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UN aid officials in Yemen forced to shift resources from fighting hunger to cholera

In May 2017, at the Sab'een Hospital in Sana'a, Yemen, patients suffering from severe diarrhoea or cholera receive treatment. Photo: UNICEF/ Alzekri

11 July – Unless the international community contributes \$200 million to address the cholera outbreak in Yemen, the United Nations humanitarian arm will be forced to “reprogram” more resources tagged for malnutrition in the country already facing famine, a senior official today said.

“This unprecedented cholera epidemic would further weaken the resources, and the resilience that people had had over the last two and a half years of this war,” Jamie McGoldrick, the Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, told journalists in Geneva.

There were now 313,538 suspected cases of cholera and 1,732 deaths, according to figures from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

About 40 per cent of the suspected cases and a quarter of the deaths were among children younger than 15 years old, particularly the malnourished. Older adults, pregnant women and people with chronic health conditions were among the greatest risk for death.

“All of this is entirely man-made, as a result of the conflict,” Mr. McGoldrick said by phone from Amman, Jordan.

He noted that two million additional people were added to the humanitarian case load since the start of the year as a result of the cholera outbreak, the looming famine, and the economic collapse.



Humanitarians were not as far ahead as they should be in terms of the cholera response, he noted, mainly due to the fact that they did not have enough resources to expand their operations into areas where health workers were working without pay.

“The actual system is in complete collapse,” he said.

The UN has received only one-third of the \$2.1 billion it sought to provide food to the millions people facing famine in Yemen; separately, a \$250 million funding appeal on cholera received only \$47 million.

“Agencies have had to use resources which they had programmed otherwise, for example for food security or malnutrition,” said Mr. McGoldrick.

UN agency considers “shelving” cholera vaccine in Yemen

Meanwhile, the UN World Health Organization (WHO) is considering not shipping vaccines tagged for Yemen.

“A vaccination way ahead of an outbreak would be useful, but that would imply a huge amount of vaccines, taking into account all the countries where cholera was endemic,” Christian Lindmeier, WHO spokesperson, told journalists.

Living conditions in Gaza 'more and more wretched' over past decade, UN finds



A Palestinian girl inside her family's partially destroyed home, looks at the destruction outside, in the Shejaiya neighbourhood of Gaza City. Photo: UNICEF

11 July – A decade after Hamas seized the Gaza Strip, the living conditions for two million people in the Palestinian enclave are deteriorating “further and faster” than the prediction made in 2012 that the enclave would become “unlivable” by 2020, a new United Nations report has found.

“Gaza has continued on its trajectory of 'de-development', in many cases even faster than we had originally projected,” said Robert Piper, the UN Coordinator for Humanitarian Aid and Development Activities, in a press release on the new report, “Gaza – 10 years later.”

In an intra-Palestinian conflict, Hamas took over Gaza in 2007. Israel has sought to isolate the group by restricting the movements of goods and people in and out of the strip. It was also administratively separated from the West Bank.

The report, compiled by the UN country team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, took stock of some key indicators identified in an earlier 2012 UN report that predicted Gaza would become “unlivable” by 2020 unless underlying trends were reversed.

The new report found that real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita had decreased and the provision of health services continued to decline in Gaza, where average Palestinians are trapped in a “sad reality” and their daily lives are “getting more and more wretched”.

The report called on Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Hamas and the international community to take action towards more sustainable development investments, reinvigoration of Gaza's productive sectors, improvement of freedom of movement for both people and goods, as well as respect for human rights and international humanitarian law.

“The alternative will be a Gaza that is more isolated and more desperate,” warned Mr. Piper. “The threat of a renewed, more devastating escalation will increase, and the prospects for intra-Palestinian reconciliation will dwindle – and with them, the prospects for peace between Israel and Palestine.”

Thanks in large part to the scale of services provided by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Gaza has maintained high education standards, but average daily classroom time for students remains as low as four hours.

While an earlier projection that the coastal aquifer would become unusable by 2016 has been revised to the end of 2017, Gaza's only water source is predicted to be irreversibly-depleted by 2020, unless immediate remedial action is taken.

Access to materials, which are necessary to allow the Gazan economy, infrastructure and basic services to recover from the 2014 conflict, remains highly restricted.

