

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Health Services in Refugee Camps
Sierra Leone

I) Background Info:

The UNHCR manages many of the world's refugee camps which serve millions of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Though these camps aim to provide safe havens for refugees in need, one of the biggest fears is the constant threat of death from disease. Because UNHCR camps are often forced to operate under extreme conditions with limited supplies and problems such as overcrowding, providing enough health services to protect all refugees is a challenge, especially during periods of crisis when the number of refugees in camps surges. When health services are inadequate, preventable diseases such as malaria, cholera, and pneumonia can plague a refugee camp and kill thousands.

II) U.N. Action:

Because the UNHCR operates many of the world's refugee camps, balancing costs and efficiency of health services within refugee camps is of a primary concern of the UNHCR. The UNHCR works frequently with the WHO to perform and publish many studies on disease control and current conditions of refugee camps. The results and conclusions of these studies are used to develop future plans and guidelines for minimizing the mortality and morbidity rates in UNHCR camps as well as improving the living conditions of IDPs. The UNHCR also realizes that besides physical illnesses, the mental health of refugees also a concern. Thus, UNHCR camps also take preventive measures against mental illnesses by integrating relaxation activities such as team sports into camps.

III) Country Policy and Involvement:

In the past, Sierra Leone has been subjected to a refugee crisis when hundreds of thousands fled amidst a civil war and it still serves today as a refuge for many displaced Africans with a substantial portion of IDPs from Liberia. Because of this, the Sierra Leone delegation often takes part in issues involving refugees, recently facilitating a resolution, "The Assistance to Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons," on behalf of the African bloc in New York. Sierra Leone agrees with the general consensus that health services in refugee camps need to be improved in order to prevent death by preventable disease and that steps need to be taken to reform health conditions in refugee camps. Though Sierra Leone lacks adequate resources to take full initiative, the delegation will support any actions in the direction of improvement.

IV) Possible Solutions:

Since funding for disease control and management has increased in recent years, special care should be taken to apportion money to where it is most needed. Because most of the diseases that plague refugee camps are preventable, disease control should not focus on case management alone but instead preventive measures. Food and waterborne diseases such as cholera can be easily prevented through providing safe rations so establishing a reliable and clean water supply

should be given priority over other actions. Prevention of transmittable diseases, such as the vector borne malaria which is carried by mosquitoes, should focus on access to early diagnosis methods in order to confirm a case of a disease and then effective treatment and assessments of the spread of a disease. In order to fully contain a transmittable disease, funding should focus on strategies of stopping the spread of such a disease while at the same time maintaining affordability. This means working with research institutions such as the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research and National Institutes of Health.

To address the health conditions of refugees overall, the UNHCR should seek the help of NGOs such as Red Cross and Red Crescent (RC) organizations among others to establish better basic medical needs and living conditions. UNHCR should also focus on working with NGOs, including RC, that focus on building newer and cleaner permanent facilities for refugees.

V) Sources:

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