

Zambia's Nangweshi Camp closes after last group of Angolans move out

LUSAKA, Zambia, November 20 (UNHCR) – Nangweshi Refugee Camp, established during the last throes of the Angolan civil war, has closed after the few remaining refugees were moved out of the facility in western Zambia.

A final convoy, carrying mainly vulnerable refugees, pulled out of the camp on the banks of the Zambezi River last Thursday, while others decided to head back to their homeland unassisted. The 165 people in the convoy were headed for the Mayukwayukwa settlement.

Further details were not immediately available, but UNCHR'S acting representative, Vedasto Mwesiga, said the UN refugee agency would hand over some assets at the camp to the government of Zambia. An official closing ceremony is likely to take place in December.

Under UNHCR's assisted voluntary repatriation programme begun last August and due to be completed by the end of this year, Nangweshi's Angolan refugees were given the option of repatriation to their homeland or relocation to the Mayukwayukwa settlement, where they would receive land and better prospects for self-reliance.

Almost 5,000 refugees opted to make the 350-kilometre journey to Mayukwayukwa, while 2,140 have been repatriated from Nangweshi. Some of the refugees from Nangweshi opted to return to Angola on their own.

The movement to Mayukwayukwa, organised by UNHCR, the Zambian government and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), reflected the need to consolidate refugee facilities after four years of repatriation to Angola and to plan for the future of those who did not want to go home. The relocation operation was funded by US\$320,000 from Denmark.

Established in January 2000 at the height of the last stage of the Angolan civil war, Nangweshi was one of Zambia's most recent refugee sites. One reason for closing the camp was the remote location of Nangweshi, where the terrain and seasonal floods made it difficult to give humanitarian assistance.

During Angola's 27-year-long war, some half-a-million people fled their country and millions more were internally displaced. When a peace agreement was signed in 2002, an estimated 457,000 Angolans were refugees outside the country's borders. Since then, more than 370,000 have come home, including 123,000 brought back by UNHCR. Many of the rest have received UNHCR assistance on arrival.

Zambia hosts 155,000 refugees, including about 75,000 living in camps and the rest who have settled outside the camps. Most of the refugees originate from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola.

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