

PLACE

Juba

DATE

08 May 2020

UNHCR South Sudan commends Government's effort to preserve access to asylum

The UN Refugee Agency in South Sudan commends the Transitional Government of National Unity for continuing to welcome people seeking refuge from the Democratic Republic of Congo and stands in solidarity with the South Sudanese government.

UNHCR commends the Transitional Government of National Unity for its continued generosity to allow people fleeing recent violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to seek refuge in South Sudan, despite the current movement restrictions to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. This is the first reported official cross-border movement from a neighboring country since South Sudan's borders were closed in late March 2020 in order to curb the spread of the new virus. South Sudan's actions are an example of how COVID-19 preventative measures can be managed while still allowing people fleeing in fear of their lives to seek asylum, observing international protection.

Nearly 250 people from DRC have crossed into rural areas of the Western Equatoria State over the last week – many among them are vulnerable women and children. UNHCR, in close collaboration with South Sudan's Ministry of Interior through its Commission for Refugee Affairs (CRA), continues to monitor their situation and address their needs in coordination with partners. UNHCR and its partners, along with the Ministry of Health, the World Health Organization, and the CRA are on the ground to support the new arrivals with life-saving assistance; food, water, sanitation and healthcare services are provided and COVID19 preventive measures are implemented.

The new arrivals have been sensitized on the new coronavirus disease and the measures in place to tackle it, in compliance with South Sudan's National COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan. As a precautionary measure and abiding by the South Sudan Ministry of Health and World Health Organization guidelines – which applies to all nationals and internationals coming into the country- the group has agreed to undergo and complete the 14-day mandatory quarantine in a safe location, a facility that has been identified by the authorities, with the support of UNHCR and its partners. UNHCR has continuous access to the population and will continue to monitor and respond to their needs.

“UNHCR praises the Transitional Government of National Unity for the inclusion of refugees, asylum seekers and other persons of concern in the National COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan. We support the government and stand together in solidarity during these difficult times”, says Adan Ilmi, UNHCR Representative a.i. in South Sudan.

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Additional Information for Journalists

- Insecurity in the neighbouring countries has pushed more than 300,000 refugees into South Sudan, which has adopted the Refugee Act in 2012 [\[link\]](#) and signed the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol in 2018 [\[link\]](#). UNHCR supports refugees in 21 camps and settlements across the country and is heavily involved in aiding the nearly 1.7 IDPs and IDP returnees through the country's protection and camp management clusters.
- The COVID-19 outbreak was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020 and a pandemic on March 12 2020. During this unprecedented time, balancing the movement restrictions and the respect to fundamental refugee rights is critical. UNHCR continues to support the Transitional Government of National Unity of South Sudan to ensure that access to territory and asylum are preserved for forcibly displaced people.
- UNHCR is participating in the National COVID-19 Task Force and its various technical working groups, headed by the Ministry of Health and Human Services and the World Health Organization. The UN Refugee Agency is engaged in a COVID-19 risk communication campaign to effectively inform asylum -seekers and refugees who, along all other persons of concerns, have been included by the authorities in the National COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan.
- UNHCR echoes the UN Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire [\[link\]](#) and calls to warring parties to cease hostilities. People on the move are most vulnerable as they often lack access to water and other services and physical distancing is harder while fleeing. Violence continues to be a major driver of displacement as well as a threat to the space of intervention for humanitarian agencies. This call is therefore twice as critical: to avoid people fleeing and to continue to adequately assist those who are already displaced.

Related news and stories

- UNHCR warns of looming humanitarian crisis in South Sudan, amidst ongoing fighting and coronavirus threat [\[link\]](#)
- Statement by Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, on the COVID-19 crisis [\[link\]](#)
- UNHCR South Sudan Facebook page [\[link\]](#)
- UNHCR South Sudan Country data portal [\[link\]](#)
- UNHCR South Sudan Situation data portal [\[link\]](#)

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