

PRESS RELEASE

UNITED NATIONS SUPPORTS VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION OF REFUGEES TO DR CONGO

Dundo, 13 November 2019. After around 14,700 refugees opted to return spontaneously to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) by their own means from mid-August, the United Nations, including its Refugee Agency (UNHCR), is now supporting the organized voluntary repatriation of Congolese refugees to their regions of origin. Since the beginning of October, UNHCR has already organized four convoys from Lóvua settlement in the province of Lunda Norte to Tshikapa in the Kasai Region via the border of Nachiri. A total of 1,239 refugees, of which more than half are children, have already been repatriated via this route. Today, on Wednesday, 13 November, UNHCR inaugurated the route to Kananga in the Kasai Central region, via the Tchicolondo border in Angola. A total of 200 individuals have been repatriated on this convoy (which adds up to a total of 1,439 people who have been repatriated).

“We are approaching the conclusion of a successful cycle of more than two years of refugee reception in Angola,” said Paolo Balladelli, UN Resident Coordinator in Angola, who had the opportunity to follow the convoy from Lóvua settlement to N'Zagi in Angola as part of the first convoy to Kananga in DRC. The Coordinator also highlighted the role that the Government of Angola has played in the reception of refugees in the last two years, “the Angolan authorities have shown their solidarity by welcoming people, including children, who were at risk of life due to serious ethnic conflicts. The conclusion of this chapter demonstrates to Africa and the world that Angola is a good example of good international practices.

Wellington Carneiro, UNHCR's interim Representative in Angola, mentioned that voluntary repatriation, which started three weeks ago, is going through several challenges such as poor road conditions due to the rainy season and hiring suitable vehicles. But noted that the operation is being organized with all guarantees of safety and dignity. He added that voluntary repatriation is expected to be completed by mid-December this year.

In the DRC, the United Nations through UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) is supporting both the approximately 14,700 refugees who returned spontaneously and those returning in an organized manner with UNHCR, by providing transport and a cash grant for food and transportation to their places of origin.

The United Nations stresses that organized voluntary repatriation is an informed, free and spontaneous decision of refugees. This is a process conducted safely and with dignity, with the support of UNHCR and the governments involved (in this case Angola and the DRC), through a tripartite agreement, as well as other UN agencies (e.g. the International Organization Migration (IOM), WFP) and implementation partners.

***Background information:** As of March 2017, political and military instability in the Kasai region of DRC has forced more than 35,000 people to seek asylum in Angola's Lunda Norte province. Initially refugees were welcomed into the reception centers of Kakanda and Mussungue. In August 2017, the Lóvua settlement was opened. The settlement was designed for refugees to live with dignity, access to water, sanitation, hygiene, food, health services and education. Most of these services have also benefited the local community by promoting social cohesion and development in the region. Lóvua's settlement was home to over 20,000 refugees.*

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