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**Deadly combination of cholera, hunger and conflict pushes Yemen to 'edge of a cliff' – senior UN official**

A suspected cholera patient is rushed into Al Joumhour Hospital in Sana'a, Yemen. Photo: Giles Clarke for UNOCHA

*1 August* – Describing the situation in Yemen as “very bleak,” with “no end in sight,” a senior United Nations official envoy today said the war-torn country, already reeling from malnutrition and dwindling health care, is plummeting into further distress amid a deadly cholera outbreak and looming famine.

“Historically, Yemen has been one of the poorest Arab nations – if not the poorest– with rapid poverty and corruption, poor governance and poor infrastructure. The war has simply made it much worse,” said Auke Lootsma, UN Development Programme (UNDP) Country Director, briefing journalists in New York via teleconference from the capital, Sana'a.

He compared the situation in the country to a bus “racing towards the edge of a cliff.” Instead of hitting the brakes and turning around, Mr.

Lootsma said, “the one controlling the direction of the bus keeps going and pushes the accelerator, all but certain to crash.”

He stressed that the Yemeni people are enduring incredible hardship, with 70 per cent of the population – some 20 million people – in need of humanitarian assistance. Additionally, some 400,000 cases of cholera recorded in the past few months have resulted in 1,900 deaths.

Mr. Lootsma emphasized that due to the scope of the crisis combined with a lack of funding and access, humanitarians “are asked to cover gaps that are well beyond” their mandates and capacities.

The country is on the brink of famine, with 60 per cent of the population not knowing where its next meal is coming from, according to the UN envoy.

He made clear that “the current food security crisis is a man-made disaster not only resulting from decades of poverty and under-investment, but also as a war tactic through economic strangulation.”

Pointing out that Yemen imported 90 per cent of its food even before the crisis, he painted a picture of the difficulty in bringing food into the country now.

“Although food may be physically available in the market, it is actually financially out of reach for many of the poor families at this point in time,” explained Mr. Lootsma.

The UNDP Country Director said that while cholera is not new to Yemen, “the collapse of the health, water and sanitation sector due to a lack of salaries and damaged infrastructure” exacerbated the situation.

### *Time is running out to 'stop the bus from going off the cliff'*

He added that almost half of the health facilities are no longer functioning because they are partly or completely damaged, a situation made worse because “doctors and nurses are not coming to work because they have not been paid and looking for income elsewhere.”

With almost 1.2 million civil servants having not been paid since September 2016, many businesses have collapsed.

The conflict continues unabated as remaining infrastructure continues to be shattered –garbage is piling up and water treatment facilities are marginally functioning, creating ideal conditions for diseases – and civilian casualties continue to mount, rendering Yemen as the world's largest cholera crisis, according to Mr. Lootsma.

With its population set to double by 2050, pressing development challenges – including changing climate, negative production and malnutrition – will have a great impact on Yemen's future.

Mr. Lootsma called on the international community to redouble their efforts, warning that time is running out to find the brakes to stop the bus before it goes off the cliff.

## **Solidarity across generations is vital for sustainable development, UN special event hears**



Young people contributing to a workshop on climate change in Iguiaz, Morocco. Photo: UNDP/CBA Baptiste de Ville d'Avray

**1 August** – The wisdom, experience, energy and ideals of the old and the young are vital to realizing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said today, stressing that they together can help break the cycles of poverty that have lasted for generations.

“The youth and the older persons in this room have wisdom, experience, energy and ideals,” the UN chief said in his video message to a special event at UN Headquarters, “Intergenerational Dialogues on the Sustainable Development Goals,” which was also addressed by his newly-appointed Envoy on Youth, Jayathma Wickramanayake, and the President of the General Assembly, Peter Thomson.

“Together, you can help break cycles of poverty that have lasted for generations – and trigger transformational change that endures for generations to come,” Mr. Guterres stressed.

The event aimed to raise awareness of the valuable role youth and the elderly can play together in implementing the SDGs – ambitious and all-encompassing development targets agreed by more than 190 countries nearly two years ago to ensure growth and protect the people and planet.

Mr. Thomson, now in his late-60s, talked about his own youth growing up in the Pacific island of Fiji, before mountains of plastic waste and ocean-warming had begun to threaten its very existence.

He said he was determined to use his experience in order to speak out on behalf of the SDGs for many years to come.

“We are going to ensure that all people, young and old, recognize themselves as the owners, drivers and beneficiaries of the SDGs [...] As a grandfather, I care for all my being that we will bequeath sustainable world to our grandchildren and those who come after,” he said.

Ms. Wickramanayake, who is 26, stressed that “building bridges for different generations to work together in a mutually empowering relationship is one of the most important factors affecting the implementation of the SDGs.”

