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**Libya: Smugglers holding refugees and migrants in deplorable conditions, say UN agencies**

UNHCR teams in Libya have been responding to the urgent humanitarian needs in and around Sabratha, a city located some 80 kilometres west of the Libyan capital, Tripoli. Photo: UNHCR

**17 October** – After weeks of conflict in western Libya, United Nations agencies have been working around the clock to meet the urgent needs of the more than 14,000 refugees and migrants who had been held captive in numerous locations in the coastal city of Sabratha – approximately 80 kilometres west of Tripoli.

“The refugees and migrants were taken to a hangar in the Dahman area in Sabratha that has been serving as an assembly point since the onset of the crisis,” Andrej Mahecic, Spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) told reporters Tuesday at the regular press briefing in Geneva.

From the hangar in Sabratha – a main departure point for migrant boats attempting to journey across the Mediterranean to Europe – they are being transferred to official detention centres for humanitarian assistance by Libyan authorities, who estimate that an additional

6,000 migrants and refugees remain captive by smugglers. If confirmed, it would bring the total number of those held to 20,500 – including those in official detention centres.

“As a priority, UNHCR teams have been working on identifying refugees and they continue to advocate for their release. In some locations, UNHCR has provided tents that are being used as makeshift hospitals where UNHCR doctors are providing medical assistance,” said Mr. Mahecic.

“Colleagues on the front lines describe a picture of human suffering and abuse on a shocking scale,” he elaborated, noting that the rescued refugees and migrants are visibly traumatized – most of whom say they were subjected to numerous human rights abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence, forced labour and sexual exploitation.

He also pointed to “a worrying number of unaccompanied and separated children, many under the age of six,” saying that many of them report losing parents on the journey to Libya or in the chaos that resulted during the last few weeks.

While UNHCR is working very closely with the authorities to respond to the growing needs, the scale of the emergency has overwhelmed existing facilities and resources. Detention centres and assembly points are at full capacity and lack basic amenities, like water tanks and sanitation facilities. Many people, including children, have to sleep outside in the open.

“The devastation in Sabratha further reaffirms the need for international action and highlights the high price refugees have to pay to reach safety in the absence of safe legal pathways,” stressed Mr. Mahecic. “UNHCR will continue to call on resettlement countries and the international community to step forward and open more resettlement places and look for a way to protect vulnerable refugees who need international protection.”

For its part, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is providing support to those in Zuwara and the Sabratha assembly point in the form of core relief packages, which include mattresses, blankets, pillows and hygiene kits at six separate locations and more than 100,000 meals.

Pointing out that the migrants are from almost a dozen nations, IOM reported that out of 1,631 interviewed, 44 per cent wished to return to their countries of origin through IOM’s Voluntary Humanitarian Return Programme. To this end, IOM has provided online consular sessions for 332 migrants to speed up the travel document issuance procedures.

The UN migration agency strongly advocates for alternatives to detention.

“We are concerned about the large number of migrants transferred to detention,” said Othman Belbeisi, IOM Libya Chief of Mission, saying they are overcrowded and do not meet the minimum international human rights standards.

“We stand ready to provide any necessary support to the Libyan authorities in providing alternatives to detention, especially for the most vulnerable groups, including pregnant women and children,” he underscored.

## UN report outlines path towards closing gender gap, realizing reproductive health rights

**17 October** – Vast inequalities threaten economies, communities and nations, trapping people in a cycle of poverty and marginalization, the United Nations said on Tuesday in a new report that outlines 10 actions countries can take on the path towards equality.

The State of World Population 2017, a flagship report of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), notes that these inequalities are not simply a matter of wealth, but social, racial and political, and are all mutually reinforcing.

The report says that around the world, gender amplifies these inequalities. Too many women and girls do not have access to sexual and reproductive health care, which means they are unable to receive family planning services or antenatal care, and may be forced to give birth in unsafe conditions.

Pressed into motherhood early, or repeatedly, these girls and women are more prone to maternal injuries, disabilities or even death. They are less able to finish their educations or enter the paid workforce, leaving their families poorer and their children with bleaker futures.

The report also warns that these inequalities could undermine the global goals on ending poverty, eliminating preventable deaths and achieving sustainability.



Mothers with their young children visit a mobile clinic in the village of Asulau, in Hatolia sub-district of Ermera District, Timor-Leste. UN Photo/Martine Perret

The report outlines 10 actions that countries can take to create a more equal world:

1. Meet all commitments and obligations to human rights agreed in international treaties and conventions;
2. Tear down barriers that prevent young women from accessing sexual and reproductive health information and services;
3. Reach the poorest women with essential, life-saving antenatal and maternal health care;
4. Meet all unmet need for family planning, prioritizing women in the poorest 40 per cent of households;
5. Provide a universal social protection floor, offering basic income security and covering essential services, including maternity-related benefits and support;
6. Bolster services, such as childcare, to enable women to enter or remain in the paid labour force;
7. Adopt progressive policies aimed at accelerated income growth among the poorest 40 per cent, including through stepped-up human capital investments in girls and women;
8. Eliminate obstacles to girls' access to secondary and higher education, and to their enrolment in courses in science, technology, engineering and mathematics;
9. Accelerate the transition from informal jobs to formal, decent work – focusing first on sectors with large concentrations of poor, female workers – and unblock women's access to credit and property ownership; and
10. Work towards measuring all dimensions of inequality and how they influence each other, and strengthen links between data and public policy.

