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Rohingya refugees living in 'dire' conditions, senior UN officials warn, appealing for assistance

Rohingya refugees reaching out for food donations been given by people from Dhaka at the at Kutupalong Makeshift Camp in Cox Bazar, Bangladesh. Photo: UNICEF/Brown

4 October – The human tragedy unfolding in southern Bangladesh is staggering in its scale, warned two senior United Nations officials today as they wrapped up a mission to the Cox's Bazar with calls for a "significant increase in assistance" for the hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas who have settled in the area after fleeing violence in neighbouring Myanmar.

"We leave Bangladesh [...] all the more determined that the United Nations do all it can to assist the Government of Bangladesh in coping with this crisis," said Mark Lowcock, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and Anthony Lake, Executive Director of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

In the last few weeks, well over half a million Rohingya people have crossed the Myanmar border in to Bangladesh, making this the world's fastest developing refugee emergency.

"People arrive fearful, exhausted and hungry, and in desperate need of immediate help including shelter, food, clean water and sanitation, and healthcare," they asserted. "They bring with them terrible accounts of what they have seen and suffered – stories of children being killed, women brutalized, and villages burned to the ground."

The UN officials lauded the Government and people of Bangladesh for its "extraordinary spirit of generosity" in opening the country's borders and their providing relief to the refugees as "an inspiring example of humanity."

Explaining that the refugees are living in flimsy shacks in sprawling, densely-crowded sites that have sprung up to accommodate them – with ever-growing risks for a disease outbreak – they underscored the urgency for funding so that all

refugees have access to food, shelter, water, sanitation facilities, health care and protective services.

“Conditions in the temporary settlements are dire. Without a significant increase in assistance, the refugees, who have suffered so much already, could face another catastrophe on top of the tragedies that caused them to flee their homes,” they stressed.

Today an update to the UN and the international aid community’s response plan was released, seeking \$434 million to scale up the relief operation supporting the refugees and host communities. In support of this, an additional \$12 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has been allocated to help establish additional sites for newly arrived refugees.

While the two senior UN officials welcomed assurances of close cooperation with the Government, they underscored that the “appalling situation” is not over as people continue to flee for their lives, crossing from Myanmar into Bangladesh – and requiring immediate support.

“We call again on the Myanmar authorities to allow the full resumption of humanitarian action across all of Rakhine state, and will continue to advocate for conditions to be created that allow for people to safely, securely and voluntarily go home,” they concluded.

UN chief urges world to implement Paris climate accord ‘with greater ambition’

4 October – Pointing to scientific evidence warning of increased extreme weather events, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, ahead of a trip to the storm-ravaged Caribbean, urged all countries to implement the Paris Agreement on climate change “with greater ambition.”

“We know that the world has the tools, the technologies and the wealth to address climate change, but we must show more determination in moving towards a green, clean, sustainable energy future,” Mr. Guterres said at a press encounter at the UN Headquarters, in New York.

“Today and every day, I am determined to ensure that the United Nations works to protect our common future and to seize the opportunities of climate action,” he affirmed.

He said: “Today I am announcing that I will travel on Saturday to Antigua, Barbuda and Dominica to survey the damage and to assess what more the United Nations can do to help people recover, visiting of course also the operations that are taking place there.”

The islands were recently hit by back-to-back category 5 hurricanes.

Since the disasters struck, the UN and partners have delivered relief by both air and the sea, reaching thousands across the region with food, water purification tablets, water storage tanks, tents, school kits, mosquito nets and cash assistance. The Organization also launched a \$113.9 million appeal to cover humanitarian needs for the immediate period ahead.

Within a span of few weeks, the Caribbean region was struck by major hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Maria and Jose that left terrible destruction in their wake.

Noting that over the past 30 years, the number of annual weather-related disasters nearly tripled, and economic losses increased five-fold, Mr. Guterres said that with climate change warming the seas – resulting in more water vapor in the atmosphere – intensity of hurricanes has worsened considerably.



United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

“Instead of dissipating, they pick up fuel as they move across the ocean,” he warned, cautioning also that the melting of glaciers and the thermal expansion of the seas would result in bigger storm surges and with more people living along coastlines and causing more damage.

Concluding his remarks, the UN chief underlined the Organization’s commitment to help all countries, in particular small island States to adapt to climate change and strengthen resilience, and called for innovative financing mechanisms to enable countries cope with external shocks.

Expert meeting at UN aspires to create ‘space’ for women in science and technology



Professor Amivi Kafui Tete-Benissan (left) teaches cell biology and biochemistry at the University of Lomé, in the capital of Togo. Photo: World Bank/Stephan Gladieu

4 October – A three-day event on how to, among other things, improve women’s involvement in the aerospace sector as well as in the fields of science, technology and mathematics, kicked off today under the leadership of two United Nations offices.

The UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) and UN Women have teamed up in organizing a ‘Space for Women’ Expert Meeting at UN Headquarters in New York to share expertise, enhance partnerships and promote efforts to encourage women and girls to become involved in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education – especially in developing countries.

“Space for Women is really a gender mainstreaming project where we will like to work with Member States; not only for STEM education but also to help young girls when they graduate to then find their place in their own society without being obliged to leave their own country,” Simonetta Di Pippo, Director of UNOOSA, said prior to the event.

The meeting will also delve into the role of space technology and science to fulfil Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality.

“And this has to be done with each Member State, and we will start with a small group of champions – as I like to call them – so, pilot countries with which we will develop this medium to long-term project,” she added.

With the most cross-cutting thematic priority of “capacity-building for the twenty-first century,” the event is discussing innovative approaches to meet the 2030 Agenda.

Astronauts, diplomats, decision makers and experts from around the globe have converged in to discuss the creation of a dedicated ‘Space for Women’ Project.

In line with UNOOSA’s vision to bring the benefits of space to humankind, the focus of the Project is to realize that women and girls are included in those benefits and that they play an active and equal role in space science, technology, innovation and exploration.

On the final day of the event, a high-level panel on ‘Space for Women,’ which will include UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, Ms. Di Pippo and UN Women’s Deputy Executive Director Laskhmi Puri, will make recommendations to UNOOSA.

The proposals, which will focus on using space to empower women, women’s involvement in the aerospace industry and STEM fields, and how alliances can be made to move forward the project, will feed into the development of the ‘Space for Women’ project.

The first UN Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space on the global governance of space activities,

known as UNISPACE, was held in 1968 – with subsequent others in 1968, 1982 and 1999. June 2018 will mark its 50th anniversary with a special segment of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, which will set the future course of global space cooperation to advance humanity.

In December 1999, the General Assembly declared World Space Week to be celebrated internationally each year from 4 to 10 October.

Libya: UN Mission condemns deadly bombing in Misrata



Ghassan Salamé, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), speaks to the press in September 2017. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

4 October – Condemning an attack against a court house in the Libyan city of Misrata, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) underscored that those behind the incident must be held accountable.

At least three individuals were killed and more than 15 injured in the attack today, the responsibility for which is claimed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) terrorist group.

“Indiscriminate attacks against civilians, including employees of the judicial institutions, are violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and cannot be justified,” the Mission said in a statement.

“Those behind today's bombing and other such despicable acts must face justice.”

In the statement, the Mission also expressed its solidarity with the Government and people of Libya.

It added that the Special Representative for the Secretary-General for the country and the head of UNSMIL, Ghassan Salame, expressed his condolences to the families of those killed and wished a swift recovery to the injured.

Counselling and dieting among new UN health agency guidelines on child obesity

4 October – An estimated 41 million children under five years old are obese or overweight, United Nations health experts warned today, launching new guidelines to tackle what they call a global epidemic.

Faced with evidence indicating that the problem affects rich and poor countries alike, the World Health Organization (WHO) has released details on how trained professionals can better identify youngsters in need of help.

The just-published obesity guidelines include counselling and dieting, an assessment of eating habits along with the more usual weight and height measurements.

WHO says the prevalence of obesity in children reflects changing patterns towards unhealthy diets and physical inactivity. Urbanization, increased incomes, availability of fast foods, educational demands, television viewing and gaming have led to a rise in the consumption of foods high in fats, sugar and salt and lower levels of physical activity.



Children playing at the multi-ethnic Krupskaya School in the town of Nookat, Osh oblast, Kyrgyzstan. Photo: OCHA/Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia, T. Jeanneret

While there have been major public health interventions to promote improved diet and patterns of physical activity in adults, the contribution of antenatal and young-child interventions to reducing the risk of obesity in later life have not been significantly reviewed.

Read full story

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Failing to heed these recommendations may leave vulnerable children at an increased risk of dying young from a range of life-threatening diseases, WHO warns.

In 2016, Asia accounted for half of all overweight or obese children, and one quarter lived in Africa, according to the UN agency's Dr. Francesco Branca, Director of the Department of Nutrition for Health and Development.

He explained that this is related to the fact that children in poorer countries often get too little breastmilk, nor the right complimentary food.

Paradoxically, this leaves under-nourished children at greater risk of putting on excess weight as they grow, when they're offered so-called "cheap calories," in the form of fatty, sugary foods.

"Malnutrition is responsible for a lack of resilience to changes in the food environment. So a malnourished child would be more susceptible to gaining more weight when exposed to a food environment which is high in fat, sugar, for instance."