Electricity supply – this year “the most visible deterioration in the living conditions in Gaza” – is as low as at 90 megawatts in recent days against the 450 megawatts needed. “Ongoing humanitarian assistance, especially through UNRWA's services, are helping slow this descent, but the downward direction remains clear,” said Mr. Piper.

Yesterday, the UN and non-governmental organizations conducted a field visit to Gaza with nine members of the diplomatic community from Australia, Canada, the European Union, Germany, Turkey, and the United Kingdom, to witness first-hand the cumulative impact of 10 years of closures and internal divide.

Eleven global banks partner with UN to make financial markets more climate transparent



These windmills in Romania are part of 'Europe 2020 Strategy', a move towards a greener and more competitive low carbon economy that makes efficient use of resources and is resilient to climate risk. Photo: Jutta Benzenberg/ World Bank

11 July – Representing over \$7 trillion, eleven major financial institutions around the globe have joined forces with the United Nations to promote climate transparency in financial markets, the Organization's environment wing said today.

According to a news release by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), ANZ, Barclays, Bradesco, Citi, Itaú, National Australia Bank, Royal Bank of Canada, Santander, Standard Chartered, TD Bank Group, and UBS have jointly committed to develop analytical tools and indicators to strengthen assessments and disclosures of climate-related risks and opportunities.

“The message from financial heavyweights is clear – climate change poses a real and serious threat to our economy,” said Erik Solheim, the Executive Director of UNEP, in the release.

“At the same time, there are enormous business opportunities in taking climate action. Transparency on how financial institutions mitigate the risks and seize the opportunities of a two degrees pathway is crucial to move international markets towards actively supporting a low-carbon and climate-resilient future,” he added.

In the news release, UNEP noted that increasing the amount of reliable information on financial institutions' exposure to climate-related risks and opportunities would also strengthen the stability of the financial system and help boost climate-friendly investments.

The partnership between the institutions and the UNEP Finance Initiative follows the recommendations by the Financial Stability Board (FSB)'s Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD).

The Task Force was mandated by the Board to develop voluntary, consistent climate-related financial risk disclosures for use by companies, investors, lenders and insurers. Its final recommendations were published in June and submitted to the G20 last week.

It is anticipated that results from the undertaking will encourage banks worldwide to adopt such climate-focused efforts.

“After the G20, the issue now is about implementation: how can the finance industry put the framework into practice and deliver disclosure that is meaningful? Through this and other industry-led working groups UNEP FI is helping the finance sector to do just that: move from awareness to action.” said Christian Thimann, Group Head of Strategy, Sustainability and Public Affairs at the AXA Group, Co-Chair of UNEP Finance Initiative and TCFD Vice-Chair.

Asia-Pacific moving in ‘wrong direction’ on some development targets, notes UN regional report



Children cross a bridge as they make their way to school in a remote part of the Sulawesi province, Indonesia. Photo: ESCAP/Yusuf Ahmad

11 July – Despite an impressive track record, the Asia-Pacific region will need to scale up development efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, the target envisioned, the United Nations development arm for the region has said.

“The region is making progress towards achieving the Goals on poverty, education, economic growth, industry and infrastructure, and life below water,” Shamshad Akhtar, the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), launching a report assessing regional development since 2000.

“[But] progress [has been slow] towards achieving food security, agricultural sustainability, good health and well-being for all, and gender equality,” she added.

The Asia-Pacific SDGs Baseline report, the first regional measurement methodology of its kind, was launched at the side lines of the ongoing 2017 session of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, at the UN Headquarters, in New York.

The report has established a “baseline” for the SDGs through the assessment of regional progress since the turn of the millennium and has identified development gaps still need to be addressed to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

One of the key aspects highlighted by the report is that the region is moving in the “wrong direction” in terms of the targets related to on reducing inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, and ensuring responsible consumption and production.

“[This] trend must be reversed to achieve the Goals by 2030,” underscored ESCAP.

Furthermore, the report also noted the areas where data is insufficient or not available to accurately measure progress, such as in areas such as those to analyze the level of inequality.

“Data scarcity is a major challenge,” noted Ms. Akhtar in her foreword to the report, highlighting the need for a more integrated and inclusive approach for generating statistics.

