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RETURN

Information Update

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ADVICE FOR CIRCULATION: This update is intended for Afghans abroad, as well as those displaced inside their country, to help them make an informed choice about returning to their homes. It is a public document and should be circulated as widely as possible.

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1. ANNOUNCEMENTS TO RETURNEES

Note on Religion: In response to queries received from prospective returnees, UNHCR reminds that Afghanistan is a Muslim State and the Constitution states that “The religion of Afghanistan is the sacred religion of Islam” and “In Afghanistan; no law can be contrary to the sacred religion of Islam and the values of this constitution.” The constitution also adds that “followers of other religions are free to perform their religion ceremonies within the limits of the provisions of law”.

- The Ministry of Public Works has announced that the Salang tunnel will be closed during the day from 07:00 hrs to 17:00 hrs until September 2004 because of the reconstruction of the road.
- UNHCR encashment centres in Afghanistan are now open in Mohmandara (Jalalabad), Daman (Kandahar), Pul-i-Khumri (Baghlan), Zaranj (Nimroz), Gardez (Paktia), Khost, Herat and Kabul.

- Returnees have the free choice of either returning to their village (location of origin) or to any other place in Afghanistan – but not to the IDP camps.
- Returnees are advised to ensure that their VRFs are correctly filled out in the country of asylum, as VRFs will not be issued or changed in Afghanistan.
- The returnees' personal belongings are exempt from all customs duties. But please note that returnees can take neither commercial amounts of any item nor can they export government-proscribed items. Returnees should also advise their truck drivers not to carry business goods on returnee trucks in order to avoid delay at the border and undesired consequences at the customs. Returnees are advised to ensure the truck is empty when they begin loading their belongings.

Note: All returnees are advised NOT to travel during the night hours, and should seek shelter in a major settlement. Several robberies of returnees have recently been reported in Herat Province.

Note on Land: UNHCR has learned about the existence of fraudulent schemes which extract money from refugees in return for a promise to get them government land for housing. As far as UNHCR is aware there is at present no legitimate government programme to distribute land. The general freeze on land distribution ordered by the President's decree is still enforced. UNHCR would like to advise refugees not to pay any money for fraudulent land schemes and to check the authenticity of any land scheme with the Representatives of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation in Pakistan and Iran or with UNHCR offices. UNHCR will therefore not be able to provide shelter assistance to refugees who acquire land under such schemes.

2. USAID PROVIDES MEDICINES TO AFGHANISTAN

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) has handed over some 700 tons of 68 various kinds of medicines worth \$ 1.5 million to the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH). The medicines will be distributed to more than 50 medical centres in 14 provinces where at least five million needy Afghans would benefit. The MoPH has contracted 21 NGOs, which would be responsible for the distribution of these medicines as well as training medical personnel and searching for capable doctors and nurses in these provinces. The first two NGOs received a part of the medicine a week ago and the rest of the medicines will be handed over to the remaining 19 NGOs shortly.

3. EFFORTS TO IMPROVE ELECTRICITY SYSTEMS

A \$105 million credit from the World Bank to the Afghan Government will be used to improve the power supply of Kabul. The funding will restore and expand the electricity distribution network and rehabilitate the largest generation station -- the 100 megawatt Naghlu hydro power station as well as its 110 kV transmission line to the East and North Kabul substations.

The Kabul programme is part of nationwide Emergency Power Rehabilitation Project initiated and led by the Afghan Government through the Ministry of Water and Power (MWP). With support from the World Bank and other donors, it aims to bring electricity to residents in other main cities of the country. The budget is \$220 million, with the World Bank financing the Kabul restoration. Additional cities will be added as co-financing becomes available. Only 234,000 customers in Afghanistan are connected to the public grid, of which some 30 percent are in Kabul.

4. OVER FIVE MILLION AFGHANS HAVE REGISTERED TO VOTE

As of the last week of June 2004, over 5,000,000 Afghans had registered to vote. The gender breakdown is approximately 3,100,000 men and 1,850,000 women (62.4 percent men and 37.6 percent women).

