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## **Rohingya refugee crisis a 'human rights nightmare,' UN chief tells Security Council**

**28 September** – Noting that the humanitarian crisis that has resulted in displacement of hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas from Myanmar not only provides a “breeding ground” for radicalization, but also puts vulnerable people – including young children – at grave risk, United Nations Secretary-General called for “swift action” to prevent further instability and find a durable solution.

“The situation has spiralled into the world’s fastest developing refugee emergency and a humanitarian and human rights nightmare,” Secretary-General António Guterres said today at a Security Council meeting on the situation in Myanmar.

At least 500,000 civilians have fled their homes in the country’s northern Rakhine state since late August and sought refuge in Bangladesh. According to estimates, some 94 per cent among them are members of the minority Muslim Rohingya community.

There have also been reports of burning of Muslim villages, as well as looting and acts of intimidation. Authorities in Myanmar have indicated that at least 176 of 471 Muslim villages in northern Rakhine have been totally abandoned.

“We have received bone-chilling accounts from those who fled – mainly women, children and the elderly,” added the UN chief, noting that testimonies pointed to serious violations of human rights, including indiscriminate firing of weapons, the presence of landmines and sexual violence.



New arrivals in Bangladesh’s Ukhiya area right after crossing the border with Myanmar’s northern Rakhine state. Photo: UNHCR/Vivian Tan

“This is unacceptable and must end immediately.”

Failure to address the violence could result in a spill-over into central Rakhine – where an additional 250,000 Muslims could potentially face displacement – Mr. Guterres warned, stressing that Government must ensure the safety and security of all communities and uphold rule of law without discrimination.

In his briefing, the Secretary-General also underscored that UN agencies and their non-governmental partners must be granted immediate and safe access to all affected communities.

Speaking also on the need to ensure safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of the refugees to their areas of origin, Mr. Guterres noted that the 1993 Joint Statement of the Foreign Ministers of Bangladesh and Myanmar could be a useful starting point, but it is not sufficient in the present circumstances, in particular as it does not refer to resolving the root cause of displacement as well as because it requires documents that the refugee Rohingya may not be able to provide.

“Ensuring the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees to Rakhine – in line with international refugee law – will require the restoration of mutual trust among the communities,” he said, noting that improved inter-communal relations forms a critical part of a sustainable solution to the crisis.

Mr. Guterres further noted that the issue of protracted statelessness must be resolved.

“The Muslims of Rakhine state should be granted nationality,” he stated, adding that while the present Myanmar citizenship legislation only allows it partially, an effective verification exercise should be conducted in the interim to allow those entitled be granted citizenship based on the present laws.

“All others must be able to obtain a legal status that allows them to lead a normal life, including freedom of movement and access to labour markets, education and health services,” he added.

In his remarks, the UN chief also spoke of a donor conference to be convened by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as well as noted efforts by regional actors to help address the crisis.

“I look forward to effective and credible follow-up to the authorities’ stated commitment to greater access, including for the international community, the media and humanitarian actors,” he said, noting: “The regional cooperation with Myanmar will also be essential, and the United Nations fully stands behind this.”

## Lake Chad Basin: Vulnerable people ‘a step away from starvation,’ says UN aid chief



Children prepare freshly caught fish, village of Tagal, Lake Chad region, Chad. Photo: UNICEF/Tremeau

**28 September** – The scale up of international assistance to the Lake Chad Basin this year has averted a famine in north-east Nigeria, even though millions of people are still suffering, according to the United Nations aid chief.

Having visited Niger and Nigeria earlier this month, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mark Lowcock, told reporters today at UN Headquarters in New York: “There are still millions of people who have suffered a lot and continue to suffer, many of them just a step away from starvation.”

He said that in field visits to Ngagam in Diffa – “the poorest region in the poorest country in the world” – and to Maiduguri, Pulka, and Gwoza in Borno state in Nigeria, he met “extremely vulnerable

people” displaced by conflict.

“Those people want to go home, they want a chance to rebuild their lives. But they want to do that when it’s safe to do so,” stressed Mr. Lowcock.

About 1.8 million people in Niger are food-insecure. Some 800,000 children are affected by acute malnutrition and almost 250,000 people are either internally displaced persons, returnees or refugees from Nigeria, he highlighted.

In north-east Nigeria, around 6.5 million people need life-saving assistance. Nearly 5.2 million are severely food-insecure and 450,000 children will suffer from severe acute malnutrition, this year.

