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Sudanese refugees who have fled the violence in their country sit in their shelter May 11, 202

Sudanese refugees who have fled the violence in their country sit in their shelter May 11, 2023, in Koufroun, Chad, near that country's border with Sudan. (OSV News/Reuters/Zohra Bensemra)

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NAIROBI, Kenya — June 20, 2023
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On World Refugee Day, organized every year on June 20 by the United Nations, a senior official of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) urged increased support for migrants, as he warned that Sudan's massive human movement due to war risked becoming yet another forgotten crisis.

André Atsu, JRS' regional director for eastern Africa, said unrelenting chaos had kept ordinary people in conflict regions in a "vicious cycle of movement," with the numbers increasing each day.

"The current conflict in Sudan is the latest development, in which we have seen a lot of movement especially into the neighboring countries, but also inside Sudan itself," Atsu told OSV News in a phone interview June 17.

The official warned that the impact of the Sudan war on the ordinary population was not receiving enough attention, despite the constant bombardment, artillery and heavy gun fire exchange displacing millions. These attacks, accompanied with threats of rape for women and girls and all forms of rights abuses, were forcing the movement of the people.

"Are we going into yet another forgotten crisis?" he asked, while appealing especially to the more developed countries to provide resources.

"We are looking at nearly 2 million displaced people. The highest percentage is within Sudan, but there are also high numbers moving into Chad, South Sudan, Egypt, Central Africa Republic and Ethiopia," Atsu said.

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The war in Sudan that started April 15 has displaced 1.4 million people within the country and over 470,000 have fled to the neighboring countries, according to June 4 estimates by the International Organization of Migration (IOM). Hundreds of the displaced residents have camped on the outskirts of Khartoum, the capital city, while others have moved to the relatively peaceful rural areas.

The Catholic Church celebrates World Day of Migrants and Refugees on the last Saturday of September, but each June 20, the world celebrates the strength and courage of people who have been forced to flee their home due to conflict or persecution. This year's theme for the U.N. observance is "Hope Away From Home."

"Our task is to accompany the people and offer this hope," said Atsu.

The number of people forcibly displaced worldwide has reached a record number of 110 million, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi, told journalists June 14.

The increase of around 19 million people to 108.4 million by the end of 2022 is the biggest annual jump on record, UNHCR said in its report.

The cause of displacement is persecution, conflict, violence and human rights violations, according to the organization, with at least 35 million of those displaced being refugees. The conflicts in Ukraine and Sudan account for millions. Recently, Chad has registered more than 150,000 new refugees, among whom 92% are

women and children, because of the fighting in Sudan.

Sudanese refugees who have fled the violence in their country walk in line in Koufroun, Chad,

Sudanese refugees who have fled the violence in their country walk in line in Koufroun, Chad, to receive food rations May 9, 2023, from the World Food Program near the border between Sudan and Chad. (OSV News/Reuters/Zohra Bensemra)

"It's quite an indictment on the state of our world to have to report that," Grandi said at a news conference in Geneva, as reported by Reuters. "Solutions to these movements are increasingly difficult to imagine, to even put on the table," he said.

JRS is among the agencies providing assistance to refugees, asylum-seekers and displaced persons across eastern Africa — in Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, Uganda, Burundi and Tanzania.

According to Atsu, JRS regional director, the organization is accompanying refugees and host communities by providing psychosocial support, education services, pastoral care and healing and reconciliation services, among others.

Soon after the conflict erupted in Sudan, JRS sent a team to the town of Renk in neighboring South Sudan from nearby Maban County to assess what aid it could offer the fleeing people. Since then, it has been on the ground providing emergency assistance.

"At this stage, people have come and they need support to adapt to the new realities. We are providing non-food items, psychosocial support, first aid and pastoral care," he said, while adding that there is an urgent need to mobilize resources to enable countries to accept the fleeing refugees.

"Resources also means: first opening borders for the people, then providing assistance and also enacting laws that provide protection to the refugees," said Atsu. "The situation is not good. … With these resources, we will be able to give light and put a smile on the faces of these people."

According to the humanitarian official, it is countries with fewer resources that are shouldering the burden of hosting refugees and asylum-seekers. They are suffering themselves, and on top of that, have to receive the people on the run.

A young Sudanese woman who fled the violence in Sudan's Darfur region stands in the yard o

A young Sudanese woman who fled the violence in Sudan's Darfur region stands in the yard of a Chadian's family house May 14, 2023. She took refuge at the house in Koufroun, Chad, near the border between that country and Sudan. (OSV News/Reuters/Zohra Bensemra)

Nikki Gamer, senior public affairs manager at Catholic Relief Services, the U.S. Catholic Church's overseas relief and development agency, said the enormity of the global refugee crisis cannot be overstated.

"Fleeing one's country often entails a difficult, dangerous journey. Taking only what they can carry, refugees are people who might have led successful careers back home, who become forced to depend on the hospitality of others, and of humanitarian agencies, to meet their needs," Gamer told OSV News.

"As we celebrate World Refugee Day this year, it's important to recognize these challenges and to pledge our support to make sure all refugees have access to safe and nurturing homes and support systems," she added.

Agencies also are highlighting the plight of the people who are fleeing the countries because of the impact of climate change. For example, refugees from Somalia, fearing starvation due to drought and hunger, have been fleeing to northeastern Kenya's Dadaab Refugee Complex.

In December, the UNCHR recorded at least 80,000 who had fled to the camp due to a combination of drought and conflict.

The people fleeing due to the impact of climate change do not qualify for refugee status or protection under international law, according to refugee agency officials.

"But as we've witnessed firsthand all over the world, the climate emergency is dramatically increasing global displacement and migration, and increasing the vulnerability of people already experiencing forced displacement, poverty, hunger and other issues," said Gamer.

"As such, on this World Refugee Day, we're asking our supporters to urge Congress to fund U.S. international assistance that addresses the impact of climate change," she said.