In mid June 2004, a 99-year-old woman and a 105-year-old man registered to vote in the Wacha Gharaka district of Paktia province. According to UNAMA, in an interview with one of the staff of the Electoral Secretariat, the woman said that she had registered so that she could elect a good leader who would look after the poor people of Afghanistan. The 105-year old man, who was a young man in the reign of Amir Habibullah (1901-1919), said he wants to elect a leader who would serve Afghanistan well.

5. MAIN PHASE OF DISARMAMENT IN SEVERAL PROVINCES

The main phase of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programme expanded to Jalalabad on Monday, 21 June 2004 and is expected to expand to Herat and Bamyan by early July 2004. Main phase of disarmament is now also taking place in seven provinces, Takhar, Kunduz, Kandahar, Kabul, Gardez, Baghlan and Mazar-i-Sharif .

Under the main and pilot phases of DDR, approximately 9,500 officers and soldiers have been disarmed and around 7,000 weapons collected. More than 8,000 of those officers and soldiers have been demobilized and more than 7,500 have started or are about to start their reintegration options.

Afghanistan's New Beginnings Programme (ANBP) has now received the lists for the officers and soldiers who are to be disarmed from military units from the Ministry of Defence (MOD). They are scheduled to enter the current phase of DDR. The lists contain 21,218 names of military personnel of which 9,961 of the names have now been verified.

6. MORE THAN 14,500 AFGHAN POLICE ARE TRAINED

As of 22 June 2004, approximately 14,500 police have been trained countrywide under the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Programme (ICITAP). An additional 3,954 police are currently being trained in six areas -- Kabul, Gardez, Kandahar, Mazar-i-Sharif, Kunduz, and Jalalabad. The objective of these intensive training courses that began at the beginning of this year and are being run by the United States is to train 20,000 police officers by summer.

This training programme supports the overall reform of the police, which is led by Germany in assistance to the Ministry of Interior. The US programme consists of basic training, instructor development (training of trainers) and the Transitional Integration Programme. Each course takes two to four weeks while separate training programmes are also run to teach literacy skills to illiterate policemen. Training is also expected to begin soon in Herat and Bamyan.

7. UPDATE ON WATER SUPPLY

Water supply was featured in the Return bulletin No. 51 published on 15 February 2004. The following updates the issue with new information.

Central Region:

Parwan: In addition to springs and karezes, four rivers of Panjsher, Salang, Shatal and Ghorband flow into Parwan province. These rivers provide 280 streams, which provide 80% of both potable and irrigation water. Parwan irrigation project provides 2,480 hectares of land with irrigation water flowing from these four rivers. Some aid agencies like IRC and ACTED have provided one generator and three water pumps and have built a water reservoir with a capacity of 125 cubic meters of water. Six water intakes have been rehabilitated and six others will be completed by the end of the current year.

Kapisa: There is plenty of river water flowing but the water is not stored due to lack of intakes. Majority of people use stream water and some others use wells and spring water. The water from river as well as deep wells is used for agriculture.

Wardak: Most of the people use wells but some others have to carry water from a distance of 10-15 km. Some farmers have dug deep wells and use diesel generators to draw water for irrigation purposes. World Bank through NSP (National Solidarity Programme) has made a small

water dam in the centre of Wardak and has planned 19 other water projects which will begin in near future.

Plans: In 2004, UNHCR is planning both construction and rehabilitation of 640 water points providing 16,000 families with safe drinking water in all central provinces. Of the total number of water points mentioned above, 280 of them are considered in Kabul, 65 in Kapisa, 20 in Logar, 170 in Parwan and 65 in Wardak provinces. Of the above, 40 of them have already been completed, and 40 of them have been allocated for Facilitated Group Return (FGR) in these provinces.

Sources of information: UNHCR and Water Supply Departments of Parwan, Kapisa and Wardak provinces.

Northern Region:

The farmers use Balkh, Amo and Samangan rivers for agriculture.

DoRRD is planning two other water projects -- rehabilitation of the water supply systems of Chaharbolak and Marmol districts -- in the near future.

UNICEF has supported construction of a total of 25 shallow wells and water tanks recently.