The crisis in the Lake Chad Basin, which covers Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria and Chad,

is complex as countries grapple with insecurity, climatic shocks, extreme poverty, the legacy of inadequate governance across vast parts of the region.

“But the way forward is also clear,” he asserted, highlighting the need to sustain the effective humanitarian response, and to ensure see better protection for people.

“Access has improved in many towns, but there’s also been a recent upsurge in horrific attacks on civilians in all four countries. In Niger, hostage-taking has increased, while in Nigeria children have been used as ‘human bombs,’” he said.

Turning to other areas of the world, Mr. Lowcock said “so far in Somalia, famine has been averted” while in South Sudan, there was “a famine declaration in a couple of counties in Unity state, that affected about 50,000 people earlier in the year, but that situation was brought under control pretty quickly.”

Calling it the world’s biggest humanitarian crisis, Mr. Lowcock pointed out that in Yemen, “we have so far again averted formal famine declaration, but the levels of suffering in Yemen are really astronomical. I mean, there’s a really dreadful situation.”

## Major new UN report sets course towards ‘pollution-free planet’



Woman wears mask to protect from pollution. China. Photo: World Bank/Curt Carnemark

**28 September** – While pollution has considerably negative impacts on human health and ecosystems, it is controllable and avoidable through political leadership, high-level champions and commitments, as well with local level action, says a new report launched today by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The report, *Towards a pollution-free planet*, was launched during the first Conference of Parties for the Minamata Convention, which addresses mercury issues and ahead of the annual UN Environment Assembly, to be held in early December.

“Pollution is a universal challenge [but] the good news is that we already know what we need to do to prevent and reduce it,” UNEP Executive Director Erik Solheim said, stressing that “now the responsibility is on governments, businesses, cities and local

authorities, civil society and individuals around the world to commit to act to beat pollution in all its forms.”

Outlining the negative impacts pollution has especially on the poor and the vulnerable and its direct threat to human rights; limited responses by governments, business and citizens to existing pollution; and the challenges of the current actions, the report suggests five overarching actions.

- A global compact on pollution would make pollution prevention a priority for all;
- Environmental governance needs to be strengthened at all levels;
- Sustainable consumption and production, through improved resource efficiency and lifestyle changes, should be promoted; waste reduction and management must be prioritized;
- Investment in cleaner production and consumption will help to counter pollution; and
- Multi-stakeholder partnerships and collaborations are vital for the innovation, knowledge-sharing and transdisciplinary research needed to develop technological and ecosystems- based solutions.

Also proposed in the report are 50 concrete actions to curb pollution in various forms, with a call for strong high-level political commitment and engagement of local government, civil society and other stakeholders.

The report stresses that although some forms of pollution have been reduced as technologies and management strategies have advanced, approximately 19 million premature deaths are estimated to occur annually as a result of the way societies use natural resources and impact the environment to support production and consumption.

“If consumption and production patterns continue as they are, the linear economic model of ‘take-make-dispose’ will seriously burden an already-polluted planet, affecting current and future generations,” the report’s foreword concludes.

## At Security Council, top counter-terrorism officials stress ‘All of UN’ approach to tackle scourge

**28 September** – Addressing the Security Council, the head of the newly-created United Nations counter-terrorism office today outlined a framework to devise a cohesive, well-coordinated programme to support Member States as well as the priority areas of such work.

“We must recognize that there are four important spheres of UN activity that need to be aligned if we are to effectively develop a coherent and well-coordinated ‘All of UN’ framework for our future counter-terrorism efforts,” Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (OCT), said at a briefing to the 15-member body on the threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts.

These four spheres are the Security Council and its subsidiary bodies; the General Assembly; the UN Secretariat headed the Secretary-General; and the 38 UN entities that directly or indirectly contribute to counter-terrorism efforts, Mr. Voronkov said.

Today’s meeting marked the 16th anniversary of Security Council resolution 1373, which was adopted on this day in 2001, following the 11 September terrorist attacks on the United States.

He said that he had more than 50 high-level meetings with Member States and international and regional organizations last week in the margins of the General Assembly’s annual debate and that he listened carefully to the statements delivered in the Assembly, in which counter-terrorism was clearly a priority for many UN Member States.

An effective, future-oriented and balanced counter-terrorism programme to support Member States would be built on six key areas; strengthening international counter-terrorism cooperation; preventing violent extremism conducive to terrorism; addressing the terrorist use of the Internet; enhancing the foreign terrorist fighters’ threat; and increasing the sharing of information and good practices.

