

### UN4U 2011: WAYS THE UN MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN OUR EVERYDAY LIFE

#### In Focus: Humanitarian Relief

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) brings together the right people and tools to help save lives. It assembles successful humanitarian action by partnering with national governments and local humanitarian organizations to lessen human suffering caused by disasters and emergencies. To reduce the impact of natural and man-made disasters, OCHA promotes preparedness and prevention techniques to avoid crises and facilitates sustainable solutions that are non-destructive and long-lasting.

Areas where OCHA assists include humanitarian access, displacement, food security, gender equality, humanitarian development, humanitarian engagement, needs assessment, working with governments, protection and transition from relief to development.

Climate change is requiring an increase in humanitarian action. Tens of millions of people across South and East Asia, Africa and Central America have been displaced from their homes because of natural disasters. As these disasters increase, OCHA is reevaluating its efforts to keep up with this demand. Joint planning exercises will be maintained with its over 350 aid agency partners to work on emergency preparedness and to improve relationships, with the goal of reducing risk.

Some of the countries where OCHA was involved recently with disaster response and emergency management include Haiti, Japan, Libya and the United States.

### Haiti

Haiti has received significant attention from OCHA. The January 2010 earthquake affected 3 million people out of a population of 10.1 million, including over 222,570 deaths and 300,572 injuries. More than 1.5 million people were displaced. Today 810,000 people are in 1,150 refugee camps and living in tent cities. Hundreds of humanitarian actors remain in Haiti. Over \$1 billion in aid has been received.

These funds have gone to education, nutrition, clean water, medical care, logistics, protection, shelter and sanitation. 80% of schools in the capital, Port-au-Prince, were destroyed or damaged. Relief aid has created 2,729 temporary learning spaces to replace these schools. In the weeks following the earthquake, 4.3 million people received food rations. 345,000 health kits with medicine, including antibiotics, vaccines, anaesthetics and analgesics, also have been distributed. Basic water and sanitation needs have been met for over 1.7 million people.

Alongside with OCHA, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) continues to provide instrumental services and assistance for the weakened Haitian Government. The country remains in a state of poverty and underdevelopment, with poor access to health care, education and sanitation services. OCHA maintains its work to further improve these areas, while transitioning control back to the Haitian government and creating response plans for possible future disasters. OCHA works to make countries minimally dependent on its services and enable governments to regain stability and control.

### Japan

The March tsunami and earthquake in Japan killed hundreds and countless more were injured. The United Nations family, via coordination from OCHA, provided aid in forms of food,

## Background Note

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clean water, blankets, fuel and medical items, as well as assisting in search-and-rescue missions.

The United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the global centre for cooperation in the nuclear field, conducted an environmental hazard analysis to address the nuclear crisis from the Fukushima Power Plant reactor meltdown. OCHA helped to revitalize the vital infrastructures, such as medical clinics, food and water distribution centres and schools, and transitioned control of the much need support back to Japan. Funds are still continuing to pour in to provide aid.

### Libya

OCHA is among numerous UN agencies currently assisting with the situation in Libya, negotiating humanitarian corridors to obtain access to populations in need. In February, Libya became part of the wider pro-democracy movement happening across North Africa and the Middle East known as the "Arab Spring." Libyan president Muammar al-Qadhafi responded to these protests by inflicting violence on his countrymen. So far, over 2.1 million citizens have been affected in the conflict against the rebel movement and over 800,000 have fled the country.

OCHA's fundraising arm has allocated \$393 million so far in aid for the humanitarian crisis. Basic resources, medical care, fuel and infrastructure support will be provided by OCHA and its partners as Libya continues to be structurally unsound.

### United States of America

OCHA has also been there for the United States (US) when the need arises. Following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the UN worked with the US Government to

provide food, health care and child's services to the people of Louisiana. The UN maintained a presence in all areas affected as the situation required.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **1. How much money does OCHA coordinate for humanitarian relief?**

In 2010, OCHA coordinated US\$ 11 billion worth of humanitarian programming in response to 19 crises in 32 countries affecting 71 million people.

OCHA is a low-cost investment in better humanitarian action. Its operating budget was less than two per cent of the \$11 billion coordinated for humanitarian programming last year. 75% of this budget is allocated for field-based coordination.

Learn more: [www.unocha.org/](http://www.unocha.org/)

#### **2. How do humanitarian organizations access this money?**

Following a humanitarian crisis, local organizations in the field can immediately provide life-saving assistance using pooled funds managed by OCHA. One type of pooled funds is the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

These funds provide assistance for food, water and shelter immediately following a natural disaster; life-saving nutrition and medical care for babies born in refugee camps; and basic life necessities for those struggling to survive in many of the world's forgotten emergencies.

#### **3. What country is the largest humanitarian donor?**

The US Government is the largest humanitarian donor, providing \$4.3 billion in 2009, a large percentage of its overall aid budget. The majority of this is provided as food aid.

#### **4. Can you name any countries that have recently benefited from OCHA?**

Haiti, Japan, Libya, and the USA. In 2010, OCHA coordinated 60 search-and-rescue teams in Haiti alone.

#### **5. What kind of help do people in crisis or refugees need?**

Different UN offices offer aid to refugees in the form of food, shelter, medical services, education and repatriation assistance.

#### **6. Who is a refugee?**

The 1951 Refugee Convention which established the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) identifies a refugee as someone with a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or

political opinion, who is outside the country of his nationality and unable to receive protection from that country.

Learn more: [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

### **7. How many refugees has the UN helped?**

More than 50 million refugees fleeing war, famine or persecution have received aid from the UNHCR since 1951. The Agency seeks long-term solutions by helping refugees repatriate to their homeland if conditions allow it; by helping them integrate in countries of asylum, or resettle in third countries.

### **8. How many people world-wide are refugees today?**

Today there are over 10 million refugees and 26 million internally displaced persons, mostly women and children.

### **9. Who is a stateless person?**

Stateless people often live in uncertain situations and are marginalized by their societies. Statelessness is not always well understood and in many countries its scope is ignored. In 2009, UNHCR estimated a total of 12 million stateless persons.

### **10. Are stateless persons also refugees?**

Stateless people may sometimes be refugees, but the two categories are distinct. Statelessness occurs for a variety of reasons such as discrimination against minority groups or failure to include all residents as citizens when a state becomes independent.

Stateless people are often unable to obtain identity documents; are subject to detention; denied access to education and health services or blocked from obtaining employment.

### **11. What is UNRWA? How is it different from the UN Refugee Agency?**

UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, was established in 1948 to carry out relief and works programmes for Palestinian refugees. UNRWA is unique in terms of its commitment to one group of refugees and its contributions to the welfare and human development of four generations of Palestine refugees.

Originally envisaged as a temporary organization, the Agency has gradually adjusted its programmes to meet the changing needs of the refugees. Today, UNRWA is the main provider of basic services – education, health, relief and social services – to over 4.1 million registered Palestine refugees in the Middle East.

Learn more: [www.unrwa.org](http://www.unrwa.org)