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Number of famine-displaced Somalis seeking aid in Mogadishu swells to 100,000 – UN



These displaced Somali women head back to their families carrying aid distributed in Mogadishu

26 July - Up to 100,000 internally displaced people have arrived in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, over the last two months in search of food, water, shelter and other vital humanitarian assistance after fleeing famine-hit areas, the United Nations refugee agency reported today.

“The number is growing by the day, with daily arrivals averaging 1,000 in July,” Vivian Tan, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told reporters in Geneva.

Severe drought has plunged communities in the southern region of Somalia into famine and sent thousands fleeing both to Mogadishu and to neighbouring Ethiopia and Kenya. The UN and partner aid agencies are seeking approximately \$1.6 billion in aid to assist millions affected by the crisis in Somalia and the wider Horn of Africa region.

On Monday, the top UNHCR officials in Somalia visited the Badbado settlement in Mogadishu which is currently home to an estimated 28,000 people.

“Given the growing numbers of displaced people in search of food assistance, the amounts being delivered are not sufficient to meet all of the needs. This has caused serious crowd crushes and even some looting,” said Ms. Tan.

“As a result, some of the weakest and most vulnerable are left with nothing, despite the best efforts of agencies and charities,” she added.

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) is hoping that the first in a series of airlifts to Somalia will begin today. The planes will bring, among other supplies, ready-to-use therapeutic food destined specifically for severely malnourished children, agency spokesperson Emilia Casella said in Geneva.

To enable people to carry the food and water they are able to obtain, UNHCR said it will begin distributing 4,000 assistance packages for 24,000 people in the coming week, including jerry cans, buckets, pots, plates, bowls, cups and other utensils. The agency has already distributed shelter materials, including plastic sheeting, in Badbado.

So far this year, UNHCR has distributed over 17,000 emergency assistance packages benefiting 102,000 people in south-central Somalia. It will distribute a further 19,000 packages in the coming days, containing essential items such as plastic sheeting for shelter, sleeping mats and blankets, buckets and jerry cans for water, kitchen sets, utensils, plates and cups for food to 114,000 people.

Another 40,000 packages containing high-energy biscuits, oral re-hydration solution and water purification tablets, are being procured by UNHCR and will reach an estimated 240,000 people in the coming days.

In neighbouring Kenya, UNHCR began an operation yesterday to relocate Somali refugees currently living on the outskirts of the Dadaab refugee camps to a new site known as the Ifo Extension. Over 500 five-person family tents were erected, with a capacity to accommodate at least 2,500 people. A second site, known as Kambioos, will also open in the next few days, to help decongest the outskirts of Dagahaley refugee camp.

The Dadaab camps – whose population has swelled to nearly 380,000 in recent months – have been receiving an average of 1,300 new refugees daily, fleeing conflict, drought, famine and insecurity in Somalia. UNHCR said the Somali refugees are arriving in an “appalling” state of health, dehydrated and severely malnourished, especially children.

Meanwhile, the agency stated that the overall nutrition situation in the remote Dollo Ado camps in Ethiopia remains a concern, with malnutrition levels among the new arrivals still high. One in three children under five arriving from Somalia is severely malnourished.

UNHCR and its partners are responding to address the situation, with supplementary feeding at the transit centre for children under five and hot meals for all refugees waiting to be registered and transferred to the refugee camps.

As of Friday, there were 114,646 Somalis in the Dollo Ado area camps, UNHCR said. The total number of Somali refugees in Ethiopia is currently over 156,000.

The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has launched, along with the Kenyan Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization (WHO), a vaccination campaign targeting over 200,000 children living in drought-affected host communities around the Dadaab refugee settlement.

Polio vaccinations and distributions of vitamin A and de-worming tablets are also being integrated into this campaign, UNICEF spokesperson Marixie Mercado stated.

She added that in southern Somalia, where immunization coverage is very low, an integrated measles, tetanus toxoid, vitamin A and de-worming campaign to reach 86,000 women and children in Mogadishu was wrapping up today.

Following that, the plan is to reach 2.5 million children up to the age of 5 in Gedo, provided UNICEF is given access across the south, said Ms. Mercado. The immunization campaigns are part of a regional push to protect children from becoming more vulnerable to potentially fatal diseases due to malnutrition.

UN envoy warns of profound deadlock in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks



Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry

26 July - The political process to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is in “profound and persistent” deadlock, a senior United Nations envoy warned today, calling on the parties to work towards a two-State solution and on the international community to help them find a credible way forward.

