

Congolese flee to Uganda after tribal clashes

By Robert Atuhairwe

The Government in partnership with international humanitarian agencies have started efforts to meet emergency needs of the more than 500 Congolese who fled into Uganda following tribal clashes in eastern DR Congo.

The tribal clashes believed to be involving the Lendu, Hema and Bagegere in areas of Gobu, Jo and Muyarumu in Bunia district broke out on Monday morning last week, forcing hundreds to flee their homes.

Emmanuel Turyagyenda, the Hoima district refugee desk officer, on Wednesday told *New Vision* that a group of women, a few men and children started arriving in Uganda at 5:30am on Tuesday last week through Lake Albert landing site of Sebagoro in Kabwoya sub-county, Hoima district.

He said the refugees were screened and, thereafter, given refugee status. They were later relocated to Kyangwali refugee

settlement camp in Hoima district.

Turyagenda said at the refugee settlement camp, they will be allocated land and food.

The response efforts are being co-ordinated by the Office of the Prime Minister's department of refugees, in collaboration with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Others are International Organisation of Migration, Hoima district local government, Action Africa Help and Africa Initiative for Relief Development.

John Steven Ekomu, the Hoima resident district commissioner, issued the response plan during a meeting at UNHCR offices in Hoima town.

He said they would expand the existing facilities in Kyangwali refugee camp to cater for the sudden influx.

Ekomu said they agreed to increase on the existing sanitation facilities, shelters, water sources and food.

"We are expecting more to flock in because, given the rate at which they arrived, there is an indication that more are coming," Turyagyenda said, adding that the number shot up to over 500 from about 200 on Tuesday.

"We have received reports that some are stuck because of lack of transport," he added. According to him, boats are charging sh20,000 for the journey to Sebagoro, which many could not afford.

Hoima district health inspector Dr Fred Byenume said a health assessment was conducted and established that the asylum seekers have health issues ranging from diarrhoea, fungal infections, stomach pain, swelling of legs, headache, anaemia and malnutrition.

Hosting over 1.4 million refugees, of which 1.053 million are South Sudanese, Uganda is currently ranked the third country hosting the highest number of refugees globally.