Violence against protesters continued in Syria in June with continued military operations in areas bordering Lebanon and Turkey resulting in further displacement and reports of human rights violations. Humanitarian agencies continued to voice increasing concern for the situation inside the country and requested immediate access to independently assess affected areas.

On 21 June, the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Jakob Kellenberger, obtained a verbal commitment to enhanced access during talks with Syrian Prime Minister Adel Safar and Foreign Minister Walid Muallem in Damascus.

On 20 June, President Assad delivered his third speech since the beginning of the uprising. The President emphasized his commitment to reform without providing a clear timeline, and noted that reform was not possible amidst chaos. Clashes between pro and anti-government protesters followed the speech and reportedly left several dead.

The international community continued applying pressure, most notably the US and Turkey, for President Assad to commit to a timeline for reform following the President’s third speech.

Displacement of Syrians across the border to Hatay province in Turkey peaked at on 24 June to 11,739 but returns to Syria were increasing slight towards the end of the months.
Yemen: Power Cuts and Fuel Shortages affect Public Services

The situation in Yemen continues to deteriorate as a result of conflict and political unrest. Power outages and a shortage of fuel have now begun to adversely impact public services such as healthcare and water provision. Meanwhile, the price of certain commodities continues to increase.

Water prices have soared three to seven times depending on the district/governorate because approximately 50 per cent of water is pumped by fuel-driven generators. Some healthcare facilities have been forced to shut down or reduce functionality due to lack of electricity or sufficient fuel for their generators.

In Haradh District in Hajjah Governorate in the north, which hosts several camps for internally displaced persons, fuel shortages have become dire. Water and sanitation activities and healthcare facilities are negatively affected as both rely on fuel to function.

The increase in food prices adds pressure on an already food insecure country. Yemen has excessively high malnutrition rates with half of its children malnourished and the increase in food price could exacerbate the problem.

The political and security context in Yemen continued to deteriorate in June. Demonstrations for and against President Saleh continued across various governorates and there were reports of sporadic clashes between armed tribesmen and security forces. The ongoing conflict in Zinjibar in the southern Abyan governorate between security forces and alleged Jihadist militants has resulted in the displacement of an estimated 45,000 persons. In the capital Sana’a, a tenuous ceasefire agreement holds between government security forces and Sheikh Al-Ahmer’s tribal militia after clashes which displaced approximately 2,020 persons.

Updated SPHERE Handbook published in Arabic

An Arabic version of the 2011 Sphere Handbook - which sets out best practices in the delivery of humanitarian aid - was launched in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE) on 23 June.

Speaking at the launch, Sultan Al Shamsi, executive director of the UAE Office for the Coordination of Foreign Aid, said it was important for Arab donor organizations to apply agreed minimum standards in their relief operations. “[Arab] aid workers need to be aware of the mechanisms to deliver aid and to be accountable according to these internationally accepted standards,” he said.

The Humanitarian Charter, which describes core principles that should govern humanitarian action, is the foundation of the handbook. The core principles include avoiding exposing vulnerable people to further harm as a result of response, ensuring their access to impartial aid, protecting them from physical and psychological harm due to violence or coercion and assisting them to claim their rights and recover from abuse.

The new Sphere Handbook is also available in Russian, Spanish, French and German.

www.irinnews.org

Advancing Disaster Risk Reduction and Urban Strategy in the Gulf

More than 25 representatives of ministries for municipality affairs, disaster management authorities and other representatives of cities in the Gulf region were introduced to disaster risk reduction and urban strategy at a workshop 14-16 June in Kuwait.

Participants familiarized themselves with global and regional frameworks and policies - including the Hyogo Framework for Action, the international road map to reduce disaster risk and loss - tools for identifying and assessing risk and vulnerabilities, and methodologies for integrating disaster risk reduction and preparedness in urban strategies.

The event was organized by the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), UNHABITAT and UNDP Kuwait in collaboration with the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative (CADRI) and the International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP). The aim was to enhance awareness and knowledge of stakeholders on disaster risk reduction trends and policies in the context of urban planning recognizing the increasing risks and challenges posed by climate change to cities in the Gulf region.

Rapid urbanization in coastal towns such as Kuwait City has led to rising vulnerability and increased risks from climate change. Kuwait. Photo: Icarus Juwait
The Arab region has many of the world's oldest inhabited cities, traditionally founded along coastlines and in densely populated areas. The rapid urbanization in the Arab region is driven by population growth, rural-urban migration and the search for economic opportunities - however, this growth in urban population is challenged by inadequate resources, rising vulnerability and increased risk from climate change. So far, there has been limited capacity and resources allocated for integration of risk reduction into urban planning.

UNISDR: www.unisdr.org
ISOCARP: www.isocarp.org
CADRI: www.cadri.net

WHO recommends improved Crisis Preparedness in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's health system lacks resources and human capacity to manage a large scale health crisis, a new disaster preparedness assessment report from the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe concludes.

The report, which is not yet published, evaluates the arrangements in place to deal with various crises, examines the initiatives taken to prevent and mitigate risk, and provides recommendations on strengthening the overall preparedness capacity of the health system.

The report acknowledges that after gaining independence in December 1991, Kazakhstan significantly reshaped the health system and included emergency preparedness and risk reduction. It concludes that the country can cope with small and medium size health emergencies.

However, the overall level of crisis preparedness needs to be strengthened and the Ministry of Health should proactively address gaps in crisis management and human resources, the report says. As a first step, WHO recommends a comprehensive audit of the capacities of health personnel working in the area of health crisis preparedness and response.

In addition, hospital's resilience to disasters and their safety must be a top priority. The WHO Regional Office is thus planning a Hospital Safety Initiative workshop at the end of July, followed by further hazard assessments of selected hospitals.

The assessment was carried out within the framework of the Biennial Collaborative Agreement for 2010-2011 between the WHO Regional Office and the Government of Kazakhstan. WHO is assisting Kazakhstan in establishing a disaster preparedness and response programme for the national health sector.

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