

Bi-weekly Operational Update: 16-29 February 2020

Ethiopian refugees return home from Kenya: On 19 February, a group of 76 Ethiopian refugees returned home from Kenya's Kakuma Camp through a voluntary repatriation programme that was facilitated by UNHCR and ARRA with support from IOM. The return movement represented a significant milestone in the quest to provide solutions to one of Africa's protracted refugee situations. This followed a previous repatriation in June 2019 in which 94 Ethiopian refugees were assisted to return home from Sudan. The majority of those returning originate from Ethiopia's Somali Region and had been living outside of their home country for up to 12 years. More than half are women and girls, with some having been born and raised in Kakuma. The returnees were flown from Kakuma to the eastern Ethiopian city of Dire Dawa in two UNHCR-chartered flights and travelled onwards by road to Jijiga, capital of the Somali Region where they received their reintegration package and transport allowance to be able to travel to their places of origin. To date, some 6,000 Ethiopian refugees, in regional and neighbouring countries, have expressed to UNHCR their intention to return home, including those hosted in Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen. Returns from Djibouti and Kenya are currently being prioritized, with more than 4,000 Ethiopian refugees expected to voluntarily return home from Kenya this year and 500 from Djibouti.

UNHCR handed over a health post to returnees and residents of Digdiga woreda: Residents of Digdiga kebele within the Kamashi Zone of the Benishangul-Gumuz Region celebrated the inauguration of a Health Post which UNHCR renovated and handed over to the authorities on 26 February 2020. The health facility, one of a few in the area, was destroyed at the height of the communal conflict in September 2018 which forced 3,500 of the village's residents into displacement in the neighbouring Oromia Region. With most of the internally displaced residents returned to their places of origin, service giving facilities for returnees and those that stayed home are scarce and the completion of the Health Post together with a water pump, a toilet and a guard house, is believed to fill one critical gap. Ann Encontre, the UNHCR Representative in Ethiopia, personally handed over the facility to the local authorities and congratulated the community on the completion of the Health Post which was also equipped and provided with a year's supply of medicines. Ms. Encontre pledged additional support including the installation of a grinding mill for the community which will remove the need for women to travel long distances for the service and expose themselves to risks. "Thank you UNHCR for this vital support", said Ato Boka Feissa, the head of the Belojeganfoy woreda, an administrative structure above the kebele. "I appeal to the residents of Digdiga kebele to please protect this facility like your own personal property".

UNHCR working with authorities to mitigate impact of desert locust: UNHCR is working closely with local authorities and partners in Melkadida, Somali Region, to mitigate the impact of the desert locust infestation threat in the area. The agency is liaising with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and other pertinent agencies to ensure that the area is included in national programmes for awareness, prevention and response. FAO is appealing for USD 135 million for the East and Horn of Africa region of which USD 50 million is for responding to the locust emergency in Ethiopia.

Clowns Without Borders (CWB) perform in Gambella camps: A team of volunteers from Spain, known as Clowns Without Borders (CWB) entertained South Sudanese refugees in Gambella with their circus and other artistic performances. The shows gave refugee children the opportunity to play and laugh as well as participate in some of the performances.