## Thousands of Rohingya refugees stranded near Bangladesh-Myanmar border – UN



Thousands of new Rohingya refugee arrivals cross the border near Anzuman Para village, Palong Khali, Bangladesh. Photo: UNHCR/Roger Arnold

**17 October** – The United Nations refugee agency is concerned about the humanitarian condition of up to 15,000 Rohingya refugees who are stranded in paddy fields near the Bangladesh-Myanmar border.

“Since Sunday night, an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 Rohingya refugees have entered Bangladesh through the Anjuman Para border crossing point in Ukhia district in the country's south-east,” Andrej Mahecic, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told reporters Tuesday in Geneva.

“Many say they had initially chosen to remain in their homes in Myanmar's northern Rakhine state despite repeated threats to leave or be killed. They finally fled when their villages were set on fire,” he added.

Tensions have escalated into violence in Myanmar's northern Rakhine state. Since 25 August, an estimated 582,000 Rohingya Muslims have arrived in Bangladesh.

As of Tuesday morning, the new arrivals were still squatting in the paddy fields of Anjuman Para village, where the sound of gunfire continues to be heard every night from the Myanmar side.

UNHCR is advocating with the Bangladesh authorities to urgently admit these refugees fleeing violence and increasingly-difficult conditions back home.

UNHCR and our partners are delivering food and water to the stranded refugees, among them children, women and the elderly who are dehydrated and hungry from the long journey.

“Every minute counts given the fragile condition they're arriving in,” said Mr. Mahecic.

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) said Tuesday that without immediate additional funding, the agency will not be able to

continue providing lifesaving aid and protection to Rohingya children who have fled horrific violence in Myanmar.

UNICEF spokesperson Marixie Mercado told reporters in Geneva that almost 60 per cent of the refugees who have fled Myanmar since August 25 are children.

“The growing needs are far outpacing resources,” she said, noting that as of Tuesday, UNICEF has received just 7 per cent of the \$76 million required to provide emergency support to children over the next six months.

Without more funding, UNICEF would soon have to stop lifesaving services. “Rohingya children have already endured atrocities. All of them need the lifesaving basics – shelter, food, water, vaccinations, protection – not tomorrow or next week or next month, but right now,” she said.

## On International Day, UN chief urges action to address root causes of poverty



Children in line for a daily meal in Ecuador. Photo: Jamie Martin/World Bank

**17 October** – Highlighting the importance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to ensure a life of dignity for all, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres called for redoubling of efforts to eradicate poverty in its entirety.

“This globally agreed agenda, pledges to secure a healthy planet and build peaceful and inclusive societies to ensure lives of dignity for all,” said the Secretary-General in a video message marking the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

“Its pledge to leave no one behind will require innovative approaches, partnerships and solutions.”

In particular, he called for addressing the root causes of poverty to eradicate it in its entirety, and in doing so to listen to the views and

guidance of people living in poverty and acting together with them.

Despite progress to eliminate poverty, more than 800 million people around the world continue live in extreme poverty and many more are threatened by alarming rates of unemployment, insecurity, inequality, conflict as well as the effect of climate change.

Eliminating poverty, and alleviating the suffering and building resilience of those living in poverty is the target for Goal 1 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty in all its forms everywhere.

The Goal also aims to ensure social protection for the poor and vulnerable, increase access to basic services and support people harmed by climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the decision by the General Assembly, designating 17 October as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

The theme for this year's commemoration is *Answering the Call of October 17 to end poverty: A path toward peaceful and inclusive societies*.

It recognizes the knowledge and courage of families living in poverty throughout the world, as well as the importance of reaching out to the poorest and building an alliance with citizens from all backgrounds to end poverty.

## South Sudan's leaders must pull country back from 'impending abyss,' UN peacekeeping chief

**17 October** – Amid worsening security and the dire humanitarian and human rights situation in South Sudan, the head of United Nations peacekeeping operations on Tuesday called on the international community to demand that the country's leadership act in a manner that is expected of them.

“I would like to reiterate that the conflict in South Sudan is a man-made conflict for which the leaders of South Sudan bear a direct responsibility,” Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the Under-Secretary-General of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), told the Security Council.

“The same leaders responsible for the conflict can also bring the country back from the impending abyss,” he added, underscoring the need for genuine political will to halt military operations, peacefully negotiate and make the compromises necessary to achieve sustainable peace in the country.

During the past month, South Sudan has seen rising insecurity because of numerous clashes in many parts of the country, as well as presence of armed groups and soldiers that continues to drive tension. The insecurity has also led to shrinking space for humanitarian action – which used to be very effective, reaching millions with assistance – as well as restrictions on the movement of relief actors and the UN Mission in the country (UNMISS).

