

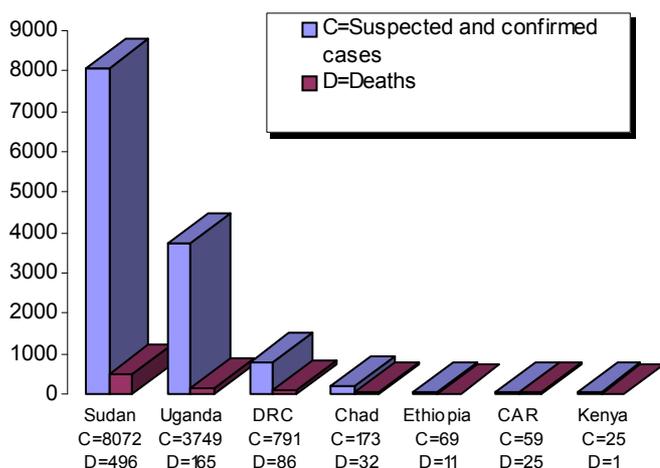
NEWSMAKER

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS

In this issue: ►Meningitis epidemic across Africa ►Will the vulnerable populations in the Horn of Africa be facing floods once again? ►Lack of funds may force WFP to stop feeding refugees and pastoralists in Djibouti ►Uganda's Karamoja region in humanitarian crisis ►LRA and Government of Uganda peace talks announced to restart 13 April ►International envoys in search for peace in Darfur ►Follow-up to these developments and more regional humanitarian information: <http://ochaonline.un.org/rocea> ►To use links in this PDF document: Select Text and copy search string into browser.

783 deaths confirmed in CEA region:

MENINGITIS EPIDEMIC HITS CENTRAL AND EAST AFRICA



Data available as of end March 2007. Main source: World Health Organization

The Meningitis epidemic that began earlier this year in West Africa is now taking its toll in the Central and East Africa region (excl. Chad) with a total of 783 deaths and 12,765 confirmed or suspected cases by the end of March in Kenya, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Uganda, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, and North and South Sudan.

Governments, UN agencies and NGOs are responding to the outbreak that occurs in the so-called Meningitis Belt stretching from Senegal in West Africa to Ethiopia in the East. In West Africa (incl. Chad), nine countries have already been affected by the highly contagious disease. 8,557 cases and 798 deaths have been reported across the West African region, according to information released by OCHA West Africa in March.

In the Central and East Africa region, Sudan is by far the most affected area with 8,072 cases and 496 deaths as of 18 March 2007.

The total population in the Meningitis Belt is some 300 million. The disease is spread by close human contact, coughing,

sneezing, living in closed quarters and sharing for instance cooking utensils. Outbreaks are worst during dry seasons because the dust and cold irritates the respiratory system making it vulnerable to infection.

Vaccination campaigns are currently being conducted in countries such as Uganda, DRC, and Sudan in response to the epidemic. Previous campaigns across the Meningitis Belt may no longer be effective as the vaccine against Meningitis - a recurrent or cyclical disease - is only effective for three years.

A WHO expert points out that there are gaps in the response mainly due to lack of effective surveillance and early detection systems, and due to shortages of health workers in many countries. There is also a shortage of funds to buy and stockpile the antibiotic oily chloramphenicol which is recommended by WHO for treatment of Meningitis in Africa. Access to vaccines may also be problematic as well as obtaining confirmation of the disease through sampling.

Track the Meningitis epidemic: www.who.int/csr/don/en

Somalia crisis deepens:

96,000 HAVE FLED MOGADISHU

96,000 people have left Mogadishu since February - 47,000 of them during the last ten days of March - according to the UN refugee agency UNHCR.

This is in addition to an existing estimated country-wide caseload of 400,000 long-term displaced, reports OCHA Somalia. It represents the fifth major wave of displacement in the last year, as people have fled conflict, drought and flooding. An influx of IDPs into any location places additional strain on the already scarce resources of local communities, increasing the vulnerability of all concerned.

The Somali population including IDPs, urban poor and agro-pastoralists is extremely vulnerable due to a combination of chronic food insecurity, continuing high malnutrition rates, the presence of Acute Watery Diarrhea (AWD) and ongoing conflict mainly in Mogadishu.

Humanitarian access to vulnerable populations in South and Central Somalia - especially new IDP populations on the outskirts of Mogadishu and in neighbouring Lower Shabelle - is minimal or non-existent due to insecurity.

Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia:

ANALYSTS WARN OF RENEWED FLOODING

The Horn of Africa region may once again face heavy, steady rains and possible flooding from April to June, the Food Security Analysis Unit (FSAU) warns in recent forecasts. (FSAU/FEWSNET, March 16, 2007. www.fsausomali.org)

Rainfall above normal may affect areas still in recovery after the severe flooding in the region in late 2006 that affected some 1.5 million people in Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia and led to an upsurge in flood-related diseases such as Rift Valley Fever, Malaria, and Cholera that affected humans as well as livestock.

The prolonged rains from October through December 2006 left soils especially in low-lying areas water logged and more heavy rain would lead to further flooding and destruction of roads and infrastructure vital for delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Heavy rains are expected to hit coastal parts of Kenya in April and May, according to IGAD* Climate Prediction and Application Centre (ICPAC) and the Kenyan Meteorological department.

The rest of the country, however, is expected to receive normal rainfall apart from the arid or semi-arid North Eastern districts which may expect poor and delayed rainfalls. The situation is likely to aggravate the food insecurity in this drought affected region.

For Somalia, weather forecasts predict near normal rainfall during the *Gu* season (mid-April to mid-June) but a high probability of above normal rain in the upper catchments of the Ethiopian highlands.

Heavy rains in Ethiopia could cause flooding in downstream riverine areas of southern Somalia, where most river banks that were damaged in the floods of late 2006 remain open.

Flooding could also worsen the outbreak of Acute Watery Diarrhoea (AWD) - as of 17 March, the AWD caseload in South/Central Somalia stood at 7,976, with 341 deaths – and may render roads impassable and damage airstrips which would make it increasingly difficult to access people in need of assistance.

Humanitarian access to vulnerable populations in South/Central Somalia is already minimal or non-existent due to insecurity. Key airstrips remain closed while overland transport is extremely dangerous due to ambushes, land mines and the presence of militia.

For Ethiopia, the head of the early warning department at the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau (DPPB) in the eastern Somali region warns of possible flooding of the Wabe-Shebelle and Weyib rivers as rains intensify in April and May.

An overflow of the Wabe-Shebelle, Weyib and Fafen rivers in October last year killed 80 people and affected another 362,000, including 122,500 who were displaced from their homes.

Awareness campaigns targeting the riverine communities and assessment missions by the Ethiopian government and humanitarian agencies are on-going in the area.

Previous coverage of flooding and other crises in the region:

www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/STED-6XKP99?OpenDocument&rc=1&emid=FL-2006-000169-SOM

**Inter-Governmental Authority on Development*

Djibouti relief operation running out of funds:

WFP MAY BE FORCED TO CUT FOOD AID TO REFUGEES AND PASTORALISTS

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) is preparing to stop food aid to 47,000 drought-affected pastoralists and 6000 relief-dependent refugees in Djibouti in April and May due to a funding shortfall of USD 6 million.

The global acute malnutrition rate is already 20.7 per cent among children under five years of age, according to a survey conducted in Djibouti in Summer 2006 by the Ministry of Health. The World Health Organization (WHO) classifies levels above 15 per cent as 'critical' constituting an emergency. The even more alarming acute severe malnutrition level stands at 7.5 per cent in Djibouti and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET) warns that thousands of households will be running short of food in the coming months.

Cutting off food aid will inevitably cause malnutrition levels among children and refugees to rise sharply, warns WFP.

Overall WFP needs USD 6 million for operations until December 2007, and USD 1 million immediately to avoid stopping the distributions just before the start of the dry season, when many families face the most severe food shortage, among them Somali refugees and pastoralist families.

Over the past five years, a series of droughts have hit Djibouti. The most severe was in early 2006, when rains failed completely, and pastoralist families lost many or all of their animals.

Djibouti is classified as both a least developed country and a low-income, food-deficit country.

WFP press release: www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/EVOD-6ZPE6V?OpenDocument

Illegal arms, ambushes and cattle-rustling across borders:

SECURITY AT A LOW POINT IN UGANDA'S KARAMOJA REGION

Human suffering is increasing and humanitarian space is shrinking due to insecurity in the troubled Karamoja region in northeastern Uganda, according to humanitarian workers.

