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## **Number of unaccompanied refugee and migrant children hits 'record high' – UNICEF**

**18 May** – The number of children traveling alone has increased fivefold since 2010, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said today, warning that many young refugees and migrants are taking highly dangerous routes, often at the mercy of traffickers, to reach their destinations.

At least 300,000 unaccompanied and separated children were recorded in some 80 countries in the combined years of 2015 and 2016, up from 66,000 in 2010 and 2011, according to the new UNICEF report *A Child is a Child: Protecting children on the move from violence, abuse and exploitation*, which presents a global snapshot of refugee and migrant children, the motivations behind their journeys and the risks they face along the way.

“One child moving alone is one too many, and yet today, there are a staggering number of children doing just that – we as adults are failing to protect them,” said UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Justin Forsyth yesterday in a news release.

Among a raft of alarming statistics, the report finds that children account for approximately 28 per cent of trafficking victims globally. In Sub-Saharan Africa and Central America and the Caribbean have the highest share of children among detected trafficking victims at 64 and 62 per cent, respectively. Further, as much as 20 per cent of smugglers have links to human trafficking networks.

“Ruthless smugglers and traffickers are exploiting their vulnerability for personal gain, helping children to cross borders,



In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, three children look out of the window of a train, which was boarded by refugees primarily from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, at a reception centre for refugees and migrants, in Gevgelija. Photo: UNICEF/Ashley Gilbertson VII

only to sell them into slavery and forced prostitution. It is unconscionable that we are not adequately defending children from these predators,” stated Mr. Forsyth.

Frist and foremost, the agency says, children need protection, highlighting the importance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, through which State Parties commit to respect and ensure the rights of “each child within their jurisdiction, without discrimination of any kind.”

### ***Six-point agenda for action***

The information is coming to light just ahead of next week’s G7 Summit in Italy and UNICEF is calling on governments to adopt its six-point agenda for action, which includes:

1. Protect child refugees and migrants, particularly unaccompanied children, from exploitation and violence;
2. End the detention of children seeking refugee status or migrating, by introducing a range of practical alternatives;
3. Keep families together as the best way to protect children and give children legal status;
4. Keep all refugee and migrant children learning and give them access to health and other quality services;
5. Press for action on the underlying causes of large scale movements of refugees and migrants; and
6. Promote measures to combat xenophobia, discrimination and marginalization in countries of transit and destination.

“These children need a real commitment from governments around the world to ensure their safety throughout their journeys,” said Mr. Forsyth. “Leaders gathering next week at the G7 should lead this effort by being the first to commit to our six-point agenda for action.”

## **Identifying all-time deadliest weather events, UN says history can help mitigate future disasters**



Storm damage in Port Vila, capital of Vanuatu, caused by Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2015. Photo: UNICEF Pacific/Alice Clements

**18 May** – The United Nations weather agency today announced “world records” for the highest reported historical death tolls from tropical cyclones, tornadoes, lightning and hailstorms, marking the first time its Archive of Weather and Climate Extremes has broadened its scope from temperature and weather records to address impacts of specific events.

“Extreme weather causes serious destruction and major loss of life. That is one of the reasons behind the WMO’s [World Meteorological Organization] efforts to improve early warnings of multiple hazards and impact-based forecasting, and to learn lessons gleaned from historical disasters to prevent future ones,” said WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas.

“The human aspect inherent in extreme events should never be lost,”

he added.

While the in-depth investigation by a WMO expert committee documented mortality records for five specific weather-related events, it did not address heat- or cold-waves, drought and floods.

The experts found that the highest mortality rate associated with extreme weather was during a 1970 tropical cyclone through what was at the time East Pakistan, which killed an estimated 300,000 people.

Other record-breaking weather events included a 1989 tornado in Bangladesh that killed an estimated 1,300 people, destroying the Manikganj district; a 1994 lightning-caused oil tank fire in Dronka, Egypt, which took 469 lives, while 21 people were killed by a single lightning bolt to a hut in the Manica Tribal Trust Lands in what was then Rhodesia; and Meanwhile, a 1888 hailstorm in near Moradabad, India, which killed 246 people with hailstones as large as “goose eggs and

oranges and cricket balls.”

