



Life-saving vaccinations for Zokoguhé's children

There is no doctor, nurse, pharmacy or health centre in Zokoguhé - Dideguhé, so when a vaccination team escorted by civilian police and peacekeepers of the UN Mission in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI) arrived there from the town of Daloa, village chief Jean Yah Kore willingly became village crier for a day.

He walked around Zokoguhé - Dideguhé shouting to all pregnant women and mothers with infants to go to the village's meeting area. "Come out, come out, they are here," he called out in Bete, the language of the area. "I want all the children in my village to be vaccinated," he later explained. "I don't want any of them to be sick."

Women and young children poured out of their homes in answer to his call. Clutching their medical cards and those of their children, they chatted excitedly as they formed a queue to meet Dr. Gaston Tra, Daloa District's health director and the man leading the vaccination campaign. "The aim of this campaign is to ensure that we vaccinate children who have not received their vaccination for one reason or another," Dr Tra explained. "A lot of people living in these areas do not have the means to take their children to Daloa and we have not been able to carry out this sort of campaign for about three years because of the war."

Zokoguhé - Dideguhé is located in western Cote d'Ivoire. It lies in the Zone of Confidence, the area patrolled by UN and French troops that separates the two sides in the Ivorian armed conflict, the Forces Armées Nationales de Côte d'Ivoire and the Forces Armées des Forces Nouvelles.

That day, some 150 children were taken by their parents to be vaccinated. However, Dr Tra said it was not always plain sailing. He recalled that in one village he and his team visited, people refused to have their children injected because the local priest had told them that was against God's wishes. The priest told Dr Tra that it was God who sent diseases, so it was he who would cure them.

A no-nonsense though softspoken man, Dr Tra said the priest only relented when he warned him he would be held responsible if any child died as a result of an illness that could have been prevented by vaccination.

The vaccination campaign, which aimed to treat some 1,500 to 2,000 children in the region, was launched after Dr Tra and his colleagues were approached by UNOCI civilian police (CIVPOLs) to whom residents of the Zone of Confidence had complained that many of their children had not been vaccinated. The CIVPOLs identified some 35 villages and settlements in the zone that needed to be visited by the vaccination team and agreed to facilitate the week-long campaign by providing transportation. Bangladeshi peacekeepers provided security.





Produced by the UNOCI Office for Public Information. July 2005.

UNOCI Photos/PIO, July 2005.

Disclaimer - This publication is for information only and is not an official document of the United Nations. The views expressed do not necessarily represent the views of the United Nations or the United Nations Mission in Cote d'Ivoire.