

Flight of Eritrean Refugees to the Sudan Their Story in Pictures at Shegerab Refugee Camp

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Welcome to internationally displaced Eritreans: This is the open “gate” to the Shegerab Refugee Camp in Eastern Sudan for new Eritrean refugee arriving at the rate of 500 persons per week or 2,000 per month. Mr. Gime Ahmed, Executive Committee member of the Eritrean People’s Party (EPP) and his delegation were there in early March 2009 to tell an eye-witness story of the ongoing tragedy of today’s Eritrean refugees. UNHCR and other concerned agencies informed the delegation that due to the worsening economic, social, and political situation in the country, the rate of refugee flight from Eritrea to the neighbouring countries will continue increasing.



New arrivals are first received at Eritrea-Sudan border security checkpoints where they are held for a few days before they are sent to the reception camp of Shegerab where they are screened for refugee status.



Until recently, most of the refugees were young students and national service escapees. Nowadays, the category is mixed and includes teachers, soldiers, civil servants, army commanders, and professionals....of all ages. In spite of the increase in repression, the authority of the regime is declining fast. Picture above shows some of the 8,000 new refugees who arrived in the camp of Shegerab in the last four months. The EPP delegation said each one of them has horrific story to tell – stories e horrific stories of arrest, torture, witnessing death of others, fear and escape. However, the refugee camps where the UNHC is expected to protect are not safe from ugly acts of arrest, robbery, rape, violence, and difficult living conditions.



Shegerab: A new home for homeless Eritreans



Delegation member Mohammed Asselo, EPP Central Council member, visiting different groups of new refugee arrivals. He and his colleagues , who also included Idris Ismail, Executive Committee member in charge of the Eastern Sudan region, and Mansour Siraj, EPP Central Council member, have seen asylum seekers receiving basic supplies like lentils, bread, tents, blankets and plastic sheeting.

Those who pass the screening process at the reception center to receive refugee status, are kept at one of the Shegerab segments with over 23,000 residents or are sent to other permanent refugee camps which include Wad Sherifey, Al-Ghirba, Kilo 26, Umgurgur, Abuda, Faw-5, Awedesid, Alsuki, Kerkur, Um Ali, WedelHilew, Salimin, Um Seqeta, Um Burush, Mafaza, Abu Rekhem, Wedel Awed, Tenedba and Fetih Al Rahman. Nearly 200,000 Eritrean refugees in the camps need relief supplies but very few refugees receive the rations which were reduced by over 50% for the past several years.



Living conditions at the refugee camps for Eritreans in Eastern Sudan are generally very harsh. Monthly death rate in all the 15 refugee camps is very high. It is estimated that the monthly death rate in all the camps is as follows: 13 for children below 5 years, 30 pregnant women before and during delivery, 24 aged persons.



UNHCR and a few NGOs supply basic supplies like water. The young man enjoying shower at Shegerab is an exception. The EPP visitors were told he was doing that because he is one of the mentally ill from Isayas Afeworki's Eritrea. Even the sick are leaving the country for the head of the evil regime and his cronies.



Children try to be children at Shegerab, but with difficulties. Of the 23,469 Shegerab inhabitants, 4427 are children below age of 5. The UN refugee agency provides special food supplements for children but not that much enough - donor countries are not yet generously coming forth to support Eritrean refugees, and EU's contemplation to give the regime 122m Euros will prove a travesty of justice.