The Special Humanitarian Envoy for the UN Secretary General, Mr. Abdul Aziz Arrukban, went on mission to Gaza on 27-28 February. During this visit he spoke at length with ordinary residents of Gaza about their most urgent humanitarian needs which resulted from the recent fighting. He also met with aid agency officials to discuss improvements in bringing in relief supplies and particularly about the urgent need for the border crossings into Gaza being opened. Mr. Arrukban has urged for a continued focus on the humanitarian needs in Gaza.

On 23 February, Qatar announced a donation of US$40 million to the United Nations for its humanitarian programmes worldwide. Thirty million dollars was pledged for emergency operations in Gaza while US$10 million will go through the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), making Qatar the ninth-largest contributor to the Fund for 2009.

“This is a generous and much appreciated contribution from Qatar, to the CERF as well as for the UN’s critical humanitarian work in Gaza,” said United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, John Holmes. “The US$10 million donation to the CERF is especially significant, as it allows the United Nations to allocate the funds based on need to other parts of the world that are often overlooked. I hope that other potential donors will follow suit, as humanitarian needs will only grow in 2009, considering the combined threats posed by intensified conflicts, climate change, the global food crisis and the global economic slowdown.”

Of the US$30 million that will go towards meeting the critical needs of Gazans affected by the recent military operation, US$10 million has been allocated to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for life-saving activities, and US$10 million will be contributed to the World Food Programme’s emergency food assistance for more than 1 million Gazans. US$5 million has been allocated for humanitarian programmes of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and US$2.25 million for the Food and Agriculture Organisation’s activities in support of the damaged agricultural sector. The remaining US$2.75 million will go to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for coordination and advocacy activities.

On 28 February, the Abu Dhabi National Energy Company announced a donation of US$ 150,000 to the CERF.

Regional Drought

Several countries across the region have been hit by drought this year, including Syria, Jordan, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. The Director of the Jordan Meteorological Department, Mr. Abdul Halim Abu Hazim, said at the beginning of March that rainfall...
so far in 2009 has been far less than predicted. He noted that the coldest period of winter, during which the Kingdom usually receives 25-35 per cent of its annual rainfall, ended without bringing sufficient rain. In Syria this month, the Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) reported that two years of drought have severely limited cereal production, pushing up food prices and putting pressure on basic food supplies. Rainfall data in March and crops assessments planned by the Syrian Authorities for April, will inform whether the drought in the north-east portion of the country is entering its fourth year, with the 2007/2008 agricultural season labelled as severe drought. A Flash Appeal to alleviate the drought in Syria was launched in September 2008 and remains only 20 per cent funded as of March 2009.

The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) reported on 10 February that the shortfall of rain for this year is also compounding the water shortage situation in the West Bank. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture, in some governorates the level of rainfall is less than half of the previous winter, and is significantly below the historical average. FAO highlighted the likely impacts on the farming community, including a decreased pumping capacity for wells, insufficient water reserves for people to survive the summer, and damage to rain-fed crops such as olives (for the full report, please visit www.fao.org). OCHA, FAO and UNICEF have compiled a Drought Response Strategy, a framework for the preparation and response to the West Bank Drought that targets an estimated 250,000-500,000 people. The emergency response will aim to improve the water harvesting infrastructure, distribute food, seeds and fodder, and implement water trucking when no other water sources are available.

**United Arab Emirates**

» On 23-24 February, UN OCHA and IRIN, in partnership with the Dubai Press Club and sponsored by the International Humanitarian City (IHC), held a two-day training programme on ‘International Humanitarian Law’ for journalists reporting on conflicts. This was the third in a series of humanitarian reporting workshops that have been held in partnership between UN OCHA, IRIN, IHC and the Dubai Press Club. Explaining the rationale for holding this workshop, the head of UN OCHA's regional office, Mr. Abdul Haq Amiri, said, "We decided to hold a training on this topic to help journalists report on conflicts in a more accurate manner. After all, conflict is a daily reality in many parts of this region, and it is up to all of us to monitor whether the rights of civilians are being respected. We hope that, after today, the media will be confident in their use of legal terminology while supporting the interests and well-being of civilian populations". A similar workshop on humanitarian reporting will take place in Riyadh from 8-9 March, opened in Riyadh by HRH Prince Faisal bin Salman.

