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Fears of cholera at Ivory Coast church

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DUEKOUE, Ivory Coast -- The priest directing a mission where at least 30,000 refugees remain said he feared an outbreak of cholera if more aid is not received soon.

Food, water, medicine and sanitation facilities are in short supply for those who took refuge at a Salesian-run mission in Duekoue after armed fighting March 29 left at least 800 dead in this multiethnic city of 47,000.

"There is no food, people are sleeping on the ground, there is nowhere else to go, there are no toilets or washing facilities and we have no drinking water," Salesian Father Vicente Grupeli, director of the St. Therese of the Child Jesus Mission in Duekoue, told the Salesian news agency ANS.

The Salesian mission office in Madrid launched an urgent appeal for food, water, medical supplies and other needs.

The mission, the site of a vocational training center, a home for children and a youth center, suspended all activities to care for the refugees who have overwhelmed the facility, Father Grupeli told ANS.

Refugees from the city and dozens of surrounding villages streamed into the mission as army forces and militia supporting President-elect Alassane Ouattara attacked security personnel and mercenaries loyal to outgoing President Laurent Gbagbo, who refused to leave office after Ouattara was declared the winner of elections in November. French and U.N. forces in Abidjan arrested Gbagbo April 11 after an assault on his residence.

U.N. forces have guarded the mission since the violence erupted.

Some refugees have started returning to nearby villages with the help of U.N. troops, but others have been required to pass through checkpoints set up by supporters of Ouattara, where they have been asked about their tribal affiliation, Father Grupeli said.

"This does not mean that there is more security," he added. "On the contrary, the people are afraid."

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