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UN seeks \$1.06 billion to help fragile countries create 'firewall against famine'



An elderly woman begs for food at a camp for internally displaced persons on the outskirts of Dinsoor, Somalia. Photo: Giles Clarke for Getty/OCHA

8 February – Ongoing conflicts and climate-related shocks have left millions of people on the brink of starvation, the United Nations agriculture agency warned on Thursday as it launched a \$1.06 billion appeal to save lives and livelihoods, and tackle acute hunger in 26 countries.

“The reality is that while the lives of millions of people were saved thanks to rapid humanitarian response in 2017, millions more remain on the very edge of starvation,” Dominique Burgeon, Director of the Food and Agriculture Organization’s (FAO) Emergency and Rehabilitation Division said Thursday.

“Maintaining food production and rebuilding agriculture are fundamental to preventing loss of life from severe hunger and to providing a pathway towards resilience in the midst of humanitarian crises,” he added.

With donor support, FAO hopes to employ a range of interventions to rapidly restore local food production and enhance nutrition for over 30

million agriculture-reliant people, to include by providing seeds, tools and other materials for crop farming.

Climate-related shocks are escalating humanitarian needs, which are largely caused by persist and intensified violence and conflict.

“This is why FAO focuses on transforming vulnerability into resilience – so that when something bad happens families are better able to cope and feed themselves, people don't have to sell off their assets or flee, and communities can rebuild more quickly after the crisis passes,” Mr. Burgeon elaborated.

FAO's 2018 humanitarian appeal focuses on assisting crisis-hit, vulnerable people in 26 of the world's most food insecure countries, including Yemen, the Democratic of the Congo (DRC), South Sudan, Syria, and Somalia.

Firewall against famine

The latest UN report on global hunger found that after years of steady declines, the ranks of the malnourished are on the rise, totalling 815 million people.



Continued conflict – including in Iraq, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen – and new outbreaks in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Myanmar have played a major role in driving hunger up.

Caribbean hurricanes left lives – and livelihoods – in tatters, while in the Horn of Africa ongoing drought has taken a heavy toll. Across all of Africa, the Fall Armyworm pest is threatening the crops of millions of farmers.

Last year, famine was contained in South Sudan and averted in three other at-risk countries thanks to a massive response by the humanitarian community on multiple fronts – including large-scale support to agricultural and pastoral communities that tilted the balance away from the worst-case scenario.

In Seoul, UN chief says Global Goals must be a blueprint for fair globalization

8 February – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on Thursday highlighted the importance of engagement and empowerment to transform the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into benefits for all people worldwide and called on all sectors of the society to actively involve themselves in this endeavour.

Speaking at the inaugural Global Engagement & Empowerment Forum on Sustainable Development, held at Yonsei University in Seoul, the capital of the Republic of Korea, the Secretary-General stressed that efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development need to “go beyond diplomatic efforts and Government programmes.”

The civil society, academia and the private sector – all have to be mobilized – to find the resources needed to achieve the Goals and apply them in the best possible way.

Mr. Guterres also cautioned against rising inequality across the globe and said that this feeling of being “left behind” undermines the confidence of people, communities and regions, in governments as well as international organizations like the UN.

He told the audience, which included former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the President of the General Assembly Miroslav Lajcak that this undermining of trust ultimately results in increased instability.

At the same time, massive challenges such as climate change, rapid population growth, unplanned urbanization, large scale movement of people, food insecurity and water scarcity also contribute to further fragility multiply the negative impacts of the threats to global security.

“This means that we need enormous efforts, engagement and empowerment to make the blueprint of the SDGs the tools with which we are able to reach a fair globalization,” said the UN chief.

He also highlighted that financing is critical to ensure that there are sufficient resources to implement the sustainable development agenda and in that context, urged the international community to strengthen their fight against tax evasion, money laundering, and illicit flows of capital.

For instance, in Africa, these illicit activities account for more than total official development aid (ODA) that flows into the continent, said Mr. Guterres.

Further, in the implementation of the SDGs, he urged everyone to not only respond to the problems of the past but also respond to the problems of the future and on all actors to create conditions for these transformations to be absorbed by the society to enable people to adapt to new scenarios.



Secretary-General António Guterres makes remarks during the opening session of the first Global Engagement and Empowerment Forum on Sustainable Development (GEEF). UN Photo/Mark Garten

It is critical that everyone joins into these discourses to ensure that we can translate all these new tools into tools that work for the improvement of humankind, said Mr. Guterres.

While at Yonsei University, Secretary-General Guterres also held a meeting with his predecessor, Ban Ki-moon.

Also today, the current and former Secretaries-General, along with the President of the General Assembly, met with met with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea, Lee Nak-yon.

