

UN seeks funds to meet new menace to Rwandans - volcanoes

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AFP, January 20, 1995

GENEVA, Jan 20 (AFP) - The United Nations appealed Friday for 710 million dollars in funds to help meet the latest threat to Rwandan refugees - volcanos which threaten almost a million people near Goma, Zaire.

"I have to alert you that at present we face a tremendous environmental challenge caused by increased volcanic activity in the Goma region," said UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata.

"In cooperation with all UN agencies, the UNHCR is preparing a contingency plan which considers the urgent relocation of the population," she added.

The two volcanos, the Nyiragongo and the Nyamuragira, both in eastern Zaire, are currently under round-the-clock surveillance by a team of Japanese experts.

The 200-member team has used sophisticated seismic equipment to

measure the activity of the volcanos over the past two months.

Sources in Goma say the volcanos pose no real threat to any of the five refugee camps grouped around the area. Each holds between 100,000 and 200,000 people.

The Mugunga camp is deemed to be most at risk from an eruption of Mount Nyamuragira, but its lava would take at least two days to reach the camp.

However the fallout from an eruption of Nyiragongo, overlooking Goma, could be extremely serious, threatening not only the refugees but the entire population. Lava could take only a matter of hours to reach the city streets.

The volcano contingency forms part of a new, UN consolidated inter-agency appeal to meet the most acute needs of the refugees in 1995.

Ogata outlined a shift in UNHCR policy in the region, focusing primar-

ily on the basic emergency needs of the more than two million refugees hosted by the neighbouring countries of Zaire, Burundi and Tanzania.

"For 1995, I hope to shift UNHCR's efforts towards voluntary repatriation programmes and support for the reintegration of repatriated refugees and displaced persons inside Rwanda and Burundi," Ogata said.

208 million dollars of the money is earmarked for the estimated 340,000 displaced people in Rwanda, and also to assist returning refugees.

600,000 Rwandans, the majority of them Tutsis, are being persuaded to return.

The fund is part of a joint UN-Kigali effort which together could raise 1.4 billion dollars from international donors to kickstart the devas-

tated Rwandan economy and prevent a slide to another bloodbath.

Rwandan Prime Minister Faustin Twagiramungu on Thursday said he was satisfied with the response to a separate appeal for 764 million dollars launched earlier this week during a meeting of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Round Table for Rwanda.

The UNDP said Friday that donor countries and international institutions had already pledged 587 million dollars.

The Kigali government says the money would go towards financing the economic reconstruction of the country, devastated by the genocide of at least half a million people in last spring's civil war.

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