

Ivorian refugees stopped from returning home over Ebola fears

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Around 400 Ivorian refugees who fled to Liberia during their country's 2010-2011 post-election violence have been prevented from returning home due to fears over the spread of the Ebola virus, a UN official said Monday.

A convoy of returning [refugees](#) was turned away as they tried to cross the border on Friday, UN refugee agency official Mohamed Toure said, calling the decision by the Ivory Coast "unacceptable".

"This is a violation of domestic and [international law](#)," said Toure, the UNHCR's representative in Ivory Coast.

But Ivorian government spokesman Bruno Kone said: "Everyone needs to show some understanding."

"We face the greatest pandemic our region has seen for a long time. We cannot be lax in this area," he told AFP on Monday.

Repatriations of refugees resumed in June after a break of several months, as Ivory Coast sought to prevent the [deadly disease](#) from propagating in its territory.

Seven convoys carrying more than 2,600 Ivorian refugees crossed into the Ivory Coast between 4 and 27 June, according to UNHCR.

But on Friday, "we were given Ebola as a reason, even though the

UNHCR offered to carry out medical screening of the refugees, but they refused," said Toure.

"It couldn't have been because of Ebola because the border was open. People came and went," he said.

Kone, the government spokesman, said that convoys of people are refused entry but not individuals, because many people farm land on both sides of the border.

He added that decisions are made on a "case by case" basis.

Some 300,000 refugees fled fighting the post-election crisis in Ivory Coast sparked by the refusal of then president Laurent Gbagbo to accept defeat at the polls by current leader Alassane Ouattara.

The Ebola virus, a form of haemorrhagic fever, has swept through Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone leaving an estimated 539 people dead, according to the latest WHO figures.

It spreads among humans via bodily fluids including sweat, so can be spread by simply touching an infected person. With no vaccine, patients believed to have caught the virus have to be isolated to prevent further contagion.

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