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Assistance for Afghanistan – WEEKLY UPDATE

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Assistance for Afghanistan

WEEKLY UPDATE

Issue No.429

12 September 2001

United Nations Staff in Afghanistan Temporarily Relocated

Due to circumstances prevailing internationally, the United Nations system in Afghanistan temporarily relocated international United Nations staff working in Afghanistan.

United Nations international staff were present in six locations of the country: Kabul, Jalalabad, Mazar, Kandahar, Herat, and Faizabad.

Authorities in Afghanistan have cooperated in issuing the necessary flight clearances. United Nations officials have held meetings with Taliban authorities in Islamabad and in Afghanistan during the course of the relocation.

The relocation of up to 75 international staff began on 12 September and was completed on 13 September.

Several hundred staff of non-governmental organisations have also left Afghanistan.

The deepening humanitarian crisis, with conflict affecting 17 out of 32 provinces of the country, is continuing to gravely affect Afghan civilians. There are currently believed to be almost six million vulnerable people inside Afghanistan, which is approximately 25% of the total population. The current caseload of internally displaced persons is estimated at 900,000 and is expected to reach one million before the end of the year. Millions more are severely affected in their villages, too poor or unable

to move. If, as seems likely, the situation continues to deteriorate in the coming year, Afghanistan is set to become the worst humanitarian crisis in the world.

Due to the severity of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, the United Nations plans to continue to provide as much life saving assistance to the civilian population as possible. On several previous occasions, during the withdrawal of United Nations international staff from Afghanistan, essential programmes were able to continue due to the efforts of hundreds of dedicated Afghan staff. In the absence of international staff, they will undertake their activities insofar as the situation permits and security prevails.

WFP Launches Emergency Appeal for Afghanistan

On 6 September 2001 The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) launched an appeal for a US\$151 million emergency operation to save millions of people in Afghanistan from starvation due to a long and devastating cycle of drought and civil war.

There is evidence of widespread pre-famine conditions due to a severe food crisis caused by the worst drought in decades and an armed conflict well into its third decade. Without more food aid many lives could be in danger.

Some Afghans, especially in the central parts of the country, have reportedly eaten poisonous grass that caused paralysis.

and many displaced people in the northern provinces have been eating meals of locusts mixed with animal fodder.

Because of soaring needs in Afghanistan WFP stepped up food distribution under a US\$ 76 million operation that was originally planned to help feed 3.8 million people until March 2002. As the food stocks for this operation will be exhausted much sooner, WFP is launching this new operation to help about 5.5 million people using more than 366,000 tons of food over 12 months starting in November.

WHO Continues Supporting Polio Eradication

WHO will continue supporting Afghanistan and Pakistan in its efforts to eradicate polio through door to door campaigns to vaccinate each child in order to stop the transmission of the wild polio virus and to attain the status of polio free countries. Both Afghanistan and Pakistan form one epidemiological block and polio cases have been reported from both of the countries. This was stressed by Dr. Gezairy, Regional Director of WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region in a press conference held on 7 September 2001 in Islamabad. He was accompanied by Dr. Suzuki, Director for Health, Technology and Pharmaceuticals, WHO headquarters and the Minister of Public Health of Pakistan.

Dr. Gezairy stated that as a result of tireless efforts, conducting high quality vaccination campaigns and particularly house-to-house campaigns, the number of polio cases has drastically decreased in Afghanistan.

A high-ranking WHO delegation headed by Dr. Gezairy arrived in Pakistan on 4 September 2001 and attended a three-day regional meeting of the WHO staff on polio eradication. The three-day meeting was attended by WHO staff from Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia and Pakistan.

WHO, UNICEF and many partners conduct national immunisation days (NIDs) in Afghanistan and Pakistan simultaneously to vaccinate each child including cross-border areas. Vaccination posts have been set up in railway stations, bus stops and various places to vaccinate traveling children and to stop the transmission of the polio virus.

