

A.31 Tunisia – 2011 – Conflict in Libya

Update: **Keywords:** Planned and managed camps, Resettlement, Household NFIs, Emergency shelter.

Country:

Tunisia

Conflict:

Conflict in Libya

Conflict date:

February 2011 - October 2012

Number of people displaced:

1,000,000

Project target population:

200,000

Project outputs:

Camp with a capacity of 25,000
200,000 people pass through site during project timeframe



Project timeline



Project description

A transit camp was established to assist refugees and migrants fleeing the conflict in Libya. The camp was rapidly established in partnership with the Tunisian authorities and housed a population with more than 60 nationalities mostly for only short periods. The camp management worked closely with organisations providing support for the repatriation of displaced people to ensure that people had a smooth transit from the camp to return locations.

Strengths and weaknesses

- ✓ The organisation was able to work together with the authorities to rapidly establish camps to cover emergency needs.
- ✓ The camps dealt with the complexity of sheltering people from different nationalities by establishing separate sectors for the major nationalities and an overflow sector for minority groups.
- ✓ The organisation worked with fourteen other national and international organisations to provide assistance.
- ✗ Tents initially provided had a very short lifespan and were difficult for people to assemble. They were also poorly suited to the climate.

- ✗ Latrines, showers and water taps were not readily available during the initial phase of the emergency.
- ✗ The lack of a rapid shelter solution that was more durable than tents greatly hampered the ability of the organisation to assist beneficiaries in a timely and efficient manner.
- construction of durable shelter solutions could not be considered given the temporary nature of the transit camp.



Shousha camp was established in Tunisia near the Libyan border. It had a capacity of 25,000 people, with tents provided as shelters. Most of the camp residents were foreign nationals. The majority travelled onwards to their home countries. Photo: A. Branthwaite / UNHCR

Background

The conflict in Libya, began in mid February 2011. It caused a mass exodus of migrants and refugees from Libya. The majority of fleeing Libyans found refuge in Tunisian homes and public institutions.

The first groups of non-Libyan nationals sought shelter in Tunisian public institutions. However, the majority the Tunisian authorities and civil society groups stated that a refugee camp setting would be more suitable for providing necessary humanitarian assistance.

Site selection

The Tunisian military set up an emergency field hospital 9km from the border with Libya when the conflict erupted. The hospital was as a result of concerns that a large number of war wounded individuals would be crossing the border into Tunisia.

The Tunisian authorities requested that the United Nations establish a transit camp (later named Shousha camp) next to the field hospital in order to host and assist thousands of predominantly migrant workers fleeing Libya. The displaced would stay in this camp while waiting to be repatriated to their countries of origin. International organisations did not have a say in the location of the site.

As Tunisia had itself experienced a revolution, the political situation was volatile. The large number of displaced people entering Tunisia meant that the United Nations had no choice but to accept the available option of establishing the camp at the site designated by the Tunisian

authorities. Neighbouring countries like Algeria and Egypt refused to set up camps within their own borders.

Site planning

In the first days of the emergency, the military liaison officer and the international organisation's field unit jointly conducted the site planning. During the first few days, Shousha camp hosted more than 20,000 migrants, predominantly single men from various nationalities. No WASH facilities were available during the first days of the crises.

In the first 24 hours, attempts were made at separating groups by nationalities. However, the attempts failed and Shousha camp accepted large numbers of single men without much organisation.

At this early stage, Shousha camp did not conform to international camp management standards. However, emergency tents, water, medical assistance and food were provided.

As a result of the mixed populations, numerous problems arose amongst camp residents. Coming from very distinct cultures, religions, ethnicities and lifestyles, the camp residents frequently bickered over space and access to humanitarian assistance. The most visible proof of the tensions were the frequent conflicts that arose between communities during food distributions.

In May 2011, a major fire burned down most of Shousha camp. The camp management organisation, operational and implementing partners and the camp

population rebuilt Shousha camp with a much more organised separation of nationalities and ethnicities in order to reduce conflicts and challenges to cultural sensitivities.

Humanitarian assistance and camp services were provided to each community separately, with each community allocated its own food distribution points, water points and sanitation facilities. Distribution points were also strategically placed to reduce conflicts and to ensure that adequate humanitarian assistance was provided in a secure environment.

