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Communities recovering from conflict rebuild housing in Eritrea

Wednesday, 13 March 2002: Thousands of families in Tserona, a trading centre on Eritrea's border with Ethiopia, now have decent housing, thanks to a post-war rehabilitation programme supported by the Netherlands.

The local people organized an inauguration ceremony last month in appreciation for the assistance and renamed their town square "The Hague Square." J.M.G. Brandt, Ambassador of the Netherlands, attended the ceremony and led the procession to inaugurate the houses and a monument built on the square to mark the occasion.

The housing project rehabilitated or constructed over 3,000 houses in the Debub Region, including 2,000 in Tserona, helping the area recover from damage inflicted during the recent war with Ethiopia. Rehabilitation of 2,400 emergency housing units in the Gash Barka Region is proceeding well. The Netherlands has provided US\$2.3 million for the initiative, which UNDP is implementing in close collaboration with local governments in Debub and Gash Barka Regions.

"Had it not been for the timely intervention and contribution by the Government of Netherlands, through Ambassador Brandt, it might not have been possible for us to be present here for this ceremony," said Simon Nhongo, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative.

He also paid tribute to the "spirit and practice of collaboration" by technical school students in aiding the project, and to the regional administration and the people of Tserona for supporting the effort.

"As the four trees that we have planted today around the monument for The Hague Square grow," he said, "let's hope and pray that the peace process is going to grow similarly. It is only through peace that the ultimate objectives of our efforts are going to be realized."

The housing project is part of the UNDP Post War Emergency and Rehabilitation (PoWER) programme. Professor Techeste Ahderom, UNDP Senior Adviser on Recovery, said the programme has set up an effective disbursement mechanism to meet the needs of people recovering from the devastation of war. In addition to the housing project, during the last year the programme has rehabilitated 22 schools and 13 health facilities, including one hospital, and drilled 12 boreholes and constructed two hand-dug wells for 12 villages.

PoWER has also supported a national social safety net through cash-for-work programmes for over 125,000 people affected by the conflict, purchased \$750,000 worth of medical supplies, printed over 450,000 worth of books for children and distributed about 1,500 emergency structures.

For further information, please contact Michael Araia, United Nations Eritrea, or Cassandra Waldon, UNDP Communications Office.



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