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Rohingya crisis: Donors pledge \$344 million at UN-backed conference to support aid efforts

23 October – A United Nations-supported humanitarian conference today raised more than \$344 million to fund critical relief programmes for Rohingya refugees and host communities in Bangladesh.

The exodus – which began in late August – continues unabated, making the crisis the fastest growing refugee emergency in the world today. As of Sunday, some 603,000 refugees are estimated to have arrived in Bangladesh and thousands more reportedly remain stranded in Myanmar without the means to cross the border.

“Humanitarian donors have today expressed their solidarity and compassion with the families and communities in need,” said Mark Lowcock, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and UN Emergency Relief Coordinator.

“These very generous pledges must now quickly translate into life-saving relief for the vulnerable refugees and support to host communities who have been stretched to the limit,” he added.

Since the crisis began, UN agencies have ramped up their relief efforts, including conducting a massive immunization campaign that inoculated more than 700,000 people against cholera, as well as providing food assistance to hundreds of thousands of refugees.

However, the scale of the crisis has overwhelmed the response, and emergency shelters, blankets, clean water, health care and other forms of aid are urgently needed. Adding to the complexity is that Bangladesh was already hosting about 200,000 Rohingya refugees prior to the crisis.



Rohingya families arrive at a UNHCR transit centre near the village of Anjuman Para, Cox's Bazar, south-east Bangladesh after spending four days stranded at the Myanmar border with some 6,800 refugees.
Photo: UNHCR/Roger Arnold

“More than 800,000 stateless Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh aspire to a life that meets their immediate needs for food, medicine, water, and shelter. But beyond that, a life that has hope for the future where their identity is recognised, they are free from discrimination, and are able to return safely to their homes in Myanmar,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi.

“As we come together in solidarity, I want to thank Bangladesh and its refugee-hosting communities and the donors for supporting them,” he added.

There were a total of 35 pledges made today, including money pledged and committed since 25 August as well as new announcements. Several donors also announced in-kind assistance worth more than \$50 million. Fundraising campaigns are also underway in several countries.

One such initiative is the UN World Food Programme’s app *ShareTheMeal*, which launched a worldwide campaign on Sunday to raise funds to feed Rohingya refugee children and provide them with vital nutrition with a simple tap on their phones.

The pledging conference was co-organized by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). It was co-hosted by the European Union and the Government of Kuwait.

No durable humanitarian solutions to political crises – IOM chief

Also speaking today, IOM Director General William Lacy Swing underscored that while sustainable life-saving assistance for the refugee population in Bangladesh needs to be ensured, the root causes of the crisis need to be addressed.

“We must urge international leaders to support the peaceful resolution of this decade-long crisis in Myanmar and insist that the authorities create conditions of safety, security and dignity in Rakhine state to one of the world’s most persecuted populations,” he said.

Adding that the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission offer a way forward to peaceful co-existence, Mr. Swing underscored that the implementation must start immediately and that the first step is to allow humanitarians to resume their work in the northern part of Rakhine state.

Central African Republic’s message to UN: ‘The only thing we want is peace’



UN peacekeepers patrol the PK5 neighbourhood of Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

23 October – It was once known as the ‘Bridge of Death,’ the frontline between warring factions in the capital of the Central African Republic (CAR). Legendary tales were shared of the bridge being drenched in blood, with even Government security forces scared to set foot on it.

Fast forward to 2014, when the United Nations peacekeeping mission was deployed to CAR and steps began to be taken to bring together the militias in attempts at community reconciliation. It was not till October 2016, that local leaders joined forces with the UN peacekeepers to convince the militia groups to disarm and re-open the bridge.

Today, it is simply known as the Yakite Bridge. Located in the PK5 neighbourhood of Bangui, the strife-torn capital, it is booming with traffic and local merchants from both Christian and Muslim communities, thanks in part to the stabilization efforts of the UN

peacekeeping mission.

This commercial suburb of Bangui is crowded with small traders trying to get back to normal business. Many traders have returned from neighbouring countries, including Cameroon, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where they escaped violence.

