Kenya: Promoting preparedness before the elections

Kenya goes to the polls in March, and humanitarian agencies are gearing up to avoid any repetition of the violence that followed the previous elections in 2007/2008. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Eastern Africa is coordinating the humanitarian elements of a contingency plan led by Kenya’s National Disaster Operations Centre.

“The old wisdom is to hope for the best but plan for the worst,” explains Modibo Toure, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Kenya. “This does not mean that we expect things to go wrong,” he adds.

The aim is to make sure that humanitarian agencies and partners are

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

What’s Inside:

- Kenya: Promoting preparedness before the elections
- ‘Eminent Persons’ team to lobby for peaceful elections and women’s equal participation
- Training Kenyan journalists on election reporting
- “Never Again!”
- International Volunteer Day celebrations held in four towns in Kenya
- Joy Maina is UN Volunteer of the Year 2012
- FAO commits to support the management and control of aflatoxin in maize
- Kenya launches AIDS Epidemic Update Report

Elections Corner

“Kenya’s elections will be watched closely around the world. Let me take this opportunity to appeal to all Kenyans to exercise their democratic right and participate actively – but peacefully – in the elections. Let me also underscore the responsibility shared by leaders at all levels to abide by legal mechanisms and to send a clear message to supporters that violence of any kind would be unacceptable.”

United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman

Upcoming Events

- 8 March: International Women’s Day
- 21-27 March: Week of Solidarity with the Peoples Struggling against Racism and Racial Discrimination
- 21 March: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- 22 March: World Water Day
- 23 March: World Meteorological Day
- 24 March: World TB Day
- 25 March: International Day of Solidarity with Detained and Missing Staff Members
- 25 March: International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade
as well-prepared as possible to manage the effects of any violence.

The plan has been finalized, eight humanitarian hubs have been established across the country and assessment trainings have been conducted with partners countrywide. At a simulation exercise held in December in Nairobi, participants worked on the three coordination mechanisms of contingency planning, humanitarian hubs and training for the Kenya Initial Rapid Assessment (KIRA) process.

OCHA Eastern Africa helped to start the process of contingency planning in April 2012 at local and national levels. Discussions have been held in numerous locations across Kenya to provide analysis and identify capacity at the field level. Response plans have been developed that will help to provide food, shelter, basic household items, nutritional support and protection, in the event that people are forced from their homes.

The humanitarian hubs will be run by agencies which already maintain a strong presence in these areas. They will provide support for coordination and act as points of information collection, analysis, dissemination and reporting. They will also be points of convergence where organizations can position staff and resources, and they will provide additional capacity to support Government and first-line response organizations.

“The hubs are mobilizing national and local capacities and every step of the exercise has been undertaken in support of the wider Government preparedness plan,” explains Gabriella Waijman, Officer in Charge of OCHA Eastern Africa.

More than 120 people have been trained in the KIRA process in four of the eight hub locations- Isiolo, Nairobi, Mombasa and Eldoret - under the contingency plan for the pre-election and election period. KIRA is a comprehensive assessment process that includes multiple agencies working in different areas of humanitarian assistance.

OCHA Eastern Africa organized these training exercises and co-facilitated them with Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) and UNICEF. Those trained include representatives of the Government of Kenya, the Kenya Red Cross Society, UN agencies and NGOs. The training exercises reviewed the assessment methodology and included WFP-led simulations in which participants had to prepare the outcomes of mock assessments. Further training is planned for partners working in the Nakuru, Kisumu, Garissa and Nairobi hub coverage areas in February 2013. It is hoped that over 200 people will benefit.

These activities complement efforts by the Government, civil society groups, NGOs, UN agencies and other partners across Kenya, to mitigate potential violence, through peace-building activities, conflict resolution, constant surveillance and analysis.

‘Eminent Persons’ team to lobby for peaceful elections and women’s equal participation

UN Women and UNDP, in collaboration with the Women’s National Steering Committee (W-NSC) established a Team of Eminent Persons early this year to advocate for peaceful general elections and equal participation of women as envisioned in the Constitution of Kenya.