“It needs to be recognized that generations do not operate as a binary,” she said. “Solidarity across generations is key for social development, and for this we require new approaches in the workforce, in education, and in socioeconomic development. Aging populations must work with younger populations to foster successful and reciprocal intergenerational relations and partnerships, which will lie at the core of every well-integrated society.”

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including the Major Group on Children and Youth and the Stakeholder Group on Ageing, were also represented at today's event, which was co-hosted by the Department of Public Information (DPI) and NGO/DPI Executive Committee.

## Venezuela: UN rights chief 'deeply concerned' by detention of opposition leaders



Protesters in La Castellana, a neighborhood in eastern Caracas, Venezuela. Photo: Helena Carpio/IRIN

*1 August* – The top United Nations human rights official today expressed deep concern about the detention of two opposition leaders by Venezuelan authorities after Sunday's elections for a Constituent Assembly convened by President Nicolás Maduro.

“I am deeply concerned that opposition leaders Leopoldo Lopez and Antonio Ledezma have again been taken into custody by Venezuelan authorities after their house arrest was revoked,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein in a statement issued by his Office (OHCHR).

He urged the Government to immediately release all those being held for exercising their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, association and expression, noting that the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention considers the detention of both Lopez and

Ledezma to be arbitrary.

President Maduro has declared victory in Sunday's elections for the new body, which could replace the current National Assembly.

Mr. Zeid also expressed his regret that at least 10 people reportedly died over the weekend amid demonstrations over Sunday's polls, calling for a prompt, effective and independent probe into these deaths.

He urged the authorities “not to make an already extremely volatile situation even worse” through the use of excessive force, including through violent house raids that have occurred in various parts of the country.

“I appeal to all parties to refrain from the use of violence,” he said.

## Breastfeeding is 'smartest investment' families, communities and countries can make – UN

**1 August** – Kicking off World Breastfeeding Week, the United Nations today stressed that although breastfeeding has cognitive and health benefits for infants and mothers, investment shortcomings impede the practice.

“Breastfeeding gives babies the best possible start in life,” said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO).

He added that breastmilk works like a baby's first vaccine, protecting infants from potentially deadly diseases and giving them all the nourishment they need to survive and thrive.

The *Global Breastfeeding Scorecard*, a new report by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and WHO in collaboration with the Global Breastfeeding Collective – an initiative launched today that aims to increase global breastfeeding rates – points out that breastfeeding not only helps prevent diarrhoea and pneumonia, two major causes of death in infants, it also helps reduce mothers' risk of ovarian and breast cancer, two leading causes of death among women.

Yet, the scorecard, which evaluated 194 nations, reveals that no country in the world fully meets recommended breastfeeding standards.

It found that only 40 per cent of children younger than six months are given nothing but breastmilk and only 23 countries have exclusive breastfeeding rates above 60 per cent.

### ***Global investment in breastfeeding 'far too low,' says UN***

The scorecard was released at the start of World Breastfeeding Week alongside a new analysis, *Nurturing the Health and Wealth of Nations: The Investment Case for Breastfeeding*, demonstrating that an annual investment of only \$4.70 per newborn is required to increase the global rate of exclusive breastfeeding among children under six months to 50 per cent by 2025.

The analysis suggests that meeting this target could save the lives of 520,000 children under the age of five and potentially generate \$300 billion in economic gains over 10 years, as a result of reduced illness and health care costs and increased productivity.

“Breastfeeding is one of the most effective – and cost effective – investments nations can make in the health of their youngest members and the future health of their economies and societies,” said UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake. “By failing to invest in breastfeeding, we are failing mothers and their babies – and paying a double price: in lost lives and in lost opportunity.”

The investment case shows that in five of the world's largest emerging economies, namely China, India, Indonesia, Mexico and Nigeria, the lack of investment in breastfeeding has resulted in an estimated 236,000 child deaths per year and \$119 billion in economic losses.

Globally, investment in breastfeeding is far too low. Each year, governments in lower- and middle-income countries spend approximately \$250 million on breastfeeding promotion – donors provide only an additional \$85 million.

Co-led by UNICEF and WHO, the Global Breastfeeding Collective is calling on countries to increase funding to raise



Sumi Madhi, a volunteer on child feeding, nutrition and care interacts with mothers in Kudada, India. Photo: UNICEF/Vishwanathan

breastfeeding rates from birth through two years of age; enact paid family leave and workplace breastfeeding policies, building on the UN International Labour Organization's maternity protection guidelines as a minimum requirement; improve access to skilled breastfeeding counselling as part of comprehensive breastfeeding policies and programmes in health facilities; and strengthen links between health facilities and communities, and encourage community networks that protect, promote, and support breastfeeding.

Both UN agencies emphasize that breastfeeding is critical to achieve many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), asserting that it improves nutrition, SDG 2; prevents child mortality and decreases the risk of non-communicable diseases, SDG 3; and supports cognitive development and education, SDG 4. Breastfeeding is also an enabler to ending poverty, promoting economic growth and reducing inequalities.