The findings were announced ahead of two major conferences on improving multi-hazard early warning systems and strengthening disaster risk reduction, taking place in Cancun, Mexico from 22 to 26 May and organized by WMO and the UN Office on Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR).

Overall mortality can also decrease as a result of continuous improvement in related forecasting and warning infrastructure.

“These events highlight the deadly tragedies associated with different types of weather. Detailed knowledge of these historical extremes confirms our continuing responsibilities to not only forecast and monitor weather and climate but to utilize that information to save lives around the world so disasters of these types are lessened or even eliminated in the future,” said Randall Cerveny, WMO Rapporteur on Climate and Weather Extremes.

The experts stressed that vulnerability is a function of both the risk of an event and the adaptation or resilience to the event. For example, heatwave-related mortality tends to decrease as air conditioning becomes more widespread. Similarly, lightning casualties decrease when munitions storage facilities install lightning rods and athletic programs establish lightning safety protocols.

Overall mortality can also decrease as a result of continuous improvement in related forecasting and warning infrastructure. For example, the MeteoAlarm system in Europe is a web-based service designed to provide real-time warning for people travelling in Europe of severe weather.

“Yet even with these improvements, mortality from weather-related events will continue. In order to put potential future weather-related catastrophes into accurate historical context, it is useful to have knowledge of baseline changes in weather-related mortality as monitored over the last one hundred and fifty years of official international weather records,” said the WMO committee.

## Experts race against clock to quell Ebola outbreak in remote DR Congo province – UN



Representatives of the Ministry of Health in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), WHO and UNICEF arrive at Likati, the epicentre of the Ebola outbreak. Photo: WHO African Region

**18 May** – A race against the clock has begun to contain an outbreak of Ebola in a remote northern area of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) said today.

Twenty cases of Ebola have been reported in the DRC's Bas Uele Province – near the vast country's border with the Central African Republic – two have been confirmed by laboratory tests and three people have died so far, the agency says.

On 9 May, WHO noticed a cluster of unexplained illnesses and death, all with bleeding symptoms in the same area. WHO, the Congolese Government and the medical aid organization, Alima, immediately deployed a team to the field and lab tests confirmed it was Ebola. Two days later, the DRC Ministry of Health officially declared an outbreak of the virus.

“It's important to note that Likati Health Zone is one of the most remote parts of the DRC. It is 1400 kilometres from Kinshasa and 350 kilometres from the nearest major town, Kisangani,” said Dr. Peter Salama, the WHO Executive Director for Health and Emergencies Programmes, speaking to the press in Geneva.

The logistic and practical challenges associated with the response to the outbreak in a very remote and insecure part of the country should not be underestimated – WHO's Dr. Peter Salama

He also said there are only 20 kilometres of paved roads in that area and virtually no functional telecommunications. It is also an area that has been subject to insecurity and displacement. “The Lord's Resistance Army is believed to be active in the area and their displaced populations from the ongoing conflict in the Central African Republic,” he noted.

With the help of the UN, the first search teams, led by the DRC's Ministry of Health, flew into Likati on yesterday. Their immediate priority is to follow the 400 plus contacts of the suspected Ebola cases.

The focus is on surveillance, getting the best information on the suspected cases, diagnosing people who have come in contact with an infected person, case management, isolating those who are infected to prevent the spread of the disease and more importantly engaging with the community, explained Dr. Salama.

Meanwhile, the first Ebola treatment centre has been established in the Likati General Hospital. Protective gear has been dispatched to health workers and a mobile lab is being constructed and then deployed to the area. Immediate repairs to air strips and telecommunications are also being carried out.

The first six months of the operation are expected to cost \$10 million.

***Risk assessment 'high' at national level; 'low risk' globally***

WHO has determined overall that the risk assessment for this event is “high” at the national level, medium at the regional level and low at the global level.

An experimental vaccine for Ebola is being tested in Guinea, where the first outbreak of Ebola in West Africa was reported.

