



## **Regional matters**

### **Report on the situation in the WHO Regional Office for Africa, Brazzaville**

In view of the recent political and security crisis in Brazzaville, the seat of the Regional Office for Africa, the Director-General provides the following situation report for the information of the Executive Board.

1. On 5 June 1997 hostilities broke out in Brazzaville, the seat of the WHO Regional Office for Africa.
2. The ensuing security crisis intensified and upon the decision of the United Nations Security Coordinator in New York internationally recruited staff of the United Nations common system were evacuated from Brazzaville. From 13 to 18 June 1997 WHO evacuated approximately 575 staff and dependants initially to either their home countries or to Libreville, designated as a safe haven. Locally recruited staff were paid salary advances, and efforts were made to assist them to relocate outside Brazzaville.
3. Temporary arrangements were made for the immediate functioning of the Regional Office. On 23 June 1997 the Regional Director, with a team of staff, set up temporary offices at WHO headquarters in Geneva. Other staff were deployed to Pretoria to prepare for the Regional Committee for Africa (Sun City, South Africa, 1 to 5 September 1997) and to three other temporary locations in Lomé, Harare and Libreville.
4. On 23 June 1997 the Director-General established a small task force comprising staff from headquarters and the Regional Office to review options for restoring the African Region to full functioning and to minimize the risk of future disruptions.
5. On 28 July 1997 the task force submitted its report. Based on the recommendation of the Regional Director for Africa, the Director-General approved one of the two options it proposed, namely, to have a "regional office with only core staff, plus selected and strengthened WHO country offices with appropriate administrative support staff".
6. In July 1997 the Minister of Health and Child Welfare of Zimbabwe, on behalf of the Government of Zimbabwe and based on a decision taken at a meeting of the ministers of the countries of the Southern African Development Community, extended an invitation providing facilities for the temporary relocation of the Regional Office to Harare. In light of the urgent needs of the Secretariat, it was decided to accept this offer.

7. Representatives at the Regional Committee for Africa were informed of the situation. They considered that the manner in which it was being handled was fully satisfactory.

8. On 15 October 1997 the hostilities ceased, although looting occurred at the compound of the Regional Office in Djoué on the outskirts of Brazzaville. The official WHO vehicles, personal cars of staff members, and personal property of staff in most of the villas and apartments were stolen. The buildings of the Regional Office, however, were not affected and all records, files and documentation were left untouched.

9. From 22 to 28 November 1997 a joint team comprising Regional Office staff and a senior staff member from headquarters visited Brazzaville to assess the political and security situation, the extent of looting of the property of the Organization and of its staff, and the urgent humanitarian assistance that should be provided. Considering the extensive and substantial destruction of the city's infrastructure, the team was of the view that the Regional Office could not adequately and fully function in Brazzaville within the next two years. None the less, it recommended, *inter alia*, that essential services consisting of a multidisciplinary team should be put in place by the Organization as part of the urgent humanitarian assistance to be provided to the country by the United Nations common system and nongovernmental organizations. The Regional Office would provide temporary offices and residential accommodation to the humanitarian team. These recommendations have been accepted and are being implemented.

10. Based on the recommendation of the Regional Director, the Director-General also approved the strengthening of the WHO country offices in Harare, Kampala, Libreville and Lomé as part of the programme of decentralization of the Regional Office activities.

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