

Despite kidnappings, Christian agencies continue refugee work in Kenya

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Nairobi, Kenya, October 18 (ENInews)--Relief work at the huge Dadaab refugee camp in northern Kenya will continue, days after the kidnapping of two Spanish aid workers from the complex, Christian and secular aid agencies said.

"The camps are calm and delivery of life saving services is continuing. This is because security has been stepped up," Ann Wangari, the Lutheran World Federation Dadaab area coordinator told ENInews on 18 October.

The workers, Montserrat Serra, 40, and Blanca Thiebaut, 30, were working as logisticians for Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors without Borders) when armed men seized them on 13 October. Their driver was injured by gunfire. A month ago, a driver working for Care International, another relief agency, was also abducted and has not been seen since.

Agencies have since halted the provision of non-essential services at the settlement, where Somali migrants fleeing drought, war and disease continue to arrive. More than 500,000 refugees have settled in a camp designed to accommodate 90,000.

"This is a very serious matter, but food distribution and provision of water are continuing. Registration centers and health facilities are still operating," said Wangari, whose organization manages the camp for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Some Christian agencies warned that the abductions threatened relief efforts there, but vowed to continued work. Caritas Somalia, a Roman Catholic charity, said kidnapping of the two aid workers would not prevent the agency from continuing its mission. "Caritas follows the highest security protocols and will continue to work in Dadaab," Suzanna Tkalec, the official responsible for the operations of Caritas Somalia in Dadaab said in news reports.

Antonio Guterres, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, condemned the abduction, as forces continued to search for the two who are believed to have been taken to Somalia. "It is wholly unacceptable that they should be made targets for kidnap. I appeal to those responsible to facilitate their immediate and safe return," he said on 13 October.

Kenya launched a military intervention in Somalia on 16 October in an effort to secure its border with Somalia, where the country is without a functioning government and where militia groups terrorize the population.