UNOG Bi-weekly press briefing: DR Congo Refugees UNHCR
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Shotlist

2. SOUNDbite (English) – Charlie Yaxley, spokesperson, UNHCR: “More than 3,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) arrived in Uganda between Wednesday and Friday last week during a temporary opening of two border crossing points at Golajo and Mount Zeu, north-western Uganda.”
3. Exterior shot, Palais des Nations with UN lettering and logo, shot from below.
4. SOUNDbite (English) – Charlie Yaxley, spokesperson, UNHCR: “The new arrivals were previously part of a larger group of approximately 45,000 people, according to local DRC authorities, who had attempted to flee towards the Ugandan border shortly after deadly clashes erupted between armed militia groups in Ituri province on 17 and 18 May.”
5. Medium shot, journalist looking at laptop computer, seated.
6. SOUNDbite (English) – Charlie Yaxley, spokesperson, UNHCR: “Some of the refugees shared heart-wrenching accounts of militia attacks on their villages to our staff. Many of them told us that they were separated from their families and had little time to pack any belongings or look for family members before fleeing. Very few were able to carry personal items and most fled barefoot with only the clothes they were wearing.”
7. Medium shot, journalist seated at table with laptop.
8. **SOUNDBITE (English)** – Charlie Yaxley, spokesperson, UNHCR: “The Ugandan Health Ministry has been conducting sample COVID-19 testing, with the first 570 samples returning negative.”


10. **SOUNDBITE (English)** – Charlie Yaxley, spokesperson, UNHCR: “UNHCR welcomes the decision of the Government of Uganda to allow the group of refugees to enter the country and receive life-saving aid and protection. This effort demonstrates how, through quarantines, health screenings and other measures, States can uphold their obligations under international law during the pandemic, while at the same time limiting potential transmission of the virus.”


Thousands continue to flee DR Congo violence seeking shelter in Uganda

Thousands of people fleeing murderous attacks in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo have crossed into neighbouring Uganda, the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, said on Tuesday.

“More than 3,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo arrived in Uganda between Wednesday and Friday last week during a temporary opening of two border crossing points at Golajo and Mount Zeu, north-western Uganda,” said Charlie Yaxley, UNHCR spokesperson.

“The new arrivals were previously part of a larger group of approximately 45,000 people, according to local DRC authorities,” he continued, adding that they had attempted to flee towards the Ugandan border “shortly after deadly clashes erupted between armed militia groups in Ituri province on 17 and 18 May”.

The development comes amid intensifying violence attributed to the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in the last 18 months, particularly in Ituri province, as well as deadly intercommunal violence involving Hema and Lendu people.

The ADF attacks have left more than 793 people dead and dozens of others injured, according to the UN human rights office, OHCHR, which said on Monday that the violence may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The UNHCR official’s comments echoed reports that civilians had endured unspeakable horrors at the hands of the ADF, whose intention appears to have been “to leave no survivors”, according to a report by the UN Joint Human Rights Office in the DRC (UNJHRO).

It detailed a “systematic and brutal” campaign of violence by ADF forces, who have been active in Beni territory, North Kivu province, for more than three decades.

Their move into Ituri province follows military campaigns against them, particularly since October 2019, forcing them to disperse into small groups and flee to other areas, especially to Irumu territory in neighbouring Ituri province.

According to the UNJHRO report, ADF assailants used heavy weaponry during attacks against villages, including AK47s and mortars, and also machetes and knives.

They also burned down villages, destroyed health centres and schools and abducted and recruited women and children.

“Some of the refugees shared heart-wrenching accounts of militia attacks on their villages (with) our staff,” said Mr. Yaxley. “Many of them told us that they were separated from their families and had little time to pack any belongings or look for family members before fleeing. Very few were able to carry personal items and most fled barefoot with only the clothes they were wearing.”

Speaking in Geneva, the UNHCR official noted that 65 per cent of the new arrivals in Uganda were children, along with 33 pregnant women, two of whom were immediately taken to a health centre last week to give birth.

While some of those waiting at the Ugandan border had returned home, others stayed close to the border, unable to cross for more than a month, owing to border closures on the Uganda side to contain the spread of COVID-19.
To date, Ugandan authorities have conducted new coronavirus testing “with the first 570 samples returning negative”, Mr. Yaxley said.

He added that UNHCR “welcomes the decision of the Government of Uganda to allow the group of refugees to enter the country and receive lifesaving aid and protection. This effort demonstrates how, through quarantines, health screenings and other measures, States can uphold their obligations under international law during the pandemic, while at the same time limiting potential transmission of the virus.”

Following the mandatory quarantine period of 14 days, in line with national guidelines and protocols, asylum-seekers will be transported to existing refugee settlements.