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Office of the Resident Coordinator Madagascar

Humanitarian Situation in Madagascar 9 March 2009

CONTEXT

The crisis that started in January continues to affect Madagascar. Ministry of Health data indicate that a total of 172 people have died and over 835 have been injured since the unrest began on 26 January 2009. Protests in Antananarivo continued. On 19 February the opposition attempted a march towards the ministries to install the “High Transitional Authority”. Demonstrators occupied the interior, security, education, and planning ministries for a few hours, which were retaken the same night by the security forces. Some fifty opposition members were arrested in the operation. The army vowed to defend the constitutional order.

On 21 February, thanks to the efforts of the Association of Christian Churches of Madagascar (FFKM), the President and the Mayor finally met and committed themselves to ending the violence, demonstrations, and provocations. Several more meetings brokered by the FFKM followed, seemingly bringing the two parties closer to an agreement. The dialogue broke off on 25 February after the President, citing security reasons, had taken a decision to travel to the provinces and missed the fourth round of meetings. In an effort to revamp the dialogue, the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs returned to Madagascar on 26 February to support the FFKM mediation. Furthermore, the UN Secretary General also nominated a Senior Political Adviser for Madagascar, a former Foreign Minister of Mali, on 4 March.

Following the first round of meetings between the President and the opposition leader, in the capital, demonstrations were put on hold, but re-started on 26 February. Several reports of clashes between demonstrators and the army, with ensuing use of teargas, rubber bullets, and firearms to disperse protestors started to be an almost a daily occurrence since 27 February. Opportunistic looting episodes ensued on several occasions. Even though negotiations continue, the security forces were deployed in the 13 May Square, the site of regular anti-government demonstrations, to prevent the opposition from holding further meetings. This resulted in a scattering of protests in several areas of Antananarivo, and – in some cases – panic among the population. Once again, violence broke out on some occasions, and teargas and live bullets were fired. Reportedly, protestors entered some schools and harassed children and teachers, in an attempt to convince them to join the movement.

Starting the last week of February, elsewhere in the regions of Madagascar, protests took place almost on a daily basis. Strikes and demonstrations were reported in the regions of Haute Matsiatra, Atsinanana, Diana, Vatovavy Fitovinany, Anosy, Sava, and Atsimo Andrefana. The town of Tamatave and Fenerive-Est witnessed protests and stand-offs between the security forces and the opposition in the week of 16 February. On 25 February, violent protests and looting broke out in Tulear, resulting in arrests and looting of foreign-owned stores. On 27 February, in the town of Fianarantsoa, the region of Haute Matsiatra, the security forces opened fire at the pro-Mayor supporters. Four people were reportedly killed and dozens wounded. Tensions continue to be high in Tulear, Ambositra and Manakara.

A curfew continues to be in place in the region of Analamanga (the capital), between 22:00hrs and 04:00hrs. Other regions and towns also maintain a curfew, which changes depending on the intensity of demonstrations and insecurity. In the area close to the university in Antananarivo demonstrators decided to apply a stricter curfew, between 19:00hrs and 04:00hrs.

Markets both in the capital and in the province are functioning, although in some instances shops were closed when demonstrations occurred because of security concerns. Various media sources highlight socio-economic challenges facing Madagascar in 2009, drawing attention to the rising numbers of children and adults begging on the streets, as well as the increase of the homeless in large cities. Since 26 January 2009 thousands of jobs have been lost, many of which in shops, which were pillaged during the unrests. The airports and ports are operational. Air Madagascar has been on strike for two weeks, and domestic flights are cancelled daily. The tourism sector is also being affected. The jobs of some 25,000 people working in the sector (worth USD 390 million in 2008) are at risk, according to analysis.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION AND UN AND PARTNERS RESPONSE

UN and partners continue to closely monitor the situation and responding to needs. Several initiatives to step up surveillance are ongoing in different sectors, with the collaboration of all stakeholders. Preliminary results are expected to be available between the middle and the end of March. It is understood, however, that the effects of the crisis are mostly felt in urban areas, whilst rural areas seem – at least for now – largely untouched by the current events. The impact of the crisis has further reduced access to food and basic services for the most vulnerable and the coping mechanisms of large portions of the population, already affected by the economic slowdown are being put under further strain.

