

Number of Somali refugees declining due to aid and rainfall

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Nairobi, Kenya, November 23 (ENInews)--With rainfall, increased humanitarian aid and military operations inside Somalia, the movement of migrants into Dadaab, the world's biggest refugee complex, has greatly declined, a Christian relief agency official said.

Moses Mukhwana, Dadaab project coordinator of the Lutheran World Federation spoke to ENInews days after the United Nations reported that famine had receded in the three areas of Somalia previously described as the worst affected.

"There is already reduced agency work and presence in the camp. We are only addressing critical humanitarian needs," said Mukhwana.

The U.N. has reported that in three areas of southern Somalia, those needing relief are now about 250,000, compared to 750,000 three months ago. With the improvements, Dadaab officials say they have seen fewer arrivals compared to three months ago, when more than 1,000 refugees arrived daily. The camp holds nearly 500,000 people.

Seasonal rains that began in October and usually end in December or January have enabled planting of seeds for food crops and cultivation and restocking of livestock as pastureland begins to grow. Rivers are flowing again, but rain in some areas has been above the normal average and has caused flooding.

"The rains and relief aid have improved lives in some parts, but people are still in need (of assistance) because the crop harvest is not expected until February or March," said Bishop Giorgio Bertin, the apostolic administrator of Mogadishu and the president of Caritas Somalia, in an email interview. "Unfortunately, with lots of rains, some areas are in flood."

On 18 November, Valerie Amos, U.N. under-secretary general for humanitarian affairs, welcomed the news that humanitarian assistance had impacted positively on Somalia. She described the progress as fragile and stressed that it needed to be sustained, while expressing concern about the critical situation in Mogadishu. "Increased insecurity, looting and other violence, high malnutrition rates and disease mean that we remain focused on the best way to scale up our relief efforts well into 2012," said Amos in a statement.

Some relief agencies had feared increased violence after Kenyan troops crossed into Southern Somalia to fight al-Shabab, an extremist Islamic group that Kenya accuses of abducting its nationals, foreign aid workers and tourists. Agencies say the situation still remains critical with nearly four million people in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.