

ALGERIA

UNHCR OPERATIONAL UPDATE ON FLOODS IN THE SAHRAWI REFUGEE CAMPS NEAR TINDOUF

2 November 2015

CURRENT SITUATION

Flooding in the Tindouf region

Unprecedented heavy rains in southwestern Algeria's arid Tindouf region have severely affected the five Sahrawi refugee camps (Laayoune, Boujdour, Awserd, Smara, and Dakhla) where some 90,000 most vulnerable refugees are sheltered. The rain continued for over a week, only stopping in the evening of 26 October. Flooding immediately destroyed many of the refugees' mud-brick homes.



Children outside their home after their personal belongings were damaged by the floods in Dakhla camp. 26 October/UNHCR, Z.Ghalioui

The resulting damage is significant with flooded latrines and damaged or destroyed food stocks, shops, hospitals, schools, and roads. Families living in traditional Sahrawi family tents

were spared the worst of the devastation, but only a minority of families possess such tents. UN and partners' estimates put the figure of affected families as high as 11,500. Altogether 60 per cent of public buildings are estimated to need rehabilitation of some kind. Rapid needs assessments in the immediate aftermath of the flooding revealed urgent needs in all sectors such as food, shelter, essential relief items, sanitation, water, health, logistics, and education.

UNHCR Response

UNHCR leads the emergency response among humanitarian actors, with support from the Government of Algeria, other UN agencies and partners on the ground. The most immediate and urgent needs are food, drinking water, and shelter. In response to this crisis, UNHCR is airlifting urgently needed shelters and relief items and has with other agencies launched a multi-agency appeal.

Airlifting emergency shelter and relief items

On 28 and 30 October, the first two of three planes arrived carrying 10,350 fleece blankets, 1,834 kitchen sets, 2,000 jerry cans, 1,319 plastic sheets, 906 family tents, and 319 plastic rolls. A third UNHCR airlift is scheduled to arrive on 5 November bringing the same composition of emergency items and around 600 family tents. Distributions have begun starting with the most affected households.

Multi-agency emergency appeal

On 29 October UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and WHO launched a USD 19.896 million funding appeal to various donors in response to the crisis. The appeal covers all five Sahrawi refugee camps, and all emergency related humanitarian needs for an initial period of three months, with particular attention to the most vulnerable, notably large families, women and children. The targets outlined in the appeal emerged during rapid first assessments conducted by the partners. Of the USD 19.896 million, UNHCR requires a total of USD 9,796,000, mainly for shelter and core relief items, as well as education, health and WASH responses.

The provision of shelter kits (wood, cement and zinc roofs) for houses and for public buildings will be required before the onset of winter. UNHCR is seeking funds to cover these efforts.

Coordination

UNHCR is the lead coordinating agency, among humanitarian actors, for the emergency response, which is being carried out by various agencies present on the ground in collaboration with local authorities, NGOs and civil society organizations. UN agencies will share responsibilities for the main sectoral humanitarian needs.

UNHCR has been present in the refugee camps near Tindouf since the 1990's, providing international protection and, together with its partners, basic life-saving assistance to 90,000 vulnerable Sahrawi refugees in the five camps near Tindouf. UNHCR works in 11 sectors in the camps. This includes implementation of multi-sectoral activities in water, sanitation, health, shelter, nutrition, community services, and distribution of non-food items. UNHCR implements protection outreach and improved communication with refugees through regular field visits and the establishment of a network of community outreach workers in all camps. As the host country, the Algerian Government continues supporting the Sahrawi refugee programme including water, electrical energy and roads.

Funding and shortfalls

Prior to the flooding, UN agencies and humanitarian organizations active in the Sahrawi refugee operation near Tindouf have been facing severe funding shortfalls, which have restricted their regular activities, including provision of food aid. UNHCR Algeria Operation was only 20 per cent funded as of October 2015. UNHCR funding shortfalls also impacted on moving forward with additional livelihoods initiatives, which complement the ongoing care and maintenance activities, particularly targeting youth to curb growing frustrations and reduce vulnerabilities.

The Sahrawi refugees have been sheltered in Algeria for over four decades, making it one of the most protracted refugee crises in the world. They remain fully dependent on international assistance. Options for economic activities are extremely limited due to the harsh environmental conditions and the remote location of the camps. Child and maternal mortality rates are high; anaemia is prevalent because of the lack of fresh food; and adequate infrastructure for basic education is lacking.

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Links:

UNHCR airlifts emergency relief to Algeria flood victims: <http://www.unhcr.org/563338686.html>



Flooding in the refugee camps near Tindouf, 24 October