

Pamir, South Sudan, 02.09.2016

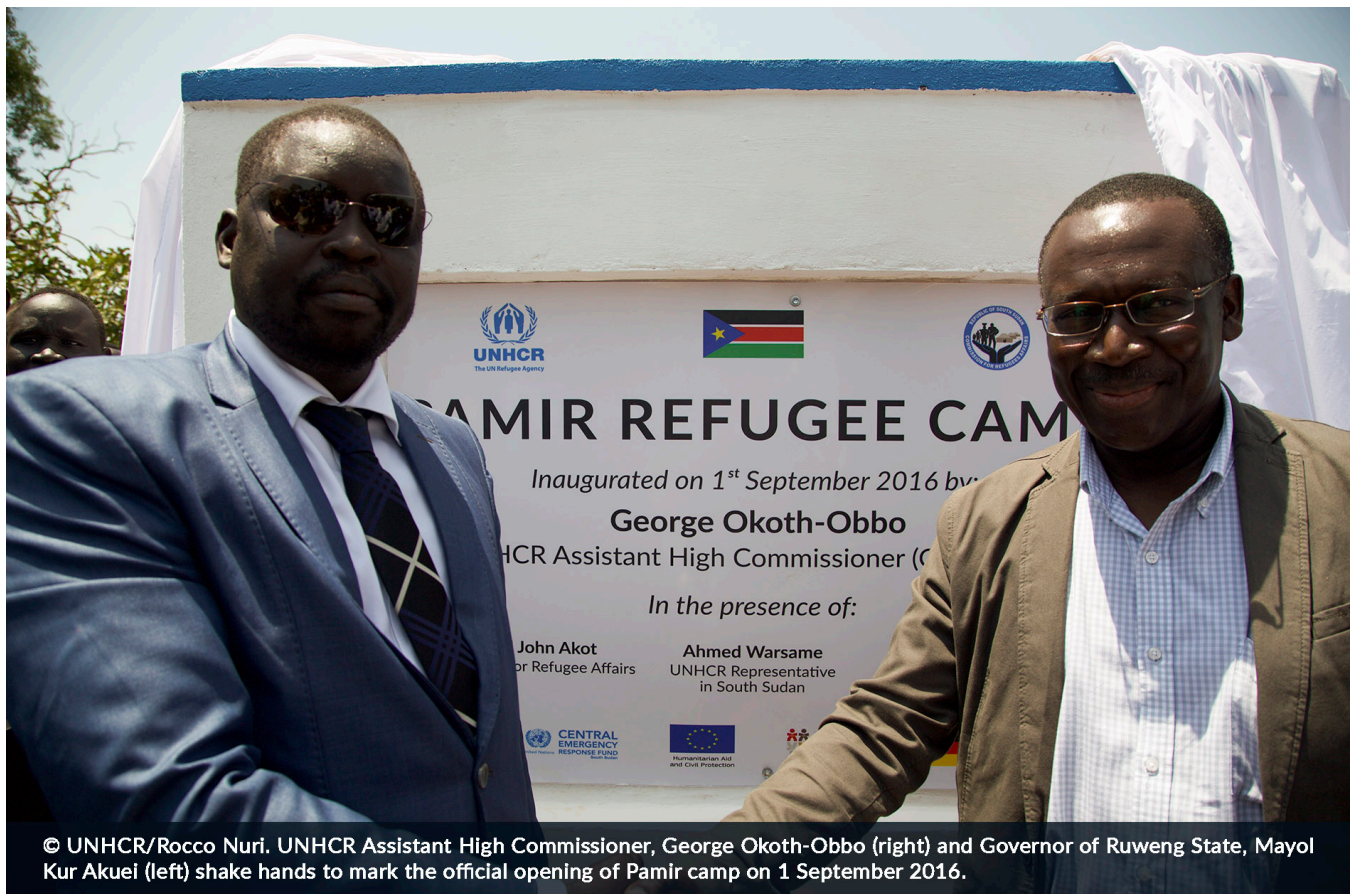
UNHCR opens a new refugee camp in northern Unity

The UN Refugee Agency officially opened a new camp at Pamir on Thursday in coordination with local authorities and South Sudan's Commission for Refugee Affairs to provide better protection and services to Sudanese refugees relocating from Yida settlement and new arrivals from the war-torn Nuba Mountains.

The new camp, some 80 km south of the contested border with Sudan, is ready to accommodate up to 20,000 people at the moment. UNHCR and partners have so far demarcated 5,000 family plots, built a primary school and a health care centre. Drinking water is available through a sun-powered water pumping system and teachers are on site to start classes as soon as the school term resumes.

UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner George Okoth-Obbo, who was on a 3-day visit to South Sudan from Geneva, cut the ribbon together with the Governor of newly formed Ruweng State, Mayol Kur Akuei, Acting Commissioner for Refugee Affairs, John Dabi and UNHCR Director of Africa Bureau, Valentin Taspoba. Representatives from the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and World Food Program (WFP) attended the official inauguration.

"Our aim is to ensure that refugees access to quality services according to international standards, but our long-term strategy is to provide them with the tools and means that enable them to become more self-reliant and less dependent on humanitarian assistance," says Okoth-Obbo. "This means boosting education, investing in agriculture and skill development opportunities."



© UNHCR/Rocco Nuri. UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner, George Okoth-Obbo (right) and Governor of Ruweng State, Mayol Kur Akuei (left) shake hands to mark the official opening of Pamir camp on 1 September 2016.

In addition to hosting the newly opened Pamir, northern Unity has two other refugee settlements: Yida, right next to the contested border with Sudan, with a population of 59,000 people and Ajuong Thok, home to more than 40,000 refugees. The latter camp received some 10,000 new arrivals from South Kordofan in first eight months of 2016 as well as more than 4,400 refugees who had previously registered in Yida.

“With Ajuong Thok at full capacity, we had no option but opening a new camp,” says Okoth-Obbo. “We cannot thank enough the authorities and communities of South Sudan for being so generous and hospitable to the refugees. Without their support, we never would have been able to extend protection and assistance to refugees in the first place.”

Governor Akuei said that refugees and local communities have been living together peacefully for the past five years, sharing land and resources. “We appreciate the great cooperation with UNHCR and we hope that this partnership will go a long way as to also benefit our communities, who are often in worst conditions than the refugees”, he said.

UNHCR carried a vanguard of 30 refugees from Yida settlement to the new camp Pamir last Tuesday. Thousands more are scheduled to relocate by the end of the year. Among them was 38-year-old Linda, mother of eight. “I decided to move to Pamir because I could not afford paying for my children’s education in Yida. Not to mention that that they weren’t learning much there,” says Linda. “My children’s future is what matters the most to me. I am here for them.”



© UNHCR/Rocco Nuri. Sudanese refugee Linda, 38, sits with her children outside their new shelter at Pamir, after relocating from Yida.

The initial development of Pamir camp was possible thanks to funds from Canada, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), Educate a Child Initiative, ECHO, Germany and the United States. Additional contributions will be required to extend development of Pamir to its full intended capacity of 52,000.

In South Sudan, UNHCR works with authorities and partners to protect and assist nearly 260,000 refugees and is also part of the multi-agency response to 1.61 million internally displaced people, as lead of the Protection Cluster.

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