

UN refugee agency seeks \$9.5 million to assist self-organized Nigerian returnees from Cameroon

26 July 2017 – The UN refugee agency is seeking an additional \$9.5 million to scale up its activities in northeast Nigeria, as a result of an unexpected surge in self-organized returns of Nigerian refugees mainly from Cameroon since the beginning of the year.

“This is a new emergency, which requires urgent attention,” said Volker Türk, Assistant High Commissioner for Protection of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in a press release.

Between January and June 2017, nearly 135,000 refugees returned to Nigeria, mainly women and children. The majority left Minawao and Kolofata refugee settlements, in the Far North Region of Cameroon.

“Many of these returnees are unable to go back to their homes due to security concerns and end up being displaced again, in dire humanitarian conditions,” he added.

The situation is particularly difficult in the town of Banki, where many are forced to live outdoors and have limited access to drinking water, food and medicine.

“During my recent visit to the region, I was not only appalled by the scale of the humanitarian needs, but also deeply shocked at the level of trauma, social division and distrust,” said Mr. Türk, who visited both Nigeria and Cameroon over the past three weeks.

“We urge the international community to pay more attention to this highly complex and challenging humanitarian and security situation,” he added.

As vulnerabilities increase over time, funding is, unfortunately, lagging behind needs. So far, UNHCR has received \$41.1 million from donors out of a total funding requirement of \$179.5 million for 2017 for Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad.

Additional funding would allow UNHCR to increase its presence in border locations and improve border and protection monitoring. The agency also plans to expand reception facilities and launch mass information campaigns to ensure that Nigerian refugees in Cameroon’s Far North have accurate and updated information on the situation prevailing in areas of return in Nigeria.

Mr. Türk said that the Governments of both countries gave him assurances that action has been taken to stop involuntary returns.

The first meeting of the Tripartite Commission, comprising representatives from UNHCR, Nigeria and Cameroon, is expected to take place early August. The Commission was set up after the signature, last March, of a tripartite agreement on voluntary repatriation of Nigerian refugees.

It will be a positive step forward, Mr. Türk said.