The team of respected Kenyan men and women representing various sectors of the economy is continuing to dialogue with key Government ministries, commissions such as the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), Commission for the Implementation of the Constitution (CIC), the Police service, main political parties and coalitions, as well as other stakeholders to ensure that Kenya will enjoy fair and credible elections and that women’s participation is upheld as per the letter and spirit of the Constitution.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3
Thirty journalists from North-Eastern and Eastern Kenya were trained on elections reporting in a two-day workshop, which took place on 25 and 28 January 2013 in Machakos County, Kenya. The training, done in co-operation with UNESCO, addressed issues relating to professionalism and the code of ethics for the practice of journalism in the country.

The training in Machakos County was a hands-on practical exercise for journalists on how to deal with hate speech and inflammatory remarks, and also on how to host talk shows in a conflict-sensitive manner during the upcoming election scheduled for 4 March 2013. The workshop was aimed to equip presenters with the skills necessary to inform and educate the public about hate speech, and to limit the transmission of hate speech without limiting freedom of expression.

The training also addressed the issue of how ordinary people across the country can reach politicians and public officials through various platforms such as radio, television, social media and mobile phones in the lead-up to the 2013 elections.

The workshop was a follow up to the capacity-building activity that took place in Nakuru last October. The Nakuru training highlighted a number of issues affecting journalists, such as: non-conformity to the journalistic code of...
The 7th International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust was observed at the UN Headquarters in Nairobi on 25 January 2013. The theme for this year was “Rescue during the Holocaust: the Courage to Care” honoring those who risked their lives to save Jews and others from near death under the Nazi regime.

Three hundred guests comprising of university students, and Middle School Model United Nations (MSMUN) delegates who were on session at the complex attended the solemn function. Other guests included Permanent Representatives from various embassies, Kenyan Government officials, NGOs and UN staff members.

Among the participants was young Katie Gilmer an MSMUN delegate from Rosslyn Academy in Nairobi. In her remarks, Katie emphasized: “Let us agree together that we will not follow this course of devaluation of our fellow humans. In fact, let’s commit to helping guide our friends and families into the path of truth and peace. Let us remind each other that EVERY man, woman and child is of infinite worth.....We can be an example to the world by treating people with decency and respect, honouring one another above ourselves.”

By so doing, we can keep the holocaust memory as a valuable warning and move forward to a future full of respect, love, peace and harmony.”

The Kenya Government was represented by the Director of the European and Commonwealth Directorate, Ambassador Lazarus Amayo who assured the guests on the commitment of the Government to guarantee national security and uphold basic human rights and fundamental freedoms as enshrined in the constitution. “These rights are intended to protect our citizens from all forms of prejudice and discrimination.”

Ambassador Gil Haskel of the Embassy of the State of Israel urged Kenyan citizens to remember the past while building the future and use the lessons of the holocaust to ensure that similar atrocities are never repeated.

In a message presented by the Executive Director of UN-Habitat, Joan Clos, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reminded “each and every individual to be inspired by those who had the courage to care, the ordinary people who took extraordinary steps to defend human dignity”.

The UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa cooperates with the Media Council of Kenya to highlight the crucial role of the media in the democratic process of a country.
The Nairobi Hebrew Congregation emphasized that for the holocaust education to have any meaning the mechanisms that allowed the holocaust to take place must be fully understood. “Holocaust studies, libraries and museums must be part of all students education”.

The climax of the ceremony was marked with a minute of silence, candle lighting and screening of a 20-minute film entitled “The last Koryac Boy”.

International Volunteer Day celebrations held in four towns in Kenya

Over 400 volunteers turned up at the main celebrations of International Volunteer Day (IVD) in Nairobi’s informal settlement of Korogocho. Held for the first time in the area, the Day was aimed at celebrating the impact that volunteers can and do have on a daily basis in the lives of communities.

The event kicked off at the local chief’s camp in Korogocho, aptly hosted by Chief Nyabuto, himself a former UN neighborhood volunteer. Present to preside over the opening of the event was UNV’s Manager for East Africa, Tapiwa Kamuruko, who presented the Secretary General’s statement for the Day, lauding the work of volunteers as well as urging greater community involvement.

The statement was followed by tree-planting in the Chief’s compound. Together with members of the community, mostly young people, the volunteers then went into the informal settlement area to clean up the streets and alleys, and to sensitize the community on fire safety and health matters.

The events were organized by the Volunteer Involving Organizations (VIO) Network in conjunction with UNV and other partners, including VSO Jitolee, Progressive Volunteers, Kenya Red Cross, St. John Ambulance, HOPE Worldwide Kenya among many others.

