



UNHCR

The UN Refugee Agency

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Briefer: Adrian Edwards / UNHCR Spokesman

- Topics:**
- 1 - UNHCR seeking \$145 million in urgent funds for Sudanese exodus
 - 2 - Somalis perish in new boat disaster in Gulf of Aden
 - 3 - UNHCR aid to countries receiving people fleeing clashes in northern Mali

This is a summary of what was said by the UNHCR spokesperson at today's Palais des Nations press briefing in Geneva. Further information can be found on the UNHCR websites, www.unhcr.org and www.unhcr.fr, which should also be checked for regular media updates on non-briefing days.

1 - UNHCR seeking \$145 million in urgent funds for Sudanese exodus

The UN refugee agency is seeking \$145 million in additional funds to help refugees fleeing fighting in Sudan's Blue Nile and South Kordofan states into Ethiopia and South Sudan. The amount is meant to cover the needs of up to 185,000 Sudanese refugees in the two countries.

Since June 2011, heavy fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-North) in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states has driven over 130,000 Sudanese refugees into Ethiopia and South Sudan. UNHCR anticipates continuing arrivals over the next months with clashes continuing and humanitarian conditions deteriorating in the conflict zones. More than 30,000 refugees have already been registered in the two countries so far this year, a pace of arrival not foreseen during the regular 2012 planning cycle.

Many of the new arrivals are in remote border areas that are close to the fighting. In South Sudan, Elfoj in Upper Nile state and Yida refugee settlement in Unity state have both seen air raids. UNHCR has relocated some 20,000 refugees from unsafe border sites since January 6th, moving them to four new settlements.

In Ethiopia's Assosa region, the pace of relocation from border areas has also picked up in recent weeks as a result of fighting in Blue Nile and the end of the harvest season for refugee farmers living near the border. The two existing camps have reached full capacity and new arrivals are being sheltered at a transit centre until a third camp can be built.

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In addition to urgent relocation from volatile border areas, UNHCR's emergency response includes the provision of basic relief items and services, registration and child protection. In December, the agency mounted a massive airlift to bring in supplies - tents, plastic sheets, jerry cans, kitchen sets, among others - to the refugees in South Sudan.

UNHCR will also use the funds to build and service additional refugee settlements, improve road access and preposition relief supplies ahead of the rainy season starting in April.

The \$145 million UNHCR is urgently seeking for this supplementary appeal is in addition to its regular 2012 budget of \$269.1 million for programmes in Ethiopia and South Sudan. UNHCR is also appealing directly to members of the public for donations via <http://www.unhcr.org/sudan>.

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2 - Somalis perish in new boat disaster in Gulf of Aden

At least 11 people have drowned and another 34 are missing following a boat incident this week in the Gulf of Aden. Survivors found on Somali beaches on Wednesday evening explained that their boat, crewed by three smugglers and carrying 58 passengers, had set sail for Yemen last Saturday (04 February). Soon after departure, the boat's engine broke down. Without power, they were adrift for five days. The boat ultimately capsized on Wednesday in rough seas and bad weather.

Shocking details came to light yesterday (Thursday) as survivors recounted to local authorities and our partners how smugglers forced 22 passengers overboard soon after the engine failed.

UNHCR is deeply saddened by the tragic loss of life. Authorities in the Somali port town of Bossaso are investigating the incident and we hope that the perpetrators will be brought to justice.

So far, 11 bodies have been recovered on beaches around the village of Ceelaayo some 30 kilometers west of Bossaso. Locals also found 13 survivors, including two women and a teenage boy and girl. Our partners, in coordination with the local authorities, organized the transport of these people from the village of Qaw to Bossaso for medical treatment. Most of them are suffering from skin burns caused by fuel inside the boat.

Every year tens of thousands of Somalis and Ethiopians - fleeing violence, human rights abuses and poverty in the Horn of Africa - pay smugglers to ferry them across the Gulf of Aden to Yemen. Many never make it, as the boats capsize or smugglers

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beat some of the passengers to death, force them overboard, or disembark people too far from shores.

To alert people planning to cross the Red Sea or the Gulf of Aden, UNHCR teamed up in 2009 with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other partners to spread awareness about the dangers. But people still keep making the perilous crossing.

Despite growing instability and worsening security in Yemen, a record 103,000 refugees, asylum seekers and migrants from the Horn of Africa made the journey across the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea in 2011.

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3 - UNHCR aid to countries receiving people fleeing clashes in northern Mali

UNHCR is stepping up its response to the Mali crisis with aid shipments by air and road to neighbouring countries for thousands of people fleeing clashes between Tuareg rebels and the Malian army. The first of four scheduled cargo flights landed in Nema, Mauritania today at 07:18 am local time with 300 tents.

UNHCR has initially purchased 1,200 tents for Mauritania, another 2,000 for Niger and 500 for Burkina Faso. These will be flown from our stockpiles in Cameroon and Ghana to address the critical shelter needs in influx areas. Trucks will also be transporting basic relief items such as sleeping mats, blankets, jerrycans, mosquito nets, kitchen sets. Two trucks carrying 40 tons of aid are currently on the way from Accra to Niger where they are due to arrive by the middle of next week

Meanwhile, at Mauritania's Fassala border crossing with Mali, the Mauritanian authorities and UNHCR are working around the clock to provide the refugees with food, clean water and shelter. UNHCR has already sent several convoys of food and aid items, with distribution of a 15-day food ration being carried out by the local authorities.

Most of the 10,887 Malian refugees in Mauritania are Tuareg, many of whom are fleeing from nearby Léré. The Mauritanian authorities have identified a potential camp site in M'Bera, 50km from the border, and plan with UNHCR to move the refugees to the new location. The same site had hosted around 30,000 Malian refugees in the 1990s when there were also clashes between Tuareg rebels and the Malian army.

In Niger, yesterday, our emergency team interviewed a group of Malian refugees in Sinegodar area some 278 km, northeast of the capital Niamey. Refugees told us that their hometown in Anderamboukane is now empty. They say that the population fled from the Malian border town following a 26 January attack by rebels

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targeting homes, looting, poisoning water points, burning personal property and businesses and taking away animals.

They all said that they want to go back as soon as peace is restored. In the interim, they would like to travel back to salvage whatever is left of their personal property and animals that may have survived the attacks and looting.

In Burkina Faso, UNHCR has released aid from its local stocks to be distributed to Malian refugees as well host communities in the arid northern region of the country. An estimated 8,000 people have crossed into Burkina Faso from Mali, of whom 6,000 are in the north.

Since the start of the Tuareg insurgency in northern Mali on 17 January, an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 people have crossed to seek safety mainly in neighboring Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger. Not all are refugees or asylum seekers. With Niger, for example, some of those returning are Niger nationals.

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