

Regional News Roundup

AFRICA

Campaigners target landmine use by “non-state actors”

The steep decline in anti-personnel landmine use in the past decade by governments is being mirrored by a similar trend among armed non-state actors (NSAs). According to the 2009 Landmine Monitor, a civil society network monitoring compliance with the decade-old Mine Ban Treaty (MBT), at least 59 NSAs in 13 countries have committed themselves to halt the use of anti-personnel land mines. Many signatory NSAs have realised that the military utility of antipersonnel mines is limited, especially when weighed against costs and even from a military point of view, they create many disadvantages and never determined the final outcome of a war, said a programmes officer of Geneva Call, a humanitarian organisation dedicated to getting NSAs to comply with international law. A total of 156 states, more than three quarters of the world's nations, are signatories to the MBT.

Read more: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=87608>

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=88482>

KENYA

Draft policy offers new hope for IDPs

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Kenya are set to enjoy greater protection under a national policy that also aims to prevent future displacement and to fulfill the country's obligations under international IDP law, say analysts. The draft policy, unveiled in Nairobi on 17 March, broadens the definition to cover displacement due to political and resource-based conflict and natural disasters, as well as development projects that force people from their homes without proper relocation. The policy further calls for laws to address historical injustices, such as the national land policy 2009, and seeks durable solutions for IDPs.

Read more: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=88485>

SOMALIA

Thousands flee Mogadishu “death trap”

Clashes between government troops and Islamist insurgents have displaced more than 55,000 people from Mogadishu since the beginning of February, with many of them heading out of Somalia to neighbouring Kenya, according to the UN refugee agency (UNHCR). Altogether, 570,000 Somalis have fled their country, most of them live in camps in Kenya. Another reason for the exodus from the Somali capital is an announcement by the country's Transitional Federal Government that it would soon mount a major offensive against insurgent groups including al-Shabaab. Five days of recent fighting in the capital have displaced hundreds of families and left residents without food, cut off from their homes and unable to bury their dead, civil society leaders said. The fighting has also cut off aid deliveries.

Read more: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=88515>

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=88427>

Somali food aid bypasses needy, UN study says

As much as half the food aid sent to Somalia is diverted from needy people to a web of corrupt contractors, radical Islamist militants and local UN staff members, according to a new Security Council report. The report outlines a problem so grave that it recommends that Secretary General Ban Ki-moon open an independent investigation into the World Food Programme's Somalia operations. It also suggests that the programme rebuild the food distribution system, which serves at least 2.5 people and whose aid was worth about USD485 million in 2009, from scratch to break what it describes as a corrupt cartel of Somali distributors.

Read more:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/10/world/africa/10somalia.html?scp=2&sq=Somalia%20&st=cse>

SUDAN

Government repression threatens fair elections

Political repression and other rights violations ahead of the April general elections in Sudan threaten prospects for a free, fair, and credible vote, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said on March 21 in Johannesburg. HRW research missions found that both governments in Sudan are violating rights and restricting freedoms critical to fair poll. Major areas of concern include restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly, freedom of the press, and equal access to media. In Southern Sudan incidents of arbitrary arrest and detention decreased after the voter registration period in November and December, however, HRW documented several incidents of intimidation, arbitrary arrests and detention as well as physical assault and torture of members of political parties opposed to the ruling SPLM party by security forces between January and March 2010. Read more:

<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/03/21/sudan-government-repression-threatens-fair-elections>

Mitigating humanitarian disaster – new report by Norwegian Refugee Council
Urgent action is needed to avoid escalation into a humanitarian disaster in Southern Sudan, warns a new report by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). The report outlines three priority areas for action from the international community, donors, Sudanese authorities, the UN and humanitarian organisations. Firstly, to address key challenges related to the peace accord, secondly, to reduce the potential for increased fighting in the South through strengthening conflict resolution and provision of basic services as well as infrastructure development and thirdly, to prepare for a worsening humanitarian crisis through boosting emergency response capacities. Read more: <http://www.nrc.no/?did=9469343>

UGANDA

Refugees face hunger as farming ban bites

A farming ban imposed on Rwandan refugees in southwestern Uganda is raising concerns for their food security, while proposed cash transfers could boost both food prices and theft, warn aid workers and local officials, who are urging the government to rescind the directive. Rwandans were stopped from cultivation so as to encourage them to voluntarily return home, according to a senior official at Nakivale refugee camp. Last year, Rwandan refugees were given until August to voluntarily repatriate but only 5,000 left, while the remaining 16,000 went to live with nationals near the settlements but returned to the camps once the repatriation period ended.

Read more: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=88482>

“Silent emergency” in Ugandan refugee camps

With at least 67,000 refugees in southwest Uganda, the government and aid workers are battling inadequate resources in what a UN official described as a “silent emergency”. The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) can hardly meet international standards of indicators such as water, health and food, said a UNHCR representative. After years of protracted conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with large influxes to neighbouring countries, the situation of the majority Congolese refugees is no longer considered that urgent by the wider aid community. Kyaka II refugee camp hosts 16,200 refugees who are served by only one doctor with the next health centre being 15km away. But lack of medical staff is only the tip of the iceberg of the humanitarian assistance gaps in the camp, said an aid worker.

Read more: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=88396>

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=88379>