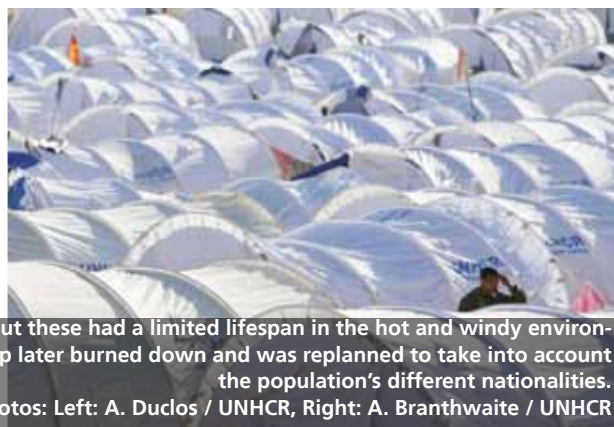
Not every nationality and ethnicity could be accommodated in a separate sector and therefore sector E was created to host minority groups. Communities were given the option to have a separate section for families in their sector.

Site construction

The site was initially constructed by the military who levelled the ground and provided some lighting. The erection of the tents was completed by the military, the two international organisations and the camp residents. Eventually, a local company was contracted to erect tents.

Partners and other international organisations contracted local companies to build sanitation infrastructure and the water network in the camp. International and local organisations provided food.

Additional camps were built by other organisations at nearby locations between March and April 2011.



The camp was originally built using light-weight tunnel tents, but these had a limited lifespan in the hot and windy environment, and were replaced with heavier canvas tents. The camp later burned down and was replanned to take into account the population's different nationalities.

Photos: Left: A. Duclos / UNHCR, Right: A. Branthwaite / UNHCR

Coordination

During the first week of the crisis, the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination team supported daily field coordination meetings in the camp. The organisation also led daily coordination meetings in Zarzis, about 1.5 hours drive from Shousha camp, where all international stakeholders were located.

After the first week, various working groups were formed. Because the response was based in a camp, all working group representatives were present during camp coordination meetings. As the crisis subsided and the camp population diminished, coordination meetings were reduced to once per week and then once per month.

This emergency response involved an exceptionally high level of cooperation with local authorities in general, and the Tunisian army in particular. The Tunisian army acted as the main humanitarian interlocutor, and, in addition to providing security, had a key role in the building of the camp and in the provision of humanitarian assistance (food, shelter and health).

Population movements

In the first two weeks of the emergency, migrants and refugees were mostly transported from the border to the camp by public transport buses mobilised by the Tunisian authorities and civil society. Later international organisation rented buses to carry out this work. Some migrants were forced to walk to the camp during the days where the influx reached its peak.

Some convoys were also organised from Libya into Tunisia. Migrants and refugees were mostly received in Shousha camp. Once the other camps were established, they also received people fleeing Libya.

An arrangement was established to receive migrants from specific nationalities in the different camps. However, this arrangement did not fully succeed given the limited capacity of the other camps, and there was a frequent overflow back into Shousha camp.

Once their return had been organised, camp residents were driven to the airport to be repatriated. All camp residents received humanitarian assistance.

Shelter solutions

Initially, lightweight white tunnel tents were used. These tents proved to be too complicated to construct in a very fast evolving emergency with thousands of migrants and refugees entering the camp during the first days and nights of the emergency.

The tents were also very fragile, breaking very easily. They did not have any exterior shading and were blown away by the wind. After a few weeks, the white tunnel tents were replaced by heavier green canvas tents. These tents were easier to build and a little more robust. However, the roof pole (horizontal beam) was weak and regularly broke.

These tents were also blown away by strong winds and did not have sufficient shading.

A third type of tent was later introduced, and performed much better in the harsh conditions, though they remained technically difficult to erect.

Core relief items such as blankets, quilts and jerrycans were adequately pre-positioned and distributed. Mattresses also distributed and proved to be very useful.