Also briefing the Council was David Scharia, Officer-in-Charge of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), who discussed how CTED’s work can contribute to the “All of UN” approach to combating terrorism.



Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Office of Counter Terrorism briefs the Security Council Meeting on Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

He said that CTED provides the Counter-Terrorism Committee, a subsidiary body of the Security Council, with neutral and independent expert assessments of Member States' implementation of Council resolutions on terrorism. To date, CTED has conducted 133 visits to 96 Member States, including 16 this year.

This process, Mr. Scharia said, helped these countries to enact new laws, establish new institutions and strengthen capacities.

“Yet, many States still do not have all counter-terrorism measures in place,” he added, expressing an expectation that the establishment of the Office of Counter-Terrorism will shorten the time period between CTED assessments and the delivery of assistance.

He noted that the entire UN system should benefit from CTED analysis, “which is probably the most updated and comprehensive research-based analysis in the UN system on counter-terrorism trends and developments.”

“Together, we have achieved a great deal since the adoption of resolution 1373 in 2001,” he said. “However, the terrorist threat continues to evolve at an alarming pace.”

CTED recently updated the Technical Guide to the implementation of Council resolutions on terrorism.

## DR Congo: UN mission deploys 'blue helmets' to protect civilians and refugees



In Uvira, South Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo, peacekeepers of MONUSCO patrol the streets of the city to ensure the protection of civilians. Photo: MONUSCO/Force

**28 September** – Responding to the worsening security situation near a major town in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the United Nations mission in the country has deployed peacekeepers to deter any attacks on the city and to prevent escalation in clashes.

According to the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC, known by its French acronym MONUSCO, clashes had occurred in the area of Uvira, in South Kivu province, between presumed armed groups and the Congolese national army (FARDC).

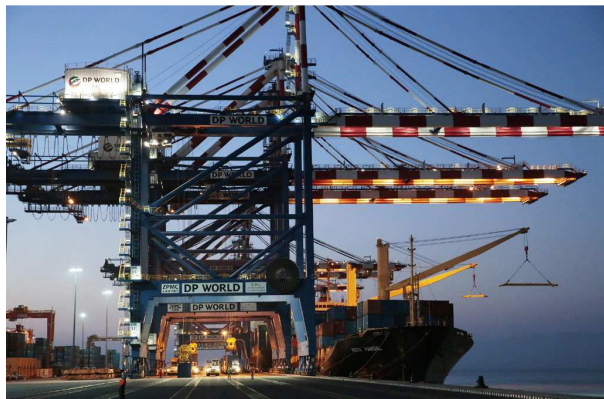
Noting that the response is guided by the Mission's mandate, Maman Sidikou, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of MONUSCO, said: “[We are] strongly committed to the protection of civilians, including vulnerable groups such as refugees and displaced people.”

He called on the armed groups to immediately cease this hostility including all forms of violence against constituted authority and innocent civilians.

“All perpetrators, in particular those who sponsor armed groups as well as those who bear command responsibility, will be held accountable for human rights abuses,” he added.

Uvira is the second largest town in the South Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

## UN maritime agency spotlights link between shipping and sustainable development



A view from the Port of Doraleh, Djibouti. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

**28 September** – Marking the World Maritime Day, the head of the United Nations maritime agency today highlighted contributions the shipping industry can make to the achievement of the global development goals.

"Shipping and ports can play a significant role in helping to create conditions for increased employment, prosperity and stability through promoting maritime trade. The port and maritime sectors can be wealth creators, both on land and at sea," said Kitack Lim, the Secretary-General of International Maritime Organization (IMO), in his message for the Day, observed annually on 28 September.

To highlight this potential, the theme of the Day for this year is 'Connecting Ships, Ports and People.'

"It will enable us to shine a spotlight on the existing cooperation between ports and ships to maintain and enhance a safe, secure and efficient maritime transportation system," Mr. Lim said.

The benefits of a free and efficient flow of goods and trade extend far beyond the ships and ports themselves, and an effective interface between them can improve the lives of people everywhere, especially in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by UN Member States in 2015.

But, to be sustainable, human activities have to be balanced with the oceans' capacity to remain healthy and diverse in the long term. The so-called 'blue economy' is a large and growing industrial sector; and, as it grows, it must remain safe and secure and not threaten the environment, he noted.

