Goma: Centers for Internally Displaced Persons

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Abstract

The conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo has claimed an estimated 5 million lives—it is the deadliest clash since World War II. Despite a 2003 peace accord, fighting between militia groups and Congolese armed forces continues. As a result, according to UN OCHA estimates, by the end of 2009 there were still nearly 2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), the majority of whom are located within the province of North Kivu. In response to this crisis, UNICEF, in cooperation with local and international NGOs as well as governmental institutions, has set up various provisional settlements for the displaced population. The emergency response mechanism for the IDPs focuses on four areas: child survival, water/sanitation, education, and protection.

Keywords: Democratic Republic of Congo; Internally Displaced Persons.



1. Lighting strikes over Lake Kivu, the body of water that divides DR Congo from Rwanda. On the lake's northwestern shores, the North Kivu region of the DRC remains the epicenter of the country's armed conflict and humanitarian crisis.

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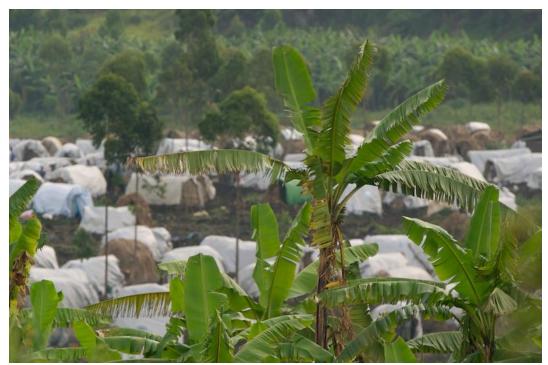


2. To stave off roadside attacks, especially while traveling through rebel-occupied territory outside the provincial capital of Goma, declarations of peaceful intentions are posted in unarmored UN and NGO vehicles.



3. A volcanic mountain range stretches across the horizon behind one of the IDP camps. Seismic activity adds yet another threat to the region—not only are gas emissions a risk on land and in the lake, but it was less than a decade ago that rivers

of lava from Nyiragongo, one of the most active volcanoes in the world, smothered large portions of the provincial capital Goma, which lies only 12 miles away.



4. As part of UNICEF rapid response, shelters are constructed for each family in the camp. According to OCHA estimates, over 1,000,000 persons have been displaced within the North Kivu region alone.



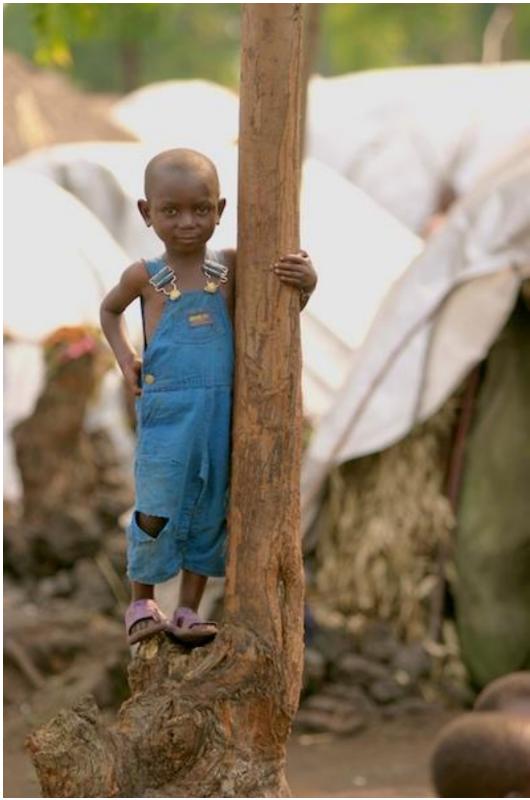
5. A boy stands in front of his family's shelter, roofed with a waterproof and UV reflective tarp. The IDPs are also provided with basic household items; because many have had to flee quickly and travel far, few arrive with even the most essential personal belongings.



6. Children clap and dance in a circle during "Espaces enfants," a program facilitated by UNICEF staff and counselors to provide the thousands of displaced children with engaging activity and entertainment.



7. More games during "Espaces enfants." These "child-friendly" spaces in the IDP camps provide a comfortable, supportive zone in which the children can relax, interact with each other, and learn life-skills.



8. A boy overlooks his peers while they play. Child survival is another pillar of the UNICEF program, including vaccinations and therapeutic and supplementary feeding centers.

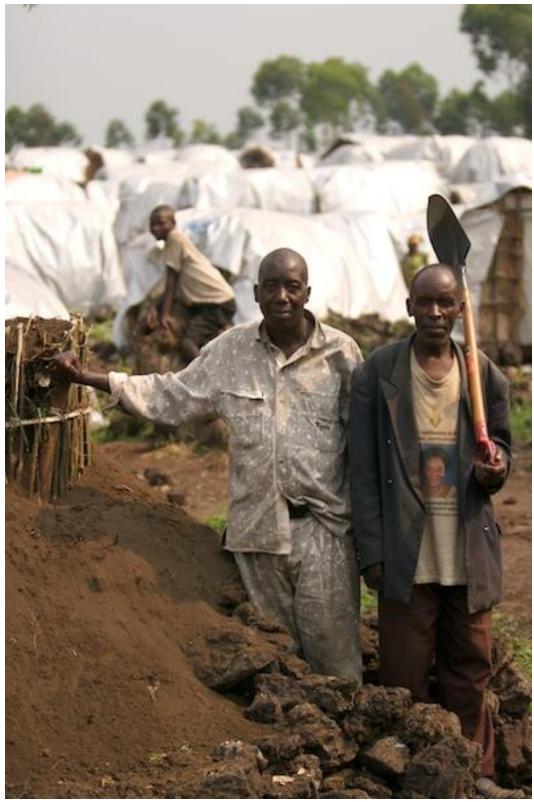


9. Looking out to the water tap from inside the Save the Children tent, which serves to identify displaced children and reunite them with their families. Part of the UNICEF mission also focuses on identifying children associated with armed groups and reintegrating them into society.



10. Water and sanitation are fundamental elements of a functioning IDP camp. A clean water supply and latrines must be set up promptly. Here, two boys start on

their journey home after filling their jerry cans at the watering hole where UNICEF fills the water trucks. The trucks carry the water to dispensaries where it is transferred to large water bladders that keep water borne diseases at bay.



11. Camp "gardeners" ensure functioning paths, tents, water drainage, and so forth—a difficult task in an area that is suddenly required to house many thousands of people, without prior infrastructure.



12. The Fédération des Scouts de la République Démocratique du Congo (FESCO) arrives at the IDP camp and survey the situation. Among other pursuits, the FESCO scouts have maintained a sustained focus on health care and community development, and more specifically, the reintegration of former child soldiers.



13. School supplies find expedient storage in the principal's office of a school built for displaced youth. With more than a quarter-million school-aged children uprooted

by war, aid organizations have effectively had to assemble, on a provisionary basis, entire primary and secondary school systems.



14. When brick and mortar buildings such as these cannot be constructed in time to meet the demand of the swelling IDP population, temporary classroom facilities are fabricated from plastic sheeting stretched across wooden frames.



15. Above, a very full classroom at the school. UNICEF provides training for displaced teachers, but even with a school and the teachers in place, the organizing of so many children among appropriate classes remains an ongoing logistical challenge.