**Qatar**

» The Humanitarian Forum - a network of key humanitarian and charitable organisations from Muslim donor and recipient countries, the West, and the multilateral system - held a meeting on 1 February in Doha, Qatar, to ensure that aid earmarked for Gaza is effective and reaches the most vulnerable population.

Qatar Charity hosted the event, which was attended by representatives of the Qatar Red Crescent, Humanitarian Forum Kuwait, Islamic Relief, Oxfam, Mercy Corps, Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation, International Committee of the Red Cross and Turkey's Foundation for Human Rights, Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief, and UN OCHA. For more information see: www.humanitarianforum.org

**Iran**

» On 28 January 2009, a meeting was held on the “Defence of Gazan Women & Children, Humanitarian Assistance to Gaza and the Modalities for Implementing Conventions and Protocols on Human Rights”, between the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought and the UN in Iran. Participants, who included representatives of INGOs, NGOs and governmental organizations, raised their
Concerns about humanitarian issues in Gaza. The Head of OCHA Iran briefed on humanitarian activities of different UN agencies in Gaza and statements made by the Secretary General, Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Head of UNRWA in this regard.

Kyrgyzstan

The revised Kyrgyzstan Flash Appeal’s new financial requirements have been reduced by US$ 5.9 million in comparison to its original requirements of US$ 20.6 million. The main adjustments were made in the health and water and sanitation sectors. The revised Appeal seeks US$ 14.7 million to help eight UN agencies and three NGOs in order to support the Government in addressing the basic humanitarian needs of about two million persons affected by the winter conditions, energy crisis and food insecurity, including 800,000 of the most vulnerable people in the country.

Yemen

High prices last year aggravated food insecurity among poor households, which were already suffering moderate to severe food insecurity, according to a recent report by FAO. A joint FAO and WFP Emergency Operation was approved in January 2009 to assist more than 500,000 Yemenis. The 12-month operation will target food-insecure Yemenis in 8 governorates, including pregnant and lactating mothers as well as children under five. Yemen imports more than 80 percent of its food supplies, only producing between 15 and 20 percent of its food requirements.

Morocco

According to the Ministry of Interior, 24 people have been killed and hundreds left homeless in February as a result of flooding caused by heavy rains in northern and central Morocco. More than 4,500 people have been evacuated from their homes. The worst hit regions included Sidi Slimane, 100 kilometres north of the capital Rabat. Flooding continued on 9 February near the Mediterranean port of Saidia, where emergency workers were erecting dykes and digging canals in attempts to channel floodwater towards the sea. Rains have also inundated nearly 60,000 hectares of farmland in western Morocco. Several ministers and senior army officials visited disaster areas on 8 February to supervise emergency efforts.

Regional

An annual meeting of Regional Directors of WHO/EMRO and UNICEF/MENARO in partnership with FAO, UNAIDS, UNESCO, UNFPA and WFP was held in WHO office in Cairo on 15 February 2009. The Head and Deputy Head of ROMENACA attended the meeting. The agenda included a review of last year’s recommendations, a report on progress on MDGs, a session on emergencies and humanitarian space, youth and adolescents, and regional health security.

Upcoming Events

3-4 March: Arab Conference for the humanitarian organizations at the League of Arab States, Doha, Qatar
5 March: Conference on International Humanitarian Law in the context of Gaza, Kuwait
8-9 March: Humanitarian Reporting Workshop, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
20 March - 1 April: UNDAC Induction Course, Muscat, Oman

For more information, please contact:
Nadia Evans, OCHA Dubai, 00971 50 2279808, evans2@un.org

Useful Links

www.reliefweb.org
www.humaniitarianappeal.net
www.ochaopt.org
www.ochairaq.org
www.irinnews.org
http://cerf.un.org
www.unhcr.org
www.wfp.org

An FAO report said Yemen was among 20 countries with 80 percent of the world’s stunted pre-schoolers. (Photo: IRIN / Muhammed al-Jabri)