Kunduz: The water supply system within Kunduz city has improved with the assistance of WHO and FAO. Many city residents have access to water supply for 1-2 hrs per day. Municipality Water Supply network, shallow wells and hand pumps are the main sources of drinking water in Kunduz while other districts use wells and hand pumps as the main sources of water.

Sources of Information: Water Supply and Irrigation Departments, DoRRD, UNHCR, UNICEF and UN Habitat.

Southern Region:

Kandahar: Kandahar is the only province in the south with tap water supply system. Kandahar Department of Water Supply (KDWS) is in the process of expanding its tap water supply, which will increase the current 2,000 customers in Kandahar City to 6,000.

More than 3,500 people in district No. 4 will soon get tap water through a project funded by the Japanese Government and implemented by UN HABITAT. KDWS supplies two million litres of water to the four sections of the city every day (each of the sections receive three hours of water per day). KDWS receives nearly three to four applications a day from people requesting water supply for their houses and business centres. The application fee to install a single ½ inch pipe from the KDWS is \$46 (2,300 Afs).

On 5 May 2004, the Kandahar Department of Irrigation (KDI) began releasing water from Dala Dam for irrigation purposes for the following two months in the province. According to KDI, this water has been strictly used for fruit trees (vineyards, orchards. etc).

Work on drilling 100 wells with installation of hand pumps in Spin Boldak, 32 in Zhari Dasht, 150 in Shawali Kot and 40 wells in Nesh district is in progress with the World Bank funding. The project will be completed within the next four months.

DoRRD is planning to drill wells in Shurabak, Meyanasheen, Arghistan and Maruf districts of Kandahar province in near future.

Source of Information: KDWS, DoRRD, UN Habitat

South Eastern Region:

Paktia Province: According to the water supply department, 30% of government departments and residential houses in Gardez city are supplied water through tap system and the remaining 70% use karezes, pump wells and local wells.

About 10-15% people in the districts of Paktia province use pump wells, 30% use springs and karezes, 30-40% use river water and 25% use local wells and water reservoirs for drinking and domestic consumptions.

In 2003-4, the city pipe scheme was extended, 15 karezes were rehabilitated, three water schemes were completed and 242 different types of wells (tube wells, dug wells and deepened wells) were dug in Gardez, Said Karam, Zurmat, Danda-i- Patan, Ahmadabad and Chamkani districts with the financial support of organisations like UNHCR and UNAMA .

At present, construction of 105 semi drilling wells is going on by DoRRD in Gardez City.

Ghazni Province: The main sources of water are wells with hand pumps, local wells, karezes, springs, rivers and pipe schemes.

In Ghazni City, 5% of people use tap system, 70% use local wells and 25% of them use pump wells water, and in the villages 10% of people use water from the wells with hand pumps, 60% use karezes, 10% use springs and 20 % use local well water.

Khost Province: About 3% of the people in Khost City use pipe water, 40 to 50 % of them use pump wells and the remaining portion of them use local wells water for drinking and domestic consumption.

The water reservoir in Khost was rehabilitated in 2004. New generators and water pumps were installed. According to the Provincial Planning Department, rehabilitation and construction of 278 wells and nine water supply schemes in Khost City, Maton, Tani, Esmail Khel, Gurboz, Terikhel, Shamal, Alisher, Jaji Maidan and Mandozai districts were completed in 2003.

Four water supply schemes will be provided in Mandozee district in near future.

Sources of information: Implementing Agencies, Provincial Planning and Water Supply Departments.

Eastern Region:

Drinking water: There is a water supply system functioning in Jalalabad City which provides safe drinking water to 4,000 families.

Some rural inhabitants also have access to pipe schemes constructed by different agencies in villages of Surkhrod, Rodat, Achin, Dur Baba and Dih Bala districts of Nangarhar province, Alingar and Dawlat Shah districts of Laghman province and Asad Abad city and Narai, Sirkanai, Chapa Dara, Manogai, Asmar, Kandai and Wata Pur districts of Kunar province.

Approximately all the districts and capital cities of the eastern region have access to river, spring and kareze water.

In Nuristan province, spring water is the main source of irrigation water. People of Nuristan province do not have access to river water, due to lack of intake.

