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AFGHANISTAN

**AFGHANISTAN—Health sector calls for greater access to those most in need of health care**

**18 August 2010 | Kabul, Afghanistan** – To mark the significance of World Humanitarian Day, the health sector in Afghanistan has appealed for improved access by and to Afghans most in need of health care.

“We, the health community, are helping people where we can reach them. Which also means that if we can't reach the people, we can't help them,” says Peter Graaff, WHO Representative to Afghanistan. “Despite challenges of widespread insecurity, health workers have taken an oath on the holy Koran and risk their own lives to provide health care to every man, woman and child in Afghanistan.”

Access to and restoration of health services is critical at the outset of a crisis to prevent avoidable death and illness. The first few days and weeks after a disaster hits are the most crucial in preventing the outbreak of epidemic diseases caused often by the collapse of the local water supply and pollution of water sources.

“Afghanistan is prone to natural disasters, especially earthquakes, drought, floods and the resulting disease outbreaks,” says Luiza Galer, Health Cluster Coordinator for Afghanistan. “The Health Cluster in Afghanistan appeals to those in control and responsible for giving access to respect international humanitarian principles and allow access to the vulnerable people in need of life-saving health care.”

Afghanistan is home to one of the world's most serious humanitarian crises, where infants, children aged under five years and mothers are more at risk of dying than almost anywhere else in the world.

There is a clear link between the intensification of Afghanistan's conflict and the worsening health situation. Decreasing accessibility to basic healthcare, especially for women and children, has led to an increase in easily preventable diseases like acute respiratory infections and life-threatening diarrheal diseases. This is also making polio eradication difficult, and preventing qualified staff, especially women, from working in remote and rural areas of the country.

Currently, more than 6 million people are in need of relief aid for health care services, the majority of whom are women. Out of these, more than 4 million people have no access to even basic health services, which makes up 15% of Afghanistan's total population.

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