

High Commissioner António Guterres to visit South Sudan and Sudan

Briefing Notes, 6 January 2012

This is a summary of what was said by UNHCR spokesperson William Spindler – to whom quoted text may be attributed – at the press briefing, on 6 January 2012, at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres is travelling to South Sudan this weekend. He will be in the capital Juba on Saturday and visit a refugee site in Mabaan on Sunday. He will also travel to Sudan from 10 to 13 January.

In South Sudan, UNHCR is supporting the government of the newly-independent country to reintegrate some 660,000 returnees, including 360,000 South Sudanese who have come from Sudan and some 300,000 who have returned mostly from other neighbouring countries.

Recent fighting in Sudan's Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States has caused some 75,000 Sudanese refugees to flee across the border into Unity and Upper Nile States in South Sudan, as well as some 23,500 into Ethiopia. To assist the arriving refugees, UNHCR has started airlifting relief supplies into Malakal and Mabaan. Since 20 December, 16 flights have delivered 1,450 family tents, 10,000 kitchen sets, 18,000 blankets, 18,000 jerry cans, plastic sheets, sleeping mats, mosquito nets and other essential relief items. The airlift is ongoing and more assistance is needed.

Meanwhile, in South Sudan, the recent outbreak of inter-ethnic fighting in Jonglei State between the Lou Nuer and Murle ethnic groups has resulted in major internal population movements.

On Tuesday, Guterres will fly to Khartoum, the capital of Sudan. From there, he is scheduled to travel to Kassala in East Sudan, scene of one of the most protracted refugee situations in the world. Some 70,000 refugees mostly of Eritrean origin reside in 12 camps. Refugees and the local host community face similar hardships: acute poverty, draught and risk of famine, lack of access to health and education, land degradation and high unemployment. Guterres will discuss with the authorities programmes aimed at enhancing self-reliance.

In addition to the 70,000 refugees, there is a regular influx of some 1,700 asylum seekers per month, mostly from Eritrea.

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