

TIL UM : S.3, S.6, SIS.3, SIF.4
FRA AMB. I ISLAMABAD
UDEN SKR. DEN 10-8-00

17.Dan. 1-56-1

Afghanistan (1)

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UNITED



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21/8-00

Assistance for Afghanistan

WEEKLY UPDATE

Issue No.374

9 August 2000

The UN Secretary-General Concerned about ban on Women Employment

Further to a range of talks between the UN and local authorities in Afghanistan, the Secretary-General is deeply concerned over the humanitarian impact of the edict issued by the Taliban that prohibits Afghan women from working with foreign agencies and NGOs, with the exception of the health sector. As a result, the UN had no choice but to caution all Afghan women directly employed by the organization and its programmes to stay home until further notice, for their own protection.

The Secretary-General notes that these restrictions come at a time when the country is facing a severe drought and an unprecedented food deficit, and are expected to impact negatively on the aid community's ability to provide urgently required humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable, particularly women and children.

In Kabul alone, an estimated one quarter of the population of nearly two million are dependent on aid for survival.

Aid workers killed in Badghis

Seven mine action workers were killed and one injured when their two vehicles were ambushed in the vicinity of Sabzak Pass, in Badghis province on 5 August 2000. As they were returning from carrying out community mine awareness education, the vehicles were

fired upon, then set alight by the assailants, whose identity and motives remain unknown.

The UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan, Erick de Mul, expressed grief and shock at the deaths of the seven, who were part of the UNOCHA Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan, and strongly condemned this act of senseless violence.

The deceased, originating from Nangarhar and Logar Provinces, were later evacuated from Herat by a special UN flight to Jalalabad. There over 2,000 mourners, including senior officials from the UNOCHA Mine Action Programme and other aid workers, took part in a convoy over two kilometres long, culminating in a commemoration service to honour the dead.

The United Nations has suspended operations in the Badghis area, as a mark of respect and mourning of the late workers, and is conducting an inquiry into the incident.

The Office of the UN Co-ordinator for Afghanistan, and its Mine Action Programme will observe the date of 10 August, as a mark of respect and mourning for the tragic departure of the late workers, in Islamabad.

Health

World Breast-feeding Week (WBW)

In a WBW ceremony inaugurated by UNICEF in Kabul from 1 to 7 August 2000, the agency was requested to assist MoPH in converting all maternity and child health

facilities to Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI).

Last week a task force comprising of MoPH/MCH, SCA, HNI, AMI, Serve, IIRO, WHO and UNICEF was established in Jalalabad. The Task Force will develop advocacy materials, provide training on breastfeeding, and mobilise communities.

Further health training will be conducted in Laghman, Kunar, Ghanikhel and Jalalabad.

Disease Outbreak

A rapidly spreading outbreak of severe diarrhoeal disease has been reported from Shumalzai District of Zabul province. Last week an MoPH medical mobile team dashed to the area for assessment and further investigation. UNICEF provided, ORS sachets and antibiotics to MoPH in the district to control the outbreak.

A joint MoPH, WHO and MSF mission visited Gulran and Ghoryan districts of

Herat province to follow up the last suspected case of Viral Hemorrhagic Fever (VHF) outbreak.

Following a reported outbreak of diarrhea (10 suspected cases and 2 deaths) in Sozma Qala area of Saripul Province, WHO with the collaboration of MoPH sent a medical team to assess the situation. They also received a report of six deaths in the Chemtal District, Mazar-I-sharif due to diarrhea.

Training

A number of training workshops to outline a microplan of fall NIDs (October-November 2000) for EPI field workers were conducted by WHO in Faizabad, Jalalabad, Kunar, Herat and Mazar provinces last week.

Water and Sanitation

With the technical and financial support of UNICEF, over 20 wells were excavated and eight handpumps installed by the implementing partners/NGOs in Kandahar, Zabul and Laghman provinces

The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) has started its water projects in eight provinces in eastern and south-eastern areas of Afghanistan.

Education

UNICEF assisted Rural Rehabilitation Development (RRD) in conducting training for 90 home-school teachers in Surkhrud District, Nangrahar province.

According to the UNICEF-supported Sandy Gall Afghanistan Appeal (SGAA) 1,570 patients were seen in Physiotherapy Department in Jalalabad last week. SGAA distributed 73 wheelchairs, 104 trolleys, 76 standing frames, and 26 crutches amongst the disabled in the area.

Afghan Amputee Rehabilitation and Recreation (AABRAR) reported that 20 boys received bicycle training last month. Currently, 7 disabled women are receiving skills, literacy and health education training. AABRAR is also supported by UNICEF.

Agriculture

FAO monitored potato and rice research trials and poultry farms in Nangrahar, Kabul, Mazar-I-Sharif and Wardak provinces. Two research stations have been selected in Kabul and Logar provinces of local potato variety testing.

Bean research trials and small seed multiplication plots of FAO research farms in Baghlan and Mazar-I-Sharif provinces were weeded and irrigated last week.

FAO distributed various poultry medicines, vaccines and urea in a number of districts in Kandahar. Fodder choppers were provided to farmers in Surkhrud and Chaparhar districts of Nangrahar province.

Mine Action

Approximately 350,000 sqm of high priority road area was surveyed and marked for clearance in Qalat and Maruf districts of Zabul and Kandahar provinces last week.

A total of 297,000 sqm of high priority grazing area was cleared by manual teams and Mine Dog Groups (MDGs) in Kandahar and Zabul provinces last week.

Over 20,000 individuals will benefit from the cleaned area in Maruf District. Some 2,000 people received direct mine awareness training in Zabul, Kandahar and Kochies of Uruzgan province.

Repatriation

Under the Joint Programme, UNHCR assisted the voluntary repatriation from Iran with three convoys of about 1,500 Afghan returnees per week, arriving at the border in Islam-Qala on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. The total number of UNHCR assisted returnees since the beginning of the programme in early April stands at 64,008 people, mainly as members of families. The number of male Afghans returning without family-members has decreased compared to the first months of the programme.

Due to an acute financial crisis of UNHCR worldwide, the cash-component of the standard repatriation grant for returnees from Iran had to be reduced from initially US\$40 per returnee (of which 50% were paid in Afghanistan) to US\$20 per returnee. A continuation of UNHCR's financial and cash-flow crisis might further damage the

Joint Programme and jeopardise its achievements both with regard to voluntary repatriation as well as to protection of Afghans wishing to remain in Iran.

In cooperation with WFP Herat, UNHCR distributed 91 MT of wheat to 372 families who had returned from Iran to Farah in 1999 and early 2000. These families had, returning via Milak-Zaranj, not received the wheat portion of the repatriation-grant.

Voluntary repatriation from Pakistan continued at an expected pace with 214 families who returned and received their standard repatriation-grant in Kandahar and Helmand.

A total of 154 families voluntarily repatriated with UNHCR assistance from NWFP to areas in the Eastern and Central region of Afghanistan.

