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News note

Conflict over, 1.2 million children to return to school in Libya

TRIPOLI/BENGAZI, Libya, 6 January 2012 – More than 1.2 million children return to school in Libya on Saturday, 10 months after evacuating classrooms because of the fighting during the country's popular uprising.

The conflict took a heavy toll on Libya's education system, with schools closed, damaged and used for military and humanitarian purposes. Many children suffered deep scars from the violence and the loss of loved ones.

"This is a massive operation and a huge achievement for the people of Libya," said Maria Calivis, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, in Amman. "At a time of great hope and upheaval, no sector has more potential than education to improve society and restore normalcy for children."

With support from UNICEF and other partners, the Government worked round the clock to rehabilitate infrastructure and clear rubble, landmines and unexploded ordnance from schools.

A total of 27 million revised textbooks are being printed, 10 million of which are already being distributed by the Ministry of Education throughout the country. Severely distressed children and their families are receiving psycho-social support and work is underway to track internally-displaced and other vulnerable children to ensure that they are enrolled.

Many challenges remain, including the plight of the displaced, a shortage of desks and books and transport for children to and from schools.

With assistance from the European Union and other donors, UNICEF will support Libyan authorities in broad-based reforms. Libya has good levels of education indicators, though better quality and more relevant teaching are required to ensure that the system is more responsive to gender disparities, minorities and children with disabilities.

UNICEF supports a nationwide school-based survey to be launched this month to collect data for planning around schools, equipment, supplies, teaching materials, teachers and enrollment.

"Investment in children and in an inclusive education is a first step towards building a tolerant and productive society," said Calivis.

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UNICEF works in 190 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: www.unicef.org

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