

Massive airlift launched to aid Sudanese refugees in South Sudan

News Stories, 20 December 2011

JUBA, South Sudan, December 20 (UNHCR) – The UN refugee agency today launched a massive airlift from Kenya to bring urgently needed aid to around 50,000 Sudanese refugees in South Sudan.

The first of 18 flights using C-130 Hercules aircraft left Nairobi this morning carrying 12 metric tons of supplies, including plastic sheets and rolls, sleeping mats,

blankets, mosquito nets, buckets, jerry cans and kitchen sets. It landed at around 11 a.m. local time at South Sudan's Malakal airport, a major landing strip close to the refugee sites.

"These supplies are desperately needed," said Vivian Tan, a UNHCR spokeswoman in Juba, South Sudan. "Families often arrive here exhausted, hungry, cold or sick. We have already distributed whatever we had on the ground, including aid from Juba and Malakal. Our local warehouse is almost empty now."

The remaining 17 flights will deliver an additional 272 metric tons of relief supplies from UNHCR's global stockpiles in Nairobi to Malakal. The items will then be taken by road either to Maban county in Upper Nile state – some three hundred kilometres to the north-east – or westwards to Unity state. The 18 flights will cost an estimated \$1.5 million, while the aid supplies being delivered are valued at \$2.5 million.

In addition to these flights, UNHCR expects to send 10,000 tents to South Sudan from our warehouse in Dubai in the coming weeks at an expected cost of more than \$8 million.

In recent months, Upper Nile and Unity states in South Sudan have been generously receiving refugees from fighting in Sudan's Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan states.



Supplies were loaded onto a C-130 aircraft yesterday in Nairobi. Today they reached South Sudan aboard the first of 18 flights planned for the airlift.

"Many families left with few belongings and walked for weeks through the bush, stopping where there was water and moving on when the source ran dry," said Tan. "Some were stranded in heavily-forested areas bordering South Sudan."

In Upper Nile state, at least 40,000 refugees have arrived since September. UNHCR is aware of 25,000 refugees at the Doro camp, and an estimated 15,000 stranded in the Elfoj border area. Both are in Maban county. There are also reports of some 27,000 refugees scattered across the Guffa border area further north. UNHCR border monitoring teams are trying to reach these remote areas to verify the reports.

So far, the UN refugee agency has distributed existing in-country supplies to more than 19,000 of the Sudanese refugees in Doro camp. Items include plastic sheets for shelter, mats for sleeping, blankets for cold evenings, buckets and jerry cans for water, mosquito nets to prevent malaria, soap for cleaning and kitchen sets to cook with. UNHCR's warehouse in the camp is now almost empty and awaiting replenishment from the Nairobi airlift.

Last week, the Maban authorities started demarcating land in Doro camp, which will enable the refugees to build more durable shelters. The World Food Programme (WFP) is providing food rations, while Oxfam is drilling boreholes for water. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Belgium provided initial communal latrines and is doing health and nutrition screening. Several other agencies are joining at the site or developing programmes outside the refugee settlement for the broader community.

"Getting the airlifted supplies into the right hands as quickly as possible is logistically quite complex," said Tan. "We could not do it without the commitment and cooperation of the authorities and our implementing partners."

Some 70 kilometres away, UNHCR and partners are preparing another site in Jammam, to receive the 15,000 refugees currently stranded at Elfoj. Efforts are under way to ensure water supply, medical support and that the site is free of mines.

In Unity state, some 22,000 refugees from the Nuba Mountains of Southern Kordofan state have fled to Yida settlement since August. The makeshift site is located near the volatile border and has come under attack in the past, most recently in mid-November. UNHCR and partners have been providing emergency assistance while trying to persuade the refugees to move to safer sites inland. Work is ongoing to prepare alternative sites further south in Unity state. In addition to basic services such as food, water and healthcare, the refugees will be able to attend school, receive skills training, farm and pursue other livelihood activities once they move to the new sites.