

Nearly 6,000 new refugees registered in March



A refugee child playing near the feeding centre at Hilaweyn refugee camp. UNHCR/S. Nic Iomhaired

UNHCR and ARRA registered 5,951 new arrivals in March, bringing the cumulative total number of refugees in Ethiopia to 309,395 (192,833 Somalis, 57,809 Eritreans and 55,014 Sudanese). Also included in these statistics were 3,739 refugees from different nationalities, including 2,780 Kenyans.

In addition, some 10,000 South Sudanese and 5,000-10,000 Kenyans (please see the next article) are in the country as asylum seekers.

UNHCR continues to monitor new arrivals from Kenya

UNHCR has a dedicated staff to closely monitor the situation of estimated 5,000-10,000 new arrivals from Kenya to the Moyale area in southern Ethiopia. The focal person will work closely with the Administration for Refugee Returnee Affairs (ARRA), the local administration in Moyale as well as with UN agencies and NGOs who have been involved in providing relief assistance in the area. UNHCR, ARRA and WFP have agreed early this year that refugees in this area would be assisted within the community.

Reports of the new influx first came to the attention of UNHCR in February 2012, following which it fielded a joint mission with ARRA to the area for a preliminary assessment, as well as to understand the magnitude of the influx. The two

organizations fielded a second mission to the area at the beginning of April to make further assessments and in order to understand the situation better and deeper.

Contrary to initial reports whereby figures were quoted as being much higher, the team assessed a population presence of around 5,000-10,000.

The mission team assessed that the recent arrivals belong primarily to the Gabra and Borana ethnic groups, which have been residing along the Kenyan/Ethiopia border, and share common cultural and linguistic features. The primary reasons for their flight are inter-ethnic clashes between the two tribes, destruction and burning of properties, fuelled by competing political leaders in the Region for representation in the national Parliament.

The two missions assessed that the group of Kenyans entered Ethiopia without obstacles, and there have been an ongoing to and fro movement across the border. The two categories of people happened to live along the border area and share cultural values and traditional practices with their kin on the Ethiopian side of the border. It is because of this that almost the entire group has been hosted within the local communities, scattered in five villages along the border strip. In the interim, the Kenyan government has undertaken interventions, to calm down and contain the security situation. The back and forth movement is also a good sign but presents difficulties on assistance issues.

Meanwhile, few UN agencies and NGOs who have presence on the Ethiopian side of the border are providing assistance to the new arrivals. UNHCR and ARRA continue to monitor the situation closely, while partners and NGOs, are regularly briefed on the situation. UNHCR has so far adopted a strategy of regular missions to monitor the situation, which should soon evolve into a more permanent presence in the area.

Chinese actress seeks to build bridges with Somali refugees

On 3-7 April 2012 Chinese actress Yao Chen paid her first visit to Africa as UNHCR's honorary patron for China. She hailed the courage of Somali refugees and the generosity of their hosts in Ethiopia: "The people of



Chinese actress Yao Chen had a lively conversation with Somali refugee women at Buramino refugee camp. UNHCR/N. Prokopchuk

Ethiopia are so generous to refugees," she said. "They keep their borders open, they share whatever they have."

During her visit Yao Chen travelled to meet with Somali refugees in the Dollo Ado and Jijiga border areas. Of the three camps she visited, Aw Barre and Sheder in Jijiga were opened in 2007-2008 for Somalis escaping insecurity back home. Bur Amino is the newest camp in Ethiopia, established in November 2011 along with four other camps in the Dollo Ado region to accommodate nearly 150,000 refugees fleeing conflict and drought in Somalia.

In Bur Amino camp, Yao Chen spoke to a mother of five children who had come from Mogadishu several months ago. Sitting in a small traditional Somali shelter made of wood and rugs, the woman said that leaving Mogadishu was the only way to save her children's lives.

In Jijiga the actress met with a group of young refugee women from Aw Barre, Kebribeyah and Sheder refugee camps, together hosting more than 41,000 Somali refugees. Some of these women were born in the camp, while others came as refugees with their families four to five years ago.

Considering the high drop-out rate among girls, these young women need to be congratulated: They managed to finish secondary school in the camps and received UNHCR scholarships for tertiary education. The UN refugee agency

sponsors about 50 refugee women to study in local colleges in Jijiga. The women will become medical nurses, public service managers and teachers, professions which are in demand both in the refugee camps and in the local community.



Yao Chen received a rousing welcome by refugee children attending classes at the Buramino emergency school. UNHCR/S.Nic Iomhaired

"Education is key to your future, this is your pass to success in life," Yao Chen told them. "It gives you skills and independence. This also enables you to help other refugees and host communities."

Inspired by her talks with the refugees, Yao Chen said, "My trips with UNHCR make me reconsider my life, my values, they change me as a person. For a week I forget about my work, I serve as a volunteer, I came here to support UNHCR and tell refugee stories to the rest of the world." Through her very large and powerful Weibo platform, the Chinese equivalent of Twitter – Yao Chen regularly reaches a vast audience estimated at 20 million followers and sensitises them about the plight of refugees.

