

Adequate humanitarian response in North Kivu

Kinshasa / Goma, 31 October, 2007 – North Kivu: Almost 176,000 people have been forced to flee their homes since September when fighting resumed between government troops and those loyal to dissident General Laurent Nkunda. The humanitarian contingency plan for the province, last updated in August this year, is based on the calculation that there could be 320,000 newly displaced people before the end of 2007. However, current figures of displaced already amount to half this number.

Mr. Andrew Wyllie, the acting Head of Office for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), stressed that “through collaborative efforts and careful planning of emergency assistance, the humanitarian community in North Kivu managed to anticipate the recent massive population movements.” For example, since the end of August the main emergency response tool, the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM), stocked up on no less than 40,000 non-food item (NFI) kits to cover the potential needs of 200,000 beneficiaries. The majority of these kits have now been distributed and additional NFI kits to cover the needs of 380,000 people are currently being brought to the province. From January to June the World Food Programme (WFP) had to increase food distributions from a monthly average of 163 metric tonnes for 16,000 beneficiaries to 2,200 metric tonnes for 122,000 beneficiaries. Today, WFP is again trying to increase amounts delivered to Goma to ensure food distribution for 500,000 people. UNICEF and the World Health Organisation (WHO) have contributed 120 essential medicines kits and WHO has also made available a cholera kit and a surgical kit. In addition, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the protection cluster assisted MONUC in identifying areas where additional measures to protect civilians were necessary.

Several organisations, including UNICEF, UNHCR, OXFAM-GB, MERLIN, IRC and MSF have reinforced their emergency response capacity by mobilizing new personnel. On the funding side, donors have contributed approximately 40 million dollars to the humanitarian response in North Kivu through various funding channels. OCHA opened two humanitarian antenna offices, one in Minova on 20 September and another in Kitchanga on 17 October, to help strengthen response coordination and provide support for humanitarian actors on the ground. A third antenna office is scheduled to open in Masisi on 6 November.

As long as the crisis remains at the current level of intensity and there is not a marked increase in the rate of displacement, the humanitarian community has the capacity to respond to the needs of affected populations. However, the humanitarians are increasingly concerned about the potential consequences of an all out military assault on the armed groups in the province. “We are currently reassessing our planning figures, our available materials and human resources. A rapid deterioration of the situation could easily overwhelm our existing capacities and make the current humanitarian crisis very difficult to manage,” explained Mr. Wyllie.

But despite consistent planning, careful reassessments, the increase in stocks and supplies, and the reinforcement of emergency teams, if large scale military operations were to take place, a significant part of the civilian population of the province would find itself out of reach for the humanitarian assistance. In fact, humanitarian organisations already run into regular difficulties when trying to deliver relief assistance. Access to vulnerable populations in North Kivu is often hampered by ongoing combat and the insecure environment. OCHA wishes to remind all parties to the conflict that it is imperative that relief organisations and humanitarian personnel are given access to populations in need. Mr. Wyllie concluded by stating that “we count on Congolese authorities and armed groups to facilitate humanitarian access to all vulnerable populations.”

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