The trials there have been “promising” and the vaccines has proven to be efficient and safe so far, Dr. Salama told reporters, while Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa, added that she is encouraged by the rapid response to quell the outbreak.

“We have not received an official request from the Government for this vaccine but they have been made aware that this possibility exists both to benefit from this new tool and also to add their support in the testing of this vaccine, she said, reiterating the experimental nature of the vaccine and expressed hope the authorities “will work with us to consider this and make a decision.”

This is the eighth outbreak in the DRC since 1976. The most recent was in 2014, around the time more than 11,000 people died and some 28,000 cases were reported in the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, mainly in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

## UN envoy urges defusing tensions over Palestinian hunger strike in Israeli jails

**18 May** – The United Nations envoy on the Middle East peace process today called for an immediate resolution to the growing tensions over a hunger strike by Palestinian detainees in Israeli jails.

“I am following with great concern the ongoing hunger strike by Palestinian detainees protesting against their conditions in Israeli jails,” said the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, in a statement.

“The strike is now entering its second month and it is imperative that a resolution be found as soon as possible in line with international humanitarian law and Israel’s human rights obligations,” he added.

Expressing hope that current efforts will result in an immediate resolution to the matter, which is in the interest of ongoing initiatives to revive a political process, he called on all actors to exercise maximum restraint, show responsibility and take all necessary steps to avoid escalating tensions.



Nickolay Mladenov, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. (file) UN Photo/Loey Felipe

## Mosul: 200,000 more people could be displaced as battle nears Old City – UN



Six family members fleeing the Mosul, Iraq, offensive, celebrate their new found freedoms, as they clamber out of the crowded truck packed with other families. Photo: UNHCR/Ivor Prickett

**18 May** – As military operations against terrorists intensify and move closer to Mosul's Old City area, up to 200,000 more people could be displaced, a senior United Nations humanitarian official in Iraq warned today.

“The numbers of people fleeing their homes in western Mosul are overwhelming,” said Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq Lise Grande in a press release from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Since military operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) began in Mosul seven months ago, nearly 700,000 people have been displaced, including 500,000 people from the city's western neighbourhoods.

Iraqi Security Forces have made rapid gains in north-west Mosul and ISIL terrorists are reportedly surrounded in the west of the city.

“The military battle in Mosul isn't over yet and even when it is, the emergency will continue for months... Hundreds of thousands of lives are at stake,” said Ms. Grande, stressing the need to re-double efforts to mobilize more resources to assist the people in need.

She said many are lacking food and haven't had access to safe drinking water and medicines for weeks or months.

Acknowledging the generosity of people in other parts of Mosul who are opening their homes for displaced families, she said: “Without this support, the camps would have been overwhelmed long ago.”

To date, the \$985 million appeal for Iraq is less than 30 per cent funded. About \$331 million is being sought for the Mosul assistance.

## Challenges can derail Bosnia and Herzegovina from path of stability, Security Council told

**18 May** – Though Bosnia and Herzegovina has continued its efforts towards membership in the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), negative incidents could still derail the country from the path of peace and stability, a senior diplomat told the United Nations Security Council today.

“As we enter the third decade of peace implementation, it cannot be assumed that Bosnia and Herzegovina is on a glide path to a peaceful, viable State irreversibly on course for European integration,” said High Representative Valentin Inzko during a briefing on the situation in the country.

The Office of the High Representative was created in 1995 to oversee the Dayton Peace Agreement signed by the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that formally ended the 1992-1995 Bosnian war.

“We need to be mindful of the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a complex political and security environment, where negative scenarios can quickly endanger the Dayton Peace Agreement and the progress achieved after Dayton,” Mr. Inzko told the 15-member body, stressing the need for the international community to retain all the instruments at hand.

In this regard, he supported the EU military force’s presence on the ground with an executive mandate and its extension, an issue to be considered by the UN Security Council in November.

The EU military force is “a relatively inexpensive but necessary investment in peace and stability in the Balkans,” he said, as it provides an essential baseline of physical and psychological security that supports the EU, his Office and other international organizations.

Regarding the Euro-Atlantic integration, Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities formally received the EU Questionnaire in December and the adaptation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU took place in the same month.