Ultimately, more efficient shipping, working in partnership with a port sector supported by governments, will be a major driver towards global stability and sustainable development for the good of all people, he concluded.

## On World Day, UN announces global initiative to end deaths from dog-transmitted rabies by 2030

**28 September** – The largest global anti-rabies initiative to end human deaths from dog-transmitted rabies by 2030 was announced, today, World Rabies Day, making it a priority disease for key international organizations and governments, according to the United Nations health agency.

"The plan ensures support to countries in developing national plans, and provides innovative training and education tools across regional rabies networks," said Dr. Bernadette Abela-Ridder today in a press statement on behalf the United Against Rabies collaboration, consisting of the World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), and Global Alliance for Rabies Control (GARC).



Veterinarian vaccinating a street dog. Photo: PAHO/WHO

The plan Zero by 30: The Strategic Plan centres on a 'One Health' approach, addressing the disease in a holistic and cross-sectoral manner while highlighting the important role veterinary, health and educational services play in rabies prevention and control.

“Vaccines are a key component of the global plan and a trigger for national programmes. The United Against Rabies collaboration provides leadership and advocates for resources critical to reaching zero human rabies deaths by 2030,” Dr. Abela-Ridder added.

Rabies – a viral disease that occurs in more than 150 countries and territories – is usually fatal once symptoms appear. Dog-transmitted rabies accounts for about 99 per cent of human rabies cases. It is estimated that 59,000 people die every year from the disease.

The statement pointed out that rabies is 100 per cent preventable, saying that the world has the knowledge, technology and vaccines for its elimination.

The alliance aims to prevent and respond to dog-transmitted rabies by improving awareness and education, reducing human rabies risk through expanded dog vaccinations and improving access to healthcare, medicines and vaccines for populations at risk.

Dr. Ren Minghui, WHO Assistant Director-General for HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Malaria and Neglected Tropical Diseases maintained, “Working across sectors to eliminate human rabies aligns with WHO’s mission to leave no one behind by building a better, healthier future for people all over the world.”

The plan will generate and measure impact by implementing proven effective guidelines for rabies control, and encouraging the use of innovative surveillance technologies to monitor progress towards ‘zero by 30.’

“Eliminating human rabies contributes to the goal of providing affordable and equitable health care, while working with partners to prevent the disease in dogs, which is the most frequent source of infection,” underscored Dr. Minghui.

The plan will also demonstrate the impact of the United against Rabies collaboration in national, regional, and global rabies elimination programmes to ensure the continued engagement and sustained financing of stakeholders at all levels.

Expressing FAO’s enthusiasm in being part of the development of the initiative, Ren Wang, FAO Assistant Director-General said, “Rural communities suffer the most from this preventable disease. Rabies puts not only their own health and wellbeing at risk, but also that of their animals, which can be a major or sole source of their livelihoods.”

“FAO has been supporting vaccination campaigns and the development of community-based programmes to prevent and eliminate rabies. This new initiative will enhance that work and can play an essential role in FAO’s overall goal to build stronger rural communities,” Mr. Wang stressed.

## Some 25 million unsafe abortions occur each year, UN health agency warns



Infographic: WHO

**28 September** – About 25 million unsafe abortions, accounting for 45 per cent of all abortions, occurred every year from 2010 to 2014 worldwide, with 97 per cent of those unsafe procedures occurring in developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, a new United Nations study has found.

“Increased efforts report are needed, especially in developing regions, to ensure access to contraception and safe abortion,” says Bela Ganatra, a scientist and the lead author of the study, *The Lancet*, released today by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Guttmacher Institute.

“Despite recent advances in technology and evidence, too many unsafe abortions still occur, and too many women continue to suffer

and die,” added Ms. Ganatra of WHO's Department of Reproductive Health and Research.

For the first time, the study includes sub-classifications within the unsafe abortion category as less safe or least safe. The distinction allows for a more nuanced understanding of the different circumstances of abortions among women who are unable to access safe abortions from a trained provider.

The risk of severe complications or death is negligible if procedures follow WHO guidelines and standards. About 55 per cent of all abortions from 2010 to 2014 were conducted safely.

Some 31 per cent of abortions were “less safe,” meaning they were either performed by a trained provider using an unsafe or outdated method such as “sharp curettage,” or by an untrained person using a safe method like misoprostol, a drug that can induce an abortion.

