

Update no 5 Humanitarian Situation in Libya and the Neighbouring Countries

9 March 2011

Highlights

- The UNHCR High Commissioner (HC) and the Director General of IOM completed their mission to Tunisia. On 8 March, they met with the President and Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Social Affairs, the Secretary General of the Tunisian Red Crescent as well as with the UN agencies and NGOs. In addition, the HC visited the Ras Adjir border and the Choucha transit camp. "An open border is the most precious thing you can have in a refugee crisis," Mr. Guterres said. "At a moment of tragedy, the Tunisian government and its people are setting an example of humanitarian generosity by opening their borders and their homes."
- Residents have reportedly been fleeing the oil port town of Ras Lanuf, 50 km west of Benghazi, due to fighting in the area according to OCHA.
- UNHCR Libya emergency team is currently in Al Saloum at Egypt-Libya border making necessary preparations for a deployment inside eastern Libya. UNHCR would like to urgently reach Benghazi to assess the needs and provide assistance to people of concerned stranded in the Benghazi port area.
- ERC Valerie Amos sent a letter to Minister for Foreign Affairs of Libya on 7 March, to follow up earlier agreement made between the UN Secretary General and Minister to organise the UN humanitarian needs assessment mission to Tripoli. ERC suggested that the mission take place later this week.
- According to IOM, some 15 % of Libya's foreign population has now left the country.
- The critical gap at present remains with long-haul flights to Bangladesh and to other countries in Asia. IOM and UNHCR are using available cash contributions to charter flights, and several donor countries have come forward with in-kind contributions of long-haul flights. According to the UNHCR-IOM Humanitarian Evacuation Cell, some 70 long-haul flights are needed for those who have already crossed from Libya into Egypt and Tunisia, a significant and growing gap remains in identifying the capacity to meet the existing needs.



Djerba: UNHCR staff with sub-saharan nationals in the Choucha transit camp in Tunisia during an information sharing and counselling session. UNHCR / MARCH 2011

Population Movements

According to the IOM/UNHCR Humanitarian Evacuation Cell (HEC), 224,661 persons have arrived to Tunisia (total 115,399 including 19,184 Tunisian, 47,631 Egyptians, 45,748 others), Egypt (total 101,609 including 65,509 Egyptians and 36,100 others), Niger (total 2,205 including Nigeriens 1,865 and 340 others) and Algeria (total 5,448 - not specified reported by OCHA).

On 6 March, total of 15,177 persons were evacuated (IOM/UNHCR arranged flights and bi-lateral flights coordinated with HEC) including 13,430 from Tunisia (11,538 Egyptians and 1,892 others) and 1,747 from Egypt.

60
YEARS



On 8 March, 15 flights were scheduled: From Djerba to Cairo (1), Bangladesh (5), Accra (4) and from Cairo to Bangladesh (3) and Vietnam (2).

Country Updates

LIBYA

• Protection

While the UN joint assessment mission which returned to Cairo from eastern Libya on 6 March reported the humanitarian crisis is not severe in the parts of eastern Libya which they visited, UNHCR remains particularly concerned about the protection needs of refugees and asylum seekers in eastern Libya.

UNHCR Libya emergency team is currently in Al Saloum at Egypt-Libya border making necessary preparations for a deployment inside eastern Libya. UNHCR would like to urgently reach Benghazi to assess the needs and provide assistance to people of concerned stranded in the Benghazi port area as well as those refugees in Benghazi itself.

UNHCR Office in Tripoli continues to operate telephone hotlines 24/7 to provide guidance to persons of concern.

UNHCR with the assistance of an NGO will provide cash assistance to vulnerable families (1,500 individuals) inside Tripoli.

TUNISIA

Concluding a two-day visit to Tunisia from 7 to 8 March 2011, the heads of UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration called for continued international momentum as people continue to flee Libya by the thousands.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres and IOM Director General William Swing noted that the joint IOM-UNHCR humanitarian evacuation initiative had dramatically relieved the overcrowding at the border with the immediate airlift response of governments. Within days, tens of thousands of Egyptians were flown home.

Mr. Guterres and Mr. Swing called on the international community to demonstrate the same kind of generosity with Tunisia as they are showing to those fleeing Libya by offering meaningful support to the Tunisian people.

They held meetings today with interim President Fouad Mebazaa, Prime Minister Beji Caid el Sebsi and a number of other key government officials to express their thanks for Tunisia's generosity and humanity toward those fleeing the violence in Libya.

During a one-day visit to the Ras Adjir border crossing and the Choucha UNHCR-run transit camp, where 16,558 people – mostly Bangladeshis

– await evacuation, Mr. Swing and Mr. Guterres recognized the large-scale efforts by the Tunisian government, civil society and the Tunisian Red Crescent, together with international organizations, to assist each and every individual crossing their border.

The two agency heads warned that as the fighting escalates inside Libya, the situation could quickly become acute again. At the height of the influx, some 14,000 mostly migrant workers crossed on a single day. UNHCR and IOM together with the wider humanitarian community are strengthening contingencies to prepare for an eventual massive inflow of people across the border.

• Protection

Transit camp: The tented transit camp in Choucha currently holds 16,558 people. The number of Bangladeshi nationals in the camp has increased. As of today, 13,277 Bangladeshi are being sheltered in the camp waiting to be repatriated to their country of origin. So far 7,500 Bangladeshis have been repatriated.

The number of Somalis arriving in the camp continues to increase. The total as of 9 March is 460. While the majority of them are single men, the number of families with small children is also increasing. Most report that they cannot return to Somalia due to ongoing violence and insecurity. Some report belonging to a minority clan, a reason why returning to Somalia is not a viable option.