The IVD celebrations were also held in Kenya’s second-largest city, Mombasa, involving over 500 volunteers in a procession, clean-up exercise and theatrical activities. Supported by VSO Jitolee, this was the first time official celebrations were being held in the coastal city, and several partners worked with VIO to ensure the Day’s success.

IVD was also marked in upcountry towns of Nakuru and Kakamega, the latter also for the first time.

It is expected that the 2013 celebrations will cover even more parts of the country as more partners get involved in promoting volunteerism at county level.
Joy Maina is UN Volunteer of the Year 2012

Joy Maina has been named the inaugural winner of the UNV of the Year Award, chosen from among the 145 UN Volunteers currently serving in the country.

Joy, a UN Volunteer serving with UNHCR in the Dadaab refugee camp as an Eligibility Assistant, received the award at a colorful gala dinner on the last evening of the annual UNV Retreat in Nanyuki.

While presenting the award, UNDP Country Director Maria-Threase Keating and UNV Manager for East Africa Tapiwa Kamuruko lauded Joy’s volunteering ethos and contribution, urging fellow volunteers to emulate her.

Joy herself was exceptionally delighted and surprised by the award, pointing out how it was motivating to note that the work that volunteers do is recognized.

The overall award was Joy’s second of the night, having earlier been named one of the three outstanding UN Volunteers in UNHCR. The others were her fellow Dadaab colleague Ally Said and Kakuma-based Tomoko Yasunaga.

UNEP on its part named Bernard Muinde, Sarah Cheroben and Karishma Thethy their outstanding UN Volunteers, while UNDP picked Narok-based Peace Monitor Elly Maloba, Mary Alobei and Manaan Mumma as its agency winners.

At UN-Habitat Sarah Laisney, Lilia Blades and Eric Luguya emerged tops.

UNV Programme Officer Dmitry Frischin also awarded a prize to the UNV Field Unit team, applauding their work throughout the year.

The awards will be run every year and presented at the Annual UNV Retreat, with every agency hosting more than 10 UN volunteers eligible to award three outstanding volunteers. The overall winner will be picked from all the volunteers serving in the country.

FAO commits to support the management and control of aflatoxin in maize

FAO has signed a US$ 427,000 financing agreement with the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation. The two-year aflatoxin management project in the Maize Value Chain will be implemented by the Ministry of Public Health in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and other relevant institutions.

The project will empower the National Food Safety Coordinating Committee to contribute to the global efforts aimed at reducing the levels of contamination as well as the quantities of maize affected in order to improve health and income. This will be achieved through effective support to the National Food Safety Coordinating Committee, an inter-ministerial agency, to function and develop appropriate strategies to prevent aflatoxin contamination in the maize.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7
Kenya launches AIDS Epidemic Update Report

The highest HIV prevalence rate is among the richest people in Kenya. These alarming statistics were shared during the launch of the AIDS Epidemic Update 2012 report on 30 January 2013. The report indicated that HIV prevalence among the top wealthy in Kenya is 7.2% that is higher than the national average of 6.2%.

The Director of the National AIDS Control Council, Prof Alloys Orago speaking at the launch noted that this was the first ever comprehensive report that summarises progress achieved over the last decade. “The rate of new HIV infections has fallen by 40%” observed Prof. Orago.

Other notable achievements in the national AIDS response mentioned were that 69% of HIV positive pregnant women received medication that prevents transmission of HIV to their babies and 83% of adults who are eligible for medication for HIV have been put on the life saving antiretroviral treatment.

Despite the progress so far, Kenya’s struggle against HIV is far from over. The number of people living with HIV continues to increase with over 100,000 people getting newly infected with HIV annually. 1.1 million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS. This places a huge responsibility on the social structures to care for such orphans.

Perhaps the greatest concern is the huge financial gap in managing the response. 81% of the financial resources used for HIV management in the country is from external donors. These external resources are declining worldwide due to the continuing global financial and economic challenges. This affects current and future HIV programmes in the country.

Attaining and sustaining long term success in the AIDS response is crucial if Kenya is to achieve its Vision 2030. To guarantee this, AIDS must remain a top national priority. It is hoped that the readers of the report will be inspired and challenged to redouble their efforts towards the goals of zero new infections, zero AIDS related deaths and zero discrimination.

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This Newsletter is compiled by the UN Communications Group in Kenya (UNCG) designed and edited by the United Nations Information Centre, Nairobi.

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