Despite high tensions and demonstrations, most shops continue to be open in Antananarivo and operate in most of the other large cities. Public offices are open, although calls for strike make their services unpredictable, and civil servants work only a few hours a day. Progress on longer term plans are on stand-by and concern exist on capacity to mobilize resources and spending as disbursement of funds is managed at the central level. However, implementation of programmes continues and stakeholders increased efforts to respond to urgent needs.

In the drought-affected south, as of October 2008, the Early Warning System (SAP) indicated that some 11 communes were food insecure. The number is now revised upwards to 31 affected. Late rains are expected to delay the harvest, now expected to be in June rather than April. In these areas, BNGRC reports indicate that most of the population has limited access to food and that admission rates of malnourished children to health centres (CSB) in Androy and Anosy regions has tripled in February compared to January. Hygiene conditions and access to water in the areas are also a matter of concern. Partners are responding to the needs.

In January 2009, the cyclones Eric and Fanele affected a total 58,493 people in Sofia, Menabe and Atsino Andrefana regions leaving 12 deaths, 33 wounded and 4,012 homeless. At present, some 1,395 people are still present in temporary shelters. Assistance to affected population is ongoing.

HEALTH – Surveillance in the 13 existing sentinel sites is being stepped up, and partnership with the Ministry of Health and the Institut Pasteur for a closer monitoring of communicable diseases is being strengthened.

Basic health care centres continue to operate, and there are indications that the population now is more inclined to use public rather than private clinics. Access to maternity healthcare services continues to be a matter of concern due to curfew and the location of some centres close to hotspots. Only a few ambulances are available in the capital, and referral services are not free.

Hospitals have been able – with the support of partners – to cope with the number of casualties. Concerns exists, however, as resources are limited. ICRC, MDM and the Malagasy Red Cross continue to provide support to health structures. UNICEF has provided a tent for the triage of casualties resulting from clashes to the main hospital in Antananarivo. WHO provided MoH with safe blood transfusion products and emergency drugs kits and the cluster is looking into the possibility of creating a small emergency stock of drugs. A Memorandum of Understanding with the MoH is being prepared for reimbursement of stocks repositioned by SUCA (Service des Urgences et des Catastrophes, the MoH emergencies and Disaster Service) to guarantee no-cost healthcare for the wounded resulting from the unrest.

WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA are at different stages of reprogramming of operations and internal funding to respond to the crisis. Prepositioning of drugs for cholera response (100,000 persons) is available in the country. Security of premises and transport, and clearance of cargo for new supplies, however, could become an issue should unrest continue.

NUTRITION AND FOOD SECURITY – Prices of rice and other basic foodstuff have slightly declined since the end of January, but are still more expensive than before the crisis. Under CARE leadership, food security partners in Antananarivo are stepping up surveillance through existing programs, and are planning to expand the number of beneficiaries of food distribution interventions. In some instances, partners have been subject to pressure to distribute food in areas other than the planned ones.

A nutrition survey in the 5 main cities of Madagascar carried out at the end of 2008 has found that 4 of them show global malnutrition levels of 5-10 percent. The situation is likely to worsen should the crisis continue. UNICEF and ONN (Office National de Nutrition) have established 15 sentinel sites, 3 in each of the 5 towns where the nutritional surveys were conducted to monitor the nutritional situation.

WFP and partners are already intensifying Food for Work (FFW), school feeding and blanket feeding activities in the drought-affected south. The National nutrition agency (ONN) is stepping up nutritional activities to respond to the deteriorating nutritional situation. In collaboration with ONN and MoH, UNICEF is to support 98 health centres (CSB) where severe malnutrition cases are treated in Tolagnaro, Amboasary, Ambovombe, Tsihombe and Beloha districts. A SMART nutritional survey will be taking place in March. MoH, ONN and UNICEF organized nutrition training for 125 health staff in these five districts. WFP, in partnership with UNFPA and ADRA stepped up food security interventions, and WFP is carrying out blanket feeding for children under the age of two and pregnant and lactating women in Ambovombe district. CARE nutritional, food security and agriculture projects are ongoing and the organization is seeking funds to step up activities.