As part of the polio eradication strategy, WHO in Ghazni conducted a training course for 60 Acute Flaccid Paralysis (AFP) focal points at the Ghazni provincial hospital. Participants from Ghazni, Paktia, Khost and Paktika provinces representing MoPH, SCA, NAC, Ibne Sina, MSF, LDI, WAMY, Shuhada organisation and PEMTs attended the course. The course educated doctors on implementation of polio eradication strategies, AFP surveillance and routine EPI activities. The participants learnt how to perform accurate and sensitive AFP surveillance in almost sixty districts of the southeastern region of Afghanistan.

Capacity Building

Last week UNOPS/CDAP conducted a ten-day course for nine community based rehabilitation workers in Zindajan and Engil districts of Herat Province. The course was meant to increase physiotherapy knowledge at the regional level.

In addition, a two-week general upgrading training course was completed by UNOPS/CDAP in the female community rehabilitation and development centre (CRDC) of Herat city. Community Based Rehabilitation and Development Workers (CRDWs) and community volunteers (CV) were trained in all aspects of disabilities.

Meanwhile, in Ghazni, Swedish Committee for Afghanistan and the Comprehensive Disabled Afghans Programme (SCA/CDAP) have conducted a three-week physical rehabilitation training course for thirteen staff, eight community rehabilitation and development workers, two community rehabilitation workers, and three field supervisors.

Kandahar Nursing School

In order to improve the quality of Kandahar nursing school for female and male students, WHO contributed one laboratory set and forty-one pieces of equipment.

Four-year nursing schools were present in major cities before 1978 in Afghanistan, but the schools closed during the conflict. However, under the initiative of WHO with local health authorities, the female nursing schools opened in Herat in 1998 and in Kandahar in August 2000. Now there are 110 students (55 female and 55 male) in Kandahar with 30 teachers in first and second classes. In the Herat nursing school, there are 106 female students who are being taught by 28 teachers in four classes. Sixteen female students graduated from the Herat nursing school in 2001. WHO supported the Kandahar and Herat nursing schools with a wide range supplies. WFP

under the food-for-institutions initiative, supports the schools' teachers and students.

WHO Conducts Training

In Mazar-i-Sharif, WHO conducted a one-week training course on the expansion of direct observance treatment strategy (DOTS) for TB control for all officers from district health facilities from Balkh, Jawzjan, Faryab, Samangan and Saripul Provinces. In two separate courses, WHO trained twenty and ten traditional birth attendants (TBAs) in Aqcha and Khwaja Doko districts respectively. In another course, WHO trained ten village health volunteers (VHVs) in Qarqin region of Jawzjan Province. The participants were jointly selected by WHO, MoPH and district administrators.

Malaria Outbreak

WHO will conduct a survey for combating malaria in Maiwand, Garmsir and Qalat Districts of Kandahar Province. A mission has met health authorities, representatives from MCI, ADHS, Ibsina, and HNI, who agreed support the situation analysis survey. WHO trained six supervisors and the training for twenty-four surveyors is ongoing. Female and male surveyors will be involved to complete the survey within twenty days. WHO is providing all of the operational costs.

The SCA Trains Traditional Birth Attendants

The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) has given a three week course to twenty-one traditional birth attendants

(TBA) at the SCA clinic in Mohammad Agha, in Logar Province. The course ended on September 5.

and Gozara Districts including IDP camps of Herat Province received training.

Screening of Afghans Continues

The joint UNHCR and government of Pakistan screening teams at the makeshift Jalo-zai site and Nasir Bagh refugee camp in north-west Pakistan in the last week have interviewed more than 4,500 Afghans seeking protection in Pakistan. The screening programme will determine the refugee status of thousands of Afghans who have fled to Pakistan in recent months to escape war and drought in their homeland.

The joint teams have developed a good working relationship and the decisions made are of a quality comparable to the standards of countries that have had a long experience of refugee status determination. Afghans who are screened-in will be granted temporary legal status to reside in Pakistan. Those whose cases are rejected have the right of appeal, but once a final decision is made, they would have to return home.

Demining Activities

Manual teams of the regional mine action programme cleared over 31,000 square metres in Badghis and Herat provinces of Afghanistan, while mine dog groups cleared over 15,000 square metres in Badghis and in Herat Province.

Regular and volunteer mine awareness teams carried out awareness activities in the region. Over 2,000 people including females and males in various villages of Enjil