no longer exist and the health care infrastructure is in a state of collapse. Parts of North Katanga have been deserted for years. Under these circumstances, the international community owes returning refugees more than just a cooking pot and a handshake when they cross the border. We must continue to nurture their return and reintegration and to support the communities to which they are returning.

Without adequate resources for development, institution-building, and reconciliation, the fragile societies to which refugees return are very likely to unravel again. Yet refugees and returnees are often omitted from broader development strategies aimed at getting such societies back on their feet. Donors see UNHCR and its partners as humanitarian agencies whose sole purpose is to deliver short-term relief assistance and then hand over to others. All too often, however, there have been gaps in that transition,



On June 20, refugees in DRC celebrated WRD under the theme 'I hope'.

and refugees who went home were unable to stay home.

Success in the peace building stage is essential. We cannot wait for such societies to meet all the conditions for official development assistance. The international community needs to devote much more attention to the transition between relief and development, to rebuilding societies which have been ripped apart by violence. This is the rationale behind the UN's newly-established Peacebuilding Commission. As recent events in East Timor have shown, hard-won peace is often tenuous. According to the UN Development Programme, half of all countries emerging from conflict slip back into violence within five years. One of UNHCR's major challenges is ensuring that returnees are not forced to flee again, a point that EU Commissioner Michel and I are underscoring in our joint mission to Africa.

As the world's biggest aid donor group, the European Union and its member states have a key role to play. The EU Humanitarian Aid Department has always been a very relevant partner in UNHCR's humanitarian actions.

The European Union must take a lead in efforts to bridge the relief-to-development gap, so that institutions can be rebuilt, former enemies can reconcile, refugees and displaced people can return, and peace can take root. This would indeed be something to celebrate on World Refugee Day.

António Guterres is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and former prime minister of Portugal.

Internal Displacement

4000 internally displaced Congolese in Eastern DR Congo's Ituri region reach safety from militia tyranny, but need more assistance

Bunia, DR Congo, June 18 (UNHCR) - Stripped naked by renegade militia-men some IDPs are too ashamed to leave the forest area around Bukiringi, although they know that they have reached safety. "We have walked for days without knowing what we would find in Bukiringi." says an exhausted looking mother of two children. "I am so relieved to see that the militia cannot come here and that there is food aid" she adds.

Over several weeks the Bunia protection working group led by UNHCR with MONUC engaged in careful confidence building efforts with IDP community leaders. The contacts have succeeded in encouraging traumatized civilians to emerge from

remote forest areas. In parallel, no efforts were spared in liaising with humanitarian partners to enable the delivery of food aid to an all but inaccessible area.

"It was expensive and unlikely" says UNHCR protection officer Irene Schmid with relief when she finally saw the first helicopters with food aid arriving in Bukiringi. "We prepared this humanitarian protection operation for three weeks".

The Bukiringi IDPs are still in urgent need of assistance, in particular of immediate food aid, as they have arrived in Bukiringi famished and completely exhausted. Another priority need is clothing. According to interviews with IDPs, militia systematically removed clothes from those attempting to leave the area under their control. Many of them are traumatised by the recent experience in the forest. They have walked as far as 80 kilometres and they need rest to recover. At the moment, IDPs say they are not ready to return to their villages of origin.

Several weeks ago, the Bunia protection working group had become alarmed about the dire condition of thousands of persons dispersed by recent fighting in the Tchei area. Reports of civilians being forced to remain with militia, were of particular concern. This was the starting point of this humanitarian protection effort.

Most of the Bukiringi IDPs are from the Ngiti ethnic group. They fled towards Aveba after fighting broke out between Ngiti militia and FARDC Government forces in December 2005. In February/ March 2006 the Ngiti militia forced some 10,000 IDPs to follow them to their stronghold in Tchei. The IDPs, displaced again, de-facto became hostages of the militia. In May 2006, the FARDC started an offensive on the Tchei area to end



"Under plastic sheeting again" - Ituri IDPs are displaced repeatedly

militia rule.

However, only once IDPs received word from the emissaries about a safer area, people decided in growing numbers to breach militia lines, and make their way through rough terrain to reach Bukiringi, Geti and Aveba.

"The Ituri population is tired of militia rule, even if the self-proclaimed commanders come from their community" explains UNHCR Representative Eusèbe Hounsokou. The pattern of militia despotism and displacement in the Ituri region of Eastern DR Congo has eroded the most basic human social norms. "Run for your safety!" is the survival mode of many communities in Ituri, often forced to leave behind the old and weak. Displacement has become a continuous state, as IDPs are forced to undertake short-term movements into refuge over and over again.

"About two years ago I crossed lake Albert into Uganda when my village was attacked. I never lost hope to see my village again, so I returned." said an old man at Tchomia IDP site in Ituri. The painful expression on his tired face shows the suffering he has been through. "Now you see where I am, living under plastic sheeting again, at a place which is not mine!"

