

# Burundi refugees threatened by rains, aid cash crisis

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GENEVA, Nov 12 (AFP) - Some 700,000 Burundian refugees need help urgently due to torrential rains, while aid is being hampered by a severe cash crisis at the U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), a spokeswoman said Friday.

Spokeswoman Christiane Berthiaume said UNHCR emergency funds had been virtually exhausted after sending 8 million dollars to help the refugees who fled to neighbouring countries after an attempted military coup unleashed a wave of inter-ethnic violence in Burundi.

A 17 million dollar UNHCR appeal launched after the coup attempt on October 21 in which President Melchior Ndadaye and several ministers were murdered only raised some 1.5 million dollars, she added.

"After having emptied out all their pockets", the UNHCR managed to scrap together about half of the amount needed.

The UNCHR's emergency account has dropped from its usual balance of 25 million dollars to just 700,000 dollars, she said.

"That means that if tomorrow another crisis arises elsewhere, we will have nothing."

There are now fears that disease could break out in the temporary camps thrown up in Rwanda, Zaire and Tanzania, as refugees try to shelter from the incessant rains in simple huts. The hygiene is "terrible", Berthiaume said.

There is a lack of aid and sanitation, and getting access to the refugees is also proving difficult, she added.

Thousands of people are believed to have been massacred in clashes between Hutus and Tutsis triggered by the failed coup, which was led by the Tutsi-dominated army.

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