

INTERNATIONAL

Humanitarian crisis unfolds in Afghanistan

By John Price

Special to Sentinel-Voice

NEW YORK (NNPA)-As American warplanes continued to pound targets across Afghanistan, humanitarian relief agencies have become increasingly vocal about their concerns for millions of impoverished, displaced and endangered Afghan civilians.

Relief workers say food supplies are low throughout Afghanistan, medical care is scarce, hundreds of thousands

of people have already fled to closed borders and remote rural regions, and the country is on the brink of a humanitarian crisis of immense proportion.

Most alarming, say relief officials, is that although the dire need for humanitarian assistance has soared since the Sept. 11 crisis began, international relief operations have actually fallen to almost nothing in the face of country-wide U.S. military strikes,

which pose life-threatening danger and operational constraints for relief workers.

"It's going to take a lot to keep Afghan children alive through the next several months," said Carol Bellamy, executive director of UNICEF. "We're focusing our energies on basic survival, including immunization against childhood diseases, and providing nutritional supplements, medicine, and clean water. UNICEF is also

delivering education materials for displaced children."

Over the past weeks, UNICEF has managed to move supplies into the Afghan region to help more than a million people. The relief convoys have included clothing for children and women, tents, blankets, food supplies, family hygiene kits, medicine and health supplies, water cans and chemicals that purify water.

According to UNICEF,

there are 5.5 million Afghans in need of emergency assistance, of which an estimated 70 percent are women and children. Almost 20 percent of the most vulnerable populations are children under the age of five.

"Operating inside Afghanistan at the moment is very difficult, given the circumstances," said Sabah Knani, director of the UNICEF's country office in Turkmenistan, which borders

northern Afghanistan. "So it's vital that we have this new base in Turkmenistan until we can become fully operational again inside Afghanistan."

UNICEF and other humanitarian agencies have dispatched truck convoys-and even horseback shipments-from the neighboring countries of Iran, Pakistan and Tajikistan to support the increase of Afghans seeking (See Crisis, Page 16)

Congo's political future undecided

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia (AP) - Crucial talks on the political future of war-divided Congo ended Sunday after the government of the central African nation withdrew its representatives.

The former Botswanan president who has taken on the tortuous task of shepherding the negotiations said the talks would continue in South Africa. He didn't say when.

"I have decided to adjourn this session until our next meeting in South Africa," mediator Ketumile Masire told the remaining delegates.

The negotiations aim to produce a power-sharing plan to end a civil war that has claimed 2.5 million lives - mostly civilian victims of war-related hunger and disease - and that has drawn armies from six other African nations into Congo.

A peace agreement calling for an "inter-Congolese dialogue" to introduce representative government after four decades of corrupt dictatorship was signed in 1999 but repeatedly violated by all sides.

The talks had been in trouble since they started last Monday with just 80 participants - less than a quarter of those invited. Each delegation was supposed to include 62 members but was scaled down to 15 because of a lack of funds.

The government of President Joseph Kabila initially insisted on the presence of all 330 delegates but later agreed to start negotiations on technical matters and continue discussions in Durban, South Africa, in four weeks.

On Friday, however, Kabila's representatives walked out and went back to

the Congolese capital, Kinshasa, saying they would only return to the talks if all 330 delegates attended the next session.

"Our position has not changed. We want all ... delegates to attend before we start any talks," said Vital Kamerhe, a government negotiator.

In a joint communique issued Sunday, most of the opposition leaders involved in the talks said Kabila's government "seems not to understand the necessity and the urgency to make peace."

Meanwhile, political and military tensions are on the rise.

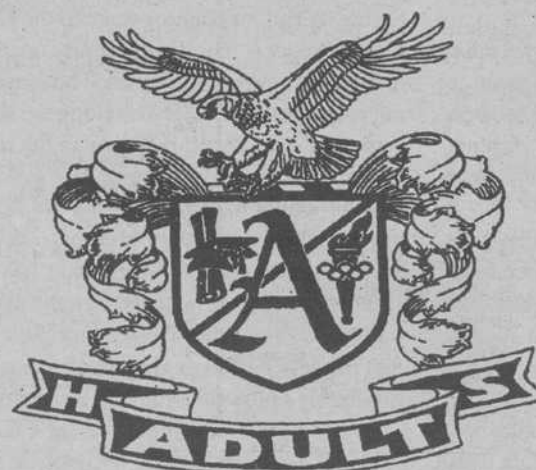
In Kinshasa, political activists have been distributing anti-government tracts, while police have stepped up patrols.

Ugandan and Rwandan-backed rebels have accused Kabila's government of seeking to re-ignite the war through an alliance with another rebel leader, Mbusa Nyamwisi, in northeastern Congo. Kabila recently met with him in Angola, which along with Zimbabwe, is backing his government in the war.

The Congolese have accused Rwanda of bolstering its military presence in eastern Congo, a charge the Rwandans have denied.

The war broke out in August 1998 when Rwanda and Uganda backed Congolese rebels seeking to oust then-President Laurent Kabila. After he was assassinated on Jan. 16, he was succeeded by his son, Joseph.

The government now controls less than half of the central African nation with the help of troops from Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia.



Adult High School Diploma Test Preparation

Clark County School District Adult High School Diploma Program offers test preparation classes for the Nevada State High School Proficiency Tests and the General Educational Development Test (GED).

Students ages 17 and older who are not enrolled in school and need to prepare for the State Proficiency Test to complete graduation requirements should contact a counselor for registration and enrollment in preparation classes. The next administration of the State Proficiency Test is scheduled for February. Students must enroll in a class to prepare prior to testing. Students may consult a counselor at one of the locations below.

The General Educational Development Test is offered to Nevada residents, ages 16 and older. Certain restrictions apply. Contact the Testing Center at 799-8655x341 for details.

Registration Sites

St. Louis
2701 E. St. Louis Ave.
Monday - Thursday
8AM-8PM
Friday 8AM-5PM

Rancho High School
1900 E. Owens
Monday-Thursday
4:30-8:30 PM

Garside Middle School
300 S. Torrey Pines
Monday-Thursday
4:30-8:30 PM

Desert Rose Adult High School
1251 Robin Street
Monday-Thursday
8AM-8PM
Friday 8AM-4:30 PM