UNHCR & JICA to collaborate on water development in Somali Region

On 28 March 2012 UNHCR signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to support the latter's Water Development Project in the Somali Region of Ethiopia, particularly in the Kebribeyah area where UNHCR has been operating for over two decades.



UNHCR Representative Moses Okello and JICA Chief Representative Ota Koji signed the MoU in Addis Ababa. UNHCR/N.Prokopchuk

The USD 9 million project covers: i) assessment of the potential of water resources and preparation of the water supply development plan in the Jerrer Valley and Shebele Sub-Basins; ii) developing capacity of the government personnel in the planning of the water supply; iii) improving the water supply in Kebribeyah town; iv) conducting a feasibility study in Gode town; and v) providing emergency water supply equipment.

The Kebribeyah component of the project, where UNHCR comes into the picture, plans to improve access to water to 72,400 people, including 56,000 people from the local community, who have limited access to safe water as well as 16,400 Somali refugees in the camp. Opened in 1991, Kebribeyah is one of the oldest refugee camps in Ethiopia hosting Somali refugees who fled the collapse of the Siad Bare Government in the early 1990s. UNHCR provides piped water to the refugees and local communities from the Jerrer valley.

After signing the MoU, Mr. Moses Okello, UNHCR Representative in Ethiopia, thanked JICA, as well as the people and the Government of Japan for extending this important support to the people of the Somali

Region of Ethiopia whom he described as having been generously hosting refugees for more than two decades. He promised UNHCR's unrelenting support for the successful completion of the Kebribeyah component of the project.

On his part, Mr. Ota Koji, Chief Representative of JICA in Ethiopia, said that Japan itself is prone to various natural disasters and does clearly understand the needs of the people of Ethiopia. He added that Japanese experts were ready to start work as soon as possible.

The contribution from JICA to Kebribeyah town will include the drilling of two boreholes, replacement of three surface water pumps, procurement of two generators, construction of the a generator house, pipes and fittings for connection with the main water supply system as well as a construction of five communal water supply points.

This is the second joint project between JICA and UNHCR in Ethiopia. The first project was completed in September 2011 with the provision of the emergency supplies (tents and generators) from JICA to UNHCR for the Dollo Ado refugee camps which host some 150,000 Somali refugees.

Refugees in Ethiopia celebrate IWD

All 16 refugee camps and two transit centres in Ethiopia- home to more than 300,000 refugees- organized different activities to commemorate the International Women's Day (IWD) on 8 March 2012. Marked under the global theme: "Connecting Girls; Inspiring Futures", the celebrations featured a number of activities ranging from sports competitions and cultural shows to panel discussions on the rights of women, Question-Answer sessions on legal instruments affecting women's rights as well as statements by refugee representatives and others that were pertinent to the theme and occasion.



Somali refugee children in one of the Dollo Ado camps singing on IWD celebration/UNHCR

From Eritrean refugees in the northern and north-eastern parts of the country to Sudanese refugees in the west and Somali refugees in the east and south-east, refugees played central role in the planning and implementation of the activities, with UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations mainly supporting their efforts and facilitating. At Addis level, UNHCR participated in another colorful IWD celebration that was organized by the Jesuit Refugee Service and saw the active participation of the urban-based refugees.

In addition to recognizing and promoting the global theme for the year, some camps, particularly those in the Dollo Ado area, adopted what they considered a more appropriate theme that has better resonance with the local context. Most activities in the five camps there revolved around the theme: **“Empower rural Women – end Hunger and Poverty”** in order to highlight the fact that hunger and famine are among other reasons that forced thousands of Somali refugees into Ethiopia. Raising public awareness on women’s rights and on the linkages between women’s empowerment and the wellbeing of communities was the overriding objective of the celebrations in all camps. Many camps also used the opportunity to addressing some specific traditional practices that are affecting women in particular. Female Genital Mutilation, Early Marriage, Rape, illiteracy as it relates to girls and women were some of the issues

raised. The need to educate girls as an essential precondition to empower women came out prominently in all communications.

Of particular interest was a panel discussion organized in Jijiga and attended by 50 college-going Somali refugee girls. Held under the topic: **“Needs and abilities of Somali refugee Girls and access to better opportunities”**, the panel was organized with the aim “to create a forum for the college students to connect and share information on their needs,

Capacities, skills and abilities and learn from each other”.

At the end of the panel discussion, all 50 girls sent text messages in Somali language to their families and friends that promote girls’ education. Some of the messages that were transmitted through their mobile phones included:

“I am a refugee girl attending college education; you should follow my footsteps”;
“I am a refugee girl attending college education; already I can imagine a different future for myself”, and “I am a refugee girl attending college education; I feel I now have a future”.

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