Health Action in Crises (WHO/HAC)
Highlights - Monday, 22 March 2004

Sudan and Chad

**Event:** The UN Humanitarian Coordinator defines Darfur as the "world's greatest humanitarian and human rights catastrophe". A recent inter-agency assessment in the Darfur evidenced ongoing displacement, looting, rape, and destruction of villages, thus underlining protection of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees as the primary concern in humanitarian assistance. Attacks against humanitarian convoys have also been reported. In this environment, the basic needs of the affected populations remain unmet. Meanwhile, in Eastern Chad, UNHCR is relocating Sudanese refugees away from the border areas.

**WHO actions:**
- WHO/EMRO has deployed two Emergency Humanitarian Action Focal Points to Khartoum and recruited two Public Health Emergency Coordinators to assist in the response to the Darfur crisis.
- Reports from Darfur confirm the need for general supplies and medicines, and surgical care to war injuries. In response, WHO is delivering five emergency health kits (each meeting the needs of 10,000 people for three months) and five trauma kits (A and B, each containing medicines, supplies and surgical equipment for 100 surgeries). Financial support to federal and state authorities is being considered, in order to improve referral facilities with national staff.
- Recent WHO/ICRC meetings in Khartoum and Geneva have focused on increased collaboration for Darfur; negotiations are underway with UNICEF in Geneva to augment collaboration in Khartoum.
- With assistance from WHO/AFRO and Geneva, WHO/Chad is preparing to extend its technical presence and strengthen health coordination for the refugee crisis in eastern Chad.

Haiti

**Event:** Josette Bijoux, a former WHO staff member, has been named Minister of Health and Population in the new government, and is tasked with restoring and rebuilding the country's health services, which—according to AMRO/PAHO's rapid health assessment—are severely deteriorated. Twenty-two out of 30 health facilities in the Port-au-Prince area are de-capacitated. The provision of health care is disrupted by lack of security for both care providers and users. Stocks of drugs are depleted and re-supply is difficult due to insufficient fuel for transport and security concerns. Control of HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis has been interrupted. In many areas, looting and vandalism have dilapidated the cold chain and vaccine stocks are lost due to shortage of gas for refrigeration. Damages to the main water pipe in Port-au-Prince have severely affected the provision of drinking water, with potential health consequences.

**AMRO/PAHO actions:** The health component of the multi-disciplinary UN Assessment Mission set forth the following actions to prevent catastrophic ill-health in Haiti in the next six months and help re-establish governance and stability:
Re-activate essential health services in all key facilities;
Increase confidence in the health system (by improving security in health facilities, e.g. insisting for a ban on weapons in hospitals, and through an awareness campaign on available services);
Restore main water systems;
Restore life-saving public health programmes.

Currently, PAHO has 70 people in Haiti who are working with numerous partners at institutional and grass-root levels to restore a functioning health system for the country. The joint PAHO/WHO and UNICEF contribution to the Security Council briefing on Haiti 23 March stresses the primary importance of Haitian people having proper access to essential health care - and urges that this be a high priority in the peacekeeping plans now being developed.

Iraq
Event: On 19 March, the Secretary-General agreed to send a UN team led by Special Adviser Lakhdar Brahimi to support the formation of the post-30 June government and the preparations for the February 2005 elections. The measles immunization campaign-targeting six million children aged 6-12-which started on 13 March in the centre/south governorates, will commence on 24 March in the northern governorates.

WHO actions:
- Through its national staff, WHO continues to contribute to the measles immunization campaign in the country through technical advice, transport, coordination with the Iraqi Red Crescent (in charge of supervising the campaign) and public information messages.
- WR/Iraq and her team met in Amman on 17/18 March with the head of the MOH Department for Drugs and Medical Supplies (Kimadia) and CPA officials. With the end of Operation Lifeline nearing (end of March), WHO, CPA and the MOH are now discussing WHO's support in the reform of the pharmaceutical sector, training activities on rational use of drugs and warehouse management, physical rehabilitation of warehouses and provision of communication facilities, etc.
- The DG Representative for Health Action in Crises met on 16-19 March in Washington with officials from USAID, the World Bank, the departments of Defence, Health and Human Services, and others to discuss the health situation in Iraq and WHO's involvement after the 30 June transition of power.

