



United Nations Eritrea

28 February 2006

Dear Sally,

Progress in UN Reform and UN Coordination in Eritrea (2005)

Introduction

Eritrea has been one of the countries carrying out the UN's harmonized common country programming process, and the Government of Eritrea and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) jointly, in the spirit of co-ownership, have prepared 2005 CCA and are in the process of finalising the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). On the development side, the UN system is contributing to the transition from relief to development by supporting Government in implementing the Integrated Recovery Programme (IRP), in developing a transparent, predictable and functioning justice system, civil administration and in improving and strengthening Government's planning capacity. Furthermore, the UN system is supporting the Government in achieving the MDGs through joint programming and coordinated action within the UN system and through enhanced cooperation with outside partners.

Socio-Political Context

Following the ruling of the Border Commission on the delimitation of the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia in April 2002, little progress has been made in demarcating the border. At present, the political and military situations between the two countries are very tense. At different times, two missions: one led by the Chairperson of the Working Group on Peace Keeping Operations from the UN Security Council and the other led by the UN Under Secretary for Peace Keeping visited Eritrea and Ethiopia to diffuse the tense situation between the two countries, however, no progress has been achieved. In addition to these, the Government of the United States of America is trying to diffuse the tense situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia and the initiative is continuing. These developments have forced the United Nations to designate parts of Eritrea, particularly the border areas and the flash points along the common border with Ethiopia, at Phase 3 and Phase 4; as a result visiting development sites in these areas is reduced.

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The tense political and military situation is affecting existing ongoing activities that used to operate on the basis of cooperation and facilitation. The UNCT and the UN (Peacekeeping) Mission in Eritrea and Ethiopia (UNMEE) collaborate very closely; and wherever feasible, UNMEE provided UNCT access to its aerial and land transport services for facilitating the UNCT's humanitarian assistance, drought assessment activities and for joint missions. Part of this support has stopped after the Government banned UN helicopter flights. Similarly, the Regional Air was the only airline that provided Eritrea the transport-communications with the Central, Southern and West Africa through Nairobi, Kenya. The airline ceased to operate in April 2005; therefore, transport-communications with the Sub-Saharan Africa as well as obtaining technical support from that region has become difficult and expensive.

The border conflict between the two countries has constrained Eritrea to divert finance and human resources to defense, and this has made it difficult for the country to implement long-term development policies.

Humanitarian Context

The main rainy season of 2005 has been much better than the preceding five years of poor intermittent seasonal rains. This year, there was no request for FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment survey; instead the Government decided to conduct its own crop harvest assessment, and the magnitude of the 2005-grain production will only be known after the results are released. While it is generally perceived that the 2005 harvest was better than in the previous years, the persistent drought from 1999 to 2004 has caused much damage to vegetation, livestock and agriculture. As a result the 2005 domestic grain production may not be sufficient to cover domestic grain requirement.

In 2005 nutrition surveys were conducted in the five Zobas (regions) of the country, except Maekel Zone (central region), and results show 10-15 per cent acute malnutrition rates among infants and children. Maternal malnutrition among women of reproductive age remains above 30 per cent in all regions. This is very high and it may increase the likelihood of maternal and neonatal death.

With respect to the humanitarian situation, concerted efforts were made to raise awareness of the international community through the visit of Mr. Ahtisaari, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for the Humanitarian Crisis for Eritrea and Ethiopia, who came to Eritrea in August 2005 and stressed the seriousness of the situation. Similarly, donor/inter-agency missions visited some of the most affected areas in Eritrea and donor partners received regular humanitarian briefings. All these contributed to the favorable response to the 2005 Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP). Based on the results of the 2004 FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Survey and a Mid-Year review of the CAP in May 2005, the requirement was revised to US\$ 156.6 million for 2.3 million beneficiaries. The 2005 CAP has succeeded in securing US\$ 99.6 million (63.6 per cent) of the requested US\$ 156.6 million, a higher response than in the previous year of 2004. Humanitarian needs have also been addressed within the framework of the UNDAF.

For 2006, however, the Government has declined to carryout a CAP. The UNCT maintains a response-ready position through the preparation of a Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP), which will be regularly updated as the situation evolves.

In addition, the UNCT has established a contingency planning working group and restarted joint Ethiopia-Eritrea UNCT/UNMEE meetings through a video-conference. The discussions focused on measures to take, with particular attention to humanitarian assistance and human rights issues, to assist populations likely to be affected by border demarcation or,

in the worst case scenario, a heightened conflict. Similarly, several consultations through teleconferences and visits among the countries of the Horn (Ethiopia, Sudan, Djibouti, Kenya and Somalia) were made to develop Contingency Plans. Moreover, the UNCT participated in two Scenario Planning Workshop at Regional Level (in Nairobi) conducted to elaborate scenarios necessary for developing contingency plans.