A number of Eritreans registered with UNHCR Tripoli office have approached UNHCR in Choucha camp. Like other sub-Saharan Africans, they fled Libya fearing for their lives following media reports about mercenaries fighting in support of the Libyan regime. Screening interviews are being undertaken by UNHCR to determine if they are persons of concern to UNHCR.

On 8 March, 1,432 people were evacuated through IOM-UNHCR chartered flights, including 1,167 from Bangladesh and 215 from Ghana and 50 from Mali. The current Bangladeshi population residing in the camp is expected to be repatriated on one week's time.

• Humanitarian assistance

UNHCR has erected two rubhalls at the Choucha transit camp. The work on the third has been postponed due to bad weather conditions. One rubhall will be donated for food storage and the camp kitchen, while the two others will be used to keep a stock of non food items at the camp site enabling the immediate response to a large influx of people (up to 10,000 persons). UNHCR is also looking into the possibility of renting a bigger warehouse in the vicinity of Djerba airport which could be used as a central warehouse for the non food items in the country.

EGYPT

• *Protection*

Egyptian border with Libya: Over 3,500 new arrivals were reported on 7 March and 2,290, arrivals were reported on 8 March including Sudan 622, Pakistan 51, India 25, Bangladesh 264, Nigeria 5, Mali 132, Palestine 7, Iraq 6, Niger 28, Liberia 1, Ghana 35 and some others.

A group of 35 Somalis and 5 Eritrean arrived in Alexandria port on 8 March night on board an IOM evacuation vessel from Benghazi. UNHCR team has interviewed the group and they appear to be persons of concern.

Rain has caused the people arriving at the border to seek refuge in limited covered areas. Many did not manage to find any shelter and were forced to hide under their blankets or UNHCR sheets. UNHCR is awaiting authorization to construct shelters.

The group of Chadians who arrived on 8 March informed UNHCR that many others are still inside Libya and are scared to travel, especially those with families. The Chadian consul in Benghazi confirmed that some 20-25,000 Chadian want to return to Chad. UNHCR has been in contact with IOM, Consul of Chad and Libyan Red Crescent to find solutions to this group other than moving them to Al Saloum border crossing where conditions are already worsening with no shelter and poor sanitation.

A group of Cameroonians approached UNHCR and expressed their anger over the long waiting time without any assistance. They left Al Kofra town five days ago after being threatened with guns, with their documents and belongings confiscated by unknown men and subjected to violence and rape on the way to Egypt.

• *Humanitarian assistance*

UNHCR with the help of partners distributed some 14,500 meals. UNHCR will assist IOM to improve the information sharing with new arrivals.

• *Contingency planning*

UNHCR facilitated the travel of several cases at the border including Congolese, Palestinian, Liberian and Ivorian families and individuals.

ALGERIA

Algerian border with Libya: It is reported that Algeria's reinforced security structures in the provinces of Illizi bordering Libya are on alert and preparing for a possible sharp increase in the number of new arrivals from Libya. Local media reports suggest that the Algerian Government has embarked on the preparation of a contingency plan for 100,000

illegal migrants. The same reports quoted that the number of illegal migrants from Libya could reach some 50,000 persons if the situation in Libya will not stabilize within the next three months. According to sources affiliated with the Algerian National Gendarmery and Border Guards in Illizi province, since 22 February some 6,820 illegal migrants have arrived from Libya, mostly Africans without identity papers.

Algerian government has reaffirmed that its borders remain open.

ITALY

Some 659 migrants arrived in Lampedusa bringing the total so far to 1,713 migrants (mainly Tunisians). The total number of arrivals since mid-January is some 7,727 individuals. UNHCR offices in southern Europe are discussing contingency planning with governments, identifying needs, and making preparations to deploy additional staff if necessary. In the event of an influx, particular attention will be given to mechanisms for identifying especially vulnerable individuals.

58 Eritreans were evacuated by Italy on 8 March from Tripoli to Crotone. UNHCR is in contact with the group, some of whom seem to have UNHCR papers.

MALTA

A Maltese cargo ship from Tripoli arrived with 13 Eritreans on board. UNHCR is negotiating their disembarkation with local authorities.

Air Evacuation

Following the surge in arrivals of third country nationals on 8 March, with 3,500 new arrivals crossing into Egypt and 2,700 new arrivals crossing into Tunisia, the need to urgently increase the numbers of long haul flights is highly evident. With no camp or shelter at the Egyptian border, greater priority will be afforded to flights from Egypt in the days to come. Some 15,000 persons are awaiting flights from Djerba in Tunisia, and a further 5,000 persons awaiting flights from Egypt.

The HEC is grateful to those donors who have responded to the joint appeals, and will be making every effort to use both the in kind and cash contributions as soon as possible to alleviate the suffering of growing numbers of Asian and sub-Saharan African third country nationals who are already awaiting a flight to their home countries.

Emergency Staffing

As of 9 March, a total of 63 UNHCR emergency staff have been mobilized for Tunisia (33), Egypt (15), Libya (9) as well as the MENA and the Airops Cell at HQ (6). 43 staff members are already on site including in Tunisia (22), Egypt (9), Libya (6) and HQ (6).

A senior UNHCR Contingency Planning Coordinator has arrived in Tunisia to assist with the contingency planning for the Libya operation.

Resource Mobilization

The Regional Flash Appeal for the Libyan Crisis requests total of USD 160.3m in funding for March-June 2011. UNHCR's total requirements are USD 32.2m.

For further details please contact:

UNHCR Headquarters
94, Rue de Montbrillant
Geneva, 1202

Mr. Andrew Harper
Coordinator, Libya Emergency
Phone: +41 22 739 8105 Email: harper@unhcr.org



UNHCR