“We are looking for peace. Now we want reconciliation, but they are still killing Muslims,” says Lawadi Ismael, a representative for the neighbourhood, adding: “When the fighting broke out in 2013, I never left. Now, business is slowly resuming, but these attacks against Muslims must stop,” as he blames the Government for its alleged passivity, while asking the UN peacekeeping mission, known as MINUSCA, to do more to protect them.

We followed a joint patrol of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the CAR (MINUSCA) to the PK5 neighbourhood, the site of numerous clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebels and the anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, during the civil conflict that erupted in 2013.

A unique aeronautics surveillance unit supports the patrol with live information gathering capacity: a camera equipped aerostat balloon, and three hover masts mounted on vehicles, send videos in real time to the joint operation centre, indicating any crowd movement or potential threats. This is used to guide the patrol to areas which need security, while protecting their members.

Even as technology helps the peacekeepers, reconciliation is still fragile, especially after recent attacks in the south-east and the centre of the country, often targeting minority communities.

“The police assist mostly when we apprehend a suspect; the military takes the lead when the use of force is required,” explains Jean-Marie Vianney, commander of the 36-strong Rwandan military platoon, as they head together with the 12-member Cameroonian Formed Police Unit (FPU) towards PK5.

“We need to reassure the population and discourage bandits,” says Sergeant Epouba Martine Martial, a Cameroonian police officer with MINUSCA.

Despite noteworthy progress and successful elections, and a UN presence to shore up stability, support governance and provide humanitarian assistance, CAR has remained in the grip of instability and sporadic unrest.

The deteriorating situation has driven about a quarter of the people in the country from their homes and since the start of 2017, the number of IDPs has reached 600,000 and refugees in neighbouring countries number over 500,000.

More than 1 million Central Africans are displaced – inside the country or abroad – and in Bangassou, the camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) has reached 1,800 people and is still growing.

When he arrives in the area on 24 October, which is also United Nations Day, Secretary-General António Guterres is expected to pay tribute to the 12 peacekeepers who have died since January 2017 due to hostile acts.

“Across the country, communal tensions are growing. Violence is spreading. And the humanitarian situation is deteriorating,” said Mr. Guterres, who made it a point to mark UN Day with peacekeepers who put themselves on the frontlines in some of the most dangerous areas of the world.

In his latest report to the Security Council on CAR, the Secretary-General has requested reinforcements of 900 additional troops for the mission.

Lieutenant General Balla Keita, Force Commander of MINUSCA, is quite clear that the effect of this surge in capacity will help the mission stabilize the situation. However, he noted: “There will never be a military solution for a peacekeeping operation. The solution will be a political one – a genuine negotiation with all parties.”



Road accidents in Africa among deadliest worldwide, UN official says, urging more action



Street vendors work between vehicles stuck in traffic in Tema, Ghana.
Photo: Jonathan Ernst/World Bank

23 October – Some 650 people are killed each day in road accidents throughout Africa, a senior United Nations official today said, calling for more to be done to keep drivers – as well as pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists – safe.

“There is projected increase in urbanization, motorization, infrastructure development projects and vehicle ownership in the region over the coming decades. Road traffic fatalities and injuries will continue to take a rising toll on countries if no significant changes are made,” warned the Special Envoy for Road Safety, Jean Todt, addressing the 2017 Africa Road Safety Conference in Cape Town, South Africa.

To change this trend, Mr. Todt urged participating governments to implement the Global Plan for the Decade of Action and the African Road Safety Action Plan, which focuses on safer roads, vehicles and road users. It also details improved post-crash care and stronger road safety governance, including the enforcement of strong legislation.

He also called for implementing basic laws not obeyed in some countries, such as using seat belts and helmets, child safety seats, and prohibiting drunk drivers.

“As much as strong legislation is important, a national vision and leadership are essential to lasting improvements in road safety,” he said, also citing opportunities to place road safety higher on global and national agendas.

The third area which could lead to reduced road traffic fatalities is to place more resources in collecting data, which can then lead to the development of strategies, monitor needs and assess impact.

