



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

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UNHCR to resume repatriation of Sudanese from Ethiopia's Bonga camp

The UN refugee agency and its partners expect to resume the repatriation of Sudanese refugees from Ethiopia on 15 December with a first group of 613 leaving Bonga camp in western Ethiopia for their homeland.

Organized repatriation of Sudanese refugees from Ethiopia started in March 2006 and more than 21,000 have been assisted to go home before the operation was temporarily halted in May this year due to the rainy season and swampy road conditions.

With the mud fully dried up and the roads becoming fairly passable at least on the route to the Kurmuk corridor, UNHCR, together with the government of Ethiopia, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the World Food Programme (WFP), has finalized preparations to send home a total of 1,800 refugees from Bonga camp to the Blue Nile State of south Sudan before the end of 2007.

Sherkole camp, which uses the same Kurmuk corridor, will soon restart the return operation. Repatriation from Fugnido and Dimma camps through the Pagak exit point is expected to resume at the beginning of 2008.

"With the resumption of the return movement at this point in time, we, together with our partners, expect to assist the return of approximately 30,000 Sudanese refugees between now and the whole of 2008," said Mr. Ilunga Ngandu, UNHCR's Regional Liaison Representative for Africa.

Mr. Ngandu added that this would enable UNHCR to close at least two of the four camps sheltering Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia before end of 2008.

Tomorrow's convoy of 11 buses and four trucks is scheduled to cross into Sudan's Blue Nile state, after an 820-kilometre-long journey. The returning refugees will have to spend three nights on UNHCR-built transit points on the road before reaching home.

Before leaving Bonga, a camp of more than 7,000 Sudanese refugees, the returnees will receive a reintegration package of blankets, jerry cans, sleeping mats, a water filter and a sanitary kit for girls and women.



They will receive more supplies at Kurmuk, including plastic sheeting, mosquito nets, plastic buckets, kitchen utensils and soap. Upon arrival in Sudan, a reintegration package comprising three months of food, seeds and agricultural tools will be provided by the World Food Programme and Food and Agriculture Organization.

Close to 400 of tomorrow's returnees are aged under 18 years, which indicates that most were probably born and raised in Ethiopia. The main influx of southern Sudanese to Ethiopia came in 1987.

Since January 2005, after the ex-rebel force SPLM and the government of Sudan signed an accord ending a two-decade war, the UNHCR has supported the return of some 70,000 to South Sudan from neighboring countries, including some 21,000 from Ethiopia. More than 90,000 are believed to have returned on their own.

At the moment Ethiopia hosts 36,850 Sudanese refugees in four camps. Some 20,000 Eritrean and more than 23,000 Somali refugees also reside in the country.

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