

## **1: Niger**

(By Jan Jaap van Halem and Joanna Clark, OCHA)

Mr. Jan Jaap van Halem briefed on the situation in Niger in relation to the IRIN movie “The Hungry for Help – Food Crisis in Niger” (17 minutes) which was released in August 2005. He stressed the causes of food and nutrition crisis in Niger and mentioned that the famine was not the only consequence of drought and locusts. Economic issue is underpinning as well, even if production of cotton increases, its price on the world market will be more expensive than of the subsidized cotton from other parts of the world. The amount of land that has been cultivated and seeds that have been available for planting, remain still unclear. The Niger Government offered cereals at reduced prices to impoverished population, as they could not afford the subsidized price. As the situation worsened authorities tried to loan the grain to the population. After the harvest they might be forced to repay these possible loans at the rate of 300%, which might cause the social unrest. Mr. van Halem also mentioned that AERC was going to debrief the Member States on her mission to Niger next week in Geneva. In relation to this debriefing the possibility to organise the IASC TF on Niger was raised and it was recommended to OCHA hold as earlier agreed, the IASC TF on Niger and on the sub-region. .

The IRIN representative outlined that the field reports were consistently highlighting the ongoing crisis, but unfortunately international community could not respond to it adequately, as the international attention was diverted to Tsunami Relief. IRIN movie on Niger has been broadcasted by all major TV Channels. IRIN seeks the possibility to raise the funds for copying the movie and for its further release. The movie was based on interviews with humanitarian actors on the ground, looked at the current crisis and set out means for prevention disasters of this nature by the international community in the future.

The WHO film “Niger Food Security and Health” (5 minutes) was filmed by Marko Kokic with music by Ismael Lo (famous singer from Senegal). WHO pointed out some of the key problems facing the health system in Niger, including the need to set up a good surveillance system and the need to support in this regard the local governments. WHO tries to reinforce the existing system between the people and the government and to introduce various types of trainings in order to reduce the malnutrition. The vaccination campaign is ongoing for the prevention of several disease outbreaks. In relation to prevalence of cholera a meeting is planned to be organised by the OCHA office in West Africa. WHO is going to take this footage to HLWG and search for additional funding resources.

In relation to Niger Food crisis, UNICEF raised concerns on the existing sub-regional monitoring system and the lack of sufficient attention given to Niger by the humanitarian community in general. The need and vitality of NFIs in Health, Water & Sanitation and other sectors is emphasized, as the food aid does not remain the soul solution for the crisis. UNICEF and WFP raised concern on the Press Release recently issued by MSF. UNICEF stated that they would request a public apology from MSF with regard to their release or at least would expect to see the apology on MSF website since it provided factual mistakes. It was agreed that ICVA would pass this message to MSF as they were not present on the meeting. FAO stressed the need of longer-term approach in Niger and the importance of NFIs, protection, recovery programmes and sensitisation of international community. IFRC mentioned that they would try to be more proactive, to pull the existing resources together and address the ongoing issues. UNICEF once again raised the issue of lessons learned and transforming them into proper plan of action. ICVA raised their concerns on the process of HC appointment in Niger.

The chairperson of the meeting briefly summarised the minimum action points discussed during the meeting: 1) how to use the documentaries and the messages for the advocacy purposes 2) IASC TF on Niger to be scheduled for next week; 3) debriefing by AERC on her Mission to Niger to be organised; 4) link between Food and NFIs to be considered; 5) debate on MSF press release and asking the organization to be present during the next meeting on Niger so they can better understand each other concerns; 6) lessons learned to be taken into account and; 6) importance to look at the gap in the regional monitoring system and preparedness.

## **2: Partnership with Muslim NGOs**

(By Manisha Thomas, ICVA and Afia Blasco, OCHA)

On 29-30 June Islamic Relief organised a two-day conference in London on “Building Partnerships between Muslim NGOs and the International Community” where the proposal was made to establish a “Humanitarian Forum”. Within the forum the working groups were to address the following three key areas: 1) capacity building for NGOs on universal codes of behaviour and standards; 2) regulatory issues: examine national legislation and government policies that affect operations of national NGOs; 3) bridge building and partnerships: outreach and networking. The first day of the conference was closed with participation of OCHA, ICRC and the UK Foreign Office. The issues discussed included problems with financial accountability: transfer of funds, “black-list” of NGOs/Charities included on the US terrorist black list and the role/responsibilities of the media in projecting the Government’s messages. Mainly UK-based organisations were represented on the conference and only one non-Arab organization, i.e. Mercy Malaysia. The second day of the conference concentrated on the issues of NGO “black list”, safety, capacity building, governance of NGOs and in-depth proposal of Humanitarian Forum. The main objective was to formulate the key problems

faced by the Muslim charities/NGOs - to build the consensus and issues to be included in the discussion within the Humanitarian Forum. The Swiss Government offered to kindly sponsor the ongoing discussion on Humanitarian Forum in the future.

OCHA highlighted the need for training and the capacity building of NGOs. WFP also made a point on capacity building problem and proposed to reconsider the recommended establishment of an IASC Task Force to address this.

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