A total of 21 UNHCR funded pipe schemes (eight in Nangarhar, four in Laghman and nine in Kunar province) provide safe water to about 110,000 individuals in the returnee areas.

A total of 506 UNHCR funded wells (267 in Nangarhar, 192 in Laghman and 47 in Kunar province) were dug which provide water to about 250,000 returnees.

Five intakes were constructed and seven were rehabilitated with the support of FAO and Islamic Relief in different districts of Nangarhar province.

A big irrigation canal is under construction in Khiwa district of Nangarhar province by a Japanese NGO. According to the plan, this canal which will have the capacity of irrigating 20,000 hectares of land will be completed by the end of 2005.

Sources of information: UNHCR, UNICEF, DoRRD, Department of Water Supply, Department of Irrigation and Agriculture.

Western Region

Farah: 50% of the population use wells, 20% use Karezes, and 30% use streams and rivers as sources of water for drinking and domestic consumption.

Ghor: 40% of population use wells, 10% use Karezes and springs and 50% use rivers and streams.

Badghis: In Badghis, ground water table is lower and water quality is saline. Majority of people use river and stream water for both drinking and irrigation. Only 30% of the population have access to safe drinking water.

Nimroz: COOPI completed 85 wells and 45 latrines in Kang district of Nimroz province on 3 April 2004. COOPI also completed construction of 85 wells in Chaharborjak district of Nimroz province in May 2004 and will complete the rehabilitation of the irrigation canal in Chaharborjak district by the end of 2004.

Three hand pumps in Chaghansoor, two in Ghorghory and two in Khashrod districts of Nimroz were installed by Voluntary Association for the Rehabilitation of Afghanistan (VARA) in 2003.

The water supply network in Zaranj City has been rehabilitated by the Iranian government in early 2004.

In Nimroz, Badghis and Farah provinces 10% of households live 15 km away from the water points.

UN Habitat under NSP will dig 20 wells in Enjil, Guzara and Zindajan districts of Herat. DACAAR will also implement some water supply and drinking water projects in Jawand district of Badghis province. VARA will complete cleaning a total of 10 canals, five in each of Zaranj and Chaharborjak districts of Nimroz province, in 2004.

Sources of information: UNHCR, DACAAR, Water Supply Dept, Irrigation & Environment Dept, UN-Habitat and ECHO.

8. SECURITY

Central region:

Kabul: On 15 June 2004 a rocket hit a private house located in Kabul in Shash Darak district and as a result one Afghan civilian was injured. Six suspects in connection to the incident were arrested by the security department of District No. 5 on the same day.

Wardak: The land dispute that caused fighting and human casualties in Kajab area of Behsud I and II of Maidan/Wardak province came under control at the end of June 2004. The dispute which started at the third week of June ended when the government sent a delegation to the area.

On 17 June 2004, letters were reportedly distributed in several villages of Sayedabad district of Wardak province calling the local population not to support the registration process and to prevent their girls from attending the school.

On 21 June 2004, a house of a female teacher was attacked by a RPG in the village of Tangi in Saydabad.

On 21 June 2004, a RPG was launched at the Osmaniah Girls School in the village of Hassankhil in Saydabad district. No casualties or damages were reported.

Northern Region:

Balkh: Northern Region has been relatively calm over the reporting period with the exception of tension between the Jamiat and Junbish Commanders over drug business in the district of Sholgara.

Southern Region:

Uruzgan: On 25 June 2004, 16 people were killed in Uruzgan. According to reports, these 16 people were pulled from their vehicle in Uruzgan province on Friday and were shot dead. Apparently these people were carrying voter registration cards but the reason of their killing is still not known.

Eastern Region:

Jalalabad: Two explosions occurred at two government posts in Jalalabad on 30 June 2004. As a result, at least one person is killed and 27 are injured.

On 20 June 2004, a small explosive device was detonated in the parking area of the Torkham border crossing point on the Pakistani side. No casualties reported.

Road Security:

Illegal checkpoints allegedly run by unofficial armed men were removed in Balkh province on 5 June 2004. A large number of residents of Balkh had complained about harassment by these local armed men and commanders and were threatened by them.