The human rights situation too remains extremely concerning, with alarming reports of extrajudicial killings of civilians, arbitrary arrests and detentions, repression of free speech and harassment of political opponents.

In his briefing, Mr. Lacroix, said that while dialogue remains key, the unwillingness – so far – of significant opposition groups to join, notably because of the concurrent Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) military operations, the credibility of the National Dialogue process remains in question.

Recalling a meeting between Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD, an eight-country trade bloc in Africa) Foreign Ministers with President Salva Kiir and his cabinet, held on 13 October, during which the IGAD group reportedly committed to support the Revitalization Forum, the UN official called on the members of the Security Council to use their “leverage on all parties and encourage them to engage in this process meaningfully and without any preconditions.”

“The conflict in South Sudan is a direct outcome of a prolonged disproportionate access to power and wealth in the country. All future dispensations, therefore, must rest on the principle of inclusivity that leads to equitable power and wealth-sharing,” he said, adding that it is critical that all processes and international support must strive to build institutions so that politics shifts from ownership by individuals to those institutions that must be accountable to the people of South Sudan.

Also in his briefing, Mr. Lacroix updated the Security Council on the deployment of the Regional Protection Force (RPF) to the country.



Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, briefs the Security Council on the situation in South Sudan. UN Photo/Kim Haughton

## UN health agency supports backs yellow fever immunization for 874,000 people in Nigeria



WHO personnel supplying and distributing Yellow Fever vaccines, supplies and other materials in Kogi state, Nigeria. Photo: WHO Nigeria

**17 October** – A 10-day campaign launched by the Government of Nigeria will immunize nearly 874,000 people against yellow fever in the states of Kwara and Kogi, according to the United Nations health agency.

The campaign launched last week and the World Health Organization (WHO), in collaboration with Nigerian health authorities, is working to implement the initiative in nine local government areas in Kwara state and two in Kogi state.

“This campaign aims to ensure that people living in high-risk areas are protected from yellow fever, and to prevent the disease from spreading to other parts of the country,” said Dr. Wondimangegnehu Alemu, WHO Nigeria Representative.

The campaign is mobilizing more than 200 health workers and volunteers, targeting residents aged nine months to 45 years old.

The last outbreak of yellow fever in Nigeria was reported in 2002, with 20 cases and 11 deaths.

Nigeria has requested support from the International Coordination Group (ICG) on vaccine provision for yellow fever. With the support of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, the global stockpile of yellow fever vaccines sums to 6 million doses.

WHO has been supporting the Nigerian Government’s response to the outbreak since the first case was confirmed on September 12.

The agency has since deployed experts to African country to support surveillance, investigation, lab testing, public-health measures and engagement with at-risk communities.

## Myanmar: Plight of refugees focus of top UN political official’s meetings



Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, briefs reporters at UN Headquarters. UN Photo/Devra Berkowitz

**17 October** – Concluding a visit to Myanmar, the top United Nations political official has underscored the importance of accountability and non-discriminatory rule of law and public safety as part of the comprehensive approach needed to address the fears and distrust among communities in Rakhine.

According to a press note issued by the UN, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman visited several communities affected by the recent violence in northern Rakhine state and viewed dozens of burned and destroyed villages by air.

“He witnessed how, in addition to the documented endemic discrimination against the Rohingya population, socio-economic challenges adversely affect all communities,” read the note.

Mr. Feltman noted the Government’s endorsement of the recommendations of the final report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State and urged their comprehensive implementation – which the UN can help support if so requested – the note added.

Visiting the country from 13-17 October, the UN official met with State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and Tatmadaw (the country's armed forces) Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, among other officials, as well as with representatives of Myanmar's civil society, the resident diplomatic community and representatives of international non-governmental organizations.

Most of Mr. Feltman's discussions focused on the situation in Rakhine state and the plight of the hundreds of thousands of refugees who have fled to Bangladesh in the aftermath of the 25 August attacks on security positions and subsequent military action.

"He reiterated Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' call that humanitarian actors be given full and unhindered access to northern Rakhine state and that refugees be allowed voluntary, safe and dignified return to their place of origin," added the press note.

Acknowledging the announcements by the Government of Myanmar, including the State Counsellor's address to the nation on 12 October, regarding the establishment of programmes and policies to address the humanitarian concerns in Rakhine and the return of refugees from Bangladesh, Mr. Feltman encouraged the authorities to utilize the capacities, best practices, and extensive experience of the UN to help assure that stated intentions could be implemented in a timely and effective manner.

In his meeting with the Tatmadaw officials, Mr. Feltman said that in the UN's experience, successful counter-terrorism efforts do not rely exclusively on security measures.

Returning to New York, Mr. Feltman will report to Secretary-General as the Organization continues to respond to the humanitarian and human rights crisis and positions itself to work with Myanmar to help relieve the suffering of the Rohingya population and address the grievances and needs of Rakhine and other ethnic groups.

During his visit, the UN official also attended the commemoration of the signing of Myanmar's National Ceasefire Agreement and met with the signatory ethnic organizations. He also visited internally displaced persons' camps outside Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine state, set up in 2012.