

Area Catholics urged to support Sudan relief efforts

As support from parishes and schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore continues to help relief efforts in violence-riddled North Sudan, a Catholic Relief Services representative working in that country urged local Catholics to endorse United Nations aid.

“The Catholic population has been extremely generous throughout this conflict,” said Mark Snyder, a CRS field representative stationed in Khartoum, who was in the organization’s headquarters in Baltimore for a press call Jan. 10. “But, we need the people here to lobby their political representatives for more U.N. support and to insure funding, so our programs won’t fade away.”

About half of Sudan’s 7 million citizens are in need of assistance and CRS is working to supply people around Darfur and the northern regions of the country with food, water, shelter, sanitation, non-food items, education and agriculture recovery.

Mr. Snyder has worked with a staff of 125 in that region since Aug. 2005 to bring aid to the suffering people of North Sudan.

The relief efforts come in the wake of the Naivasha Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in Jan. 2005, which was preceded by a bloody 21-year civil war that claimed the lives of 2 million Sudanese, plus an additional 10 years of conflict.

Violent attacks by government armed militia have increased during the past year, making it difficult to get food, seed and other supplies to the populations in villages and refugee camps, Snyder said.

“We’ve been unable to reach many of our locations by land,” Mr. Snyder said. “We’ve been sending out teams by U.N. helicopters... and we’ve worked with a network of local leaders in these villages and camps to get aid to these populations.”

Though CRS has managed to maintain their food programs with steady supplies of monthly rations, the access problems have made it difficult to sustain their educational, agricultural and sanitation projects, Mr. Snyder said.

“We’ve received about \$26,000 for Sudan from parishes in the Archdiocese of Baltimore,” said Hilary Roxel, a CRS spokeswoman. “The account these funds went into meets needs across Sudan – northern and southern – and can also be used in eastern Chad, where we help a local partner managing refugee camps.”

Parishioners of St. Pius X, Rodgers Forge raised \$3,400 for programs in Darfur as of last September and several students at Notre Dame Preparatory School in Towson participated in a Save Darfur Now rally in New York City Sept. 17 to draw global attention to the humanitarian crisis in that region of the world.

“We’re really interested in mobilizing Catholics in the Baltimore area into action,” said Christine Tucker, regional director for the Mid-Atlantic States for CRS. “We want them to become more informed about the crisis and what is behind the crisis. Then, we would invite them to try and influence legislation. Writing your congressman and letting him know this is an issue of importance to you can go a long way.”

Local parishes and schools can contact Ms. Tucker at 410-951-7253, or by email at ctucker@crs.org, to organize an educational seminar about the situation in North Sudan.