“Addressing systemic data and statistics gaps for monitoring the SDGs will only be possible if resources are mobilized in a targeted and sustainable way to support the implementation of national strategies for statistical development,” she added.

Security Council warned DR Congo's violence on rise amid little political progress



A child stays in the Mussungue reception centre for refugees in Dundo, northern Angola. Since April 2017, thousands of people from the Democratic Republic of the Congo crossed the border and arrived in Angola's Lunda Norte province, fleeing violent attacks in the Kasai region. Photo: UNICEF/ Wieland

11 July – The security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) continues to be a major source of concern, with violence in the Kasai provinces, in the western part of the vast country, reaching “disturbing” levels, the United Nations Security Council was told today.

Presenting the latest report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the DRC, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix, who recently visited the country, urged the Council to support the Government and the people to preserve the gains of the past 17 years.

“The current political impasse, the rising insecurity, and the worsening human rights and humanitarian situation in the DRC require a concerted response from regional and international partners,” Mr. Lacroix said.

“This response must aim to help to create the conditions for a successful transition and the holding of free, fair and inclusive elections, in accordance with the Constitution,” he stressed, with a nod to a political agreement signed last year which specified that elections would be held by the end of this year.

The agreement – facilitated by Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo (CENCO) mediators, and reached in DRC's capital, Kinshasa, on 31 December 2016 – allowed President Joseph Kabila to stay in power beyond the end of his term.

In today's statement, Mr. Lacroix said implementation of the Agreement “remains largely inadequate.”

“At a time when the DRC is at the mid-point of its transition, it is more necessary than ever for national political actors and international partners, including the members of the Council, to remobilize the political agreement of 31 December 2016,” the senior UN official stressed.

Supporting the implementation of the Agreement – in addition to paving the way for elections and protecting civilians – remains a key priority of the UN peacekeeping mission in the country, known as MONUSCO, Mr. Lacroix said.

He underscored his commitment “to ensuring that MONUSCO delivers on its core mandated objectives as efficiently and effectively as possible” while responding to the changing situation on the ground.

MONUSCO is currently undergoing a strategic review, which will likely result shifts in its structure and mandate, based on options presented to the Security Council by 30 September.

‘Reports of daily human rights violations and abuse’

Amid the political impasse, the focus in the country faces rising insecurity, with particular concern over violence in the Kasai provinces, and a recent increase in inter-ethnic violence there.

“Disturbing reports of human rights violations and abuses continue to be received on a daily basis,” Mr. Lacroix said.

Dozens of mass graves have been reported so far, and the national investigation efforts are “slow,” he said, adding that “MONUSCO has also received disturbing reports of summary executions and rapes including of civilians by the security forces.”

Between May and June, the number of displaced persons in the DRC increased by 26 per cent to 1.3 million, according to UN figures.

Noting that he visited the country last month, Mr. Lacroix said he had stressed the need to prioritize political means to address the situation in the Kasais and emphasized the urgency of ensuring accountability.

He also stressed UN's continued focus on ensuring that those responsible for the killing of UN human rights colleagues, Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalan, are brought to justice.

Despite the insecurity, MONUSCO has been able to support pockets of stability, such as in the town of Tshimbulu, where some schools and churches have reopened.

“Through a combination of human rights monitoring and political outreach, supported by a light but increasing military presence, the Mission is helping to bring back some measure of stability wherever it can,” Mr. Lacroix said.

Safe, effective family planning is key to 'empowering people, developing nations' – UN



Two women and a baby in a village near the city of Makeni, in the northern province of Sierra Leone. UN Photo/Martine Perret

11 July – If the demand of women in developing countries who wanted access to safe and effective family planning was met, it would reduce an estimated 100,000 maternal death and avert 67 million unintended pregnancies, the United Nations population agency today said.

“Some 214 million women in developing countries who want to avoid pregnancy are not using safe and effective family planning methods, for reasons ranging from lack of access to information or services to lack of support from their partners or communities,” the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) said on the occasion of World Population Day, marked annually on 11 July.

This year's occurrence coincides with the Family Planning Summit, the second meeting of the FP2020-Family Planning 2020-initiative, which aims to expand access to voluntary family planning to 120 million additional women by 2020.

Natalia Kanem, UNFPA Acting Executive Director, noted that better reproductive health care – including voluntary family planning – could bolster economies and contribute to sustainable development by empowering women to complete school and join the labour force. There, she would be likely to earn a higher income and increase her and her family's savings and investment.