Ingredients in the humanitarian scenario include the proliferation and easy availability of small arms, cattle-rustling, politicized ethnic conflicts, the continued forced disarmament exercise by the Ugandan military, poor economic conditions and generalized food insecurity. As an example, aid workers and local officials indicate that half a million people are food insecure due to drought that occurs every two years.

Ambushes on civilian vehicles, attacks on civilians and cattle-rustling by the Karimojong warriors continue. Cattle raids have also been reported in the neighbouring Teso and Acholi regions of Uganda and across the border in the Turkana district of Kenya.

The easy access to weapons is a result of the illegal arms trade in the region fuelled by conflicts in northern Uganda, southern Sudan and Somalia. In 2005, the governments of Kenya and Uganda agreed to undertake a simultaneous disarmament exercise in both the Karamoja region and neighbouring Turkana districts of northwestern Kenya.

But so far the exercise has not been undertaken simultaneously across regional borders and the Karimojong have accused the Ugandan government of taking away their guns, leaving them defenseless against armed communities from Kenya and Sudan who raid their kraals and steal their cattle.

Reports of gross human rights abuses perpetrated by the

UPDF and criminal activity by the Karimojong warriors have triggered a reaction from the population and humanitarian organizations raising concern that the disarmament exercise is provoking more, not less, insecurity in the region.

In November 2006, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour accused the Ugandan military of "indiscriminate and excessive" force during the cordon and search operations and has since called for the suspension of the programme. However, the military maintain that the program has been a success, saying that it has recovered 4,500 guns between January and October 2006.

The violence has also resulted in an increased influx of Karimojong into the capital Kampala. Humanitarian agencies and the Government have worked to resettle the Karimojong, but limited land availability has posed a problem for resettlement of populations.

WFP is providing drought relief assistance to 500,000 people in Karamoja. This is planned to continue until June 2007 at a cost of over USD 10 million.

Ugandan Government to meet rebel army in Juba:

LRA PEACE TALKS TO RESTART 13 APRIL

The stalled peace talks between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) are expected to resume on 13 April in the Sudanese city of Juba, the Chief Government negotiator Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda has announced.

Observers warn that if these talks fail once again, it could lead to renewed violence and massive displacement.

Joaquim Chissano, the United Nations special envoy to the LRA-affected areas, has expressed optimism that the talks can be successfully restarted. At the same time, a cessation-of-hostilities monitoring team is being set up under the African Union to oversee the assembling of the LRA fighters at two sites near the Sudan-Dem. Rep. of Congo border.

Progress towards a political solution to the conflict has been slow so far, but the talks have led to improved security and increased access to the internal displacement camps in Northern Uganda. At the beginning of the negotiations in July 2006, over 1.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) were living in camps and an estimated 1.3 million persons remain there today. 300,000 IDPs have returned to their homes.

The IDP populations in many camps have no proper access to water and sanitation, and education has been disrupted; according to the Office of the Prime Minister in September 2006, 70 per cent of the IDPs have not completed their primary education.

Those who have returned home or moved to new resettlement sites have no schools for their children and limited military protection from LRA attacks. In some facilities a single hand-pump cater for 2000 people while generally used humanitarian standards call for one hand-pump per 500 people.

Humanitarian interventions in the IDP camps in northern Uganda were funded with USD 119 million from the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) in 2006, and projects outside the CAP received USD 38 million in funding, totaling USD 157 million.

In a related development, the mandate of the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) established by the Government of Uganda in May 2006 to improve its humanitarian response in northern Uganda has been extended to June 2007 when the Government is also expected to launch its National Plan for Recovery, Development and Peace.

Additional reading: ►►

The internally displaced in northern Uganda:

www.internal-displacement.org

OXFAM "Between Hope and Fear in Northern Uganda: Challenges on the Ground and an Urgent Need for Peace":

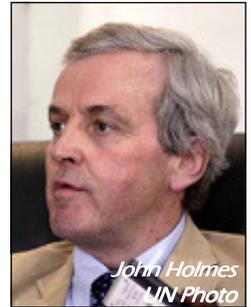
www.oxfamamerica.org/newsandpublications/publications/research_reports/between-hope-and-fear-in-northern-uganda

Current international engagement in Darfur:

A HUMANITARIAN CHIEF AND FOUR ENVOYS IN SEARCH FOR PEACE, HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Momentum towards an end to the humanitarian crisis in Darfur seems to have been gained during March with efforts by several international envoys and top-level diplomats travelling in the troubled region of Sudan/Darfur, Chad and the Central African Republic.

