



AIR OPERATIONS TO RETURN IDPS TO THE EQUATORIAS

COMMENCE

Khartoum, 9 July 2007: On 10 July, an important milestone will be reached under the Government of National Unity, Government of Southern Sudan and United Nations Joint Plan for Returns, when the first flight will depart Khartoum for Yambio in Western Equatoria via Juba, carrying nearly 100 internally displaced people (IDPs) for the first time since the operations began.

This maiden flight will be followed in the coming few weeks by a further 15 flight rotations from Khartoum to destinations in Western and Central Equatoria. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), which is implementing the air operation, plans to return a total of 1,600 IDPs to these two States by air.

As with previous road and barge convoys, IDPs have registered for return at booths in Khartoum staffed by IOM. Pre-departure medical screening was conducted by IOM. The IDPs flying to Yambio will first overnight in Juba at a way station managed by German Governmental Organization GTZ and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) before flying to Yambio on two rotational flights on Wednesday, 11 July. On arrival in Yambio, they will be received by a reception committee comprised of local government officials and the local community. Government vehicles will take them to a Way Station in Yambio where they will receive packages of basic household items to help start their new life. These packages are being provided for organized returns by the United Nations Joint Logistics Centre (UNJLC), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Non- Governmental Organization CARE. They will also receive a three-month food ration from the UN World Food Programme (WFP) to cover their families' initial needs at the Yambio Way Station operated by the local government. All IDPs originate from Yambio town and its immediate surroundings. They will be taken to their final destination on government busses.

IOM will have medical and escort teams in all flights to ensure a safe and dignified return for the IDPs. A Task Force, co-chaired by representatives of GNU, GoSS and the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS), oversees the implementation of the Joint Plan for Returns.

Since operations under the Joint Plan commenced in early February, 43,000 IDPs have been assisted to return home in different areas in Southern Sudan and Southern Kordofan from a number of locations in Sudan. Around half of those assisted have departed from Khartoum. This includes 451 IDPs who arrived safely to Lakes and Jonglei States by barge from Kosti in the past few days.

In addition, 36,000 refugees have been assisted to return home by UNHCR and IOM this year.

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