Madagascar
Event: Cyclone Gafilo has affected an estimated 773,000 people, as well as destroyed or damaged 200 health centres. The Government estimates that the total economic impact of the cyclone is more than US$250 million (source: OCHA).

WHO actions: WHO has participated in the preparation and launch (19 March) of a UN flash appeal for US$8.9 million to address the requirements of the most affected population for the next three months. The health emergency projects submitted by WHO --amount to US$371,200--include the provision of essential drugs for 200 health centres and 10 district hospitals. UNICEF is
appealing for US$1.7 million to cover water and sanitation requirements, the nutritional needs of children and to provide shelter, blankets and educational supplies.

**Serbia and Montenegro**

**Event:** Thirty-one people were killed and more than 500 injured on 17 March, as the UN-administered Serbian province of Kosovo was swept by violence between ethnic Albanians and Serbs (source: AFP). Over 3,200 people are newly displaced as a result of the clashes.

**WHO actions:** WHO has provided coordination, technical assistance, and emergency medical supplies. On 20 March, WHO Acting Head of Office in Pristina convened a meeting-in which participated the MOH, ICRC, UNMIK, and K-FOR-on health response co-ordination issues. WHO has also arranged for the translation (into both Serbian and Albanian) of the Rapid Health Assessment Form, for use in all IDP settlements.

**Palestine**

**Event:** Strikes and movement restrictions throughout the occupied Palestinian territory have affected international personnel on 22 March but movement now possible in West Bank.

**WHO actions:** DGR/HAC plans to review WHO's activities in relation to the health of Palestinian people in the oPt April 4th - 5th.

**Inter-Agency Initiatives**

- WHO/EIP participated in a 18/19 March technical review meeting in Rome (hosted by FAO) on information management coordination.
- Preparations are underway for the 25 March meeting of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on gender and humanitarian action. The meeting will focus on mainstreaming gender in the Consolidated Appeals Process and the 2004 ECOSOC Humanitarian Report. The Task Force, co-chaired by WHO, is also developing a toolkit on Gender-Based Violence in humanitarian crises.
- The theme of World Water Day 2004 (22 March) was "Water and Disasters". WMO and UN-ISDR spearheaded celebrations, and--through PHE and HAC--WHO contributed through the issuance of a guide on health issues in water-related disasters; a special inter-agency Health in Emergencies newsletter on the theme; and a fact sheet on the role of WHO in health aspects of water emergencies.

**Inter-Departmental Initiatives**

- HAC and GAR are carrying out a lessons learnt exercise on the response to the yellow fever outbreak in Liberia.
- In collaboration with EMRO/EHA, the Geneva-based Inter-cluster working group on preparedness and response to natural occurrence, accidental release or deliberate use of biological and chemical agents or radionuclear materials that affect health (ICWG) is assisting the Government of Jordan in an assessment of intersectoral preparedness.

**Performance Enhancement: Strategy, Plans and Process**
An initiative to enhance WHO's performance in supporting countries and communities as they prepare for and respond to the health aspects of crisis, and support the repair and recovery of public health and health systems after crises, has been developed jointly by WHO regional teams and a planning group in HQ (together with external partners) as a sequel to the Health Action in Crisis strategy that was developed in January 2004. The programme document describing this initiative is now available and includes some early proposals for performance benchmarks together with milestones, activities and budget needs. The emphasis is on improved performance at country level in areas where WHO is needed and has a distinct comparative advantage. The analytical work to develop the programme has formed the basis of the WHO Programme Budget 06 - 07 submission for area of work 26 (Emergency Preparedness and Response). It is intended that it will be the subject of focused discussions between RDG, HAC and ADGs, Directors, Focal Points in WHO Geneva, and potential partners, during the next two weeks.

WHO is working with partners to address the health aspects of crises in more than 40 countries. Check the Health Action in Crises Web site for more details: http://www.who.int/disasters/