

High Commissioner's World Refugee Day mission next week

High Commissioner António Guterres will spend World Refugee Day on June 20 in Southern Sudan, where tens of thousands of refugees and internally displaced people are returning home after decades of conflict. Their repatriation is one of the few bright spots in a region otherwise known as an epicentre of major displacement.

Southern Sudanese are coming home with U.N. help from refugee camps in Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Ethiopia and the Central African Republic. Others are returning from exile in Libya and Egypt, as well as from other areas of Sudan itself.

Like all of the world's people forced to flee violence and persecution, the southern Sudanese have long dreamed of going home – despite the uncertainties and hardship. And Mr. Guterres wants to stress that all of the world's forcibly displaced people – nearly 40 million in all – deserve much more support than they have been getting.

He notes that the future is likely to see even more people on the move around the world. Many of them will likely be in search of economic opportunity and better lives or escaping environmental degradation and natural disasters. Others will be forced to flee failing states wracked by violence and persecution. Already today, many people are fleeing a combination of all these factors.

Sudan's Darfur crisis is a good example of the complexities. The conflict has political roots, but is also fuelled by increasing competition between traditional herders and farmers for scarce resources, especially water.

But even when conflicts are resolved – as in Southern Sudan – and the uprooted are able to go home, their problems are not over. Some 50 percent of countries that emerged from conflict in recent years fell back into strife – a stark reminder of the imperative of addressing in a comprehensive way the increasingly complex challenges that push so many people from their homes.

Mr. Guterres is scheduled to arrive in northern Uganda on Monday to join a group of Sudanese returning by convoy to their home area around the Southern Sudan town of Kajo Keji. He will also visit UNHCR operations in the Yei and Juba areas and then fly to Nairobi on the afternoon of World Refugee Day (Wednesday).

The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement for South Sudan in January 2005 ended a 21-year civil war between the north and the south and paved the way for the repatriation of refugees in

camps in neighbouring countries. The first UNHCR-organized repatriation convoy took place in December 2005 from Kakuma camp in Kenya to Bor and Kapoeta areas in south Sudan. Since then, more than 155,000 Sudanese refugees from at least seven countries in the region have come back to their homes in Southern Sudan and Blue Nile State, including 64,000 through UNHCR's voluntary and assisted repatriation operation. Over 300,000 refugees still remain in camps in neighbouring countries. UNHCR plans to bring home a total of 102,000 refugees from countries of asylum in 2007.

UNHCR has offices in Southern Sudan in Yei, Yambio, Tambura, Rumbek, Kapoeta, Kajo Keji, Malakal and Bor. In Blue Nile, we have offices in Damazin and Kurmuk.

In all, we have 166 staff on the ground and our budget for 2007 is \$56.1 million.