

Public

Annex 2.3

Some 350,000 Burkinabes have fled I Coast since September: minister

OUAGADOUGOU, July 22 (AFP) - Some 350,000 Burkinabes have fled the Ivory Coast to escape persecution since a military revolt sparked civil war in the neighboring state last September, the social action minister said Tuesday.

The minister, Mariam Lamizana, said the refugees had faced various types of persecution in Ivory Coast, whose government has accused Burkina Faso of supporting the rebels.

The Burkina Faso government last February began an operation called M'Bayiri -- meaning mother country in the local Mossi language -- to repatriate its citizens, while thousands have made their way back by their own means.

The operation was halted for several months, but following the opening of the border at the end of June, Burkina Faso started sending bus convoys to the Ivory Coast with the assistance of the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The border between the two countries, which is crucial for the trade relations of landlocked Burkina Faso, had been practically closed since the fighting broke out in Ivory Coast, which was cut in two along an east-west line by the rebellion.

Belligerents in the Ivory Coast declared fighting over on July 4, and a government of national reconciliation has been established.

Officials on both sides are especially eager to fully reopen a north-south rail link between the two countries, which are highly interdependent.

In Abidjan, the IOM said it was hoping to organize two convoys a week to evacuate up to 8,500 Burkina Faso citizens who have sought shelter in Catholic missions and elsewhere.

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