The problem of excess weight is rising in all world regions, but most rapidly in poorer and middle-income countries.

Dr. Branca insisted that it was up to governments to do more to address the problem, faced with what he called an "unsuitable food system" that fails to provide sufficient nutritious foods "with the right levels of vitamins and minerals."

Educating people about the risks of eating unhealthily is a welcome first step, he said, but what's really needed is more regulation to ensure that healthier foods are cheaper and more readily available.



Sustainable cities key to implement SDGs, says head of UN regional development arm



Aerial view of Lima, the capital of Peru. Photo: World Bank/Franz Mahr

4 October – Noting the high speed of urbanization in Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Nations development arm in the region underlined the need to keep a close watch on the provision of services, equipment, mobility, housing and urban land to make sure they can match pace with the demand.

Speaking at the opening of the *Cities Conference*, Alicia Bárcena, the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) underscored that despite significant progress in reducing poverty, high degrees of socioeconomic residential segregation continues to persist in metropolises and large and small cities and towns.

“Socioeconomic segregation deepens inequity and contributes to social fragmentation and the high levels of violence that characterize

many cities in [the region],” she said.

According to estimates, by 2030 – the timeframe to realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – there could be more than 92 million additional people living in cities in Latin America and the Caribbean. The region is already the most urbanized developing region in the world.

Therefore, added Ms. Bárcena, it is necessary to guarantee the right to the city as a basic requirement for achieving sustainable development.

Concluding this Friday, the Cities Conference focuses on the regional implementation of the New Urban Agenda – the outcome of the Habitat III conference – to build inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities.

Also at the inaugural session of the Conference, the head of ECLAC presented the Regional Action Plan for implementing the Habitat III outcome, proposing actions the countries of the region can take to ensure sustainable development of their cities and human settlements.

The Regional Action Plan is centred on six action areas, which include national urban policies; urban legal frameworks; urban and territorial planning and design; financing urbanization; local implementation; and monitoring, reporting and revision mechanisms.

The Cities Conference has been organized by ECLAC, the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the General Assembly of Ministers and High-level Authorities of the Housing and Urban Development Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean (known by its Spanish acronym, MINURVI) in Santiago, Chile.

Switzerland needs to do more to keep 'dirty money' at bay, urges UN expert



Independent Expert on foreign debt and human rights, Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky. UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

4 October – Highlighting the problems posed by illicit financial flows globally, including undermining rule of law and human rights, a United Nations human rights expert has called on Switzerland to ensure that so called dirty money – which stems from tax evasion and corruption – does not enter its financial market.

“Despite significant efforts in adopting legislation and improving procedures to detect suspicious transactions, the risk that the Swiss financial market is used for money laundering remains,” said Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky, the UN Independent Expert on foreign debt and human rights, in a news release issued by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Facilitated by weak institutions and lack of good governance in countries of origin and financial opacity in countries of destination, illicit financial flows, such as money laundering are a particular concern in developing and under developed countries, syphoning money and resources which could have otherwise used for public services.

In the case of Switzerland, the UN expert noted that the risk of money laundering is particularly highlighted by the involvement of several banks in the Petrobas corruption scandal and in the suspicious cash flows linked to the Malaysian sovereign fund 1MDB.

“It is especially troubling that these events are not from years ago – the money was still being accepted until quite recently,” added Mr. Bohoslavsky, who today concluded his first official visit to the European nation.

In the news release, the expert also underlined that criminal sanctions in Switzerland for assisting foreigners to evade taxes remained relatively weak noting that criminal liability arises only if the tax evaded in a foreign jurisdiction exceeds 300,000 CHF (about \$307,500).

He also urged that the staffing, resources and powers of the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority needed to be proportional to the size of the Swiss financial market, and those who infringed standards needed to be named to ensure individual corporate accountability.

Further, noting that favourable tax arrangements in Switzerland made it attractive for multinational corporations to establish their headquarters in the country, but also provided incentives for profit-shifting, affecting tax revenues in foreign countries.

“I call upon the Swiss authorities to carry out a social and human rights impact assessment of the proposed corporate tax reform package, which should include an analysis of how the reforms will impact on tax revenues available for the realization of economic and social rights within Switzerland and for individuals living abroad, in particular in developing countries,” said the UN expert.

Mr. Bohoslavsky visited the country at the invitation of the Swiss authorities, where he met with Government officials as well as with leaders in the banking, financial and trading sectors, civil society and the academia in Bern (the capital), Basel, Geneva and Zurich.

His findings and key recommendations will be presented in a comprehensive report to the Geneva-based Human Rights Council – the highest UN intergovernmental forum on rights issues – in March 2018.

Independent Experts and Special Rapporteurs are appointed by the 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.