

26 January 1959

REPORT ON MISSION TO MOROCCO AND TUNISIAmade by A. Rørholt, December 1958I. STATISTICAL DATAGeneral observations

1. I was assured in both countries that the figures given for refugees did not include Algerian permanent residents.
2. Approximately half of the refugees in both countries are children, 35% women and the rest men, most of whom are 40 and above. This composition was confirmed by the not inconsiderable groups I saw.

Morocco

3. A census was undertaken in the Province of Oujda in February 1958 and resulted in a total of 58,500 Algerians. On the other hand, the President of the Moroccan Red Crescent estimated the number at 120,000, the representative of the Algerian Red Crescent at 100,000 and Dr. Tonellot, Chief Medical Officer of the Province of Oujda, who was in charge of food distribution for "Entr'Aide Nationale" at 80,000. It is certain that the Swedish "Save the Children" Organization distributes rations to approximately 40,000 children under 16. On this basis I am inclined to fix the total number of those who live along the frontier and who are in need of help at somewhere between 70,000 and 80,000 persons. In any case, a Relief Programme of that size would certainly cover the most urgent needs of the refugees. They are spread out on a line from the Mediterranean in the North to Figuig in the South with the biggest concentration in and around the town of Oujda.

Tunisia

4. The Tunisian authorities claim that they have made an exact census covering 100,000 Algerians, but estimate the total figure at present at 120,000.

They are distributed as follows:

Province of Soukh el Arba	...	40,000
" " Elkef	...	46,000
" " Sbeitla	...	21,500
" " Gafsa	...	13,000

5. The remainder are spread in small numbers over towns like Tunis, Sfax, Beja, Touzeur, Sousse, etc.

6. It is difficult to judge the correctness of these figures. I was assured that considerable numbers have come in since my first visit in 1957, and I am inclined to think that my estimate at that time, namely, 20-30,000, was too low. At present I would estimate that the correct figure is around 90,000 and that a Programme based on that figure would go a long way to relieve the situation.

II. SITUATION OF REFUGEES IN MOROCCO

Accommodation

7. During a 5 days' trip I visited Saidia, Berkan, Berguent, Oujda town and Boub'Kher, close to the frontier.

8. There appeared to be no refugee camps in the Oujda area. A great number of refugees live among the population in villages and towns sharing their accommodation. Others live in Beduin tents or in "gourbies", a kind of primitive hut made out of stones, branches and mud, spread out in small groups. In Boub'Kher I found approximately 300 people living in huts of corrugated iron, opened-up tin cans, etc., without any kind of sanitation. They had practically nothing to sleep on, blankets were very scarce, and the whole place made a bad impression. There are apparently several such places.

9. However similar accommodation is being used in several Moroccan towns by the local population.

10. In view of the large areas over which the people are spread any systematic distribution of food is made very difficult. On the other hand, there is an advantage for refugees to live among the population, since from time to time they are given some help or temporary work. It should also be remembered that many of these people are accustomed to the Beduin kind of life. It may be that later on the setting up of camps will be necessary, but for the time being I would recommend such measures only for those living in the so-called "Bidonvilles". The authorities do not, at present, seem to favour the establishment of camps in Morocco.

Care and Maintenance

Feeding

11. Indications as to the food supplies which have been distributed to the refugees so far may be found in reports from the I.C.R.C. and the Entr'Aide Nationale.

12. As mentioned above, the Swedish "Save the Children" Organisation at present distributes wheat, sugar, condensed milk, peas, olive oil and soap for approximately 40,000 children below 16. The Organisation started in the South in October and has by now reached the Mediterranean. The Organisation will start a second distribution, which presumably will continue until March 1959. Thereafter, plans are uncertain. In addition, the Algerian Red Crescent (which is a successor of the so-called "Amicale des Algériens musulmans") distributes 10 kilos of dhura wheat plus 200 Moroccan francs per person per month. The representative of this Organisation told me, but I was not able to verify this, that their monthly budget for the Algerian refugees in Morocco amounted to approximately 80 million Moroccan francs. This was spent partly on food, partly to replace family and other allocations, to which the French citizens were entitled. The French have announced their willingness to make such allocations to Algerian refugees, provided they would register with the French Consulate. This many of the refugees are not willing to do. The Red Crescent therefore tries to make up for the loss.

