

With funding 'down to a trickle,' UN agency renews warning over Burundi refugees

23 May 2017 – The United Nations refugee agency has increased its funding appeal by \$36 million to support Burundians fleeing their homes in what could become the third-largest refugee crisis in Africa.

“Arriving refugees continue to cite [human rights abuses](#), fear of persecution and sexual and gender-based violence as reasons for fleeing,” Babar Baloch, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), told reporters in Geneva.

Since April 2015, some 410,000 refugees and asylum-seekers have been forced to flee their homes. With no sign of improvement of the political situation, the total refugee population is expected to grow to over half a million by the end of this year, making it potentially the third-biggest refugee situation in Africa, he said.

Currently, Tanzania is hosting the majority of Burundian refugees with some 249,000 already accommodated in three overcrowded camps. Rwanda hosts some 84,000 refugees with another 45,000 in Uganda and some 41,000 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Smaller numbers of Burundian refugees have also fled to Kenya and into Southern African countries such as Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi and South Africa.

UNHCR has revised its funding needs for the Burundi situation to \$250 million from \$214, but it has so far received only two per cent of the required funds.

Urgent funding is needed to upgrade and construct new settlements to decongest the current ones and provide basic services. In DRC, the transit centres are unable to host incoming refugees, forcing them to live in extremely poor conditions, often without shelter.

Education of refugee children is also severely affected with school classes unable to accommodate the number of students. In Tanzania, there is a need to construct over 600 new classrooms, as many children attend classes under trees.

Overcrowded camps further expose refugees – especially women and children to many risks, such as a new cholera outbreak.

UNHCR renewed its call to donors for continuing to support countries hosting Burundian refugees, also repeating its appeal to the neighbouring countries not to return refugees against their will.