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UN REFUGEE AGENCY AT KYRGYZ-UZBEK BORDER

GENEVA - A team from the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) arrived on the Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan border Sunday to assess the needs of hundreds of Uzbeks who fled violence in their homeland.

The three-member UNHCR team, from the refugee agency's office in the Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek, confirmed that some 560 Uzbeks had arrived on Saturday in Suzac, in the Jalalabad Oblast region of Kyrgyzstan. Suzac is located some 50 kilometres north-east of the Uzbek city of Andijan, where an unknown number of people died in a military crackdown on Friday. The majority of the new-arrivals on Kyrgyz soil are men, among them are eighteen wounded.

More people are reported still on the Uzbekistan side of the border, wanting to cross into Kyrgyzstan. The situation on the border appeared calmer on Sunday, but there were still reports that the situation inside Uzbekistan remains tense.

On Saturday, UNHCR and Kyrgyz officials met in Bishkek to discuss protection and assistance needs for any Uzbeks arriving in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyz officials requested UNHCR help after reporting that more than 500 people from Uzbekistan had arrived in Jalalabad Oblast. They said some of the Uzbeks were wounded and were receiving care in local hospitals.

UNHCR is sending humanitarian supplies from its existing stockpiles in Osh, in Kyrgyzstan, including soap, blankets, clothing and jerry cans. More relief items are on their way to the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border from Kazakhstan. The Kyrgyz have also requested tents, food and medicine. UNHCR is looking at ways to rush further aid supplies to its warehouse in Osh.

UNHCR welcomes assurances from Kyrgyzstan that its border will remain open to those in need of international protection. The refugee agency is deploying a three-person emergency team to support UNHCR's existing staff in Kyrgyzstan in the event of a further influx.

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Media Relations & Public Information Service
HQPI00
P.O. Box 2500
CH-1211 Geneva 2

Tel: 41 22 739 8502
Fax: 41 22 739 7314

Media Relations Public Information Service

hqp00@unhcr.ch

HQPI00
P.O. Box 2500
1211 Geneva 2

Tel.:
(41 22) 739 85 02

Fax:
(41 22) 739 73 15

www.unhcr.ch

Email: hqpi00@unhcr.ch

Website: www.unhcr.ch

For further information please contact
Marie-Helene Verne
UNHCR Public Information Officer
Tel: + 41 79 217 3116

Media Relations & Public Information Service
UNHCR
HQPI00
P.O. Box 2500
CH-1211 Geneva 2

Tel: 41 22 739 8502
Fax: 41 22 739 7314
Email: hqpi00@unhcr.ch
Website: www.unhcr.ch

**Media Relations
Public Information
Service**

hqpi00@unhcr.ch

HQPI00
P.O. Box 2500
1211 Geneva 2

Tel.:
(41 22) 739 85 02

Fax:
(41 22) 739 73 15

www.unhcr.ch