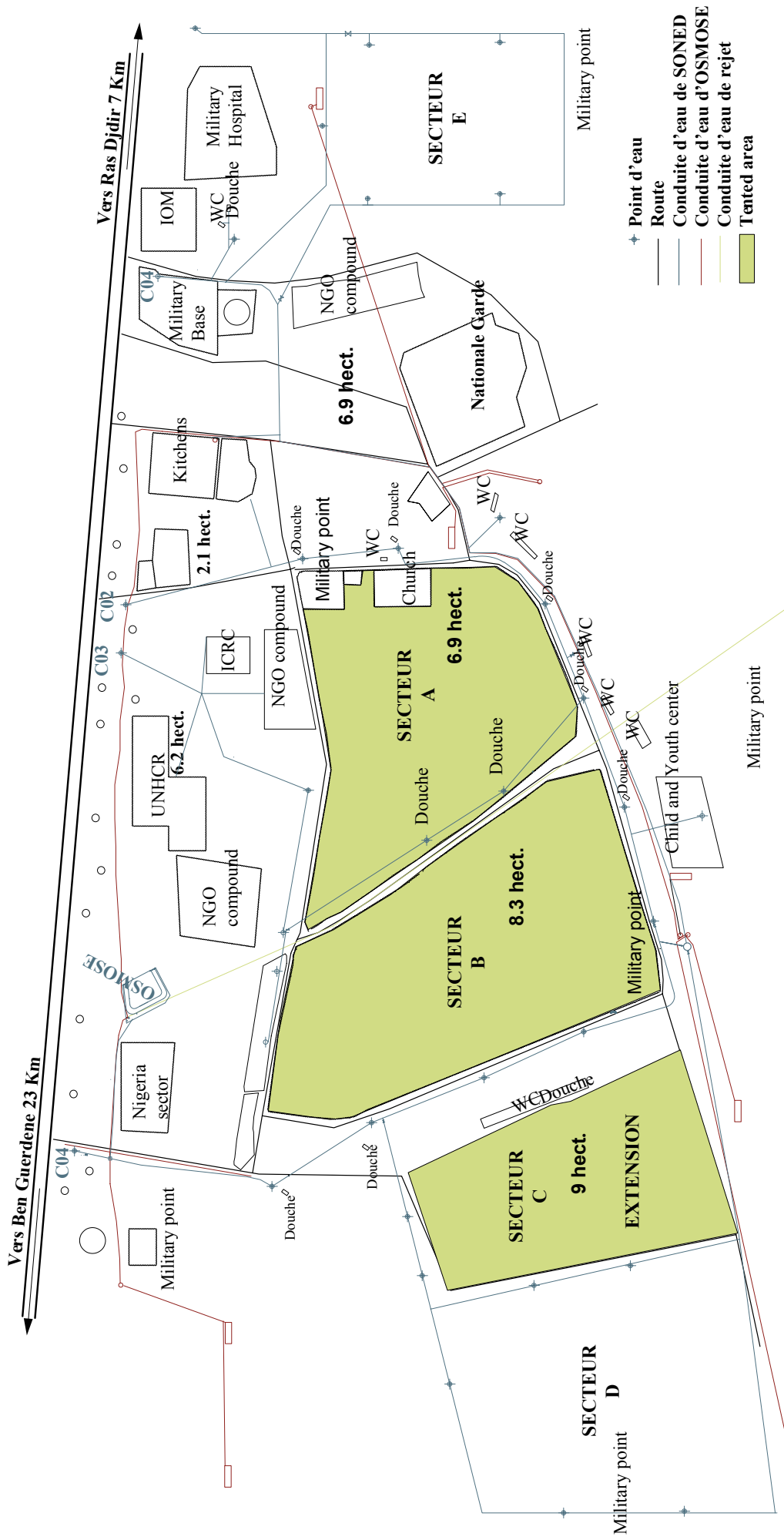
The organisation found itself obliged to set up a very costly electricity grid in the camp which continues to be difficult to manage since the network is constantly tapped into by camp residents.

Exit

By the end of 2012 around 1,200 refugees and asylum seekers remained in the camp. The majority were awaiting resettlement, some within Tunisia. In addition, around 200 rejected asylum seekers remained in the camp. The organisation was in discussion with the Tunisian authorities to find a solution for this group since it was outside of the organisation's mandate to assist them.



Border crossing early in the response. The camp was established near the site of an emergency field hospital 9km from the border. Photos: Left: A. Duclos / UNHCR



1 hect. = 10,000m²

Camps Réfugiés Choucha		Plan Réseaux	
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DWG 002-2/11	23-04-2012		

Site plan for rebuilt Shousha camp after the fire. Infrastructure and water supply networks are superimposed. As there were over 60 nationalities present in the camp, not all groups could have their own sector, and Sector E was created to host minority groups.