



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/43/595
8 September 1988

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Forty-third session
Item 12 of the provisional agenda*

REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Assistance to displaced persons in Ethiopia

Report of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 42/139, the General Assembly requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to continue his efforts in mobilizing humanitarian assistance for the relief, rehabilitation and resettlement of voluntary returnees and refugees in Ethiopia. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General, in co-operation with the High Commissioner, to report to the General Assembly at its forty-third session on the implementation of the resolution.

II. ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES

2. Over the past few months, Somali refugees have been arriving in eastern Ethiopia at a rate that represents one of the highest sustained refugee influxes of recent years. By mid-August, UNHCR was assisting over 250,000 refugees. A further 60,000 were being assisted by the Ethiopian authorities pending transfer to a more accessible location. Although there are indications that the extraordinarily high rate of arrival may now be declining some 2,000 more refugees are still being registered each day at one location alone. The refugees state that lack of security in north-west Somalia as a result of events since the end of May is the reason for their flight. There was no prior warning of this massive influx and, therefore, no possibility of contingency planning.

* A/43/150.

3. At the same time, Sudanese refugees fleeing civil strife in the south of their country continue to arrive in the west of Ethiopia at an average rate of some 10,000 each month. Their numbers now exceed 300,000. A major relief operation has been mounted to respond to their needs. The long distances involved, problems with access to remote sites, particularly during the rains, and the severely malnourished state of many new arrivals have made this a complex and difficult operation. While much remains to be done and more resources in cash and food are needed in response to the High Commissioner's appeal on 18 May for \$26.7 million, the situation of the Sudanese refugees has improved. Although this progress must not be compromised, the immediate priorities in these exceptional circumstances clearly lie with the needs of the Somali refugees in eastern Ethiopia.

4. The health of the Somali refugees is generally good on arrival, but the locations where they are gathered are very difficult of access and devoid of natural resources. The largest group is divided between Hartishiek and Harshin, some 75 km and 125 km respectively south-east of Jijiga. The second group is some 120 km east of Degeh Bur, a town 170 km south-east of Jijiga. A further 60,000 refugees are reported to be some 100 km east of the second group. The immediate priority is action to improve the access roads. This work is under way. There are no sources of ground water near the refugees and water is being trucked from distances of between 75 km and 125 km. Food and other supplies have to be moved over much longer distances. As the area lacks natural shelter, the sites are exposed, and it has been raining.

5. In close co-operation with the Ethiopian authorities, a great effort is under way to mobilize the necessary assistance. Much of what is immediately needed by way of food, medicaments and logistics is available within Ethiopia. Significant contributions have been made by the United Nations system, including the provision of two aircraft currently moving supplies from Djibouti, and non-governmental organisations. Food has also been lent, and the World Food Programme has approved an initial allocation covering 200,000 refugees for six months. Urgently needed supplies that are not available within the country, notably tents and water equipment, are being airlifted. Much remains to be done to bring the situation under control, and the major immediate constraint is the lack of financial resources.

6. On 22 July the High Commissioner appealed for international support for a relief programme valued at \$11 million, excluding food. This appeal was based on a tentative planning case-load of 120,000. By the end of July, a planning figure of 200,000 had been adopted, and on 12 August UNHCR addressed a telex letter to Governments noting, on the one hand, the rapid increase in the case-load and therefore the needs, and on the other, the fact that only \$1.2 million had been contributed in cash in response to the appeal. Although a further \$830,000 has been pledged, the shortfall has become even more acute. The August cash estimates of \$19 million for 200,000 refugees did not take account of the needs of the second group, numbering some 75,000, which had been first visited by a joint mission only on 9 and 10 August.

7. It is evident that 400,000 is now a realistic planning figure to adopt for Somali refugees in eastern Ethiopia, taking account of the continuing influx and

the long lead times necessary to deliver supplies. Financial needs are being reassessed accordingly, but it must be stressed that response to date falls far short of even the first target. Meanwhile, UNHCR has made a total of \$10.5 million temporarily available through internal transfers, all of which has been fully committed. Most of these transfers will need to be reimbursed.

8. Greatly increased financial support to this emergency programme is of critical importance to the lives of these refugees.

III. ASSISTANCE TO RETURNEES FROM DJIBOUTI, SOMALIA AND SUDAN

9. Since the inception of the special programme in December 1986, 4,940 Ethiopian refugees had returned home from Somalia and 3,891 from Djibouti under UNHCR auspices by the end of March 1988. In addition, some 11,000 refugees returned spontaneously from the Sudan. Assistance was provided to these returnees to reintegrate around their home areas in the form of food rations for up to 12 months, agricultural tools, seeds, materials for home construction and livestock. The programme has now been extended until the end of December 1988 and a new project has been established to cover the period. Based on experience gained in recent years, it has become clear that a review of the overall rehabilitation operations in favour of the population of the Ogaden should be carried out. A study to this end has, therefore, been commissioned. The results of this study will be the source of specific project ideas which will be developed jointly by UNHCR and UNDP. It had, however, been indicated that the Government would retain the initiative in attracting donor interest in such project ideas, it being understood that UNHCR will pursue those activities within its competence and mandate when appropriate, and thus play a supportive, catalytic and promotional role in relation to the Government's initiatives.
