

Addis Ababa, Friday 30 March 2007

UNHCR closes first Sudanese camp in Ethiopia

The UN refugee agency closed Yarenja camp on Wednesday 28 March 2007 after the last convoy took home 494 returning refugees to South Sudan. With this, Yarenja has become the first of five camps in Ethiopia [hosting Sudanese refugees] to close.

Situated in a far-off location in the Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State, Yarenja camp-the smallest of the five Sudanese refugee camps in western Ethiopia- was established in 2,001 to meet the protection needs of some 4,000 Sudanese refugees fleeing generalized violence and insecurity in their home towns and villages in Southern Sudan.

Thanks to the January 2005 peace agreement signed between the Sudanese government and the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA/M), many went home on their own, while a total of 1,488 were repatriated with UNHCR assistance between 10 March and 28 March 2007.

“With the help of our partners, particularly the Government of Ethiopia and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), we have successfully repatriated all refugees from Yarenja,” says Mr. Ilunga Ngandu, Representative of UNHCR Regional Liaison Office for Africa. “The camp is now empty and we shall soon transfer to the local administration all the assets the refugees had been using”

Before leaving the camp, returning refugees received 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 also distributed before departure.

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.

Since organized repatriation of Sudanese refugees from Ethiopia began in March 2006, the UN refugee agency assisted 12,305 people from all five camps to return home in safety and dignity. 7,691 of these were returned since 26 February 2007.

“The voluntary repatriation of refugees from the remaining four camps continues as we speak, and the target for 2007 is to assist at least 20,000 refugees to go home, which of course is contingent up on the generosity of the donor community,” said Mr. Ngandu.

Ethiopia currently hosts some 57,000 Sudanese refugees in Fugnido, Bonga, Dimma and Sherkole camps. There are also 18,125 Eritrean and 17,000 Somalis living in the country as refugees.

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