In the cyclone-affected areas, WFP, in partnership with CRS, has completed a general food distribution for 13,145 affected people in the Menabe region. BNGRC, ONN, and Malagasy Red Cross have distributed food in Belo-Sur-Mer.

AGRICULTURE – Farmers are in the middle of the second main harvesting season. Climatic conditions are congenial to rice production. Because of the urban character of the crisis, the agricultural sector, with the exceptions of the southern regions, has not yet been adversely impacted. CARE seeds distribution targeted 1075 people (255 households) in Belo-sur-Mer.

WATER AND SANITATION – Following the riots, the WASH cluster immediately reinforced surveillance mechanisms in three major urban centres (Antananarivo, Tamatave and Tuléar) to check on water, garbage and soap availability at fokontany level. In Antananarivo, disruptions are communicated to the authorities for immediate response.

In the last two weeks, cluster partners started increasing the number of water points in poorly serviced areas of the capital. Although technical services at municipal level continue to work, the administrative process and sensitisation and soap distribution campaigns are delayed or suspended. Cluster meetings continue to take place bi-weekly, and the Ministry of Water did not suffer any major disruption in service provision. Municipal cleaning services in the capital are slowly resuming services.

In the South, access to potable water is poor. Water collected from rivers is sold at high prices and some vulnerable groups started using sea water for cooking. Diarrhoea cases are increasing since the middle of February. Two UNICEF's evaluation teams (WATSAN and Health) are currently in the region to assess the situation and prepare a response plan.

EDUCATION – In collaboration with the protection cluster, a survey is being organized to assess the impact of the unrest on the education sector in the capital, including information on attendance and drop-out levels. Schools in the capital remained closed between 26 and 30 January following the unrest. It is estimated that around 270,000 students missed out on schooling. The situation in other locations varies, but in general most schools remained open since the beginning of the crisis. Presence of students and teachers varied in different parts of the country. Families fearing for the security of their kids refrain from sending them to school or to child-friendly spaces. There are reports of threats made against schools that remain open during the crisis. No major damages to infrastructures have been reported.

Whilst schools remained open in the capital in February, services were again disrupted at the beginning of March, when protests intensified. Poor attendance and further disruptions in the sector are likely to increase the risk of repetition and drop-out rates. The Ministry of Education (MoE) is currently distributing rice to some schools in the capital to ensure functioning of school canteens to encourage attendance.

Following cyclones Eric and Fanele, emergency materials (school-in-a-box, recreation kits, tents, tarpaulins, etc.) have been provided by UNICEF and partners to ensure the continuation of classes in damaged schools.

PROTECTION – Since the end of January, an increased number of missing persons have been reported. This includes reports of some 29 missing children. Capacities to respond to this problem are limited and tracing is a major issue as authorities work at reduced speed. UNICEF training for social workers to be involved in the exercise is ongoing, and ICRC has deployed an expert to assess the situation, and step up response.

ICRC is assessing the situation in prisons, and has well-established mechanisms to respond. Concerns exist as, should the situation deteriorate, the already limited access to health and food for prisoners may worsen.

Children have been involved in demonstrations, and in some cases have been directly affected by the violence, especially in Antananarivo. There is a need to provide psychosocial support to children in various ways affected by the crisis and the national competencies for family tracing and reunification need to be strengthened. The education cluster is teaming up with the protection actors in order to use teachers to identify cases of children affected by the situation. A three-day training (12-14 February) on child rights and basic protection principles was provided to 80 members of the social workers professional association of Antananarivo. UNICEF facilitated a training session of partners on family tracing and reunification on 20 February.

LOGISTICS AND COMMUNICATION – Security of cargo during discharge operations, transport to warehouses, storage, and transport to a final destination are of concern. Small thefts occurred at one WFP warehouse and four schools where WFP school feeding activities are taking place since the start of the crisis. These incidents could be replicated if instability continues and food prices increase further. UN agencies are reinforcing security at warehouses.

COORDINATION – The Humanitarian Country Team is planning to set up a «Humanitarian Situation Room» to improve data collection, processing and dissemination, and to address the need of inter cluster analysis and coordination improvement. The virtual situation room is operating, ensuring the flow of information and updates on the situation in the country.

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