

Kenya: UN Ambassador Angelina Jolie visits 'dire' camp for Somali refugees



A refugee child looks out from one of the three overcrowded camps in Dadaab, Kenya

12 September 2009 – Visiting the world's largest refugee camp, housing refugees from Somalia, on the Horn of Africa nation's border with Kenya, Academy award-winning actress and Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations refugee agency Angelina Jolie today characterized the site as “one of the most dire” she has ever seen.

“If this is the better solution, then what must it be like in Somalia?” Ms. Jolie **asked** during her day-long visit to Dabaab, one of three camps that together were designed for 90,000 people but now host some 285,000 refugees.

Children ran to greet her as she made her way to the new arrivals area, where she met a young women with three small children with distended stomachs and streaming noses who just reached the camp in Kenya after walking for days to flee Somalia, where half the population – or some 3.8 million people – are in need of aid.

The Goodwill Ambassador saw first-hand the daily reality of life in Dabaab, where women and children line up for hours every day at water taps which are turned off for hours.

“The the toilets are already overflowing,” she observed. “There is not even enough space for trash dumps so people are living amongst the garbage.”

Ms. Jolie was told of a cholera outbreak earlier this year by staff from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (**UNHCR**) at the camp, where some families who have made their homes there for years are hosting newly-arrived refugees.

“What is amazing is that as more and more people come into the camp, the Somali families continue to be generous with what little they have, even if that means having one eighth of the water they need and their children suffering from dehydration,” she said.

At the end of her visit, Ms. Jolie noted that “the Somali families I met today are full of warmth and affection. I wish more people could meet them [because] then they would have a stronger desire to help.”

When he visited Dabaab last month, High Commissioner António Guterres was assured by the Kenyan Government that it understood the urgency of granting additional land to alleviate overcrowding at the site.

Mr. Guterres, who called Dabaab the “most difficult camp situation in the world,” pledged UNHCR's support in the interim to boost the refugees' living conditions by upgrading the

aging water and sanitation systems, increasing health services and providing adequate shelter and nutrition.

He also committed an additional \$20 million for refugees and the host community in Dabaab, calling for massive international donor support.

UNHCR has recently begun moving 12,000 refugees to the Kakuma camp in northern Kenya as an emergency measure for new arrivals.

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