“At the very basic level – within how many days after a crash can a death be classified as a road traffic fatality? Can we as a global community come to an agreement on data issues like these,” Mr. Todt said.

He added that reliable data is also urgently needed to achieve the Decade of Action for Road Safety, which runs through 2019, and the Sustainable Development Goals, which include a target calling for road fatalities and injuries to be halved by 2020, and another target related to safe and affordable access to sustainable transport systems for all by 2030.

“The continent suffers from the highest road traffic fatality rate than any other region – despite having less than five per cent of the world’s registered vehicles,” Mr. Todt said, noting the particular importance that improving road safety has in changing the lives of Africans.

He noted that 90 per cent of people and goods on the African continent are moved by road, adding that road crashes “can strip a country from realizing their true development potential.”

Wildlife conservation, sustainable development in spotlight at UN-backed conference



A lion watches his territory in Kenya. Photo: UN/DPI Photo

23 October – Unless the international community integrates wildlife conservation with sustainable development, it will not be able to protect the remaining animal species on Earth, the head of a United Nations-backed environmental treaty today said at the opening of a wildlife conference in the Philippines.

“Development without a regard for the environment is not sustainable. Their future is our future,” said the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), Brandee Chambers, in a press conference on the opening day of the Twelfth Meeting of countries that have joined CMS. He spoke alongside Ibrahim Thiaw, Deputy Executive Director, UN Environment and UN Environment Goodwill Ambassadors, Nadya Hutagalung and Yann Arthus-Bertrand, among others.

The week-long event is being billed as “the year’s largest wildlife conference,” and is for the first time being convened in Asia since the treaty was adopted in Germany in 1979.

More than 1,000 delegates from 120 countries are expected for the five-day conference that will focus on protecting some of the most vulnerable animals in the world, such as the whale shark, which is the world’s largest fish with a rapidly declining population due to fishing, illegal poaching, and other human activity.

Among other animals that the hundreds of governments, civil society and private sector representatives, and experts will discuss are ten species of vultures and the Steppe Eagle, which are threatened with extinction, and the giraffe, which is not safeguarded by any convention.

Participants are also expected to strengthen their work with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), to conserve African carnivores, such as the African lion, the cheetah, the leopard, and the African wild dog.

These proposals are among the 31 to be discussed at the conference, affecting at least 35 distinct species.

The theme of this year’s conference is the “Their Future is Our Future – Sustainable Development for Wildlife & People,” and links to the Sustainable Development Goals, which aim to alleviate poverty and hunger, while improving health and education, and protecting oceans and forests.

Addressing the opening of the conference, John Scanlon, the Secretary-General of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, noted the importance of the CITES and the CMS, and other conventions in the family of biodiversity-related conventions that “go to the very heart of international environmental governance” and stressed that “their successful implementation is critical to ensuring the survival of wildlife and to our own quality of life.”

UN, African Union pledge to help Kenya ensure credible rerun of presidential poll



UN Photo/Staton Winter

23 October – The heads of the United Nations and the African Union have expressed their organizations' commitment to assist Kenya in ensuring a credible and transparent process in the forthcoming rerun of the recent presidential election.

In a joint statement issued Sunday by the two organizations, UN Secretary-General António Guterres and AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat urged all political actors, parties and their supporters to create conditions for a peaceful election and refrain from any act of violence.

On 1 September, the Supreme Court of Kenya nullified the August 2017 election and ordered the holding of a new one.

“It is critical that all concerned work towards the preservation of calm and peace in the country,” the statement said.

The two leaders said that they continue to closely monitor developments in Kenya, in the light of the forthcoming election, calling on all stakeholders to cooperate with the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), the constitutionally-mandated body to conduct the election.

They stressed the need for the Kenyan security services to exercise restraint, use minimal force in performing their duties and respect the freedom and political liberties of all Kenyans.

Three multinationals join UN global network on disability inclusion

23 October – Three multinational enterprises – Capgemini, Legrand and the Savola Group – today became the latest members of a United Nations global network that promotes equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in the workplace.

