

# NORTH AFRICA

**Algeria, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Western Sahara**

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## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The refugee situation remained stable throughout North Africa and there have been no large population movements in the first half of the year.

At the end of April, UNHCR conducted a comprehensive assessment of the humanitarian situation of the 165,000 refugees from Western Sahara residing in four camps in Tindouf, Algeria. The findings have been shared with the Security Council through the Secretary General's report. The study found that the reduction of basic assistance, in the absence of a durable solution, has had a deteriorating effect on vulnerable refugees, who have no other source of assistance and who are permanent residents in the camps. It was also noted that as UNHCR's assistance had already been prioritised to focus more on life-sustaining activities, and as the refugees were acutely aware of the inadequate basic food deliveries in the camps in the recent months, there was a feeling among refugees that humanitarian assistance was being used as a political tool to encourage people to return to Western Sahara. The refugees were assured that this was not the case, and UNHCR organised several meetings, together with other agencies, donors and the press, to remedy the situation.

Since January, UNHCR has also observed a movement of Western Saharan refugees from Algeria to Mauritania, as a result of the protracted refugee crisis and the harsh economic conditions prevailing in the camps

The refugee issue was high on the agenda in Libya, where a group of some 65 Congolese locked themselves inside a school in a Somali refugee compound, threatening to go on hungerstrike and

demanding immediate resettlement. Though UNHCR undertook several visits to the school and informed the Congolese of their rights as asylum-seekers, they did not want to speak to UNHCR or undergo refugee status determination. UNHCR stands ready to assist this group, in line with other asylum-seekers and refugees in Libya, should they be willing to co-operate with UNHCR and provided that they are found to be refugees.

The refugee situation has remained stable in Tunisia and Morocco. The two countries also continue to be popular crossroads for migrants from African countries hoping to settle in Europe.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES: PROGRESS AND CONSTRAINTS

UNHCR continues to protect and assist refugees in the region until more lasting solutions, such as voluntary repatriation, become realistic options. As the current circumstances in their countries of origin do not allow for the voluntary repatriation of most refugees in the region, UNHCR has reoriented its focus towards protection and will continue to strengthen the capacity of local authorities through workshops and dissemination of issues related to international refugee law. Across the region, workshops and seminars have been held with local authorities and refugees to increase awareness of UNHCR's protection mandate.

The voluntary repatriation of the Western Sahara refugees under the UN Settlement Plan, is feasible only if a number of political differences between the parties involved are resolved. At the end of June, the UN Security Council granted an extension of the mandate of MINURSO, the UN body responsible for the implementation of the plan, until 30 November 2001. As a response to this,

UNHCR has adjusted its activities and is currently developing a strategy in co-ordination with MINURSO for the next six months.

### ACTIVITIES UNTIL 30 JUNE

In **Algeria**, UNHCR has been providing basic humanitarian assistance in the areas of health, education, sanitation, shelter, and agricultural support to approximately 155,000 particularly vulnerable Western Sahara refugees living in four camps in the south-west of the country. Women and children represent the majority of the camp population. UNHCR organised a donor mission to the camps and conducted a planning workshop with the host Government, refugee leaders, partners and donor governments to increase transparency and improve the partnership. As a result, a Humanitarian Working Group based in Algiers was founded to provide support for UNHCR's operation in the country. The preparation for the voluntary repatriation of the Western Saharan refugees, including the pre-registration of voters in Tindouf, has been finalised.

As a consequence of the decline in humanitarian assistance, especially in the food sector, and of UNHCR's comprehensive review of the humanitarian situation, UNHCR has organised several meetings with WFP, ECHO and donor representatives in both Algiers and Geneva. Due to these efforts, more funds have been allocated to the food sector by donors and a buffer stock has been created to pre-empt future food crises in the camps. The Office has also conducted two workshops for refugees, one on refugee law and one on gender issues, which was held at the request of refugee women. UNHCR has also been providing protection and assistance to a small number of urban refugees of different nationalities.