Equally encouraging was the consensus and forward-looking pragmatism demonstrated by the country’s Presidency in adopting the so-called Defense Review of military forces last November, one of the requirements to participate in the NATO Membership Action Plan.

At the regional level, bilateral cooperation and overall reconciliation between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia has continued to improve, he noted.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, however, faced some significant challenges over the last six months, including the controversy between Bosniak political representatives and Serb political parties over whether the country should submit a request for revision of the International Criminal Court’s 2007 judgment in the genocide case of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia vs. Serbia.

In another negative development, Croat politicians have intensified calls for the “federalization,” which was understood by some to imply the further ethnic division of the country into three to four “federal units,” one of which would have a Croat majority.

Further, the situation with regard to rule of law continued to deteriorate, with corruption a serious problem.



Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, briefs the Security Council on the situation in that country. UN Photo/Manuel Elias

These “will require continued attention and commitment from the international community,” he said.

## Industry leaders agree to implement UN agency's standards on clinical trial reporting

**18 May** – With about half of all clinical trial results unreported, some of the world's largest funders of medical research and international non-governmental organizations today agreed to adopt standards – based on United Nations health agency's recommendations – to register and publicly disclose results of all clinical trials they fund or support.

“Research funders are making a strong statement that there will be no more excuses on why some clinical trials remain unreported long after they have completed,” said Marie-Paule Kieny, Assistant Director-General for Health Systems and Innovation at the UN World Health Organization (WHO).

The concern is that unreported trials result in an “incomplete and potentially misleading” understanding of the risks and benefits of vaccines, drugs and medical devices, and could lead to the release of harmful products.

The standards are based on a 2015 WHO published position on public disclosure, which defines timeframes within which the results should be reported.

Today's joint statement that future standards will be in line with that 2015 position, was signed by the Indian Council of Medical Research, the Norwegian Research Council, the UK Medical Research Council, Médecins Sans Frontières and Epicentre (its research arm), PATH, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Institut Pasteur, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Wellcome Trust.

According to a press release, the entities agreed to develop and implement policies within the next 12 months that require all trials they fund, co-fund, sponsor or support to be registered in a publicly-available registry.

## UN expert urges Dominican Republic to place child protection at core of tourism strategy

**18 May** – Those who come to the Dominican Republic to sexually exploit children must know that they will be punished, a United Nations independent expert said, urging the Government to put child protection at the centre of its tourism strategy.

At the end of her first official visit to the Dominican Republic, the UN Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, urged the Government to “send a strong signal that the target of 10 millions of tourists by 2022 is not reached at the expense of exposing further children to the scourge of sexual exploitation.”

During her eight-day mission, the Special Rapporteur visited child care institutions, and met with children in vulnerable situations to fall victims of sexual exploitation such as girl vendors on beach locations.

She noted that blame for rape and other sexual exploitation is often put on the families and the exploited children “while



A laboratory specialist researching on avian influenza at a human health lab. (file) Photo: World Bank



Special Rapporteur Maud de Boer-Buquicchio. UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferre

perpetrators – often foreign male from Western countries whose crimes are facilitated by all sorts of intermediaries – walk around with a complete sense of impunity.”

The Special Rapporteur called on the Ministry of Tourism to incorporate prevention of this scourge in its plans, and to lead efforts already deployed by the private travel and tourism sector, together with local actors of affected communities, to implement the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism.

The expert commended measures adopted by the specialised units of the Attorney General's Office to combat trafficking and high technology crimes, which have led to a series of convictions, including of foreign nationals.

She also called for better coordination between the police and the body in charge of tourist security (CESTUR) to improve detection and referral of cases for criminal investigation.

“International police and judicial cooperation are also crucial to combat impunity,” she added.

Ms. de Boer-Buquicchio also called for a strengthened cooperation between the Dominican and Haitian authorities to address the situation of unaccompanied children living and working around the Haitian border, and reminded that “while these children remain in the country, they must receive the Dominican authorities' assistance and protection.”

Among other statements made during her visit, the expert called for absolute prohibition of child marriage.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.