

UN official says refugees from Sudan are suffering, don't have adequate aid as funds run low
By Associated Press reporter Jason Straziuso in Nairobi, Kenya
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ASSOSA, Ethiopia — Sudanese refugees who fled fighting between rebels and Sudan's military are suffering in primitive camps without enough aid because the international community has not provided the needed funds to help, a top United Nations official said.

Antonio Guterres, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, urged donor nations to ease "the enormous humanitarian tragedy."

Sudanese troops are fighting rebels, who were once aligned with what is now South Sudan, in two states near the countries' shared border. Guterres said more than 200,000 refugees have fled the states of South Kordofan and Blue Nile and into neighboring Ethiopia and South Sudan.

"It is absolutely essential that the international community mobilizes itself to support the refugees themselves and South Sudan and Ethiopia that are hosting them, having kept their borders open in a very, very generous way," Guterres told The Associated Press Monday while visiting a refugee camp in western Ethiopia.

Seasonal rains have set in at refugee camps in South Sudan, and Lane Hartill of Save the Children said conditions "are getting quite bad." Heavy rainfall has made dirt roads impassable, making aid delivery difficult and expensive.

"I think things are going to deteriorate in the weeks to come," he said.

Save the Children says that up to 2,000 children a day are arriving at overcrowded camps in South Sudan. Some were forced to abandon elderly and weak relatives on the way to the camp, it said.

Because of the fighting in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, families did not plant crops, fearful that Sudanese bombers would target them while in the field. That has forced residents to eat roots and leaves to survive.

"People are coming just as heavy rains make it virtually impossible to access these areas to provide aid. The resources are not in place to meet the needs of everyone. The worst-case scenario is now a reality; we are witnessing a full-blown humanitarian crisis in one of the most remote places on earth," said Jon Cunliffe, Save the Children's South Sudan country director.

In the Ethiopian camp of Bambasi, aid workers on Monday registered about 600 new arrivals from a nearby transit center that holds 14,000 people who need to be relocated to healthier living conditions. However, Bambasi doesn't have the funds to accept all the refugees.

Representatives of the refugees told the visiting U.N. delegation that they are in desperate need of more food and clothing. Guterres promised them he would "knock on all the doors" when he will be back at his office in Geneva, but also admits that it's more difficult than the refugees hopes for.

"All of our operations in Africa are now dramatically underfunded and in particular this operation is severely restricted," said Guterres. "It breaks my heart because when I see these people suffering I would like to do much more but unfortunately we don't have enough resources."

The World Food Program says the latest influx of refugees into Ethiopia — from both Sudan and Somalia — is straining its operations there.

“With the current number of people we have enough food to cover August, September and most of October distributions, and after that we start to have shortfalls of cereals, beans and pulses,” Miller told AP.

While appealing for more refugee aid, Guterres also said a political solution was needed in Sudan.

“The international community needs to make sure that everything is done for a political solution to be found and for peace to be re-established because these people are suffering in a terrible way and they don’t deserve that,” he said.

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