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AFRICA/CHAD - A new project to guarantee potable water and limit the outbreak of cholera

Bongor (Agenzia Fides) – In mid-December in Chad 6,369 cases of cholera and 180 deaths were recorded: these statistics were released by the United Nations for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The African Country has the lowest coverage of potable water (for only 44.7% of the population) and adequate sanitation facilities (12%) in all of West and Central Africa, according to UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). Nearly 90 percent of the population defecate in the open, says UNICEF, which is working with the Government and the Netherlands-based PRACTICA Foundation to improve water and sanitation in the country, and reduce the outbreak of cholera. Beyond the need for basic infrastructure, is also that of adopting a hygienic lifestyle, adapted to economically challenged families. For example, once the people of Bongor have finished the items distributed by aid agencies, they no longer have regular access to soap and detergent. More work is needed towards prevention: some do not understand the importance of hand washing that can mean not dying of cholera. In a school in Bongor temporary thatch-walled latrines marked “Oxfam-GB” in green letters line the schoolyard.
Cholera, though easily preventable, is one of the most deadly diarrhoeal diseases. Once someone is infected through contaminated food or water, the vibrio cholerae bacteria are present in faeces for one to two weeks, and without proper sanitation are likely to infect others. But proper sanitation facilities, as well as safe drinking water, are out of
reach for most Chadians. According to a message sent to Fides, Intermón Oxfam said that the Government must tackle this as their first priority post-emergency. Once the epidemic is over, the Government must work on improving basic water and sanitation infrastructure and promoting hygiene for the long term. This is the way cholera can be tackled definitively, as well as other infectious diseases caused by the lack of potable water and proper hygiene. It is difficult to effectively teach proper hygiene to students when schools do not even have adequate washroom facilities. Among schools in the capital N'djamena Intermón Oxfam workers have visited, one had no toilet for 785 students, another had one toilet for 623. (AP) (24/1/2011 Agenzia Fides)

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