

Without urgent funding, Burundi risks becoming a 'forgotten crisis' – UN refugee agency

6 February 2018 – Warning that Burundi could become a “forgotten crisis,” with the number of people struggling for survival increasing by the day, United Nations agencies together with aid partners on Wednesday launched a funding appeal to keep the humanitarian situation from deteriorating further.

“Food rations [are] cut in many of the neighbouring countries,” said Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, adding that vulnerable groups, including women, who have already been exposed to violence cannot be provided with the necessary support.

Since 2015, over 400,000 refugees and asylum seekers have fled the small central African landlocked nation, escaping human rights abuses, political uncertainty, and deteriorating humanitarian situation.

Over 60 per cent of that number have fled to Tanzania (254,000 refugees) and several thousands to Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Uganda. Furthermore, with the volatile situation persisting, there are fears that the total number of refugees could rise to 450,000 by the end of 2018. Humanitarian efforts to assist those in need, however, also remain constrained due to severe lack of funding.

The \$391 million [Burundi Regional Refugee Response Plan](#) includes targeted response in those four countries along with the resources needed in each context.

Fully funded, some 430,000 vulnerable persons will benefit from the Plan through 2018.

The common thread is ensuring that the majority of the displaced living in refugee camps (about 85 per cent), are provided with food, shelter and education as well as protection from sexual and gender based violence.

“For the moment, the conditions are still fragile, so support to host countries continues to be a priority that I hope the world will not forget,” added Mr. Grandi.

Funds will also go towards strengthening social services, livelihood opportunities, protection and restoration environment as well as providing documentation and training for government officials on refugee status determination.

UNHCR 'not encouraging' refugee returns at this time – Spokesperson

According to Babar Baloch, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), over the last few years, some Burundian

refugees have decided to return home, and are seeking to re-establish their lives in their communities.

They, however, are facing considerable economic pressures and food insecurity.

“At this stage, UNHCR and partners are not promoting or encouraging refugee returns to Burundi,” said the UNHCR spokesperson, noting that the agency is working with the relevant Governments to assist those who indicate they have made a free and informed choice to return voluntarily, to do so in safety and dignity.

“We are also reiterating our appeal to Burundi’s neighbours to continue to uphold their international responsibilities and commitments to receive asylum-seekers at their borders and offer protection to those who need it,” he added.

An outbreak of violence in Burundi in April 2015 and, later, a political crisis along with deterioration in security and humanitarian environment has pushed the country deeper into crisis and continues fuel the exodus of its populations, some of whom have been displaced as far as to South Africa and Kenya.