Development context

In his 2002 agenda for further UN reform the UN Secretary General called for increased joint programming and pooling of resources to further enhance the effectiveness of the UN system's support to national priorities, and to ensure the system's combined resources are put to best use. Based on this agenda, the UNCT and the Government of Eritrea have demonstrated a shared commitment to advance and make progress in working together in MDG-driven and result-oriented programmes. The UNCT has identified a number of joint programmes in the various thematic areas that support implementation of national priorities, as well as the MDGs. In 2005, two joint programmes have been completed, four are under implementation, and four are in process for implementation.

UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, UNHCR initiated a joint programme in the Resettlement of IDPs and Expellees in 2005 given that there was still a backlog of over 42,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and expellees still living in temporary camps waiting to return to their communities and/or be resettled. So far over one million IDPs and refugees have returned to their localities and are still dependent on humanitarian assistance. In 2004, the Government committed itself to the resettlement of 30,000 IDPs and expellees, and at the beginning of 2005 with the cooperation of the UN and donors the Government resettled 18,633 of them to their villages of origin. They are getting basic assistance, however, normalizing their livelihood will be a long-term process, and concerted effort is being made to work towards achieving full normalization of their livelihoods. Out of the 30,000, which the Government committed itself to resettle at the beginning of 2004, the remaining 11,367 IDPs will be resettled in 2006.

A second joint programme (UNFPA and UNDP) initiated in 2005 aims to build the capacity of the national women's machinery to support implementation of the national Gender Action Plan developed in 2004.

Eritrea's 2005 Sentinel Surveillance showed an HIV prevalence rate of 2.4 per cent. At country level, UNCT developed a Joint Implementation Support Plan (ISP) aligned with the nine national priorities of the National Strategic Plan supporting the national response to HIV and AIDS. The ISP included a Joint Programme on HIV and AIDS, which targeted the Eritrean Defence Force (EDF) and was jointly executed by UNFPA, UNICEF and UNAIDS. The UN Agencies committed a total of US\$4.4 million to facilitate implementation of the ISP. The 2005 review indicated that the average level of achievement was 55%.

The UNCT and UNMEE are working in partnership to effectively support each other on several shared goals. To this effect, UNMEE is cooperating with UN agencies in developing and implementing joint projects (Quick Impact Projects) to alleviate the suffering of war-affected people in the Temporary Security Zone and its adjacent areas. Moreover, UNCT and UNMEE have developed a joint approach to observe events such as UN Day, World Aids Day, Commemoration of the UN Head-Quarters Bombing in Iraq, UN Peace Day, International Women's Day and Human Rights Day and conveyed unified UN messages. It is now a standard procedure that UNMEE attends the regular UNCT weekly and monthly meetings, and the Resident Coordinator representing the UNCT attends UNMEE daily senior management Meetings (SMM) for information sharing and decision-making purposes.

In 2005, the UNCT in cooperation with UNDGO reviewed three joint programmes. The preliminary results show that joint programmes: a) contribute to achieving UNDAF strategic objectives; b) help pool resources and technical expertise to ensure efficient utilization of resources and produce effective and maximum impact; c) promote partnership and alliance of those partners who mobilize their resources and efforts and work towards achieving a common objective; and d) reduce transaction cost (staff time, resources) both for UN agencies and Government. In the same vein, the UNCT is working closely with the Norwegian Government to clearly define processes and capacities required to take joint programming forward in Eritrea and to get more value from UN reform.

Country Programming Process

Eritrea has been one of the 47 countries carrying out the UN's harmonized common country programming process, to this effect; the preparation for the second Common Country Assessment (CCA) was launched in 2005. The Government of Eritrea and the United Nations Country Team jointly prepared the 2005 CCA. The CCA has drawn from the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (I-PRSP), the National Food Security Strategy (NFSS), Eritrea's First Millennium Development Goals Report (MDGR) and the existing databases. The organizational structure for preparing the CCA had three levels of joint Government/UN teams: a Steering Committee, a Task Force and nine thematic groups (including HIV/AIDS). The Steering Committee (co-chaired by the Minister for National Development and the UN Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator) adopted the CCA 2005 outline, its completion timeframe, and schedule of the UNDAF strategic planning retreat.

The key recommendations of the 2005 CCA include: a) need to continue investing in capacity development across all the sectors; b) ensure availability of data and information for evidence based planning; and c) establish effective disaster prevention, preparedness, mitigation and response and a national policy on disaster management. Finally, it underscored that consolidation of the peace process including speedy demarcation of the common Eritrea-Ethiopia border needs to be a priority; otherwise, people's vulnerabilities will continue to increase. Thus, the international community and other development partners need to ensure that peace prevails.

After the completion of the 2005 CCA, the UNCT jointly with the Government of the State of Eritrea conducted a three-day strategic planning retreat in October 2005 to set out collective priority areas of the UN system to respond the challenges of the national priorities through the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

Participants at the plenary agreed that based on national priorities and comparative advantages, the UN should focus on the following five strategic areas: **food security; emergency/recovery; basic social services; capacity development and gender.**

The UNDAF had the same organizational structure as that of CCA, of joint Government/UN teams: a Steering Committee, a Task Force and five thematic groups. The five thematic groups prepared the draft UNDAF document and the UNDAF Task Force will clear the document before it is submitted to the Steering Committee. According to the timeline, the joint strategic meeting, the preparation of the Country Programme Documents, Country Programme Action Plans and Annual Work Plans will be prepared in 2006.