## UN migration chief visits Nigeria's northeast; new fund allocates \$10.5 million



A market rehabilitation project in Nigeria. Photo: Julia Burpee/UN Migration Agency (IOM)

**1 August** – The United Nations has scaled up its efforts to tackle the humanitarian crisis in northeast Nigeria, through a visit by its top migration official and the allocation of \$10.5 million from a new fund.

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), nearly two million people fled their homes to escape Boko Haram violence in northeast Nigeria. More than half of the displaced are children and 133,000 infants.

“We’ve seen the suffering of the people. We’ve seen their resilience. We’ve seen their courage. We’ve seen their patience,” said IOM Director General William Lacy Swing during his visit to the area from 28 July to 30 July.

“This crisis is competing with about eight others, including that of Syria, Yemen and South Sudan, for the world's attention,” he added.

IOM's emergency response is based in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno and the birthplace of Boko Haram. Mr. Swing's visited Maiduguri and other main cities that have been devastated by the whole Boko Haram conflict, and the first camp for the internally displaced in the region.

Mr. Swing met with the deputy governor of Borno state and discussed IOM's increasing focus on livelihood interventions for displaced Nigerians, such as sewing, knitting and barbershop work.

IOM has built tarpaulin shelters for nearly 11,000 families, about 102,000 people in Borno state. A few hundred other households were given shelter kits to expand or repair their spaces in Adamawa, the other state devastated by the conflict.

Mr. Swing also met with Nigeria's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Geoffrey Onyeama, in Abuja to discuss ways to prevent irregular migration.

According to IOM, about 37,000 Nigerians arrived in Italy by sea last year and more than 9,000 so far this year. Most travel to find work in Europe. But more than 2,000 migrants have died on the precarious Central Mediterranean route they follow from Libya to Italy in 2017.

“The idea is not to stop migrants. It's about trying to save lives by counselling them about the risks of putting their lives in the hands of a smuggler,” Mr. Swing said, explaining that IOM opened a migrant information office in Agadez, Niger, last year to try to engage migrants heading north from Nigeria to Libya and the Mediterranean Sea on the dangers many face.

IOM has helped more than 1,800 Nigerians return home safely from Libya this year through the organization's Assisted

Voluntary Return and Reintegration programme.

### ***\$10.5 million in relief aid allocated from new fund***

Meanwhile, the Nigeria Humanitarian Fund (NHF) managed by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has allocated \$10.5 million to life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable, including those in the hard-to-reach and newly accessible areas.

It will fund about 15 different projects, including the provision of safe drinking water, emergency shelter and health services.

Some 8.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in the three worst-affected Nigerian states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe; of them, 6.9 million people are targeted for humanitarian assistance.

## **In South Sudan, UN peacekeeping chief urges an end to fighting to give peace process 'better chance'**



On a visit to South Sudan, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix (left) talks with senior Government officials. UN Photo/Isaac Billy

**1 August** – The conflict in South Sudan has to end in order to give the peace process there “a better chance of success,” the top United Nations peacekeeping official said today, kicking off a three-day trip to the African country.

In the South Sudanese capital, Juba, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix met with senior Government officials including the First Vice-President Taban Deng, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Deng Alor and the Minister of Cabinet Affairs, Martin Lomuro, as well as other ministers.

The peacekeeping chief said that there was a “shared understanding” with the Government that actions and initiatives to advance peace are important and that they have to be put in place to accelerate the implementation of the Peace Agreement and bring sustainable peace to the world's youngest nation.

Mr. Lacroix underlined that the peace process could not move forward if fighting continued.

The UN peacekeeping chief commended efforts made by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and neighbouring countries, such as Uganda, to revitalize the implementation of the Peace Agreement and to bring stakeholders together.

The conflict in South Sudan began in December 2013 and since then a humanitarian crisis has developed which has left more than 5.5 million people in need of aid. Some 1.7 million refugees have also fled to neighbouring countries.

“The UN is here to help move forward efforts to achieve peace in South Sudan and to help the people of South Sudan,” said Mr. Lacroix. “UN humanitarian agencies are doing their best to help South Sudanese and we look forward to further cooperation with the Government so that we can access populations in distress wherever the needs are.”

## INTERVIEW: Head of UN drug body urges greater access to treatment for women

*1 August* – Women continue to be disproportionately affected by drug use, and face obstacles in accessing treatment, compared to men, according to the President of the United Nations International Narcotics Control Board (INCB).

Viroj Sumyai, who earlier recently presented the Board’s annual report to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), urged Member States to integrate gender perspectives in the elaboration of their drug policies to address this discrepancy.

According to the report, drug-related harms to women and the resulting consequences for communities are often “sorely understudied,” and gender-disaggregated data on drug use are rarely collected.



