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Press release

UNHCR, WFP, IOM and Mauritania welcome Japanese Ambassador on his first visit to Mbera camp and surroundings

NOUAKCHOTT - The Ambassador of Japan to Mauritania, H.E. Hisatsugu Shimizu, visited Mbera camp from 21 to 23 November to have a first-hand account of Japan-funded interventions carried out by the United Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme (WFP) to assist Malian refugees in Mauritania. The Ambassador also attended the inauguration of a Mali-Mauritania border post – a Japanese-funded project, built by the International Organisation for Migration and aimed at strengthening security in the area.

Since 2012, UNHCR, WFP and IOM have been working closely with Japan, the Government of Mauritania and several non-governmental organizations to assist over 42,000 Malian refugees who fled conflict in northern Mali. External support remains vital for the refugees, as well as for 20,000 vulnerable Mauritians who live in the camp surroundings and have generously shared their resources with the refugees.

“During this visit, I realized how refugees and Hodh ech Chargui’s residents rely on vital support.” Said the Ambassador. “Children facilities, such as nursing stations, supplementary feeding centers and schools left an indelible impression. I was also very impressed by the camp coordination and the good cooperation between the UN agencies, the Government of Mauritania and NGOs in such a harsh environment. ”

Since 2013, Japanese contributions have allowed UNHCR to provide refugees in Mbera camp with essential services, such as protection, water and sanitation, health and education.



“In the past years, the Government of Japan generously funded the provision and the distribution of shelter kits and other essential items, with a particular attention to people with specific needs, such as unaccompanied children and people living with disabilities in Mbera camp. This support played a crucial role in improving life conditions for refugees in the camp.” Said Mohamed Alwash, UNHCR Representative in Mauritania. “While UNHCR and its partners continue to strengthen refugees’ self-reliance and shift gradually from general assistance to more targeted support, Japanese funding is crucial to maintain access to such vital services” concluded Alwash.

“Support from the Government of Japan has played a crucial role in improving food and nutritional security for refugees,” said Jean-Noel Gentile, WFP Country Director in Mauritania. “It has allowed us to reduce the number of food insecure refugees residing in the camp. Nevertheless, more needs to be done to enhance self-reliance and ensure that no Malian or Mauritanian goes to bed hungry. We must keep working together to achieve *Zero Hunger*.”¹

With security in northern Mali still precarious, and far more refugees reaching Mauritania than voluntarily returning to Mali, there are fears of growing strains on the limited resources of the Hodh ech Chargui. The semi-arid region has been the main target of three technical Japanese-funded projects implemented by IOM – among them, the construction and equipment of a border post at Fassala (Néré), in the strategic location of Doueinkara Village.

Speaking at the inauguration of the border post – also attended by the local authorities, villagers and civil society representatives – Anke Strauss, IOM Chief of Mission in Mauritania, noted that the Mauritanian vulnerable population hosting the refugees had also benefitted from two community stabilization projects funded by Japan. “These projects,” she said, “are aimed at improving resilience and providing households with more sustainable and diversified livelihoods.”

¹ Zero Hunger is a worldwide initiative that pledges to end hunger and achieve food security



The three UN agencies look forward to further collaborating with the Government of Japan and other donors to provide life-saving assistance and self-reliance programmes to refugees and their host communities in Mauritania.

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UNHCR coordinates the humanitarian response to the refugee situation to ensure protection, access to primary education, health, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene as well as the provision of life-saving items in Mbera camp. The organisation works to promote self-reliance and pacific coexistence in the camp and surroundings.

WFP provides monthly general food distributions and works to treat and prevent moderate and acute malnutrition providing fortified nutritional supplements for children under five, pregnant and nursing women, and a daily hot meal to children at school in Mbera refugee camp. In addition, WFP assists vulnerable Mauritanian population with food and nutritional assistance through safety nets and resilience building programmes in the most food insecure areas of the country.

IOM collaborates with the Government of Mauritania and other partners in an effort to strengthen national migration management capacity and enhance support of migrants in the country. Moreover, since the outbreak of the conflict in Northern Mali in 2012, IOM has supported host communities surrounding the Mbera refugee camp, as well as the Malian refugees fleeing armed conflict in their country.

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