“People with disabilities constitute some 15 per cent of the world’s population,” pointed out Guy Ryder, Director-General of the UN International Labour Organization (ILO), at the annual meeting in Geneva of the Global Business and Disability Network.

“In striving to achieve full and equal rights and participation in society for all women and men with disabilities, we are pleased to forge and strengthen such as the Global Business and Disability Network,” he added.



Men and women at the entrance of a school in Romania that teaches people with disabilities. Photo: World Bank/Flore de Préneuf

The Network serves as a platform for companies for peer-to-peer support on disability inclusion policies and practices, with the goal to promote the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities in the private sector, including in developing countries.

Participants at the meeting discussed the business case of digital accessibility and how to become more accessible for employees and clients with disabilities. Moreover, the meeting showcased good business practices on advertising that is inclusive and contributes to a positive image of persons with disabilities.

The meeting, among other things, also highlighted ways to prepare companies for the future of work by addressing their



internal skills gaps through tapping into the professional potential of people with disabilities.

Representatives from Capgemini, Legrand and the Savola Group, together with other disability champions among the business community, also shared their success stories and challenges in putting principles of the Network into practice.

Famine can be a war crime and should be prosecuted, says independent UN rights expert

23 October – Famine can constitute a war crime or crime against humanity, an independent United Nations human rights expert today said, noting that more civilians die from hunger and disease related to conflicts than in direct combat.

“If the famine comes from deliberate action of the State or other players using food as a weapon of war, it is an international crime,” the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Hilal Elver, told journalists in New York.

The expert spoke to the media after presenting her report to the General Assembly committee dealing with social, humanitarian and cultural issues, also known as the Third Committee, where she said an estimated 70 million people in 45 countries need emergency food aid.



Two children carry water in Leer, Unity State in South Sudan, parts of which have been declared as famine-affected. Photo: OCHA

Those countries include Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen, where around 20 million people are hungry or face starvation as a result of man-made conflict.

States and other parties involved in conflicts, Ms. Elver said in a press release, need to recognize their own duty to act, and above all, avoid using hunger as a weapon of war.

The right to food is an unconditional human right and legal entitlement for all people, not a discretionary option, she added.

“It is crucial that the international community understands that it is an international crime to intentionally block access to food, food aid, and to destroy production of food.”

She noted that the most serious cases of man-made famine could be referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC), but said in the press conference that this has never been done.

The independent expert urged governments to focus on peace processes and long-term policies that break the cycle of recurring famines.

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

UN Special Rapporteurs are in New York this week to present their reports to the General Assembly. Check back to www.un.org/News for highlights throughout the week.

UN Security Council strongly condemns terrorist attack in Egypt



Wide view of the Security Council. UN Photo/JC McIlwaine (file)

21 October – Condemning “in the strongest terms” the terrorist attack that took place Friday in Egypt’s El Wahat desert, the United Nations Security Council underlined the need to bring the perpetrators and sponsors of such “reprehensible acts” to justice.

According to reports, more than 50 police personnel were killed and many injured.

“Terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security,” reaffirmed the Security Council members in a press statement issued today.

“Any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever

committed,” they reiterated.

They also underlined the need for all UN Member States to combat by all means, in accordance with the UN Charter as well as other obligations under international law, including international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law, threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts.

The Security Council members also expressed their deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government of Egypt, and they wished a speedy and full recovery to those who were injured.

UN chief Guterres, US President Trump commit to work together to address common challenges

21 October – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres met Friday with United States President Donald Trump and discussed, among others, tensions in the Korean Peninsula and the fight against terrorism.

According to a readout of the meeting, the Mr. Guterres and Mr. Trump discussed UN effectiveness and reform, as well as global issues of mutual concern, including Myanmar, the tensions in the Korean Peninsula, the situation in the wider Middle East, and the fight against global terrorism.

“The two committed to work together to address these and other common challenges in the coming months,” the readout added.

The meeting was held on Friday, 20 October at the White House, Washington, D.C.



Secretary-General António Guterres (right) meets with United States President Donald Trump at the 72nd session of the General Assembly at the UN Headquarters, New York. (file) UN Photo/Rick Bajornas