United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes visited the three countries advocating for humanitarian access and an end to violence, while the United Nations Special Envoy for Darfur, Jan Eliasson, travelled with his African Union (AU) counterpart Salim Ahmed Salim to Sudan and Eritrea to address the political processes underlying the humanitarian crisis.



A main focus for the joint UN and AU envoys' mission was to engage not only political actors, but also civil society and for instance tribal leaders in the troubled region.

Both John Holmes and Jan Eliasson are expected to report back to the UN Security Council and the UN Secretary-General respectively in April.

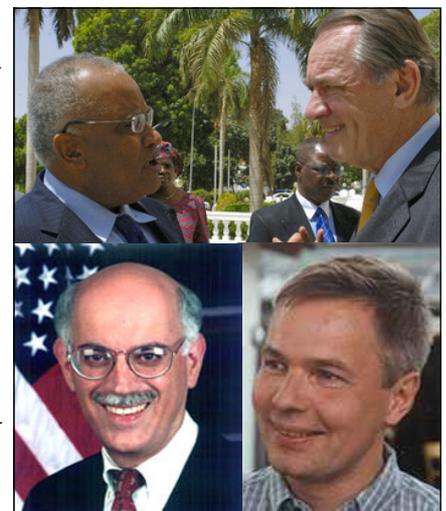
Several bilateral and multilateral envoys are currently engaged in the Darfur process:

Appointed in December 2006, Jan Eliasson's assignment includes reenergizing the international political process and helping to raise funds for the AU force in Darfur (AMIS).

Appointed in September 2006, Andrew S. Natsios is the President of the United States' Special Envoy for Sudan whose mandate includes facilitating the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the Darfur Peace Agreement.

The European Union (EU) Special representative to Sudan from July 2005, Pekka Haavisto, visited Sudan in January this year and said that he considered that 'the political track is moving again'. His mandate includes to work in support of the AU and the UN to achieve a political settlement of the conflict in Darfur.

In May 2005 the Chairperson of the African Union Commission announced the appointment of



Sudan/Darfur Envoys clockwise from top left: Salim Ahmed Salim (AU), Jan Eliasson (UN), Pekka Haavisto (EU), Andrew S. Natsios (US). Photos: UN, EU, US gov't.

Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim as the AU Special Envoy for the Inter-Sudanese Political Talks on Darfur. His role is to facilitate and provide additional momentum through a sustained negotiating process.

Latest development: Joint communique between the Government of Sudan and the United Nations on facilitation of humanitarian activities in Darfur:

<http://ochaonline2.un.org/LinkClick.aspx?link=ocha&docid=1008914>

SELECTED READING

ENOUGH campaign to end genocide and mass atrocities in Darfur, northern Uganda and eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo issues monthly reports to galvanize public and political leaders to confront mass violence against civilians: www.enoughproject.org.

Uganda - Conflict Action Network (CAN) explores in a new blog series "What's at State in the Juba Peace Talks?" www.ugandacan.org/peacetalks.php

183,400 vulnerable people in Eastern Equatoria state will require 10,780 metric tons of food aid assistance during 2007, according to WFP. <http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp117038.pdf>

APRIL 2007 CALENDAR

- April 3 The International Contact Group on Somalia to meet in Cairo. The group consists of the European Union, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Tanzania, the United Kingdom and the United States.
- April 4 International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action. NGO International Campaign to Ban Landmines www.icbl.org
- April 7 World Health Day: International health security. www.who.int/world-health-day/2007/en/index.html
- April 10 International forum on indigenous peoples of the forests of central Africa, Brazzaville (to April 15) www.ipcaucus.net/
- April 13 Tentative date for resuming talks between the Government of Uganda and Lord's Resistance Army
- April 15 Mandate of U.N. peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo due to expire

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Disclaimer: The information in this document is consolidated from reports and field information from a variety of sources including OCHA field staff, United Nations agencies, humanitarian partners, NGOs, news agencies, and others. The articles provided are subject to availability of data and do not claim to be exhaustive or fully verified. The Humanitarian Newsmaker is intended to bring to the attention of media and humanitarian partners newsworthy humanitarian developments in the Central and East African region in order to contribute to the fulfillment of OCHA's mandate. Articles do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.

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