

UN resumes repatriation of Sudanese Refugees from Kenya

The UN High Commission for refugees (UNHCR) said the UN refugees' agency has resumed the repatriation of the Sudanese refugees from Kakuma Camp in North-West Kenya after the poor weather and roads conditions besides insecurity in their return areas have halted the operation for three months. The UNHCR said some 200 refugees were transported to the town of Bor in South Sudan's Jonglei state on Wednesday and Thursday last week and many more are keen to follow them. More than 8,000 of the 50,000 Sudanese refugees in Kakuma have registered to return from Kenya. UNHCR hopes to help some 3,000 more to return home by air and land by the end of the year. The agency had brought back more than 4,000 before the operations were suspended in August. Mohammad Arif, UNHCR's senior operation officer in Kakuma said "The refugees are really keen to go back home," adding that "Some of them have been here for more than 15 years. That is such a long time to be in exile." Arif explained that "Ayen Gai Deng arrived at Kakuma in 1992 when she was only 11 years old and she has become a woman during her time in the camp, where she met her husband Majok Manyiel and gave birth to her six children." Her husband is already back in South Sudan, working for an aid agency in Juba town. "He sent us a message and told us that we should now go and join him in Sudan," Deng explained while waiting to board the November 21 flight to Bor that she plans to spend some time in her native village before moving to Juba with the children. Some of the passengers were much older. "Sudan is my home and I am ready to go back so that I can be buried with my ancestors when I die," said 77-year-old Mabil Ajak, as his son helped pack his bags ahead of their return. In the days leading up to last week's flights, the returnees were given awareness courses on HIV and AIDS, and on the danger of landmines. They were also told about their rights and obligations back in South Sudan. It is to be noted that since launching an assisted voluntary repatriation programme for South Sudan in December 2005, UNHCR has supported the return of some 70,000 refugees to South Sudan, including 6,000 from Kakuma. More than 90,000 refugees are believed to have returned on their own, including some 20,000 from northern Kenya. The UN refugee agency is also involved in programmes aimed at easing the reintegration of returnees and encouraging more people to go back, including mine clearance activities and building and rehabilitating basic facilities such as schools, health centers and water wells.