

LWF Underlines Importance of New Dadaab Camp Extension

More Secure Environment for Those Fleeing Drought in Somalia

DADAAB, Northeastern Kenya/GENEVA 26 July 2011 (LWI) – By nightfall yesterday hundreds of recently arrived refugees from Somalia were settled into a new tented camp at Ifo in the Dadaab complex in northeastern Kenya, after an intensive weekend of preparations by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The aim is to increase the rate of movement to 1,000 a day by the end of the week.

Lennart Hernander, Kenya-Djibouti country representative for the LWF's Department for World Service (DWS), underlined the importance of the opening of the Ifo extension, noting that it increased the ability of the LWF and partner agencies "to host people in more a secure environment and provide the services the refugees need and are entitled to."

Space at a Premium

Space in Ifo and the other two camps at Dadaab–Dagahaley and Hagadera–, all managed by the LWF, has become a source of international concern as the drought crisis in Somalia has led to an average daily influx of 1,300 refugees since the beginning of June. With the complex already full to capacity, the new arrivals have been settling on the outskirts of the camps.

At Ifo, these new settlements have been on a flood plain, raising concerns about a further disaster when the rains finally come, and about the local environment. Hopes that the previously laid-out Ifo II camp could open have been stalled by disagreements within the Kenyan government.

The approval of the Ifo extension as well as of an extension to the Hagadera camp will mean a more secure environment for up to 50,000 people. This development was very important for the LWF, noted Hernander, as it strived to assure "the dignity of those who have fled."

Last Minute Push

However, the final go-ahead for the relocations only came on Friday, giving LWF staff a huge task to get the sites ready on time. The Ifo site had already been surveyed and

plots marked out, but not a single tent had by then been erected. At Hagadera, while detailed plans had been prepared, the proposed site was still bush and scrub land.

“We are the planning team and we are the camp managers,” said Anne Wagari, LWF’s area coordinator in charge of the 120 LWF staff at Dadaab. “So when the decision is taken to move these people, we have to plan the camps, we have to lay out plots and provide access and set up tents in readiness for the movement.”

She led the effort over the weekend, which saw a bulldozer and refugee workers deployed clearing ground at Hagadera and setting up tents at Ifo. More than 100 tents were put up on Sunday alone, and the teams are looking to pitch twice that number by the end of the week. The Hagadera site is expected to be receiving its first refugees by that time as well.

‘Even in these difficult circumstances, the staff are pushing on and doing their best to deliver,’ said Wangari.

The Move

Yesterday, LWF information teams went to areas of the outskirts of Ifo camp to tell people that this was the day on which they would move to their new living space. After detailed lists of the families involved were read out, the business of dismantling temporary shelters began.

Women, often with a baby on their backs, took off layers of blankets and sheeting from bent wood frames and painstakingly gathered everything, including twine and strips of material, for later use. Then they bundled everything together for carrying to the new site.

Among them was Fatouma Mohammed (50), her daughter and the eight children they have between them. A month ago, they had fled the drought in Somalia that killed their livestock and made it impossible to farm.

“I am pleased that the agencies will help us to settle somewhere,” she said. “I hope at some time they will help me to build a durable structure to live in, but now I am very happy to have a tent.” (680 words)

By LWI correspondent John Davison, LWF/DWS Kenya-Djibouti

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