In the **Libyan Arab Jamahiriya**, UNHCR has been providing protection and

assistance to the most vulnerable among the 30,000 Palestinian and 3,000 Somali refugees, including substance allowances and medical assistance. As a result of a simplified and streamlined procedure for refugee status determination, decisions have increased by 70 per cent compared to previous years. However, some time was also devoted to clarify the status of a group of Congolese, who demanded resettlement without any desire to undergo refugee status determination. UNHCR, in close co-operation with a local NGO, the Islamic World Call, organised a well attended seminar for government and NGO representatives officials in Tripoli to increase awareness of UNHCR's mandate. Progress was also made in the field of private sector fundraising.

In **Mauritania**, UNHCR has completed the registration of 26,416 refugees from Western Sahara residing in the Nouahdibou and Zouerate areas. The Office continues to gather information to establish the cause of the refugee's ongoing movement out of the Tindouf camps. UNHCR has also been providing humanitarian assistance to 362 refugees, mainly from Sierra Leone and Liberia with particular attention given to the 150 most vulnerable. Most of these refugees live in the cities and have assimilated well. Furthermore, the Office received 47 new asylum-seekers. In close co-ordination with the Government, UNHCR organised a campaign to raise awareness among Mauritania officials of refugee and human rights issues as well as UNHCR's mandate. UNHCR, on a request from the Government, is planning to provide assistance to the relevant authorities to develop national legislation responsive to the needs of asylum-seekers and refugees in the country.

In **Morocco**, UNHCR has been supporting and protecting refugees and asylum seekers from neighbouring countries. There has been a decrease in the number of beneficiaries as some refugees have left the country spontaneously, nine persons departed for resettlement, and five have repatriated voluntarily. UNHCR has also been helping

vulnerable refugee children with one time financial assistance in order for them to have access to education.

In **Tunisia**, the Office has been negotiating with different parties to find solutions for the 133 refugees registered with UNHCR. In close collaboration with the Tunisian Red Crescent, UNHCR has been providing humanitarian assistance to the most needy refugees. A total of 13 refugees have left Tunisia spontaneously and three have departed to be reunified with their families.

In **Western Sahara**, under the auspices of the UN Settlement Plan, UNHCR is responsible for the voluntary repatriation of refugees from Tindouf, Algeria, and Mauritania. The offices in Mauritania and Algeria are liaising with the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), the UN body responsible for the repatriation plan, to update its planning figure and include an eventual refugees repatriation from Mauritania under the UN settlement plan. UNHCR has continued to liaise with

MINURSO and the Special Representative to the Secretary General's office on various issues related to UNHCR's role in the settlement plan. It has also input to the Secretary General's reports to the Security Council on Western Sahara.

## OUTLOOK FOR JULY-DECEMBER

UNHCR will continue to provide protection and basic humanitarian assistance to refugees and registered asylum-seekers. In addition, the focus will be on capacity building of the local authorities and on limited fundraising activities within the private sector. In Algeria the focus will be on improving daily life in the camps and exploring the possibility for cross-border confidence-building measures. In Libya, the consultations with the Government in order to pursue the signing the MOU will continue. In both Libya and Mauritania UNHCR will negotiate for enhanced opportunities for specific refugees who have lived in the countries for a long time to receive employment and social benefits.

## FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

| Country                | Annual Programme Budget |                  |                                    |                  |
|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|
|                        | Initial Budget          | Revised Budget   | Total Funds Available <sup>1</sup> | Obligation Level |
| Algeria                | 4,710,978               | 4,176,355        | 4,540,643                          | 2,417,000        |
| Libyan Arab Jamahiriya | 1,334,486               | 1,307,143        | 770,900                            | 770,900          |
| Mauritania             | 290,759                 | 281,556          | 465,377                            | 117,200          |
| Morocco                | 517,672                 | 475,611          | 233,400                            | 233,400          |
| Tunisia                | 368,643                 | 356,460          | 182,600                            | 182,600          |
| Western Sahara         | 578,669                 | 355,934          | 180,600                            | 180,600          |
| <b>TOTAL</b>           | <b>7,801,207</b>        | <b>6,953,059</b> | <b>6,373,520</b>                   | <b>3,901,700</b> |

<sup>1</sup> Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the regional, sub-regional and/or country level, opening balance and adjustments.