Robert Serry, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East peace process, told a meeting of the Security Council that efforts to find the necessary common ground for resumed negotiations have proven extremely difficult, given the differences and lack of trust between the parties.

“Political leaders on both sides are frustrated, as are their publics,” he said at the start of a debate that was expected to hear from over 35 speakers. “This is particularly acute on the Palestinian side, in the absence of a credible political horizon for ending the occupation that began in 1967. Israelis remain concerned about achieving lasting security and end of conflict.”

Israeli-Palestinian peace talks have been stalled since late September following Israel’s refusal to extend a 10-month freeze on settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory.

That decision prompted Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to withdraw from direct talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which had only resumed a few weeks earlier after a two-year hiatus.

“The political process to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is in profound and persistent deadlock,” stated Mr. Serry, who along with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has been calling repeatedly on the parties to re-engage in direct talks.

“We continue to urge the parties to find a way forward at this sensitive and important time. We hope that the international community can help by shaping a legitimate and balanced framework,” he added.

The envoy noted that both Mr. Abbas and Mr. Netanyahu continue to reiterate their desire to negotiate. However, in the absence of a framework for meaningful talks, and with Israeli settlement activity continuing, the Palestinians are actively exploring approaching the UN.

“President Abbas states that he remains committed to negotiations, and that efforts in the United Nations would help to preserve the two-State solution. Israel opposes this course of action, stating that it will make negotiations for a two-State solution more difficult to achieve,” he said.

“We hope that the international community can be united in fora of collective decision-making— now, in September, and after September too – and shape a legitimate and balanced way forward that helps the parties overcome their differences and ultimately return to negotiations.”

Noting the gains made in the West Bank, Mr. Serry said that the Palestinian Authority has, in key areas, reached a level of institutional performance sufficient for a functioning state and is ready to “assume the responsibilities of statehood” at any point in the near future.

“Real security and economic gains have been made, benefiting both peoples,” he said, pointing out that better governance, increased investment, improvements in movement and access and donor engagement have strengthened the West Bank economy in a difficult global environment over the past two years.

“However, as we have often warned, this agenda is reaching the limits of achievement without more political and physical space. This requires Israeli steps to roll back measures of occupation and continuous donor support.”



Meanwhile, on the ground, demolitions of Palestinian structures have surged, settlement activity continues and the calm between Israel and Gaza that was restored in early April has been challenged by the firing of rockets into Israel and air strikes and incursions carried out by Israel in Gaza.

“I cannot but describe the situation where Palestinian statebuilding has matured in the West Bank, but the political track has failed to converge, as dramatic,” stated the envoy.

Erroneous linking of Norwegian attacks to Islam was ‘revealing’ – UN rights expert

26 July - A United Nations human rights expert on freedom of religion said today that initial media reports on Friday’s mass murder in Norway which implied a possible connection with Islamist terrorism were “revealing” and “embarrassing” examples of prejudice.

Heiner Bielefeldt, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, said: “The way in which some public commentators immediately associated the horrifying mass murder in Norway last Friday with Islamist terrorism is revealing and indeed an embarrassing example of the powerful impact of prejudices and their capacity to enshrine stereotypes.



Makeshift memorial in Oslo, Norway

“Proper respect for the victims and their families should have precluded the drawing of conclusions based on pure conjecture.”

At least 75 people have died as a result of twin attacks – an explosion in the centre of the capital, Oslo, and a shooting at a nearby island where a youth camp was taking place.

Many initial media reports focused on Norway’s contribution of troops to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and implied that may be connected to the bombing and shooting. Yet the suspect in the massacre is a non-Muslim.

Mr. Bielefeldt is an independent, unpaid expert who reports to the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

UN strongly condemns attack against blue helmets in Lebanon



UNIFIL armoured vehicles pass through a Lebanese Armed Forces checkpoint near Ghanduriya

26 July - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the Security Council strongly condemned today’s attack against a convoy of vehicles carrying members of the United Nations peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon in which five soldiers were wounded.

Mr. Ban was “deeply disturbed” by the attack targeting the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) near Saida, also known as Sidon, 55 kilometres north of the peacekeepers base at Naqoura, according to a statement issued by his spokesperson. The blast occurred outside UNIFIL’s area of operations.

