
ECDC NEWS

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ECDC President Commends New Ethiopian Policy Allowing Eritrean Refugees to Live Out of Camps

Commending the Ethiopian government's recent decision to relax movement restrictions for Eritrean refugees confined to refugee camps as "a bold and courageous step," ECDC President Tsehaye Teferra said today that the policy change was particularly noteworthy because it involves refugees from a neighboring country that has an ongoing conflict with Ethiopia.

Under the new "out-of-camp" policy, established through consultations with UNHCR and Ethiopian government officials, Eritrean refugees will be allowed to live outside of refugee camps in any part of the country where they are able to sustain themselves financially or who have relatives or friends willing to sponsor them.

In a letter to Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin, Teferra expressed hope that the policy will soon be extended to refugees from other countries and lead to "a more enlightened response to refugees flows across the continent." Teferra pledged to push for UNHCR's continued engagement in protection and assistance efforts for refugees in Ethiopia.

"Based on more than a quarter-century of engagement in African refugee affairs, I have long grieved over the appalling waste of human resources resulting from camp confinements," Teferra wrote. "By allowing qualified refugees to live and work in urban settings, access needed educational and medical services and achieve a measure of self-sufficiency, host countries can establish a new paradigm in humanitarian treatment of displaced people."

An estimated 138,000 refugees, including Somalis, Sudanese and Eritreans are currently housed in three camps and two community centers in Ethiopia. Since the Ethiopia-Eritrea border conflict in the late 1990s, more than 60,000 Eritrean refugees have crossed into Ethiopia. UNHCR estimates that about 36,000 are living in the camps.

ECDC is a community-based organization established in 1983 to promote cultural, educational and socio-economic development programs to assist refugees and immigrants in becoming productive members of their new homeland. It is one of ten national agencies authorized by the Department of State to resettle refugees and now has three branch offices and a network of 12 affiliated community based organizations located in major cities around the nation.

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