

CLOSING IDP CAMPS IN KENYA

On 16th September 2009, Kenya's President gave a directive to close all Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps and resettle all Internally Displaced Persons. Two years after the country's post election violence, thousands were still living in tented camps after fleeing their homes during the skirmishes. One group of IDPs returned to their farms in 2008. A government compensation exercise enabled another group purchase communal land in peaceful neighborhoods and move from IDP camps last year. A final group remained in camps awaiting compensation from the government. The government's offer of a two-acre piece of land and KShs. 35,000 (about USD500) will help the families begin their lives anew. They are now being moved to new land as the resettling exercise comes to an end.



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There is a renewed sense of hope as families move onto their new land. Living in tents and on food handouts has been extremely difficult for the formerly self-reliant farmers. Loss of livelihood, independence, and social structure has been tragic for a people still traumatized by their experiences. They lost friends, relatives and close family members. Their homes and business premises were burned to ashes and property accumulated over the years looted. They are re-building their lives from scratch with few resources in their hands. But many count themselves blessed to be alive and take it as a cue to keep moving. They draw strength from each other and newly formed communities as they begin another phase in life. “Do not call us IDP’s anymore, we now have a place to call home” the new land owners are proud to say.

Getting daily food and educating their children remains a big challenge. Perhaps the most pronounced need is for safe and permanent housing. The tents they have been living in for almost two years now are worn out and have multiple leakages during the rains. Families have had to stay up as tents flooded and beddings soaked on nights with heavy downpour. Rains have made it impossible to light fires to cook the little they receive since cooking cannot be done in the tents. These hard-working people long for warm homes to live in like they used to. They long to resume farming activities which is a way of life for them.

Shalom City is home to over 3,000 formerly displaced families who have taken initiative to acquire communal land and construct brick homes. They collectively purchased a brick making machine and are making bricks. Each house requires cement, roofing sheets, doors and windows purchases but does the construction. While the government has provided land, families will take a while to rebuild and furnishing over 3,000 homes. Widows with young children and the elderly over 70 years are most disadvantaged. *To help build a home for a widow or an elderly person in Kenya, contact amber@africarising.org*