Events that have an effect on the work of UNCT

Government and Partners consultations have been taking place in different forms, but not in the form of a “National Consultative Forum”. The “National Consultative Forum” was re-established in 2003 to be convened regularly (every two or three months) for Government and its development partners to discuss the following areas: (i) Humanitarian assistance; (ii) Recovery, including Integrated Recovery Program; (iii) Development Assistance, including Medium Term Development Plan (2004-2006); (iv) Macro-Economic Issues; and (v) Peace Process, Demobilization and Reintegration Programme (DRP). The Consultative Forum met twice in 2003; once in 2004 and did not meet in 2005. The earlier meetings (2003 and 2004) afforded the consultative forum in-depth discussions on issues like the I-PRSP, the NFSS, IRP, emergency humanitarian activities and the process for the preparation of the MDGR. The Forum was providing an opportunity for the Government and its partners to be closer in discussing issues of common development concern; therefore, it is hoped that this will be revived so that consultations on development issues can happen on a regular basis.

The Government of Eritrea issued a circular in March 2005 to its ministries to collect and submit all UN funded project vehicles that are currently assigned to ministries to carry out project activities. The reason for the impoundment was to rationalize the use of transport vehicles in projects in the face of fuel shortages, as a result, the projects’ smooth operations have been affected and they are put at a stand still. Most of the projects affected and vehicles impounded belong to UNDP and UNHCR. The circular issued is contrary to the Standard Basic Assistance Agreement, which stipulates that the property and assets of the United Nations Agencies should be free from interferences and should be used for the purposes of the programme or project for which they were purchased. Against this interference, the UNCT has taken a collective position that until the Government proposes a mutually convenient rationalization of the vehicles, or until the impounded vehicles are released, not to release or to continue to acquire fuel-using motor transport for project use.

In 2005, Proclamation No. 145/2005 was issued to determine the administration of NGOs. The proclamation requires NGOs to ensure efficient, effective, and fair work, to register and secure financial or human resources, to relieve the Government from tax subsidies and recruit personnel and procure goods and services competitively and transparently. The Government is aware of the important role NGOs played during the liberation struggle as well as after independence, however, this proclamation requires them to register and conclude a contract with the concerned Government entity that they will be working. NGOs are required to pay taxes and/or duties on all goods imported into Eritrea. The activities of every NGO are limited to relief and/or rehabilitation works. To engage in relief/rehabilitation, a local NGO should have at its disposal in Eritrea one million US Dollars or its equivalent and an international NGO two million US Dollars or its equivalent. This proclamation came into effect at the beginning of June 2005 and from a total of 36 NGOs currently working in the country, so far the Government has certified 19 NGOs to continue operating in Eritrea.

In August 2005, the Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) formally asked USAID to cease its activities. The withdrawal of USAID, one of the main donors in Eritrea, poses serious questions on the humanitarian situation as well as on the development programmes. USAID phased out all its three main development programmes, which were focused on: improvement of rural livelihoods through micro lending, improvement of health care and HIV/AIDS, and increase of participation in growth and development through capacity building. The UN agencies agreed to sustain the HIV/AIDS programmes initiated by USAID; however, the remaining programmes will drastically suffer. With respect to food aid, food donations from the US Government will not be affected by USAID withdrawal and deliveries of food will continue.

Work plan for 2006

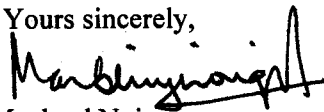
The UNCT will continue to build its teamwork.. The plan for 2006 will include:

- a) Prepare Country Programme Documents (CPDs), Country Programme Action Plans (CPAPs) and Annual Work Plans (AWPs) particularly of the ExCom agencies on the basis of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF: 2007-2011).
- b) Focus on joint advocacy, communications and campaigning for the MDGs;
- c) More harmonized planning and programming to support national priorities within an improved joint programming framework.
- d) Assessment of the existing UNDAF (2002-2006) implementation.
- e) Support the Government in the resettlement of 11,367 IDPs and expellees,
- f) Develop the 2006 UN HIV and AIDS Implementation Support Plan (ISP) including advocacy for full implementation of the "Three Ones" Principles and the formation of the "Joint UN Team on AIDS"
- g) Develop strategy to address avian flu and its consequence on the humanitarian situation; and
- h) Implement the decisions of the joint UNCTs (Eritrea and Ethiopia) cross-border collaborations.

UN efforts in support of development and humanitarian assistance will continue. For the reasons outlined above, progress in demarcation of the border would reduce people's vulnerability. The UNCT hopes that 2006 will be the year when the border issue will be resolved.

Many thanks and warmest regards

Yours sincerely,



Macleod Nyirongo

Resident / Humanitarian Coordinator