

## Update on Emergency Response Operations in South Sudan

### Week Ending 20 January 2013

#### Highlights

- **UNHCR TO OPEN NEW REFUGEE CAMP IN UNITY STATE**

#### Unity State

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UNHCR will open a new refugee camp in Unity State to manage the continuing inflow of Sudanese refugees and to decongest the existing settlement in Yida, where essential services are overstretched.

Following a long search for a suitable location, the UN refugee agency and the South Sudanese government agreed to locate the new camp at Ajuong in the vicinity of Jam-jang, a forested area of red sandy soil with good terrain, water resources, and plenty of space. Ajuong is located in the border county of Pariang, however the national authorities have given UNHCR assurances that the location is safe.

Refugee leaders and UNHCR have been working closely together in the process to determine the suitability of the new site. After a “go and see visit” organized for members of the refugee community to visit to the new location, refugees have also determined that the site is suitable for them. The black cotton soil in the area could be used for agriculture by the refugee population. “If it is going to be here, then I have nothing to say against it, this is a good place for our people,” one refugee leader remarked after visiting the new site.

Local communities in the area have reacted positively to the proposal and have expressed on numerous occasions that they welcome the refugees because of the cultural ties they share with their northern neighbors.

In addition to Ajuong, which will eventually hold 20,000 refugees, UNHCR is planning to open other camps in Unity State in northern South Sudan. The new camps could eventually hold an estimated 110,000 refugees.

“With approximately 300 refugees arriving every day, UNHCR and its partners are racing against the clock to prepare suitable sites and pre-position food and essential items before the start of the rainy season,” Marie-Helene Verney, Head of Field Office for UNHCR in Unity State.

New arrivals from Southern Kordofan will be given priority in Ajuong, which is expected to begin receiving refugees in early March. Yida, which currently holds about 61,000 people, is the largest refugee location in



A woman refugee arrives in Yida from Southern Kordofan, Sudan in mid-January with her belongings strapped to her bicycle. UNHCR/K.Mahoney

South Sudan. An additional 300 persons are arriving per day, with a possible 60,000 more refugees expected during the next five to six months of the dry season.

In talks with the South Sudanese government, UNHCR insisted that the civilian character of the camp be guaranteed from the start, with comprehensive screening mechanisms in place and close cooperation with the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army.

While UNHCR does not force refugees to move under international refugee law, officials are hoping that many will choose to move to Ajuong and eventually to the other camps. The new sites will allow refugees to live in a safe environment where longer term assistance, including primary and secondary education, agricultural assistance and income generating activities will be available.

“We are hopeful that these new camps will give refugees an opportunity for a new start with more comprehensive services that were never possible to establish in Yida,” Verney said. “Education in particular is likely to encourage many refugees to move to the new camps.”

The Yida site presents major problems in large part because it is totally cut-off during the six months of the rainy season, posing serious hygiene and health risks. Last year the World Food Programme had to fly in 2,500 metric tons of food at high cost while UNHCR airlifted thousands of tons of essential relief items such as buckets, plastic sheets, and medicines.

The close proximity of Yida from a contested border area with Sudan also poses security problems, raising concerns about the safety of refugees and the civilian character of the site.

## Statistics

Upper Nile State: 112,470		Unity State: 62,179	
Yusuf Batil	37,229	Nyeel	827
Doro	44,704	Pariang	763
Jamam	15,633	Yida	60,589
Gendrassa	14,904		

### Partners:

ACROSS; ACTED; CARE; Danish Refugee Council (DRC); Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); GOAL; GIZ; IBIS; International Rescue Committee (IRC); International Organization for Migration (IOM); INTERSOS; MEDAIR; Non-Violence Peace Force (NVPF); Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC); OXFAM; Relief International; Samaritan’s Purse; Save the Children Fund; UNICEF; World Food Programme (WFP); World Health Organization (WHO); World Relief; World Vision International.