

Refugees from Cote D'Ivoire Crisis Could Top 100,000 by April, UN Warns

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As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon kept up his diplomatic push for a speedy solution to the post-electoral crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, United Nations agencies called for urgent funding today, warning that refugees fleeing to neighbouring Liberia could top 100,000 by the end of April.

Mr. Ban met today in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, with President Goodluck Jonathon of Nigeria, who has played a major role in trying to solve the crisis resulting from former president Laurent Gbagbo's refusal to leave office despite his UN-certified defeat by opposition leader Alassane Ouattara.

The Secretary-General has repeatedly called on Mr. Gbagbo to step down. In his talks with Mr. Jonathon, he stressed the need for an early solution to the impasse consistent with the will of the Ivorian people as expressed in the November presidential run-off election, which was meant to be a culminating point in reunifying a country split by civil war in 2002 into a Government-controlled south and a rebel-held north.

The resulting turmoil, much of it involving Gbagbo loyalist forces attacking civilians and UN convoys in Abidjan, the commercial capital, as well as ethnic strife in the west of the country, has displaced tens of thousands of people, with 32,000 fleeing to Liberia as of the end of last week.

"UN agencies have voiced concerns that if the current trends in refugee influx continue, by mid-February there could be as many as 50,000 refugees in Liberia and 100,000 by the end of April," the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in its latest update on the situation today, stressing the urgent need to repair roads due to the upcoming rainy season in April, which will restrict access to many of the 32 Liberian villages hosting refugees.

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