13. During my stay, the Red Crescent Societies of the United Arab Republic landed in Casablanca 2,000 tons of dhura wheat, 250 tons of sugar, 15,000 articles of clothing and 20,000 blankets. Finally, NCWC is enlarging its activities in Africa and is planning a Relief Programme based on surplus commodities in Morocco. To some extent, Algerian refugees would also profit from this.

14. Comparing the situation with that in Tunisia, my impression was that there is a considerable amount of malnutrition among the refugees in both countries and that the situation is less favourable in Tunisia than in Morocco, where the Swedish Programme for the time being looks after the children.

Blankets

15. As in Tunisia there is a great need for blankets. 5,000 blankets have been distributed by the I.C.R.C. In addition, there are 20,000 blankets at present in Casablanca.

16. If each refugee is to be provided with a blanket, taking into consideration wear and tear, there would be an additional 50,000 blankets needed in Morocco.

Clothing and Shoes

17. The situation is very bad, as in Tunisia, and one sees many refugees in rags. On the other hand, one sees a considerable number of Moroccans dressed in the same way, and it is difficult to judge whether the refugees are worse off than many of the local population. The same applies to shoes.

18. I was informed that refugees living in villages and towns accept rather easily European clothing, which they have become accustomed to seeing. In the country it was considered more difficult and it would be better to issue clothes of the kind to which the people are accustomed. In any case, clothing and shoes must be cleaned and sorted out before being sent.

Sleeping Facilities

19. I was told that camp beds were needed. On the whole, I should think that mats would be as good. Many of the refugees are accustomed to sleeping on mats. Such mats could be produced by the refugees themselves from alpha grass, of which there is a great quantity in many districts, but it would take some organisation.

Tents

20. I was also informed by various authorities and organisations that tents were needed. This is probably correct. But tents do not last very long and are easily blown to bits. Whether or not camps are organised, I should think that refugees should be encouraged to construct their own habitations, however primitive.

Medicines

21. As in Tunisia there are no epidemics, although incidents of lung trouble and colds are high owing to the exposure, particularly among children. In both countries, the medical authorities informed me that although there was a considerable need for medicines, particularly for vitamin preparations, they had so far been able to control the situation and also felt capable of meeting emergencies. They pointed out, however, that they would have to stretch medicines provided for the local population for the refugees also and that critical situations might arise. I refer you to the enclosed List of Needs worked out by Dr. Tonellot for the Oujda Province. I should like to add, however, that I think he could manage with considerably less than the quantities indicated, if absolutely necessary.

Distribution

22. Until recently, distribution was handled and coordinated by Entr'Aide Nationale on the basis of the census of February 1958 comprising 58,500 people. The Entr'Aide Nationale is an umbrella Society, headed by Princess Lalla Aisha and covering various Moslem Welfare Societies, such as an anti-tubercular league, the Association for the Protection of Children and the Moroccan Red Crescent. The representative in the Oujda Province was Dr. Tonellot, a very energetic and active Frenchman with considerable administrative ability. Distribution was based on ration cards held by each head of the family and a corresponding index card with a space for entering the quantities distributed. Mr. Colladon of the I.C.R.C. confirmed that this method worked and that the cooperation with the authorities was good.

23. Some time ago, the handling and coordination of the distribution, with the consent of the authorities and the Entr'Aide Nationale, was taken over by the newly created Moroccan Red Crescent. The card index system was also taken over, but was enlarged by including new groups, not so far covered.

24. Under the Moroccan Red Crescent also, distribution by any organisation is to be carried out under the control of the local authorities, the "Caids". A representative of the Algerian Red Crescent is also present for the purpose of control. I saw a distribution of goods by the Swedish "Save the Children" Organisation in Oujda town. The system worked, except for one main point: the quantities and articles distributed were not entered in the index card. In reply to my question, I was told that this would be done later in the Office, on the basis of vouchers. Until such a system of central control is working, the various Organisations using the card index system of the Red Crescent will know what quantities each Organisation has distributed, but no one will know the quantities received by any particular family. Furthermore, although a census has been carried out, there is no real control that the number of family members given correspond to reality.

25. My impressions were confirmed by the representative of the Swedish "Save the Children" Organisation and by Mr. Colladon.

26. I was also informed by Dr. Tonellot that in one instance the Algerian Red Crescent had distributed medicines directly to the refugees.

27. The material situation is at present a little better in Morocco than in Tunisia. The system of distribution is definitely less efficient in Morocco and, to avoid confusion, must be coordinated and controlled. Coordination will be all the more necessary when the NCWC commences a Relief Programme for Algerians and Moroccans alike. To my mind it would be best if a Central Committee were set up, composed of a representative of the Ministry of the Interior, and representatives of the Ministry of Health, the Entr'Aide Nationale, the Moroccan Red Crescent and the donors. A replica of this Committee should be set up in Oujda.