“The members of the Security Council condemned all attempts to threaten the security and stability of Lebanon and reaffirmed their determination to ensure that no such acts of intimidation will prevent UNIFIL from implementing its mandate in accordance with Security Council resolution 1701 (2006),” the Council said in a press statement read by Ambassador Peter Wittig of Germany, which holds the rotating presidency of the Security Council this month.

The Council expressed its sympathy to those injured and their families, and welcomed Lebanon’s commitment to launch an investigation and to bring perpetrators of the attack to justice. It also recognized the cooperation between the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL.

The statement issued by the spokesperson of the Secretary-General also stated that UNIFIL and Lebanese authorities were cooperating and coordinating closely to determine the circumstances surrounding the blast. “The Secretary-General hopes that the perpetrators are swiftly identified and brought to justice,” the statement added.

Members of the Council urged all parties to abide “scrupulously” by their obligation to respect the safety of UNIFIL and other UN personnel and to ensure that their freedom of movement is fully respected, in conformity with the peacekeeping force’s mandate and rules of engagement.

“In this regard, the members of Security Council reaffirmed their full support to UNIFIL and expressed their strong appreciation to Member States contributing troops,” said the statement.

Today’s attack was the second against UNIFIL in as many months. On 27 May, a roadside bomb ripped through a UNIFIL convoy near Sidon injuring six Italian peacekeepers and two Lebanese civilians.

UNIFIL has been deployed to the area since 1978. Last August the Security Council extended its mandate for a year, until 31 August 2011.

Foreign direct investment lags despite recovering world economy – UN report

26 July - Global foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows rose only modestly last year, United Nations trade and development body said in a report released today, noting that foreign investments have continued to lag behind recovery in industrial output and international trade.

Global industrial production and world trade are already back to levels that prevailed before the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008, according to the latest World Investment Report prepared by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).



However, FDI flows at the end of last year were still below their pre-crisis average and far below their peak in 2007, according to the report, which, however, predicts that the recovery in direct foreign investment will continue in this year and return to the pre-crisis average.

Investment promotion and facilitation have remained the dominant element in recent national investment policies, the report points out. Nonetheless, the risk of investment protectionism has increased as restrictive investment measures and administrative procedures have accumulated over the past few years.

The international investment regime has been growing rapidly, with three international investment treaties signed per week, a development that poses challenges for both countries and business, according to the report, whose theme this year is “Non-Equity Modes of International Production and Development.”

The report presents original, “ahead-of-curve analyses” on why and how non-equity modes (NEMs) such as contract manufacturing, services outsourcing, contract farming, franchising and licensing are increasingly used by trans-national corporations in managing their global value chains.

NEMs – which allow an owner to enter a new market in less direct ways such as through the licensing of a logo or by exporting goods for distribution – represent a highly significant “middle way” between FDI and trade which, among others, shapes patterns of international trade and trajectories of development, according to the report.

Last year, cross-border NEM-related activities generated over \$2 trillion in sales, with such enterprises employing 14 to 16 million workers in developing countries. In some industries they accounted for 70 to 80 per cent of global exports.

The report also examines the catalysts behind the rise of NEMs, their scale and scope and development impact, and their

policy implications.

Millions of children reached in UN-run anti-measles vaccination in DR Congo



Child being vaccinated against measles

26 July - Some 3.1 million children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have been vaccinated against measles in a United Nations-coordinated campaign to combat the disease outbreak which has claimed the lives of 1,145 children since the start of this year.

The measles epidemic affected a total of 115,600 children between January and June, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in a press release issued yesterday, adding that the vaccination campaign was funded with \$1.9 million.

The campaign, which kicked off on 10 May, was coordinated by the UN World Health Organization (WHO) in the provinces of Katanga, Kasai Occidental, Bas-Congo, Equateur and Orientale.

“The funding – equivalent to 61 cents per child – helped protect the health of millions of children,” said Fidèle Sarassoro, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for DRC. “We thank our partners and urge them to continue supporting us, especially now that DRC is facing other epidemics, including cholera in the west of the country,” said Mr. Sarassoro.

Some 5,407 cases of measles were reported in DRC last year, causing 82 deaths, compared to 899 cases, including 26 fatalities, in 2009.

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease, which mostly affects children. It is transmitted through droplets from the nose, mouth or throat of infected persons. Initial symptoms, which usually appear between eight to 12 days after infection, include high fever, a running nose, bloodshot eyes, and tiny white spots on the inside of the mouth. A rash then develops, starting on the face and upper neck and gradually spreading to the rest of the body.

