

UN Refugee Agency Struggles to Help Displaced in South Sudan

Hello and welcome to As It Is, from VOA Learning English. I'm Mario Ritter in Washington.

Conflict in Africa has forced thousands of people to flee their homes. Today we hear how the United Nations refugee agency is dealing with the large number of displaced people in the world's newest nation, South Sudan.

"We are extremely concerned, of course, about the safety of refugees and about south Sudanese who are displaced within their own country."

Then, we hear more about the conflict in the Central African Republic. Deadly violence there has claimed more lives and forced hundreds of thousands of people from their homes.

The crises in South Sudan and the Central African Republic are next on As It Is.

The Numbers of Displaced South Sudanese Swell, Worrying the UNHCR

The United Nations estimates that more than 200,000 people have been displaced within South Sudan by continuing fighting. Another 10,000 people have fled to neighboring countries. June Simms has Joe De Capua's report for VOA.

Daniel MacIsaac is a spokesman for The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR. He says his group is trying to help those in need, even as the fighting in South Sudan has spread to at least seven states.

"We are extremely concerned, of course, about the safety of refugees and about south Sudanese who are displaced within their own country. We're also seeing that access to these people is affected by what we call insecurity, basically, the danger, the fighting and that type of thing, too."

Many of the displaced in South Sudan have sought refuge at U.N. bases in Juba, Bor, Pibor, Malakal and Bentiu. Daniel MacIsaac says the refugee agency is assisting refugees in those areas.

“Approximately 75,000 people - although that does change - have taken shelter at these different U.N. bases or compounds around the country. So as a result that’s a huge responsibility to protect those people, as well as to simply house them.”

McIsaac says that UNHCR is working with other United Nations agencies and additional groups to provide sleeping mats, tents, food and water for the refugees.

He says the refugees that are fleeing across South Sudan’s borders are also receiving help.

“There’s good cooperation with the governments, be it Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and even in Sudan, of course, as well -- together with our NGO partners in those countries. And then we would help operate transit centers where we would register, take information, find out the needs.”

The UNHCR is also providing support for about 210,000 refugees from neighboring Sudan. Most are in the Yida and Ajoung Thok camps in Unity State in northern South Sudan. There are also refugee camps in Maban County in Upper Nile State.

The UNHCR says it is also directing its attention to child protection. It notes that many family members have been separated while trying to escape the fighting. I’m June Simms.

Warring Sides in Central African Republic Endanger Aid Workers

As violence continues in the Central African Republic, the conditions for aid organizations like Doctors Without Borders have become dangerous. Twice in recent weeks, hospitals and clinics had to be cleared when armed men entered the buildings. Christopher Cruise has this report from VOA about events in the African nation.

Teams with Doctors Without Borders say violence in Bangui -- the capital of the Central African Republic -- has been increasing. This has happened even with the presence of French and African troops.

Unrest increased in early December when Christian militias -- known as anti-Balaka -- increased their attacks against former Seleka rebels, who are Muslim. The rebels helped the country's Muslim president, Michel Djotodia, gain power after the overthrow of President Francois Bozize in March. Attacks by former rebels against civilians led to the formation of the Christian militias. The resulting violence has killed more than 1,000 people in the last month, including children.

A spokesman for the United Nations refugee agency says 935,000 people are now displaced inside the Central African Republic.

Last week, thousands of people protested at Bangui's international airport, blocking a runway. They were demanding more international aid. And some of them called for the temporary president to resign.

Doctors Without Borders says its relief efforts have suffered because of the violence. Sylvain Groulx is the head of mission for Doctors Without Borders in the country. He says medical workers had to temporarily leave their buildings on December 24th and 25th because of gunfire and threats by armed men.

"Essentially they have been threatening medical personnel. They have been threatening the staff as well. It's been very, very difficult to manage those incidents and certainly what we are requesting as a medical organization is that there is a full respect by all of the combatants or individuals within the city and that there is a full respect for our patients' rights. They are no longer combatants, they are no longer part of a community or another. They are simply patients."

Doctors Without Borders is giving medical care to thousands of people in Bangui. The group says its teams have been treating up to 20 people a day who have been injured in the violence. Sylvain Groulx says medical volunteers are concerned about all the people they cannot reach.

"It's quite difficult, and what's worse is actually the level of insecurity has driven hundreds of thousands of people -- rough estimates -- approximately half of the capital city of Bangui is now living in dire and squalid conditions in camps, IDP camps in approximately 50 sites around the city."

The United Nations refugee agency says better security is needed for aid agencies to do their jobs. The UNHCR and other aid groups depend on African Union peacekeeping forces, known as MISCA. That force is expected to have 6,000 members soon.



In addition to those displaced within the country, about 75,000 people have fled to neighboring countries. That has raised the number of refugees from the Central African Republic in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad and Cameroon to about 240,000.

I'm Christopher Cruise.

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