28. I mentioned this point to Princess Lalla Aisha, Minister Faraj and Minister Cherkaoui, as well as M. Fougère, who all, on the whole, agreed.

III. SITUATION OF REFUGEES IN TUNISIA

Accommodation

29. In Tunisia, as in Morocco, the refugee population is concentrated in the frontier areas and the concentration becomes denser the nearer one approaches the frontier. Thus, the district of Senna in the Province of Elkef has a refugee population of 10,200 against an indigenous population of 5,900. In Sakiét Sidi Yusseff the refugee population is 15,600 and the indigenous population just over 7,000. There are no camps in these areas and the refugees are spread over many districts in much the same way and in the same kinds of dwellings as in Morocco. I saw 3 camps in Tunisia: one below the town of Elkef and two to the West of Speitla with a total population of 1,200 - 1,300 people.

30. In my report of 1957, I stated that the Tunisian authorities were against the setting up of camps and that I had agreed with them. The authorities now maintain that the much greater number of refugees and their present location presents certain risks and considerable difficulties. In the first place there is insufficient control to prevent the Algerians from transgressing the frontier from time to time. In the second place the present location of the people makes the distribution of relief supplies very difficult and expensive. The Governor of Elkef, for instance, stated that the people often had to walk up to 20 km. to the distribution points, and that he was sometimes unable to distribute items such as milk and oil because the refugees lacked the necessary containers in which to carry them.

31. The local authorities, supported by Mr. Essepsi of the Ministry of the Interior, are now much more in favour of the establishment of camps away from the frontier. In so far as this would reduce political and administrative difficulties, I am inclined to support the idea, especially as there is little chance of these refugees achieving economic integration. On the other hand, I would not recommend the establishment of camps as a general measure; it must be realised that once camps are set up, the authorities have to assume the responsibility for care and maintenance. Consequently, camps cannot be established unless there is a permanent relief programme. Even if there is such a programme, camps should only be organised in so far as this would reduce the political and administrative problems. When the refugees live among the population, receive help from the people and obtain occasional work, they should be left where they are.

32. The local authorities emphasized that it would be impossible to establish camps away from the frontier, unless there were some advantage involved, namely, more food and better dwellings. I had to discourage the idea that the UNHCR would provide any kind of accommodation. On the other hand, I believe it would be possible for the authorities to make the refugees construct mud-brick huts or simple stone and mud buildings themselves against a moderate remuneration in cash or kind. It was done in Jordan. But it takes a certain amount of encouragement and organisation. I also recommended to the authorities to organise the camps as villages and to make the refugees responsible to the greatest possible extent for administering their own camps.

Care and maintenance

Feeding

33. Previous reports show the quantities and kinds of goods that have been distributed since my visit in 1957. At present, the Tunisian Government has received sufficient goods under the US Surplus Commodities Programme to cover the needs of the refugees for wheat, dried milk and cheese up to April 1959. I understood from Messrs. Blake and Nelson of the American Embassy that the Programme would probably continue beyond that date. The Algerian Red Crescent is also distributing food stuffs in Tunisia, but seems to have less quantities at its disposal here than in Morocco. I did not find any other Organisation distributing food at present, and no gift from the Red Crescent Society of the United Arab Republic has so far been received by Tunisia. The local Governors, however, have stated that there were still stocks in hand, and on the whole my impression was that the situation had improved since my visit in 1957, in spite of the greater number of refugees.

34. Comparing the situation with that in Morocco, my impression was that there is a considerable amount of malnutrition among the refugees in both countries and that the situation is less favourable in Tunisia than in Morocco, where the Swedish Programme for the time being looks after the children.

35. As far as quantities are concerned, the situation would be redressed if the United Arab Republic gave a similar quantity of goods to Tunisia as to Morocco. But, although there does not seem to be actual starvation, the diet is unbalanced and there is a considerable lack of fats (olive oil) as well as beans and protein products. Furthermore, the refugees complained that with the American wheat

distributed to them it was difficult for them to bake the only kind of bread to which they were accustomed and for the preparation of which they were equipped. Finally, dried milk, although sufficient in quantity, represents a serious problem, owing to the refugees' inability to mix it and the necessity of drinking it shortly after preparation. Powdered milk, therefore, is only useful in camps, institutions and other places equipped with kitchens.