In addition, for each additional dollar spent on contraceptive services above the current level, the cost of pregnancy-related care is reduced by \$2.30, according to UNFPA figures.

“Investments in family planning help lead to prosperity for all,” Ms. Kanem said, highlighting this year's theme for the 2017 Day, 'Family Planning: Empowering People, Developing Nations.'

She added that safe and effective family planning also contribute to the success of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly the corresponding goals of ending poverty, ending hunger, promoting good health, and aiming for gender equality.

In her message, Ms. Kanem urged all Governments and stakeholders to help the UN agency achieve its goal of meeting unmet demand for family planning by 2030.

On behalf of UNFPA, she also called on the 179 member countries that endorsed the Programme of Action of the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) to fulfill their commitments to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health, including voluntary family planning.

“Not only is this a matter of protecting health and rights, but it is also a matter of investing in economic development as well as humanity's prosperity and progress,” said Ms. Kanem.

Call for greater partnerships

In London, addressing the Family Planning Summit, co-hosted by UNFPA and the United Kingdom Government, Deputy-Secretary-General Amina Mohammed urged different sectors and actors to work together by pooling resources, knowledge and expertise.

“We need inclusive global, regional, national and local partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society, built on shared principles and values,” the Deputy-Secretary-General said.

She pointed to the need for continued support of civil society and faith-based organizations, as well as strategic partnerships with the private sector.

“These partnerships will ultimately benefit businesses themselves, through healthier, better-educated and more committed workforces and communities,” Ms. Mohammed said.

With Mosul reclaimed, accountability key to heal Iraq's 'ISIL wounds' – UN rights chief



Civilians foraging near the Mosul University Presidency building, which bears the scars of fighting between Iraqi troops and ISIL militants. Photo: OCHA/ Themba Linden

11 July – Although the retaking of Mosul city from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) fighters by Iraqi Government forces marks a significant turning point in the conflict, Iraq must ensure that those who committed crimes be held accountable, the United Nations human rights chief has said.

“Dialogue between communities needs to begin now to try to halt the cycle of violence, and to promote accountability for the crimes against Iraqis,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein in a news release from his Office (OHCHR).

“The right to truth must prevail to ensure ISIL's crimes do not poison Iraqi society for generations,” he stressed.

With Mosul now reclaimed, the extent of ISIL's violations and abuses has become even more evident. Information gathered by OHCHR strongly suggests that international crimes may have been perpetrated by ISIL during the three years that the group was in control not only of Mosul but of large areas of Iraq.

“ISIL's serious and systematic violations of international humanitarian law and gross abuses and violations of human rights, including the sexual slavery of women and girls, committed over these past three years have left deep scars on Iraqi society,” Mr. Zeid said. This includes the abduction of 1,636 women and girls, and 1,733 men and boys from the Yezidi community who remain unaccounted for.

Even now, ISIL fighters can terrify and kill through bombings and abductions, and people are still being subjected to daily horrors and suffering in remaining ISIL strongholds, such as Tal Afar and Hawijah, Mr. Zeid warned.

He also noted that there have also been allegations of human rights violations and abuses by the Government security and

associated forces, as well as by individuals taking revenge against captured ISIL fighters or people accused of supporting them.

Such punishments are an act of vengeance that works against national reconciliation and social cohesion, he warned.

“The most fitting response... is to step up efforts to create an Iraq grounded in equality and the rule of law,” he said.

The High Commissioner welcomed the fact that the judicial authorities have launched investigations into allegations of serious human rights violations committed by pro-government forces, and he called on the Government to make the findings public and ensure that perpetrators are brought before courts.

Given the large-scale nature of serious crimes, Iraq should also seek legal reforms to allow domestic courts to have jurisdiction over international crimes. To this end, the OHCHR and the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) are supporting efforts to initiate a legal framework to establish a specialised court competent to try alleged perpetrators for international crimes.

“I urge the Iraqi Government to prioritise advancing accountability and also repeat my call for the Government of Iraq to become a party to the Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC),” he said.

