



AFRICA/BURKINA FASO-Thousands of displaced Tuareg from conflict zones of Mali, the situation worsens

Ouagadougou (Agenzia Fides) - At least 8 000 Tuareg fleeing from fighting in neighboring Mali have found refuge in Burkina Faso, arriving in poor condition. The Government has organized to establish a coordination committee to bring together refugees, currently scattered between the western and the Sahel areas of the country, in a more central place and provide them with education and sanitation. The humanitarian situation is alarming: many of the displaced are living outdoors and the bad weather, aggravated by dry winds and dusty harmattan, favours the spread of disease; food, clean water and sanitation are precarious, said a responsible of the Red Cross in Burkina Faso. People urgently need help to survive, they also need blankets, kitchen utensils, carpets and curtains. Forty Red Cross volunteers are already operational. Since early February about 4,000 displaced persons have arrived in the region, and the flow continues in Inabao and Deou, Oudalan province, and in Mentao, Soum Province.

This situation unfortunately will aggravate the current food insecurity. The Government has stated that in 146 of the 350 municipalities this year it rained a lot less and this could cause further famine. Meanwhile, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), at least 30,000 displaced people in Mali were in desperate condition because of the fighting in the north of the country since mid-January. In Aguelhoc, 150km northeast of Kidal in northeastern Mali, the bloody fighting has forced an estimated 4 000 people to abandon their homes. Most had little food and lived in makeshift shelters in the semi-arid region. Some have found shelter with host families. The ICRC together with the Mali Red Cross have arranged for the distribution of millet, rice, oil and salt, towels, blankets, sleeping mats, buckets, cooking utensils and personal hygiene items. The Red Cross of Mali has already sent urgent food assistance for 600 displaced persons in particularly serious conditions. According to the two international organizations, in Menaka, in the Gao region, the fighting has forced an estimated 26 000 people to abandon their homes in search of a safe haven, both inside and outside the city. The ICRC is also monitoring the situation in Tessalit (Kidal region), Léré and Niafunké (Timbuktu region), involved in clashes in Mali. According to local sources, there may still be 20 000 displaced in these areas. The clashes in Menaka and Andéramboukane have forced more than 15 000 people to seek refuge in Niger, in north Tillabery region. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 24/2/2012)