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South Sudanese refugees washing their hands at a UNHCR facility during a registration exercise in South Darfur. Prior to the registration, UNHCR conducted a sensitization session about COVID-19, which included handwashing techniques.

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Helping refugees brace themselves for COVID-19 in Sudan

In Sudan, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) is collaborating with partners to avert the spread of the Novel Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) among refugees. Today, there are 20 UN Volunteers actively supporting UNHCR in its prevention efforts, serving in various fields, including protection, health, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and external relations.

Sudan is currently hosting over one million refugees from South Sudan, Eritrea, Syria and other countries. While there have been no reported cases of refugees who have tested positive for COVID-19 so far, the high density of refugee dwellings, coupled with limited health care and WASH facilities, makes them particularly vulnerable to the pandemic.

Based in Kosti, White Nile State, Alemayehu Gebremichael (Ethiopia) is a UN Volunteer serving as a Health and Nutrition Officer within a programme that caters to the needs of nearly 160,00 refugees in nine camps.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Alemayehu was delivering trainings to medical staff on integrated disease surveillance, Health Information Systems (HIS), and pharmaceutical supply management. But since the outbreak of the virus, his tasks have been focused on training healthcare staff on active surveillance, triage, isolation and case management.

At the same time, Alemayehu continues to visit the camps to assess if there are any cases of people affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. He is also now supporting awareness-raising efforts, through collaboration with WASH colleagues and partners.

“ We need to be kind to people, especially to the refugees who need our assistance and support in protecting themselves and their families from COVID-19. Be generous and lend a helping hand to those in need and those who are confined at home because of COVID-19. --Alemayehu Gebremichael, UN Volunteer with UNHCR Sudan

Alice Alaso (Uganda) is another UN Volunteer supporting UNHCR in delivering health and nutrition services to refugees in Sudan. She is based in El-Daein, East Darfur, with a programme that is currently serving more than 79,000 refugees in two camps and seven settlements.

Alice arrived in El-Daein around the time when the first COVID-19 case was reported in Sudan. Right upon her arrival, she became involved in the rapid assessment of the level of preparedness for response to the virus in health facilities within refugee camps.

Additionally, Alice is taking part in the COVID-19 Task Force, a group comprising UN and government partners that is coordinating COVID-19 interventions. As the health focal point in East Darfur, she has also been participating in discussions at the Darfur area level where she has been providing guidance on key issues, such as isolation centres, risk communication and medical supplies.

“ I would like to applaud all the health and nutrition workers around the world for the great sacrifices they have made in the fight against COVID-19. They, just like soldiers, are faced with considerable mental stress, due to panic related to the pandemic. --Alice Alaso, UN Volunteer with UNHCR Sudan

Modesta Ndubi (Kenya) is a UN Volunteer serving with UNHCR as an External Relations and Reporting Officer in El-Fasher, North Darfur.

Before the unfolding COVID-19 situation, Modesta was involved in several tasks within her team. Taking part in the emergency team that was on the ground during the intercommunal clashes that broke out in West Darfur last December, she developed content for UNHCR's global website and Sudan Twitter account.

She joined UNHCR team to assess the displacement of Sudanese refugees in Chad. From that mission, she produced photographs that were used for a fund-raising campaign by UNHCR's Private Sector Partnerships Service.

Since the onset of COVID-19, Modesta has been working closely with protection and health colleagues in coordinating information campaigns that aim to sensitize refugees on COVID-19 in all locations. She is also documenting activities through photography to enhance the visibility of UNHCR's work and to support fundraising efforts for the COVID-19 response in Sudan.

“ We need to keep showing the world why vulnerable people must not be forgotten. Let us continue encouraging and supporting other colleagues during sensitization campaigns. This will soon pass, but as we wait for that day, let us all stay safe. --Modesta Ndubi, UN Volunteer with UNHCR Sudan



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