The difference between being a refugee – which implies having crossed a border to seek protection - and an internally displaced person blurs when the civilian population constantly undertakes short-term flight movements over short distances. Across the border in Uganda some Congolese refugees choose to only stay a few days or weeks, and to return once rumour indicates that conditions in their home area have improved. The reason for this short-term refuge often lies in the fact that the displaced continue cultivating their own fields in areas of origin during the day, while they return to the place of refuge at night, when the situation is most dangerous. Due to militia insecurity, food is scarce both in displaced hosting communities and in areas of origin.

Once information about civilians at risk in remote bush areas will systematically reach protection actors in time, less Congolese will experience the trauma the Ngiti IDPs survived. *By Jens Hesemann, In Kinshasa*

Return & Reintegration

Reintegration in Equateur's Dongo raises hopes for the returning communities

Equateur, June 17 (UNHCR) – Despite the funding gaps in UNHCR's return activity programme the rate of reintegration has stunned aid workers in Dongo of Equateur Province, west side Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Dongo is one of the rural riverside towns that flank sites littered with refugees on the edge of the Congo river on the opposite side in the Republic of Congo (RoC). There, scores of DRC nationals fled to seek protection when war in their country intensified at the end of the 1990s.

As has become familiar, the start date of returns to Dongo suffered delays as a result of insecurity, harassment and extortion of civilians by militia. The less-than-ideal social conditions did not also guarantee a return in safety and with dignity.

The all-too-familiar story of Congo's logistical challenges compounded by inaccessible roads and broken bridges was another of the constraining factors. A critical aspect of the water transport requires the Congo River, the main return highway, to be high enough to enable pirogues cross families into DRC. "We were also unable to acquire construction materials locally which contributed to the late start of the operation," says head of UNHCR office in Dongo, Vito Trani.

Subsequently, returns to Dongo only started in November 2005 with two convoys of pirogues crossing some 200

individuals a week. Within six months the steady flow of convoys delivered home a massive 7,000 Congolese, more than what was initially projected.

But that is not all. Of this return figure, 88% of them have access to land, although third parties account for a small number of families who reportedly encountered exploitation. A remarkable 82% of them have since obtained official identity documents. At the same time, 96% of children born in RoC have received birth certificates for ages 0 to 5-years. "Identity documents have also made it possible for the school children numbering 1,296 to be enrolled in new schools," say AIDES, a UNHCR implementing partner. On its part, UNICEF has distributed school kits to 3,500 children, among them 48% returnees. Teachers have received education kits, while some schools have been renovated.

Inter-agency support aid has also been forthcoming. In Equateur, communities eke out a living by working the field and fishing. FAO, a UN Agency for food security, encourages families to join farming and fishing associations set up to increase food self-sufficiency. FAO has also provided agricultural and fishing tools to newly reintegrating families, while WFP has supplied three months of food rations.

More support aid has also gone towards improving dilapidated health conditions in areas with high return numbers. Additional medical equipment and some of the health centres have been rehabilitated to cope with the increasing numbers.

There are other concerns, however. "Our only concern is that water is not potable," say aid workers and authorities in the area. Shelter of mostly mud houses is also problematic with families supporting more than the average numbers.



Reintegration in Dongo has progressed quicker than expected

Even so, a staggering 64% of them have constructed own homes. Host communities have built new shelter for counted vulnerable families. Others are asked to join those with more room.

Disputes over property claims represent 60%, 19% of which have already been resolved through joint interventions with the National Commission for the Refugees (CRN), a DRC Government inter-ministerial body overseeing return and reintegration activities.

“More local tribunals to resolve property disputes are being considered at this stage,” reports Vito, adding that this way, claimants do not have to cover long distances to reach help. Understandably, without public transport to reach the few and far placed provincial officials in time for intervention, more tribunals are inevitably vital.

Insecurity, previously a common occurrence in the areas, has now improved sharply, say authorities. Number of incidents of

harassment, extortion or looting of civilian property have dropped incredibly low. The drop is explained by increased sensitisation and systematic joint interventions whenever incidents have been reported.

At least 60,000 Congolese fled into RoC and Central African Republic (CAR) to escape fighting that broke out in 1998. They found shelter in villages and towns on the opposite river banks of the Congo and Ubangui, covering a stretch of more than 500km from Bangui in CAR to Loukolela in RoC.

The return of the Congolese from CAR started in October 2004 to northern parts of Equateur Province by boat. In April the following year, more areas opened up around the towns of Libenge, Gemena and the main town, Mbandaka.

“When we look at available resources, we take relief in what we have been able to achieve with very little on hand,” a relieved Vito says. *By David Nthengwe/In Kinshasa*

Published by:

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNHCR Office, Kinshasa
6729 de l’OUA/Ngaliema Av., BP 7248
Democratic Republic of Congo
Tel: +243 818801245
E-mail: CODKI@unhcr.org

Media Contact:

Jens Hesemann
External Relations Officer
Branch Office Kinshasa
Democratic Republic of Congo
Tel: +243 817009484
E-mail: hesemann@unhcr.org