

Relief Fund Update October - December 2008

The Mothers' Union Relief Fund offers emergency support to families all over the world who have been affected by natural or man-made disaster. The Mothers' Union is well placed within local communities to be able to offer assistance quickly to families whose lives have met with adversity. Emergency supplies of food, medicine, blankets and other essential items can be purchased locally and distributed swiftly to those most in need.



In 2008 Mothers' Union has sent Relief Fund grants totalling over £114,500.00 to help communities in need.

Thousands flee renewed fighting in Democratic Republic of Congo

The Democratic Republic of Congo is nearly a quarter of the size of the USA and borders no less than ten countries with a population of 66 million. Since gaining its independence in 1960, the country has been marred with trouble, unrest and civil war. The war has had a devastating affect on individuals, families and communities.

In October 2008 violence broke out again in the eastern part of the country and according to news reports an estimated 250,000 people fled their homes and are now living in desperate conditions. They join more than one million people already displaced in the region.

Mothers' Union has over 300,000 members in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In October 2008 Mary Sumner House received news from the Mothers' Union in Boga diocese that there had been a renewal of fighting in their region.

"Members of Mothers' Union locally are trying to gather some food items in order to feed the Internally displaced people within the Diocese of Boga. As we are unable to meet the need of these displaced mothers and children, we would like to make an appeal to MSH for assistance of the vulnerable. The number of the needy is estimated at 250 families according to the statistics of the Diocesan office. The size of the displaced is still increasing. Our Mothers Union office is targeting to assist at least 98 children and 60 mothers. This is after the visit of the Mothers' Union to the site of the displaced"

Mugisa Isingoma, Mothers' Union Diocesan President, Boga.

In response to this a Relief Fund grant was agreed for the Mothers' Union in Boga towards purchasing emergency supplies Cassava flour, Soya beans, Beans Maize flour Sugar Rice Cooking oil and salt for the displaced people. Additional provisions of mosquito nets for children and plastic sheeting to protect families from the rains, which are just starting, will also be distributed.

"Thank you very much for the email that you sent to us concerning the displaced people in Boga Diocese. May I take this opportunity on behalf of Mothers Union in Democratic Republic o Congo to thank the Worldwide Grants Committee for agreeing a special gift to help to buy emergency supplies to those whose lives have been devastated in the Diocese of Boga. At present more than 70,000 people are living in camps and in terrible conditions".

Mrs Damalie Sabiti, Mothers' Union Provincial Worker



Following this the situation in Congo deteriorated further and the affects of the conflict spread into other areas. In early November 2008, the Mothers' Union Provincial Worker approached Mary Sumner House on behalf of the diocese of Bukavu requesting that they also be given some support from the Relief Fund.

"As I write you this letter, in the dioceses of Bukavu and Boga there is still trouble. The rebels have made people flee from their homes. Many of them went to live in Nyakeru which is about 25km from Bunia town. Back home they left their crops in their gardens, now they are lacking food. They sleep in unfinished houses which they come across. Please pray for us. This is the time when the Mothers' Union could be of great help. We are trying our best to help". Mrs Damalie Sabiti, Mothers' Union Provincial Worker

"Mothers and children are suffering from hunger, they feel cold, and many of them are victims of Cholera, Malaria,... Because of the bad condition of life in unsafe camps, they are in hardship. They often loose their properties during looting by militias, many are raped and this is why they go in displacement camps far from their homes. Mothers' Union Bukavu has no possibility to give to these people any material assistance. Please, we need your prayers and any kind of help for this situation". Mrs Venerande Bahati, Mothers' Union Diocesan President, Diocese of Bukavu.

In response to this a Relief Fund grant was immediately sent to the Mothers' Union in Bukavu to enable them to purchase emergency supplies for the displaced people. Worldwide President of Mothers' Union, Rosemary Kempself, highlights the particular risks to women caught up in the war: *"Women are, we hear, increasingly being subjected to rape and worse. We [Mothers' Union] need to do all we can to support the relief efforts of our team in DR Congo at this time."*

Mothers' Union in Uganda reaches out to refugees

The current crisis in Democratic Republic of Congo is also now affecting neighbouring countries who, in recent weeks, have witnessed an influx of thousands of refugees. Many of the refugees have fled their homes with very few possessions, taking with them only what they can carry. They are therefore desperately in need of food and other supplies.