Blankets

36. The President of the Red Crescent informed me that approximately 65,000 blankets have been distributed altogether, but that they are partly worn out. The only place in which I saw 1 blanket per person was in the 3 small camps in Tunisia. In Morocco my impression was that there was one blanket for 3 to 4 persons.

37. If each refugee is to be provided with a blanket and taking into consideration wear and tear, an additional 40,000 blankets would be needed.

Clothing and Shoes

38. The situation is very bad, as in Morocco, and one sees many refugees in rags. On the other hand it is difficult to judge whether the refugees are worse off than many of the local population. The same applies to shoes.

39. I was informed that refugees living in villages and towns accept rather easily European clothing, which they have become accustomed to see. In the countryside it was considered more difficult and it would be better to issue material of the kind to which the people are accustomed. In any case, clothing and shoes must be cleaned and sorted out before being sent.

Sleeping facilities

40. I was told that camp beds were needed. On the whole, I should think that mats would be as good. Many of the refugees are accustomed to sleeping on mats. Such mats could be produced by the refugees themselves from alpha grass, of which there is a great quantity in many districts, but it would take some organisation.

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Medicines

42. As in Morocco there are no epidemics, although incidents of lung trouble and colds are high, particularly among children, owing to the exposure. In both countries the medical authorities informed me that although there was a considerable need for medicines, particularly for vitamin preparations, they had so far been able to control the situation and also felt capable of meeting emergencies. They pointed out, however, that they would have to stretch medicines provided for the local population also for the refugees and that critical situations might arise.

Distribution

43. The system of distribution is approximately the same as in Morocco. It is based on ration cards and is carried out by the Tunisian Red Crescent under the supervision of the local Governors and their delegates. Representatives of the Algerian Red Crescent are also present. This machinery is being used by any organisation distributing goods.

44. My definite impression was that in Tunisia the system worked very well. I had a long discussion with Messrs. Blake and Nelson, who were very satisfied as far as the American Surplus goods were concerned and who confirmed my impression from last year that the local Governors and delegates in Tunisia on the whole are capable men, and that the Red Crescent under Mr. Djellouli is as efficient as can be expected.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

45. The Algerian refugees in Morocco and Tunisia represent in numbers nearly the same proportion as the Hungarian refugees in Austria. While the refugees are primitive and frugal, they live in countries that have considerable problems of their own and for which they constitute a political and economic burden. They have been able to exist so far on the basis of more or less makeshift arrangements, but in the long run a more systematic relief must be given, which will require international action. This action needs coordination, perhaps by a temporary Representative of the High Commissioner on the spot.

46. The role of such a person would be to advise the Central Committee mentioned above in matters of organisation, distribution, needs, etc., and to report on further needs. I have reason to believe that such a Representative would be acceptable to the governments concerned.

47. A balanced diet must be established for the refugees, and the needs of blankets, clothing, shoes, etc., must be taken into account.

48. If the present conditions in Algeria continue to prevail, there will be a need for schooling facilities for refugee children. A considerable number visit local schools and I have seen primitive refugee schools in tents; however unless the schooling system is put on a proper basis a large proportion of the children will be handicapped through lack of education. The same applies to elementary social welfare.

49. At present, there is a natural tendency among Organisations and Governments to offer relief in kind and to send goods of which they have a surplus. This is understandable and also useful, but it is not economic. The cost of transporting, for instance, 2,000 tons of wheat from Casablanca over more than 600 km. to Oujda is very high. The same applies to other goods. Furthermore, the system does not ensure that the refugees receive the kind of goods to which they are accustomed. There is therefore the risk that they sell the goods. The best form of assistance consists in funds for the purchase of goods on the local markets. If this proves impossible it should be possible to sell the goods received in towns where they can be used, and to purchase other food in the same amount locally. This would save transport costs.

50. I am inclined to agree that a proportion of the refugees should be established in organised camps, but this should not be a general measure.

51. A possibility of facilitating distribution would be to set up distribution points, opened permanently, so that the refugees could fetch their rations whenever they needed them, on the basis of ration cards similar to those used in European countries during the war. But the organisation would be considerable, and it might lead to a black marketing of ration cards.

52. Lastly, the Algerian refugee problem is already considerable. It is of great importance to set up now a machinery that can take care of their problem. Present arrangements are insufficient. Should the present situation develop into an emergency, the presence of a Representative of the High Commissioner would be of great importance.