In malnourished children and people with reduced immunity, the disease can cause serious complications, including blindness, encephalitis, severe diarrhoea, ear infection, pneumonia and even death.

Sudan: UN promotes peace and disarmament in Darfur through the arts

26 July - In a bid to promote peace, security and reconciliation in Darfur, the United Nations-African Union peacekeeping mission to the Sudanese region (UNAMID) and other UN entities have used the performing arts to raise awareness of a disarmament and demobilization process.

The event, held yesterday in El Srief locality, 45 kilometres north of El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur state, was aimed at raising community awareness on the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process, and to enhance people understanding of threats to their security.

Sensitization was carried out through songs, dance and puppet shows by local performing artists, according to UNAMID, which organized the function in partnership with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the Sudan DDR Commission (SDDRC) and other relevant UN agencies.

The outreach event began with distribution of 40,000 litres of water to the local residents by UNAMID. The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is also installing water pumps and repairing others in El Srief, where residents are forced to walk long distances to fetch water.

“These performers have messages for each and every one of us – messages of unity, peace, messages about the dangers of



Darfur Drama actors perform at El Srief as part of an outreach activity organized by UNAMID

arms,” UNAMID DDR officer, Joan Bao-in, told the gathering.

Hussein Elsherif, a child protection officer for the non-governmental organization (NGO) Friends of Peace and Development, said: “Here we send the arms control message on a daily basis. For example, people used to use guns to celebrate, shooting in the air, but we discussed it and the community agreed not to do that any more. We want to send a message of peace and coexistence among communities.”

UN refugee agency condemns Sudan’s deportation of Eritrean refugees



Eritrean children at Shagarab camp in eastern Sudan

26 July - The United Nations refugee agency today condemned Sudan’s deportation of Eritrean asylum-seekers on Monday, saying it was concerned with the increased frequency of such incidents and said they violated both international and Sudanese law.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said two asylum-seekers jumped off a truck carrying them to the border with Eritrea. One was killed and the other seriously injured. Four other asylum-seekers were deported at the same time.

“UNHCR strongly condemns the recent deportation of Eritrean asylum-seekers by Sudan,” the agency said in a statement released in Geneva today.

“The asylum-seekers had been convicted on charges of illegal entry to Sudan under national immigration laws. They had at no time been provided with access to asylum procedures. Such deportations of asylum-seekers without having their claims reviewed by the competent authorities amount to refoulement and constitute a serious violation of the 1951 Refugee Convention as well as the 1974 Sudanese Asylum Act,” UNHCR said.

According to the agency, since May this year Sudan has deported at least 30 asylum-seekers and refugees to Eritrea, “where UNHCR believes they are likely to face persecution.”

“UNHCR is deeply concerned over the recent increase in deportations of Eritrean asylum-seekers and refugees from Sudan,” it said. “The UN refugee agency has consistently reminded Sudan of its obligations under international and Sudanese law.”

“UNHCR urges the Sudanese Government to stop the ongoing deportations and to provide all asylum-seekers currently in detention with immediate access to asylum procedures,” it said.

Parties to Libyan conflict remain deeply divided on political solution – UN envoy

26 July - Parties to the crisis in Libya remain deeply divided on how to reach a political solution to the conflict that has raged since February when an uprising flared up in a bid to oust the ruling regime, the United Nations envoy for the North African country, Abdul Ilah Al-Khatib, said today.

“The Special Envoy said it is clear from the discussions in Tripoli today and in Benghazi yesterday with representatives of the Libyan Transitional National Council, that both sides remain far apart on reaching agreement on a political solution,” according to a note to reporters issued by the office of the spokesperson of the Secretary-General.



Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Libya, Abdel-Elah Al-Khatib, speaks to reporters

The two sides, however, reaffirmed to Mr. Khatib – the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy – their desire to continue to engage with the UN in the search for a solution.

In his meeting with Libya’s Prime Minister Baghdadi Al-Mahmoud in Tripoli today, Mr. Khatib once again urged the

authorities there to engage in a political process that leads to a political solution that meets the legitimate demands and aspirations of the Libyan people.

Mr. Mahmoud reiterated previously stated positions regarding the NATO air strikes, and against the stepping down of Libyan leader Muammar al-Qadhafi, according to the note.

Libya has been engulfed by fighting since a pro-democracy movement opposed to the regime of Mr. Qadhafi emerged in February following similar protests in Tunisia, Egypt and other countries across North Africa and the Middle East.