About 14 per cent were “least safe” abortions provided by untrained persons using dangerous methods, such as introduction of foreign objects and use of herbal concoctions. Complications from “least-safe” abortions can include a failure to remove all of the pregnancy tissue from the uterus, haemorrhage, vaginal, cervical and uterine injury, and infections.

The study also found that in countries where abortion is completely banned or permitted only to save the woman's life or preserve her physical health, only one in four abortions were safe; whereas, in countries where abortion is legal on broader grounds, nearly 9 in 10 abortions were done safely. Restricting access to abortions does not reduce the number of abortions.

Most abortions that take place in Western and Northern Europe and North America are safe. These regions also have some of the lowest abortion rates.

The proportion of abortions that were safe in Eastern Asia, including China, was similar to developed regions. In South-Central Asia, however, less than one in two abortions were safe. In Latin America, only one in four abortions were safe. Less than one in four abortions in Africa, excluding Southern Africa, were safe.

## UN chief urges all parties to refrain from acts that could escalate tension in Cameroon



United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres (file). Photo: TASS/ UN DPI

**28 September** – Expressing “deep concern” over the deteriorating security situation in parts of Cameroon as well as heightened tensions related to planned events this Sunday, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres called all parties to refrain from acts that could lead to further tensions and violence.

According to a statement attributable to his spokesperson, Mr. Guterres encouraged the Cameroonian authorities to continue their efforts to address the grievances of the Anglophone community.

“He urges the authorities to promote measures of national reconciliation aimed at finding a durable solution to the crisis, including by addressing its root causes,” the statement added.

It also noted that the UN chief supports upholding the unity and territorial integrity of the country and believes that genuine and inclusive dialogue between the Government and the communities in the South-West and North-West regions is the best way to preserve the unity and stability of the country.

The Secretary-General stands ready to support these efforts, including through the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), the statement read.



## Horrific accounts of sexual violence against Rohingya 'just tip of the iceberg' – UN agency



Displaced persons near Sittwe, Myanmar in December 2013.  
IRIN/David Longstreath

**28 September** – Warning that the horrific accounts of rape and sexual assault against Rohingya women and girls fleeing unrest in Myanmar could be “just the tip of the iceberg,” the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) underscored the need to ensure that such violence is prevented and called for additional resources so that it can reach all those in need of assistance.

“Gender-based violence, including rape and sexual assault, is a key concern that has emerged from the ongoing humanitarian crisis,” said UNFPA in a news release today.

The UN agency noted that it has already provided a range of services, including medical and psychosocial counselling assistance, to more than 7,000 Rohingya women refugees.

However, many victims have not reported their ordeal out of concerns over safety, confidentiality, shame and stigma, it added.

“This is what makes it challenging to come up with accurate numbers of gender-based violence survivors.”

According to UNFPA, the lead UN agency on addressing gender-based violence in humanitarian crisis and emergencies, more than 480,000 Rohingya refugees – over half of them women and girls – have poured into Bangladesh’s Cox’s Bazar since August 25, having fled their homes since violence erupted in Myanmar’s northern Rakhine province.

Some 120,000 among them are women of reproductive age and 24,000 are either pregnant or breastfeeding.

UNFPA has set up five ‘Women Friendly Spaces’ – areas which women can access at anytime for safety or to access information, education, support or other services – and plans to scale it up to fifteen by the end of the year.

It has also helped set up community watch groups and medical camps with psychosocial counselling assistance amid what it noted are “incredibly challenging circumstances.”

However, given the scale of the crisis, UNFPA and other UN agencies as well as partners, are struggling in need of resources. UNFPA alone needs an additional \$13 million to meet the demand for services over the next six months.

### *Humanitarian crises across the world suffering the blight*

The scourge of sexual and gender violence, unfortunately, is not only limited to the Rohingyas who fled Myanmar. Humanitarian crises globally are affected, with women and girls disproportionately affected, their specific needs not addressed adequately.

And it is therefore of paramount importance, underscored UNFPA, that each and every survivor of gender-based violence who needs such services must receive them in an environment that respects their right to self-determination, privacy and confidentiality, ensuring safety and, in so doing, helping them regain or strengthen their sense of dignity.

“All women and girls, regardless of their ethnicity or religious affiliations, must have access to health care and other essential services without discrimination, and they must be protected from all forms of violence, including sexual assault,” emphasized Natalia Kanem, the Acting Executive Director of UNFPA.

“The health and safety of women and girls must be protected.”