



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

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UNHCR opens new repatriation corridors to south Sudan

The voluntary repatriation of south Sudanese refugees from Ethiopia has assumed an important milestone with UNHCR today officially inaugurating two more repatriation corridors named, **Pagak and Bambudi**. **Kurmuk** was the only corridor UNHCR used so far to assist Sudanese refugees go home, and the opening of Pagak and Bambudi brings the total to three.

323 refugees from Fugnido camp in the Gambella Regional State, and 505 others from Yarenja camp in the Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State happened to be the first Sudanese refugees to use Pagak and Bambudi respectively to go home early this morning.

“ The opening of the two corridors means the majority of the close to 37,000 refugees from Fugnido, Dimma and Yarenja camps will be able to return mainly to the Upper Nile, Jonglie and Blue Nile States of south Sudan”, Says Mr. Ilunga Ngandu, UNHCR Regional Liaison Representative for Africa.

UNHCR is working very closely with the government of Ethiopia and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in facilitating the voluntary repatriation operation.

Two more convoys from Yarenja camp are scheduled for 15 and 20 March 2007, taking home all, but one, of the 1,522 Sudanese refugees there. One Darfurian refugee did not want to repatriate and UNHCR will continue to extend international protection to him.

Organized returns from Ethiopia started in March 2006 and 4,628 Sudanese refugees from Bonga and Sherkole camps were assisted to go home before the year ended. Almost all went to the Blue Nile State.

Before leaving the camps, returnees were given an aid package consisting of blankets, jerry cans for storing water, sleeping mats, a water filter and sanitary kits. Other supplies such as soap, plastic sheets for temporary roofing, mosquito nets, water buckets and cooking sets were distributed once the convoys reached the border crossing points.

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Inside Sudan, the World Food Programme and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) have agreed to provide the returnees with a reintegration package comprising food grains and agricultural tools and seeds to help them rebuild their lives.

In February and early this month UNHCR and IOM assisted a total of 1,658 refugees to go home to the Blue Nile State of south Sudan from Bonga and Sherkole camps. This brings the total number of UNHCR-assisted returns from Ethiopia since March 2006 to 6,285.

In 2007 UNHCR, together with its partners, plans to close Yarenja camp and to repatriate a total of 20,000 Sudanese refugees. "The overwhelming majority of the close to 65,000 Sudanese refugees in our camps in Ethiopia have expressed the desire to go home and, together with our partners, we expect to repatriate them all subject to the availability of resources and absorption capacity in the places of return in South Sudan", Mr. Ngandu said

Ethiopia currently hosts more than 99,000 refugees of mainly Sudanese origin. There is also a significant presence of Somali and Eritrean refugees.

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