

RELOCATION TO MANTAPALA GIVES REFUGEES A SIGH OF RELIEF



Makasa Kalombe arrives at Mantapala refugee settlement. UNHCR is supporting a relocation operation of refugees from Kenani transit centre to Mantapala settlement - Photo: UNHCR/Bruce Mulenga

By Bruce Mulenga

UNHCR in conjunction with the Zambian Government and other UN agencies have completed a sixth relocation operation to transfer up to over 15,000 DRC refugees currently living at Kenani transit centre to Mantapala refugee settlement situated further inside Nchelenge district. A total of 1,693 refugees have moved from Kenani, five kilometres North of Nchelenge to Mantapala settlement 35 km inland since the operation began in January 2018.

The refugees are transported on buses on a convoy supported by UNHCR and other UN agencies. The recent relocation movement took place on Friday March 9, 2018 when 519 refugees were transported to Mantapala. Many refugees have expressed willingness to leave Kenani because the transit centre has become overwhelmingly crowded. As a result families have no space to conduct livelihood activities to support their families. Children too have no adequate playing ground.

"I would like to go to Mantapala because we are overcrowded here at Kenani. There is no space for me to carry out an activity of my choice to support my family. Children have no space to play around. The road is close by and we live very near to the lake", says Mamauno Lukoko.

Upon arrival at Mantapala settlement, refugees undergo a registration process and receive a family registration card. UNHCR protection staff escort the newly arrived refugees to family tents while others go to communal shelters within the reception centre. Refugees live at the reception centre not more than four days when they are allocated

a family plot of about 25 by 30 metre squared inside the settlement where they build a permanent house, a toilet and bathroom, and have enough space to prepare a backyard garden.

“I am happy that I shifted to Mantapala. I now have a big house where my family and I live. My plot is big enough and I have begun growing vegetables to feed my family”, says Mambwe Mushota

UNHCR has demarcated over five hundred plots and over 250 households have constructed their houses in the settlement. Over five boreholes have also been sunk to provide clean and safe water for drinking.

Mantapala becomes a permanent settlement for refugees during their stay Zambia. The settlement opens huge opportunity for refugees to begin a new life of hope to live normal lives, re-build self –reliance as well as live in harmony with host communities. Refugees, side by side with host communities, will actively participate in the growth, development and contribute to local economies which will create a mutual benefit between refugees and the local communities.



Photo: UNHCR/Bruce Mulenga

More relocation movements have been planned in the coming weeks. The convoys carry an average of 200 people and will take place every week until the population at Kenani reduces.

The Government of Zambia has since brought together its departments, local and international NGOs and UN agencies in a formidable partnership to support refugees, and ultimately make Mantapala a sustainable settlement.

Mantapala has over 6,000 hectares of land and is estimated to host over 20,000 refugees. Currently, over 15,000 refugees have fled across the Northern border into Zambia since last August. Dozens are scattered along a stretch of remote borderland in the North in the makeshift houses where they are still vulnerable to periodic incursions by militia from the DRC.