Several road robberies have been reported on the high way of Herat – Kandahar and Herat - Qala-I-Naw (QIN) during which several returnee families have also been affected in the past. The valuables and money have been taken from the passengers. Afghan National Army (ANA) presently in QIN deployed several troops to the area to investigate the robbery – no one has been arrested yet. No human casualty has been reported as a result of the incident.

9. RADIO PROGRAMMES

UNHCR/BBC Radio Programme: There is a joint BBC/UNHCR radio programme specifically aimed at Afghan refugees, IDPs and returnees. The programme deals with the situation in Afghanistan, including security, development activities of the Afghan government, United Nations and other aid agencies, and the challenges that the Afghans, especially returnees, are facing.

The BBC radio programme is part of UNHCR's efforts to provide an accurate account of the situation in Afghanistan to those wishing to return home, and to offer a forum for a wider debate on all aspects of repatriation and reintegration. The programme is broadcast from Saturday to Thursday (6 days a week) on short wave frequencies of 13,605 kHz, and 9,795 kHz and on FM frequency of 89 MHz in Kabul.

Language	Days	GMT	Afghanistan Time
Pashto 1 st edition	Saturday to Monday	0916	1346
Pashto 2 nd edition	Tuesday to Thursday	1603	2033
Dari 1 st edition	Saturday to Monday	1616	2046
Dari 2 nd edition	Tuesday to Thursday	0846	1316

It has a section for listeners' letters. If you have any comments or questions please write to the following addresses. The BBC will include them in the programme as time permits.

Afghanistan: BBC, Post Box No. 1, Central Post Office, Kabul, Afghanistan.
 Pakistan: BBC, Post Box 255, University Town, Peshawar, Pakistan.
 Iran: UNHCR (BBC) – P.O.Box No. 91775 – 1876, Mashad, Iran.

BBC FM transmitters in different provinces of Afghanistan are as follows:

City	Kabul	Mazar	Jalalaba d	Bamyan	Kunduz	Faizabad	Pul-i-Khumri	Herat
FM Trans. MHz	89.0	89.0	89.0	89.0	88.1	88.4	99.6	89.2
City	Gardez	Kandahar	Jabulsaraj	Shibirghan	Maimana	Khost	Taloqan	
FM Trans. (MHz)	87.9	88.0	89.1	91.0	92.1	90.1	88.3	

UNHCR/ERTV Radio Programme:

UNHCR has also a joint radio programme with Afghanistan Radio and TV, "Coming Home", as part of its efforts to provide information for refugees. The programme is broadcast on Sundays and Fridays (two days a week) at 2100 hrs for 30 minutes in Dari and Pashto languages.

10. PRICES OF ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES IN THE MARKET PLACE

(WFP 3st Week of June 2004)

Cities	Wheat (Kg)		W/Flour (Kg)		Bread (Kg)		Diesel/Litre	
	AFS	US\$	AFS	US\$	AFS	US\$	AFS	US\$
Kabul	8.0	0.16	11.0	0.22	20.0	0.41	20.0	0.41
Kandahar	8.6	0.18	10.9	0.23	12.0	0.25	18.0	0.38
Jalalabad	9.3	0.19	11.2	0.23	19.8	0.41	21.0	0.43
Herat	9.7	0.20	12.0	0.25	15.0	0.31	17.0	0.35
Mazar	8.5	0.18	10.0	0.21	15.0	0.31	17.0	0.35
Faizabad	9.2	0.19	11.4	0.24	33.0	0.69	22.0	0.46

Cities	One year old Live Sheep		Casual Labour/day		Exchange Rate		Wheat / Labour Day
	AFS	US\$	AFS	US\$	AFS	US\$	Kg
Kabul	4,400	89.80	140.0	2.86	49.0	1	17.5
Kandahar	3,800	79.17	120.0	2.50	48.0	1	14.0
Jalalabad	4,200	87.00	125.0	2.58	48.5	1	13.4
Herat	3,600	75.00	145.0	3.02	48.0	1	14.9
Mazar	2,200	45.83	180.0	3.75	48.0	1	21.2
Faizabad	3,700	77.73	150.0	3.15	47.6	1	16.3

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