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OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL FOR MENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS ON UNITED NATIONS AFFAIRS

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This publication is distributed to Missions to the United Nations and to Mental Health Clinics throughout the world on a quarterly basis. Its purpose is to inform all about the work of the United Nations in Mental Health and related activities.

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Editor's Note: This part of our publication tells of the wonderful work of the United Nations in such areas as helping people with disabilities, getting mental health aid and other basic needs to the people in Darfur, and in getting food and health care to children all around the world.

12 August 2005 – Marking another step forward for persons with disabilities, the United Nations panel negotiating an international treaty codifying their rights has wrapped up its sixth session having agreed on draft articles on such issues as education and children's disabilities, as well as accessibility and personal mobility.

The rights to health and rehabilitation, the right to work, social security and adequate standards of living, as well as participation in political, public and cultural life and in recreation, leisure and sport, were among the other articles negotiated during the current session of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral Convention to Promote and Protect the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, which has been meeting at UN Headquarters in New York since August 1.

Briefing the press on the work of the session, the Chairman of the Committee, Don MacKay of New Zealand, spotlighted the importance of disabilities, but also for the UN, which had an opportunity to show, once again, that it could come up with a convention that would have a direct impact on people's lives.

In its present state, the draft convention contained about 25 articles, he said. What the authors of the draft convention tried to do was to strengthen the rights of people with disabilities and to set out a more detailed code for their implementation. "For example, persons with disabilities had freedom of movement, but that right was not of much use to the people confined in wheelchairs if no accommodations were made for accessibility," he said.

The convention also sought "a paradigm shift" away from the tendency to segregate people with disabilities and towards social inclusion. "People with disabilities actually perform, live and contribute much better if they are included in the community – be it by way of inclusive education,

inclusive health, participation in political life, or measures to improve accessibility,” he said.

Mr. MacKay also stressed the active involvement of civic groups in the Committee’s work. Some 400 civil society representatives had registered for the meeting – the largest number ever, he added. This has given the drafting process “a very unusual flavor.” The participants had been very focused on the issues and there had been genuine interaction on the text and proposals, he said, adding: “This was not one of the United Nations meetings where people are sitting there reading prepared statements at each other.”

The last two weeks had “gone pretty well” for the negotiations on the draft instrument, he said. The Committee had conducted “a detailed read-through” of the draft and identified the areas of differences and convergence.

With appreciation to US News Centre, *Key Articles in Draft Disability Treaty Approved at UN Meeting, August, 12,2005* at <http://www.un.org/apps/news>



With appreciation to <http://www.un.org/Pubs/chronicle>

WASHINGTON/DARFUR – July 26 - A recent study conducted in South Darfur by Dr. Lynn Lawry (formerly Amowitz), Director of Evidence-Based Research for International Medical Corps (IMC), warns that while some of the displaced population’s basic needs are being met by humanitarian organizations, significant gaps persist in general health services, mental health, and women’s health needs.

The current international aid response is not fully meeting these needs. The study calls for immediate steps be taken to address the poor state of mental and women’s health.

Approximately 2.3 million people in Darfur rely on aid to survive. United Nations officials have called this the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. Insecurity for aid workers and poor infrastructure continues to hinder relief efforts, particularly in South Darfur. Although health assessments of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Darfur have been previously reported, mental health and women’s health burdens in this population remained largely unknown.

To assess these needs, IMC surveyed a random sample of 1,293 displaced women living in camps in Nyala district South Darfur. The results represent over 220,000 IDPs in Nyala and revealed the significant unmet women’s and mental health burden among these people.

Urgent women’s health needs

Women make up the majority of refugee and IDP populations. This study reflects a poor state of reproductive health among IDP women in South

Darfur. Family planning and provisions for safe motherhood (prenatal, delivery, and postpartum care) are inadequate. Overall, 12% of respondents (152/153 were pregnant at the time of the study. The average number of pregnancies was 6 ± 0.09 (range 0-20) while the average number of pregnancies receiving pre-natal care was 1.4 ± 0.06 .

