

Lilongwe, Malawi
3 April 2023

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UNHCR urges Malawi authorities to reconsider relocation decision

Lilongwe, 3 April 2023 - UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has learnt with deep regret and concern the decision taken by the Malawi government on 27 March to proceed with the execution of its directive to relocate refugees living in rural and urban centres across the country, back to Dzaleka camp.

While UNHCR appreciates the leniency exercised by the government regarding the previous relocation deadline for refugees in rural (30 November 2022) and urban areas (01 February 2023), the UN Refugee Agency in Malawi once again urges the authorities to reconsider its decision which will have disastrous consequences on many refugees' lives.

Refugees living in rural and urban areas are expected to return to the already congested Dzaleka camp, which presently accommodates nearly 50,000 people. Dzaleka camp was originally established to accommodate up to 12,000 refugees. Relocating several thousand refugees back to the camp will have dire consequences on the provision of critical basic services such as health and education, as well as protection activities.

"The relocation means that children will have to leave their schools, and for breadwinners to abandon their employment or small businesses and return to a camp where they will be dependent on humanitarian assistance," says Cyr Modeste Kouame, UNHCR's Representative in Malawi.

UNHCR is also very concerned about the extremely tight deadline given for the relocation of all refugees back to Dzaleka camp which is now 01 – 15 April 2023.

Relocating self-sufficient and productive refugees and asylum-seekers to Dzaleka camp would only exacerbate the problems the already overcrowded camp is facing.

Underfunding is already impacting current service provision to refugees and asylum seekers in Malawi. As of 28 March 2023, UNHCR had only received 6 per cent of the USD 27.2 million required to adequately support refugees and asylum-seekers in Malawi this year. This has crippled UNHCR's ability to meet the protection, assistance and livelihood needs of the people it serves.

UNHCR once again appeals to the Government of Malawi to allow refugee families to remain in rural or urban settings where they can continue their education, be employed, and operate their small businesses.

UNHCR appreciates the Government of Malawi's efforts to ensure the protection, safety and security of all refugees and asylum-seekers.

ENDS*

For more information on this topic, please contact:

In Lilongwe, Malawi:

Kenyi Lukajo, Associate External Relations, and Reporting Officer lukajo@unhcr.org,
+265885510477