Muhabura diocese in Uganda borders Democratic Republic of Congo. A Relief Fund grant was sent at the beginning of December to support the Mothers' Union in Mwumba Parish in their relief work with the Congolese refugees. The following is a recent report and photographs received from the Mothers' Union Diocesan President, Mrs Hope Mugisha detailing how they have already supported the refugees from within their own resources. The recent Relief Fund grant will enable them to reach out to and feed more families with supplies of dry beans, potatoes, sugar and maize flour.

MWUMBA MOTHERS' UNION HOST REFUGEES IN FACE OF SHARP FOOD CRISIS

Every year the months of September to November are characterised by a shortage of food in most homes in Kisoro district because all the seed is in the ground sprouting. But this year the food shortage has escalated by the destructive hailstorm that hit hard Mwumba area on 10th October 2008. Hail in the form of white stones as big as an egg hit house roofs so hard that they left gaping holes. Crops in the field, especially climbing beans, cassava and banana plantations were left leafless after the storm. The animals in the field and birds of the air were not left without casualties. The following morning many carcasses littered the place and for a few weeks there was no noise from the birds.

Another unusual event that mothers in Mwumba experienced was the influx of refugees from Congo. Mwumba Parish is located a few kilometres from the Congo border. When the war in Congo erupted many people took refuge into the neighbouring homes just across the border. One family hosted over 40 people. This posed a challenge to the hosts in terms of feeding, sleeping and medical facilities. Children, adults and domestic animals crammed the little houses.

When the Mothers' Union Worker received the news of what the mothers in Mwumba Parish were going through, she mobilised mothers in Seseme Parish to collect some food stuffs and used but usable clothes to distribute to the people in Mwumba as a sign of fellowship with the suffering community.

On Saturday, November 15 2008, the Mothers' Union President and Mothers' Union Worker visited the Mwumba Mothers' Union members and helped them distribute dry beans to the refugees. The following Saturday the same team visited one of the local churches, Muko Church of Uganda that was hosting refugees to distribute potatoes and a few clothes to the refugees. The photos below tell the rest of the story.

The local efforts by the Mothers' Union in Muhabura Diocese need strengthening to make a more meaningful impact to the mothers in Mwumba Parish as people wait for harvest of food crops in two months' time and hopefully the situation in Congo will have improved to enable people to return to their homes.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

*Hope Mugisha (Mrs)
President Mothers' Union, Muhabura Diocese, Uganda*

MWUMBA MOTHERS' UNION HOST REFUGEES IN FACE OF SHARP FOOD CRISIS



Hope (Mothers' Union Diocesan President) uses a basket to give some food rations as Zeridah (Mothers' Union Diocesan Worker) witnesses.



Hope holds one of the malnourished babies among the refugees. The mother does not have sufficient nutrition to enable her to give enough milk to the baby.



One of the male refugees came with a sick baby on his back, a role strictly for women or young children, to receive clothes and potatoes because the mother had gone to look for more food and left the sick child with the father. Hope gave a word of exhortation from the Bible (2 Chronicles 20:15) after the distribution of the potatoes and clothes.

Amazingly, the Congo refugees received the supplies calmly and quietly. They appreciated the gesture though it was like a rain drop in a vast ocean. What was given to each family was just enough for a meal!

Mothers' Union in the diocese of Kinkizi have also witnessed an influx of refugees in recent days and have mobilised themselves to help support these refugees with emergency supplies. The following information was received from the Mothers' Union Worker in Kinkizi, Rev Canon Evas Kurama and the Bishop of Kinkizi, Rt. Rev. John Wilson Ntegyereize.



"Today's report indicates that over 50,000 people have been received at the border in South West Uganda Kanungu District. The situation is overwhelming. These people who are stranded at the Ishasha border town in Kihiihi subcounty include mainly children and women ranging from 1 year to 50 years. There are others who are entering Kanungu from different corners. Over three hundred refugees are currently in one of our schools while many others are at Buhoma, Kyeshero,

Ntungamo, Kihembe - our churches in Kayonza sub county and Rukarara, Kazinga our parish centres in Kihiihi Sub County. They need food, water, warm clothing and blankets, shelter and emergency health care.