UN agency helps nearly 100,000 migrants return home in 2016



At the Transitional Center in Bamako, Mali, returnees are welcomed by their relatives and friends. Photo: IOM/Juliana Quintero (file)

11 July – The United Nations migration agency reported today that it helped nearly 100,000 migrants return home voluntarily last year, a 41 per cent increase over 2015.

This assistance was provided through the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes and highlighted in its 2016 Key Highlightsreport.

In a corresponding news release, IOM notes that the people assisted in 2016 from 110 countries were returned to 161 countries and territories of origin.

According to the report’s findings, nearly one third of migrants assisted by IOM AVRR programmes were female and nearly one quarter were children. Of the total assisted, 1,253 were unaccompanied migrant children, 995 were migrants with health-related needs, and 895 were identified as victims of trafficking.

“The current migration dynamics show that assisted voluntary return and reintegration has to be part of any comprehensive and effective migration governance,” said Anh Nguyen, Head of IOM’s Migrant Assistance Division.

As in 2015, the European Economic Area (and Switzerland) was the region from where most migrants returned (83 per cent), while south-eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and the Central Asia remained the region to where most migrants returned (49 per cent).

Germany was the host country from where the largest number of migrants assisted by IOM returned (over 54,000 migrants), followed by Greece (6,153) and Austria (4,812). The number of returns from these countries increased in 2016, in comparison to 2015, and together accounted for nearly two thirds of the total.

With approximately 17,976 migrants assisted, Albania remained the country to where the largest share of migrants returned, followed by Iraq (12,776) and Afghanistan (7,102). West and Central Africa, East Africa as well as the Horn of Africa are regions which registered important intraregional flows.

The report provides an overview of global and regional trends for 2016, and a comparison between 2015 and 2016.

It also highlights concrete activities related to key themes, which were of particular significance in 2016: AVRR from transit countries, innovative initiatives to assist migrants in vulnerable situations, partnership and cooperation projects conducted to enhance the provision of assistance to migrants, and research and evidence-based programming applied to AVRR. Voices of returnees are also echoed through direct testimonies shared in the report.

“The impact that return has on host countries, transit countries, and countries of origin, and most importantly on migrants and their communities, cannot be neglected. AVRR remains one of IOM’s core assistance and represents a win-win situation for all concerned, as it provides a humane, dignified, and cost-effective way to return home and to reintegrate within communities,” concluded Mr. Nguyen.

Opening of land route to Syria's battle-affected areas 'making difference' for aid delivery – UN agency



Displaced Syrians who recently fled the besieged city of Raqqa arrive in Ein Issa camp. Humanitarian workers work around the clock to overcome obstacles and to provide life-saving assistance to those in need. Photo: UNHCR/Bassam Diab

11 July – The United Nations refugee agency said today that the opening of the road to Syria's north-eastern Hassakeh governorate is already making a difference for humanitarian aid delivery on the ground.

“With the number of people displaced from and within Ar-Raqqa governorate now having passed 190,000 since 1 April, the opening of the road from Aleppo to Menbij and Qamishli is a breakthrough,” said Andrej Mahecic, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), at a press briefing in Geneva.

The agency has completed a first series of humanitarian convoys by the vital land route to Qamishli, opening a new link in getting aid to those in need in battle-affected Raqqa. Prior to these convoys, the road had been closed for nearly two years due to fierce conflict.

Costly airlifts, with limited capacity, were the only ways to bring supplies into the area.

The spokesperson said that UNHCR's first convoy of three trucks reached Qamishli on 29 June and delivered relief including tents, blankets, jerry cans and other essentials for thousands fleeing conflict in the area. A second convoy arrived on 4 July, a third reached its destination on 10 July, and a fourth convoy is on the way, he added.

In Ar-Raqqa governorate, about 430,000 people estimated to be in need of humanitarian aid, with between 30,000 and 50,000 people trapped in Raqqa city.

Availability of food, water, medicine, electricity and other essentials has been dwindling, with the situation rapidly deteriorating. It is imperative that trapped civilians are able to secure safe passage out – to reach safety, shelter, and protection.

“Many face the terrifying dilemma of having to decide between taking cover as fighting continues to rage, or taking their chances and running – risking death for themselves and their families either way,” Mr. Mahecic said. “For civilians to be put into such a situation is an affront to the common humanity of us all.”

He reminded all parties of their obligations to abide by international humanitarian law and protect civilians.