Departing Seoul, the Secretary-General and his delegation drove to the site of the PyeongChang Olympic Winter Games. On site, he toured the Olympic village at Gangneung, where he was able to meet with a number of athletes, including Cheyenne Goh, the first Singaporean ever to qualify for the Olympic Winter Games. The Secretary-General also met and encouraged competitors from Switzerland, Hungary and China.

In the evening, the Secretary-General attended the official dinner hosted by the President of the Olympic Committee, Thomas Bach, for visiting dignitaries.

ICC to open separate initial examinations of Philippines 'war on drugs;' Venezuela protests



Permanent headquarters of the International Criminal Court at The Hague. (file) UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

8 February – The Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced on Thursday that she will open preliminary examinations into the so-called “war on drugs” campaign launched by the Government of the Philippines and, separately analyze alleged crimes committed by Venezuela related to the demonstrations and ongoing political unrest there.

“Following a careful, independent and impartial review of a number of communications and reports documenting alleged crimes potentially falling within the jurisdiction of the [Court], I have decided to open a preliminary examination into each situation,” ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda announced.

Since 1 July 2016, it has been alleged that thousands of people in the Philippines have been killed for their alleged involvement in illegal drug use or dealing. While some killings have reportedly occurred in the context of clashes between or within gangs, it is suspected that many incidents involved extra-judicial killings in the course of police anti-drug operations, according to the Court.

In Venezuela, the ICC will analyze alleged crimes committed since at least April 2017, in which State security forces frequently used excessive force to disperse and quell demonstrations, arresting and detaining thousands of opposition members – a number of whom would have been allegedly subjected to serious abuse and ill-treatment in detention.

Reports also affirm that some protestors resorted to violence, killing and injuring security forces, said the Court.

While under the ICC’s founding Rome Statute, to which both Philippines and Venezuela are party, national jurisdictions have the primary responsibility to investigate and prosecute those responsible for international crimes, Ms. Bensouda emphasized that a preliminary examination is an information-examining process to determine whether there is a reasonable basis to proceed with an investigation pursuant to Rome Statute criteria.

“Specifically,” she explained “under article 53(1) of the Rome Statute, I, as Prosecutor, must consider issues of jurisdiction, admissibility and the interests of justice in making this determination.”

In line with the Rome Statute’s requirements, Ms. Bensouda said her Office would engage with the relevant national



authorities to discuss and assess any pertinent investigations and prosecutions.

“In the independent and impartial exercise of its mandate, my office will also give consideration to all submissions and views conveyed to it during the course of each preliminary examination, strictly guided by the requirements of the Rome Statute,” she continued, noting that a preliminary examination was not subject to statutory timelines.

Depending on the facts and circumstances of each situation, ICC Prosecutor will decide whether to initiate an investigation, subject to judicial review as appropriate; continue to collect information to establish a sufficient factual and legal basis to render a determination; or decline to initiate an investigation if there is no reasonable basis to proceed.

“I reiterate that my office undertakes this work with full independence and impartiality in accordance with its mandate and the applicable legal instruments of the Court,” she underscored, adding: “We hope to count on the full engagement of the relevant national authorities in the Philippines and Venezuela.”

The ICC investigates and, where warranted, tries individuals charged with the gravest crimes of concern to the international community: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of aggression.

International community must stay ‘one step ahead’ of ISIL, stresses UN official

8 February – Despite military successes against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh), the terrorist group and its affiliates continue to pose a significant threat around the world, the top United Nations counter-terrorism official told the Security Council today, urging strengthened international cooperation to address violent extremism and bring those behind it to justice.

“The rapidly evolving and transnational threat from ISIL presents a difficult challenge for Member States and the international community,” said Vladimir Voronkov, the head of the UN Counter-Terrorism Office at a Security Council meeting, on threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts.

“ISIL is no longer focused on conquering and holding territory. It has been forced to adapt and focus primarily on a smaller and more motivated group of individuals who remain committed to inspiring, enabling and carrying out attacks,” he added.

Countering the changing threat implies the “need to stay one step ahead of ISIL” as it continues to adapt and evolve, stressed the UN official.

In particular, Mr. Voronkov called for a strong international framework to counter the threat from ISIL through the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy as well as relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, as well as effective implementation of existing multilateral tools and legal instruments, conventions and protocols.

Addressing the ISIL threat also requires addressing its underlying conditions which sway young men and women towards violent extremism, he added.

He also urged the international community to address the “deficit” in counter-terrorism cooperation at the global, regional and national levels and called on countries to engage fully at the first ever UN Summit of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies (to be held in June.)

The UN official informed the 15-member council of the evolving activities of ISIL and its affiliates in different parts of the world, including efforts to fund its illicit activities and spread propaganda.



Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, briefs the Security Council. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

He also warned that ISIL members and its sympathizers continue to abuse social media, as well as technology such as encryption methods and communication tools within the dark web, to communicate, coordinate and facilitate their activities and perpetrate attacks.

UN launches appeal to fund relief work in Nigeria's restive north-east



Displaced persons at a food distribution site in Rann, Borno state, north-east Nigeria. Photo: IOM/Jessica Mamo

8 February – With the crisis in north-east Nigeria – a region devastated by the Boko Haram insurgency – into its ninth year, United Nations agencies together with humanitarian partners today launched a \$1 billion appeal to fund life-saving and emergency assistance programmes in the region.

“The humanitarian crisis in Nigeria's north-east, that has spilled over into the Lake Chad region, is one of the most severe in the world today,” said Edward Kallon, the Humanitarian Coordinator for the country.

“This crisis is a protection crisis first and foremost that has also evolved into a food security and nutrition crisis,” added the UN relief official.

According to estimates, nearly eight million people are in need of some form of humanitarian assistance in the restive region, with the states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe the worst impacted.

Fully funded, the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan will reach some 6.1 million most vulnerable, providing them with food, protection, water, shelter and sanitation, medicines, as well as with healthcare, education and agricultural support.

In addition to catering to immediate needs, the Plan also includes a multi-year strategy aligned with national development and recovery efforts as well as with the UN Sustainable Development Partnership Framework in the country.

Altogether, some 60 humanitarian organizations, including UN agencies and non-governmental organizations will be implementing the Humanitarian Response Plan in 2018.

“It is a step towards strengthening the humanitarian, development and peace nexus, in line with the New Way of Working and commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016,” said Mr. Kallon.

Underscoring the importance of strong coordination and generous funding, the UN official recalled humanitarian efforts in 2017, which delivered life-saving assistance to millions across the region, helped contain a deadly cholera outbreak, and supported children go to school.

However, despite the achievements, many challenges remain and conflict continues to force people from their homes. And while humanitarian assistance has stopped people from slipping further below emergency thresholds, a lasting political solution is critical, said Mr. Kallon.

New Bollywood film about rural innovator spotlights menstrual health, women's rights

8 February – Bollywood is highlighting the issue of menstrual hygiene in a new comedy-drama that aims to break taboos around sanitary pads.

Pad Man is inspired by a rural welder in southern India, Arunachalam Muruganantham, who devoted 20 years of his life to creating a machine which made low-cost sanitary pads.

He was inspired to create an inexpensive pad after seeing his wife use rags during her monthly cycle, just like 88 per cent of the females in India who do not have access to sanitary products.

The lack of access to proper hygiene was also what inspired the film's producer, Twinkle Khanna, who encountered 'period poverty' while in boarding school. Ms. Khanna adapted the film from a short story she had written, "The Sanitary Man of Sacred Land."

Ahead of the film's opening on 9 February in theatres worldwide, UN News spoke to Ms. Khanna about menstrual health and the taboos which surround it, not only in India, but in all countries.

"It's just a natural part of our biology. In fact, it's the most important part of our biology because without that, our species would be extinct," Ms. Khanna said.

Muruganantham's mini-machines, which can manufacture sanitary pads for less than one-third of the cost of commercial pads, are now installed in at least 23 of India's 29 states.

The man who was once ostracized by his family and community, who felt embarrassed by his obsession with menstruation, has been honoured by the Indian Government and the international community – including the United Nations.

He is also an advocate for women's health, a global issue entwined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the global development adopted by UN Member States, in 2015, that aims to protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all people.

Girls without access to sanitary napkins rely on unhygienic substances, such as sand, sawdust, leaves and even ash, which can lead to reproductive diseases and potentially impact maternal mortality.

"This real story was one of the breakthrough inventions that I came across while serving as the World Health Organization's representative in India from 2010 to 2015," said Nata Menabde, Executive Director of the WHO Office in New York.

She noted that substantial numbers of girls in many developing countries have knowledge gaps and misconceptions about menstruation, as well as lacking access to basic menstrual hygiene products.

"This causes anxiety, fatigue and keeps them from participating in social activities and going to school," said Ms. Menabde. "Taboos and stigma attached to menstruation further hinders the situation by reducing their self-esteem."

Muruganantham, as he is known, encountered these taboos himself when trying to recruit college girls to test his sanitary napkins. He then used an old soccer-ball bladder filled with goat blood around his hips to test his sanitary pads.

"This film highlights the importance of universal access to sanitary products, privacy, running water, toilets and disposal facilities, which are all imperative in eliminating stigma and allowing girls to take control over their lives," Ms. Menabde said.



Actor Akshay Kumar on the set of *Pad Man*. Courtesy of *Pad Man*

“The film also underscores the importance of simple and low-cost inventions that could bring powerful solutions to improve human lives,” added the WHO official.