Thirty percent of respondents (380/1,262) were breastfeeding at the time of the study and 50% (177/353) of these reported difficulties or an inability to breastfeed. Fifty-six percent of respondents (709/1,274) reported gynecological symptoms and 67% of respondents (853/1,269) reported they must ask permission of a family member to access health care all or most of the time.

The findings also indicate limited sexual and reproductive rights including rights to marriage, spacing and timing of children, movement, education, consensual sex, unattended deliveries or attendance with untrained birth attendants and access to health care. This may negatively impact health and the already high maternal mortality rate.

Depression and suicide

The prevalence of depression and suicide rates presents a considerable challenge for humanitarian agencies in Sudan. This reflects a more general need to address mental health needs in populations affected by conflict as the priority is usually given to physical health. Nearly a third of women interviewed (31 390/11,253) met criteria for Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) and another 63% of women reported symptoms of depression including feeling down, depressed, and hopeless. Suicide attempts among women and household suicide prevalence were alarmingly high in contrast to general rates worldwide. Over the prior year, 5% of respondents reported suicidal ideation (66/1,257) and 2% reported personal suicide attempts (28/1,260) Two percent of households had a household member that committed suicide during the prior year (21/124.)



With appreciation to www.unicef.org/emerg/darfur

Historically, provisions for mental health programs in Sudan have been minimal. To IMC's knowledge, there are no mental health services available for IDPs beyond services provided by a few non-governmental organizations.

"Women make up the majority of refugees and their needs cannot be neglected. These women are not just helpless victims, they are resilient and determined to cope and adjust to their situation. Mental health is important in building this coping ability. We as an aid community must address these unmet needs," Lawry said.

Call to Action

The study proposed the following steps to address some of the unmet needs:

Increasingly culturally appropriate mental health support, further mental health assessments, and multidisciplinary programs are needed. It is noteworthy that 98% (381/390) of women meeting criteria for MDD felt that counseling facilitated by international agencies might be helpful. To effectively promote women's mental health in Sudan, gender-and-rights-based models (i.e. provision basic needs) including health needs will be necessary.

Reducing deaths from maternal and neonatal tetanus Tetanus toxoid immunizations for women of child-bearing age are a fundamental component of antenatal care for pregnant mothers to prevent maternal and neonatal tetanus. Given limited antenatal services and lack of skilled traditional birth attendants (TBAs) in this population, a high-risk strategy (vaccination of at least 90% of all women of child-bearing age with three, properly spaced doses of tetanus toxoid) may be necessary per UNICEF, WHO and UNFPA recommendations. It is also essential to train TBAs or midwives to address the most common causes of maternal death such as hemorrhage and to make appropriate referrals to health facilities that can care for women with complications of pregnancy.

Addressing breastfeeding difficulties. Nearly half of women surveyed reported difficulties breastfeeding, which emphasizes the need for infant feeding counseling and education programs. Displaced women in emergency situations are at increased risk of breastfeeding problems. In emergency settings, breast milk is a hygienic, economical food source that is important for conferral of immunity, nutrition, fertility regulation, and psychological well being of mother and child. It is an essential preventive measure against diarrheal diseases.

Reducing the risk of sexual violence. Given the predominance of women and children foragers found in this study, and the reports of sexual violence in Darfur, particularly among women and girls foraging for wood beyond camp borders, there is a need to find alternative provision for assuring fuel for households in IDP camps.

Managing the health consequences of female circumcision. The 84% prevalence of female circumcision was consistent with previous estimates of 89% in Sudan. Health consequences include hemorrhage and infection, urology and sexual dysfunction, difficulties with childbirth, and psychological complications. A predominance of infibulation (an extreme type of female genital mutilation) has been reported in Sudan and surgical defibulation may be necessary for safe deliveries. The high prevalence of this traditional practice emphasizes the need for national policies, culturally-sensitive educational programs, and appropriate health care including obstetric and gynecological services.

