

DOMISTAN STAR EXERCISE BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

(copy for all participants)

Domistan Background.

Domistan is a small country with a GDP of US\$100 / capita, with no mineral wealth and completely ignored by the major world powers. Bordering on the ocean, with a capital city on a cliff overlooking a harbour, the country is divided into two main geographical regions. The first is the lowlands, an agricultural area, which contains rich fertile soil, and a major river that terminates in a vast delta. The second is the plateau, a full 2000 metres higher. The plateau is bisected by Domistan's border, existing from colonial times, with Neighbour Country. The Plateau contains the major cities and economic power. Two distinct ethnic groups make up the population of Domistan (and Neighbour country). The Low people are agriculturists and the High people are plateau cattle herders who have turned to commerce in the last century.

30 years ago, a coup d'etat in Neighbour Country resulted in a low-intensity civil war between the Low and High peoples which has never ended. The government and army in Neighbour Country is dominated by High people, who are fighting a mobile and illusive Low People resistance army. The coup caused many deaths, and caused 100,000 of the Low ethnic group to flee to Domistan. They spread out through the lowlands of Domistan becoming labourers and small tenant farmers. Never considered citizens of Domistan, afraid to return to Neighbour country where the government also fears the shift in power should they return, the Low refugees in Domistan are one of the oldest case loads of UNHCR. Most of the world has forgotten them, and they survive mostly using their own means, while UNHCR's donors are growing tired of the yearly subsidies.

Domistani Low people resent the refugees for causing violence but all Low people are united when oppressed by the national army. Inflammatory political statements and discriminatory policies by the political parties and government of the Domistan elite make peace difficult. The result is that terror groups roam the countryside, in a running battle with the army, claiming political motivations for their actions but sustain themselves from the profits from theft and extortion. Pockets of the lowlands are cut off for months at a time due to insecurity and the population bears the brunt of the suffering through food shortages while both the army and rebels seem to be getting richer each year.

This year, extraordinary high levels of rainfall in the mountains of Domistan caused unprecedented flooding, and near complete destruction of this year's crop throughout the Domistani Lowlands. Faced with starvation, a large number of people fled the lowlands to find refuge in Southtown, on the plateau. The influx touched off violent reaction against the Low people, many of whom now are forced to take to the sea in rafts and small boats for refuge in other countries. Those with money arrange for illegal passage on large vessels, those with nothing use whatever means they can find.

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Recent developments in the humanitarian response

(copy for all participants)

(This information was provided by a news story sent around the world on wire services)

1. The local clinics and hospitals in Domistan are completely overwhelmed. Entries have doubled, yet many people are turned away. Doctors cite examples of severe physical trauma – bullet and knife wounds, beatings and many cases of rape. In addition a large number of psychosomatic complaints in the IDP group have been recorded, severe headaches, mysterious internal pains, trouble sleeping and memory loss. She also said that the number of deaths in town had increased by a factor of five.
2. Leaders of the displaced population claim that everyone is robbed by “bandits” before arrival in coastal areas, and that they have literally nothing of value left.
3. In spite of the apparent danger of returning to Neighbour country, the border post closest to Southtown has reported 100 people a day crossing the border away from Domistan - These are all Low Domistani ethnic groups and families.
4. News of the plight of the passengers aboard the Domistan Star, called "illegally trafficked migrants" by some and "refugees" by others makes world headlines as the ship is refused entry to the Pacific States.
5. Caught between political pressures at home and very bad press abroad, the Government of the Pacific States uses economic pressure and economic support to "convince" the constitutionally autonomous Salt Island Administration, (actually a very dependent protectorate), to accept the 820 Domistani migrants as a temporary measure.
6. Due to a violent flare-up of ethnic violence against Domistani Low people, and those assumed to be favorable to their cause, masses begin to take to the sea in large and small boats bound for the Pacific States or for Salt Island, which they have heard is now a safe refuge, and a likely stepping stone to resettlement in other states.
7. Commercial vessels at seas as well as the Pacific States Navy ships now commonly collect migrants from the sea and transfer them to Salt Island as a matter of routine.
8. International agencies and Governments begin to address the growing emergency situation at Salt Island as people continue to arrive in need of water, food, and shelter.