

Exported to Danger

Refugee Women and Children in Guinea

Introduction

This presentation is about the current situation of the refugees from Sierra Leone and other African States still living in camps in Guinea.

Currently there are 43,000 refugees from Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Liberia living in three refugee camps in Guinea. These are Boreah Camp, N'zerekore, Kountaya and Kissidougou.

The video was taken in Boreah by Rita Kamara and Tenneh Kpaka in December, 2004. They are both from Sierra Leone. Rita and Tenneh were resettled to Australia from Guinea in 2001, having lived through horrendous experiences as refugees. Once in Australia they kept in touch with friends and family left behind and heard that conditions were getting even worse than before.

They became so worried about the people left behind in the camps in Guinea that they saved their own money and self funded to return to the camps at some personal risk to see what they could do to assist. This video is the record of their trip.

Resettlement from the camps has stopped for refugees from Sierra Leone and refugees are being pushed to repatriate to Sierra Leone as the war is now officially over. Yet, conditions in Sierra Leone are still extremely dangerous, especially for single women and orphaned children.

Tenneh and Rita came back from Guinea determined to advocate on behalf of the women and children still trapped in the camps. They have the full support of the Australian National Committee on Refugee Women (ANCORW). Tenneh is an active member of the Sydney based African Women's Advocacy Unit which is auspiced by ANCORW. Rita is the Chair of the African Womens Federation in Adelaide.

Key Issues

These are the key issues which need to be raised:

1. Of particular concern is the plight of the women and girls, children and amputee children in the camps who are in constant danger of rape and sexual abuse and exploitation. They are often targeted as the objects of sacrifice in ritual murder. These groups are extremely at risk and are unable to be resettled due to the closure of all resettlement from Guinea under the understanding that there is safety in Sierra Leone. Such vulnerable groups should not be exported from one situation of danger to another.
2. The children, including the amputee children have no schooling, no education, not enough food, no health facilities, no trauma counseling. The girls are raped and there is no security for these children. No one is loving them, they have no future and little support.
3. There is insufficient food and non-food items, such as blankets, pots and pans, sanitary towels etc. available for the refugees. Pregnant women and new mothers are not getting adequate nutrition. They face grave risk when trying to acquire additional food and non food items.
4. Many of the women and girls currently in the camps were raped and tortured in Sierra Leone by members of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the Armed Force Revolutionary Council (AFRC). When they arrived in Guinea they were raped again by Guinean Security Forces both police and army. Many of the RUF and AFRC have been reinstated into the police and army of Sierra Leone. This means that women, girls, children and amputee children will be in real danger if they are repatriated back to Sierra Leone. The only option for these women is resettlement to a third country.
5. The host population in Guinea is openly aggressive in its attitude towards the population, making local integration difficult. This is particularly the case for women who have been raped and tortured, and who have had limbs amputated and for orphaned children, especially amputees. The refugees from Sierra Leone are English speaking the local language is French. Amputees are perceived by the local population to be rebel collaborators and as a result they are at high risk of being arrested and tortured.
6. Many resettlement countries are reluctant to accept amputees for resettlement because of the perceived economic burden of people with disability. This has resulted in families being separated and amputees not allowed to join other family members who have been resettled. This leads to extreme vulnerability through loss of family support, risk of predation by others, social isolation and increased poverty. These children are victims of war – they are the future. Even though they have lost limbs, they can still be productive members of society.



Refugees in Guinea

Key Recommendations

Recommendation 1

That as a matter of urgency, UNHCR reopens resettlement from Guinea specifically targeting women and girls at extreme risk, orphaned children and amputees

Recommendation 2

That UNHCR encourage member states who provide resettlement to allow amputee children to join family members for resettlement, including with resettlement with extended family,

That UNHCR encourage member states who provide resettlement to accept amputee and other orphaned children who are extreme risk as unaccompanied minors.

Recommendation 3

That as a matter of urgency UNHCR sponsors research and consultation with the women and grass roots service providers in the refugee camps in Guinea to document the problems they are facing and to identify durable solutions. This research must include looking at the physical security of the women and children, especially amputee children, adequate nutrition and health service provision, and secure durable solutions for these vulnerable groups.

Recommendation 4

That UNHCR does not force women, girls, children and amputee children to repatriate to Sierra Leone where their security cannot be ensured.

Recommendation 5

That UNHCR work in collaboration with states to ensure the ongoing safety and protection of women, girls, children and amputee children in country of asylum.

tkpaka@yahoo.com