The crisis in Darfur has displaced over 200,000 refugees into Chad and 1.85 million people within the greater Darfur region. Up to 3 million could be displaced in Darfur by the end of the year. The death toll from disease and violence is unknown with estimates ranging from 180,000-300,000.



With appreciation to www.unicefusa.org/site/pp.asp

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- In Chad and Darfur, IMC is supporting the needs of more than 250,000 people who have been affected by the ongoing violence through emergency medical assistance, primary health care with a focus on maternal and child health, nutritional screening for children 0-5 years of age, health education and hygiene promotion and immunizations and mental health programs. In addition, IMC is recruiting and training volunteer community health workers from within the camps to provide health education, identify community members who are in need of treatment and encourage pregnant women to access antenatal care.

- With appreciation to Common Dreams News Center, *Darfur Study, 2005: Basic Needs, Mental Health, and Women's Health Among IDPs*, July 26 at <http://www.commondreams.org>

UN Launches Large Scale Food Distribution in Niger

- 9 August – With funding finally coming in for Niger's hungry millions after initial appeals fell on deaf ears, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) today reported the start of large-scale distribution that will feed 2.5 million people in the next two months.

- Yesterday, the first free food distribution at village level took place in the small village of Tolkobey, 90 kilometres from Niamey, the capital and WFP is finalizing field level agreements with non-governmental organization (NGO) partners.



With appreciation to www.un.org/news

- The agency last week tripled the funds it had requested to deal with crisis arising from drought and the worst invasion of crop-devouring locusts in 15 years in the world's second poorest country. So far it has received 40 percent of the new total of \$57.6 million, leaving the current shortfall at \$34.4 million.

- WFP aims to get food assistance to all critical and at-risk areas to avoid an increase in hunger among the 2.5 million people most at risk. More than 1 million more have been affected by the crisis, UN agencies say.

- The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) reported that, more than a week after pictures of starving children shocked the world into action, relief supplies are reaching their destination, but more need to be done to get children out of danger.

- "While its initial appeals for money to avert the disaster fell on deaf ears, UNICEF programmes in Niger are now almost "fully funded" the agency said, noting that it had received nearly \$15 million to help care for nearly 200,000 children, 32,000 of them severely undernourished, and some 160,000 are moderately undernourished.

- UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Rima Salah recently toured emergency feeding centers in Maradi, epicenter of the crisis, to see the suffering first-hand. "We were at the hospital of (NGO) Medecins Sans Frontieres where they receive the severely malnourished children and we saw a child die in front of us...I think we should all feel guilty because children cannot die now at this time and age when we have technology and resources," a shocked Ms. Salah told reporters before leaving Niger at the weekend. Working closely with its partners on the ground, UNICEF Niger has provide 41 tons of therapeutic milk, 6.7 tons of food and 190 tons of UNIMIX- a life-saving porridge easy for undernourished children to digest. In collaboration with WFP, 187 tons of corn-soy blend and 614 tons of cereals have been deliver3ed to 62 affected villages, benefiting an estimated 200,000 people, including 40,000 children under five.

- In addition, about 900 tons of cereals are being delivered to another 90 villages, and approximately six tons of seed (corn, wheat, potato) have also been provided.

- As famine threatens to spread through the region, neighboring countries including Nigeria, Mali, and Burkina Faso are also at risk of serious food shortages.

- "We need to fight poverty, we need to build an early warning system, and we

need to empower the government and the local communities, so that we can prevent this from happening next year," Ms. Salah said.

- With appreciation to UN Daily News, *UN Agency Launches Large-scale Food Distribution in Niger, August 9, 2005* at www.un.org/news

UNICEF Urges G8 Leaders to Focus on Needs of the World's Children

- 1 July – The head of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) today challenged the leaders of the world's richest countries ahead of next week's G8 summit to summon the collective leadership, resources and political will needed to improve the lives of more than 1 billion children living in poverty.



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