Although the Government is making arrangements to take these people into a camp by sending buses to pick them up, the process takes a long time. This means that people are starving and suffering from different diseases, the situation which needs urgent action to avoid death. Common illnesses appearing include skin infections, diarrhoea, malaria, and body pain as a result of walking long distances.

It is feared that dysentery and cholera might break out soon if no urgent step is taken to improve their conditions. Our border institutions like churches, hospitals and schools have become affected because they are now landing centres for these refugees. So far the Diocese is working with seven parishes to handle this situation through the pastors, Mothers' Union leaders and our health workers but the problem is beyond our means. As a church we cannot sit back and relax when people are suffering in our presence. We are therefore bringing this to the attention of all our friends, partners and well wishers... so that they can help us as a Diocese to assist the refugees who are in dire need".

A Relief Fund grant was immediately sent to help the Mothers' Union in Kinkizi support these refugees with emergency supplies.

Famine relief in north-eastern Uganda

Since 2005, the north-eastern region of Uganda has suffered from unreliable rainfall. Sometimes there has been too little rain falling to support the growth of crops, at other times there has been plenty of rain but at the wrong time. As a result food stocks in the region have been depleted exposing people to increased hunger which is now turning into famine. Today, according to the Mothers' Union in Karamoja diocese, *"the situation is becoming overwhelming... people are becoming weaker and collapsing, an unspecified number have already died and children are emaciated. Women and children are most affected and in dire need. Emergency food is needed now."*

"The famine situation in Karamoja has resulted in a massive influx of the Karamojong young into neighbouring districts for survival through odd jobs, prostitution, child labour and other inhuman acts which have never been experienced before to this magnitude in the history of Karamoja. Their tears and deaths in those towns, no one knows or cares".

The Mothers' Union in Karamoja have responded and are targeting 1,100 families to help with supplies. With approximately 8 people in each family they are aiming to reach 8,800 beneficiaries in total. The majority of the affected are children, mothers, and people of disability, widows, HIV/AIDS patients, orphans, and the elderly.

A Relief Fund grant was immediately sent in December 2008 to help the Mothers' Union in Karamoja support these families with emergency supplies of maize, beans, vegetable oil and also some clothing.

Supporting displaced families in Kenya

In November 2008 over 10,000 people were made homeless in the Budalangi district of Kenya after floodwaters destroyed their homes. The floods were caused by heavy rain and the sudden collapse of two dykes on the River Nzoia in Nambale diocese in Western Kenya. These latest floods come just over a year after severe floods hit the region in 2007 wiping out villages and leaving thousands homeless.

Budalangi has an estimated population of 64,000 people. Many families have now settled on higher ground waiting for the floodwater to recede when they will then be able to assess the full extent of the damage. There are already indications that the floods are likely to have a long term affect on the local area. Many crops of maize, the local staple food, are feared to have been destroyed by the floods leading to food shortages.

Mothers' Union in Nambale contacted Mary Sumner House in November 2008 requesting help from the Relief Fund to support 2,500 affected households with urgent supplies of food and medicines. A Relief Fund grant was immediately sent to support this work in Nambale.

How you can help...

Through prayer... Please pray for all the families that have been affected by these disasters, especially for families who are grieving for lost friends and relatives. Please pray also for all those who are working tirelessly to bring aid and relief to these families.

By giving... The Relief Fund supports vital Mothers' Union work where it is most needed. This relief work is only possible through the continued enthusiasm, financial and prayer support of our members and friends around the world. By making a donation to Mothers' Union Relief Fund you can make a real difference to vulnerable communities across the world by enabling us to send help immediately as an emergency arises.



Call 020 7222 5533 now to make a donation over the telephone using a credit or debit card, or send a cheque made payable to "*Mothers' Union Relief Fund*" to: Mothers' Union, 24 Tufton Street, London, SW1P 3RB.

For more information about the Mothers' Union Relief Fund, please visit the Mothers' Union website www.themothersunion.org or e-mail worldwide@themothersunion.org