According to the INCB, only one in five women addicted to drugs are able to access treatment facilities. Seen here is a woman from a hill tribe in Thailand smoking opium (file). UN Photo/D. Gair

“There are also inadequate budget allocations by Member States for the specific prevention and treatment of drug dependence and substance use disorders among women, who often do not have access to any assistance and suffer in silence,” the report pointed out.

In this context and to learn more about the work of the INCB, as well as the challenges before the international drug control regime, *UN News* spoke to Mr. Sumyai, a national of Thailand, during his recent visit to UN Headquarters.

*Parts of the interview have been edited for brevity and clarity.*

### UN News: Can you tell us about the work of the INCB?

**Viroj Sumyai:** The board is composed of 13 members, elected in their personal capacity, by the Economic and Social Council. We are based in Vienna, Austria. Our primary responsibility is to monitor the compliance by the States parties to the three international drug control conventions: the 1961 Convention; the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances; and the 1988 Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.

### UN News: Women and drugs was a key subject in the Board’s latest annual report. What were the major concerns that you identified and how can they be addressed?

**Viroj Sumyai:** The biggest problem we see is the disproportionate impact on women in being able to access treatment facilities for substance use disorder. According to the data, only one in five women addicted to drugs are going to treatment facilities.

There are no specialized facilities for women to seek treatment. This creates a major obstacle both for them as well as their families, especially children that depend on women for care.

Looking at it from a sustainable development perspective, when governments are looking at issues such as livelihoods for their populations, they need to look at this issue too. It is also the right of women to seek treatment for substance use disorder.

And this is my main goal as the President of the INCB: I want to tackle the problem of lack of access to treatment for women who are addicted to drugs.

**UN News: What are your thoughts on the abuse of opioid medications?**

**Viroj Sumyai:** Over prescription of opioid medication, happening primarily in high-income countries like the US, Canada, countries in Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand, is creating a lot of problems. However, at the same time, there is the lack of access to these medications in low- and middle-income countries which in itself is causing a lot of issues. This is a major concern.

**UN News: What are the biggest challenges for the international drug control system and how can they be overcome?**

**Viroj Sumyai:** The biggest challenge, in my view, is for the people in the middle- and low-income countries who suffer from the lack of access to controlled medications due to misconceptions on the part of the State party, who feels that very strict controls over narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances is good and that it stops diversion of these drugs into illicit markets.

This is resulting in medical practitioners and health officials becoming reluctant to prescribe such medications – like morphine – to people who are in need and are suffering from deadly diseases and require the medicines to alleviate their pain. Similarly, persons with psychological illness are also suffering because they cannot avail psychotropic medicines they need.

**UN News: Can you share some good practices on tackling drug-related offences while also upholding human rights?**

**Viroj Sumyai:** Many officials in law enforcement have raised the issue of overcrowding in prisons of those incarcerated on drug-related offences. According to the 1961 Convention, drug-abuse offence is a minor offence, and rather than incarcerating the drug user, getting them to treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration could be a better option. This would be a very good practice to follow.

**UN News: Can you tell us about the collaboration between the INCB and other UN entities?**

**Viroj Sumyai:** We are working closely with the UN World Health Organization (WHO) as well as with UNAIDS (the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS), particularly to address the problems of those suffering with HIV and AIDS and are at the end stages of their lives, especially as they need morphine to lessen their pain.

With WHO, given their work with health professionals, we collaborate on building capacity regarding proper prescription of opioid medication and to ensure that these medicines are not over-prescribed. We also work with WHO in programmes on building capacities of national authorities on procurement of various types of medications.

**UN News: What message would you like to convey to UN Member States?**

**Viroj Sumyai:** I urge UN Member States, especially those that have the financial resources at their disposal, to support the INCB project building the capacity of national officials in low- and middle-income countries to tackle the problem of low access to opioid medication.

**UN News: Is there anything you would like to add?**

**Viroj Sumyai:** One of the problems we are encountering is some Member States not going live with the 1961 Convention on issues regarding the legalization of non-medical use of cannabis. The 1961 Convention allows Member States to use schedule one substances for medical and scientific purposes. The time has already passed for the traditional use of cannabis or cocoa leaf because when this Convention was ratified there was a grace period of 25 years for each Member State to abolish the traditional use of cannabis or cocoa leaf, such as chewing the leaf.

This time period has already passed. We need to look towards the future and not go back to old practices or we will have to solve problems such as [those associated with] the problem of tobacco. Right now, a lot of money is wasted on trying to solve health problems associated with smoking. So if we go back to old habits of smoking marijuana, at the end we will find



ourselves facing the problem not different from the problem of smoking.

*INCB is an independent, quasi-judicial expert body established by the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961. It comprises 13 members, each elected by the UN Economic and Social Council, in their personal capacity to serve as independent experts.*