

Slow return of displaced Southern Sudanese

by Tim Morris

The pace of repatriation of Sudanese refugees and return of IDPs to South Sudan has picked up but expectations at the time of the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in January 2005 have yet to be realised. With all eyes on Darfur, assistance to sustain returns to South Sudan remains inadequate.

The CPA which ended the conflict between the Khartoum government and the main southern rebel group¹ paved the way for the return of those uprooted from their homes in the south. Under

its provisions the last of the northern troops stationed in the south are due to leave and the region is preparing for its first census. Southern Sudan is slowly but gradually shifting from humanitarian action to recovery and development. There are remaining pockets of conflict and brigandry but peace talks between the government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army have improved security. However, there are

massive humanitarian needs in all of the region's ten states. The UN reports that in the first quarter of 2007 over 630 people died from meningitis and 340 from acute watery diarrhoea. Mines and unexplored ordnance prevent a return to agriculture in many areas.

The over-whelming majority of the estimated 1.2 million IDPs who have returned since the signing of the CPA have done so without support from the international community. An institutional framework to support the return and reintegration of the IDPs and refugees remains largely unused as lack of infrastructure and livelihood opportunities prevent the UN from promoting large-scale return of IDPs and refugees.

Some two million IDPs from the south remain in the capital, Khartoum, where they continue to be exposed to forced relocations.



UNHCR has set itself a 2007 target to bring home 102,000 Sudanese refugees from neighbouring countries by road and air and to provide them with individual repatriation packages and community-based reintegration support. So far, in 2007, 53,585 refugees have returned. In April the last refugees returned from the Democratic Republic of Congo and from the Central African Republic (CAR), 17 years after the first camps for Sudanese refugees were opened in CAR. There are still an estimated 350,000 refugees from southern Sudan in neighbouring countries. UNHCR is turning its attention to camps in Uganda and Kenya, where massive registration has been going on to prepare for refugee repatriation to southern Sudan.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres has lauded south Sudan repatriation as a bright spot in a region which has seen far too much displacement. On a World Refugee Day visit to the southern capital, Juba, he told refugees returning from Uganda that the international community "needs to express solidarity with South Sudan... You are going back home and you need to have education for your children, health care for your families, agricultural land for farming and other support. All of this is only possible if there is strong solidarity from the international community."

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has helped more than 110,000 southerners return home from Khartoum since 2005. Echoing UNHCR's call for more concerted assistance, IOM director general Brunson McKinley has called for provision of basic services and infrastructure to encourage IDPs to return.

"People have to be able to support themselves and their families. If they know that there is very little awaiting them on the other end, that has to be a disincentive," he said on a recent visit to Juba.

Under the terms of the CPA the south is supposed to get 50% of oil revenues from wells in the south. Donors have also pledged \$4.5 billion, some of it earmarked for rebuilding devastated infrastructure. The Government of South Sudan says it has yet to see the bulk of the pledges.

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1. See FMR 24 www.fmreview.org/sudan.htm