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UN agency urges Jordan to allow 12,000 desperate Syrian refugees stranded at border

8 December - Amid worsening conditions inside Syria, the United Nations refugee agency today expressed grave concern for nearly 12,000 people trying to flee the country who are now stranded in remote areas along the north eastern Jordanian border, and urged the Government of Jordan to allow them entry, prioritizing admission for the most vulnerable.

The population includes about 11,000 people in Rukban (about 8 kilometres to the west of the point at which the Iraq, Syria, and Jordan borders meet) and 1,000 people in Hadalat (some 90 km further west), and has been growing in recent weeks, according to the UN.

“It includes elderly people, others who are sick or wounded, children, women, and others who are vulnerable and need help, Melissa Fleming, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told the regular press briefing in Geneva.

Ms. Fleming added that the refugees are gathering near an earthen wall or 'berm' on Jordanian territory in a rocky area devoid of shade, water or vegetation and that the number of people congregating at these locations rose sharply from 4,000 to 12,000 in November, following the recent intensification of conflict in Syria.

The spokesperson added that women have had to give birth at the berm, in unsanitary and unhygienic conditions. Moreover, common medical complaints are on the rise such as respiratory tract infections, gastroenteritis, and skin diseases such as scabies.

Ms. Fleming underscored that the health situation is deteriorating, with increasing signs of diarrhoea, vomiting and acute malnutrition among children and stressed that if refugees are not admitted to Jordan and substantial assistance are not
provided, the lives of refugees will be at risk in the coming winter months.

“We appeal to the Government of Jordan to allow refugees stranded at the border to enter the country, prioritizing entry for the most vulnerable adults and children, including serious and emergency medical and surgical cases, pregnant women, children below six months together with their families and the severely disabled,” said Ms. Fleming, highlighting the “excellent working relationship” the UN agency shares with the Government.

At the same time, she acknowledged the serious impact of the Syria conflict on Jordan’s security and said that UNHCR recognizes the tremendous contribution of Jordan in hosting over 630,000 refugees, which has put a heavy strain on its infrastructure and economy.

Additionally, Ms. Fleming said that the Azraq camp, located about 320 kilometres from Rukban has capacity to receive additional people and added that UNHCR has provided considerable support in recent months to improve the capacity of the Ruwaished transfer facility to allow the proper screening and processing of newly arrived refugees from the Berm.

Ms. Fleming reiterated that UNHCR recognizes the legitimate security concerns of Jordan, which “can be managed through proper assessments of the circumstances of individuals.”

“We believe this can best take place, after an initial screening by the Border Guards, in the Government of Jordan/UNHCR facility at Raba’a Al Sarhan, in Mafraq governorate, where authorities and necessary security and registration equipment is present,” said Ms. Fleming.

Lastly, she said that UNHCR stands ready to upgrade the security of the registration area at Azraq camp to allow for the comprehensive screening of the entire border population there.

**UN health agency outlines global trends and looks ahead to 2030 targets**

**8 December** - The World Health Organization (WHO) today issued a comprehensive analysis of global health trends since 2000, and laid out actions that should be prioritized over the next 15 years to achieve the newly-agreed United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), saying that universal health care is the “linchpin of development in health.”

Health in 2015: from the MDGs to the SDGs, identifies the key drivers of progress in health during 15 years under the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and lays out actions that countries and the international community should prioritize starting 1 January 2016.

The report contains “snapshots” on 34 different health topics that outline trends, achievements made, reasons for success, challenges and strategic priorities for improving health in the different areas. These “snapshots” range from air pollution to hepatitis to road traffic injuries.

Although the health MDGs missed a number of global targets, according to the report, the overall results were impressive, with the past 15 years witnessing major declines in child and maternal mortality, and progress in the fight against HIV, tuberculosis and malaria in developing countries.

Saying the world now stands on “the threshold of a new era,” WHO Director General Dr. Margaret Chan said in the report’s preface the new report is a first step in a series of actions she is taking to make her organization fit to fully support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals agenda.

Even though almost all the SDGs are directly related to health or will contribute to health indirectly, one goal (SDG 3) specifically sets out to ‘ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.’
“Universal health coverage cuts across all of the health-related goals,” according to Dr. Marie-Paule Kieny, WHO’s Assistant Director-General of Health Systems and Innovation. “It is the linchpin of development in health and reflects the SDGs strong focus on equity and reaching the poorest, most disadvantaged people everywhere.”

“As the global agency with the mandate to cover the whole health agenda, WHO will take a leading role in supporting countries to set their own national targets and strategies, advising on best-buy interventions, defining research priorities and monitoring progress in achieving the health-related SDGs,” according to Dr. Kieny.

The WHO report presents the analysis for the key areas outlined in the health SDGs:

- reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health;
- infectious diseases including HIV, tuberculosis, malaria, hepatitis and neglected tropical diseases;
- noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) including heart disease, cancer and diabetes;
- mental health and substance use including narcotics and harmful use of alcohol;
- injuries and violence; and
- universal health coverage.

“One of the biggest challenges will be measuring progress across a staggering number of targets, particularly with the lack of health data in developing countries,” according to Dr. Kieny. SDG monitoring requires regular, high-quality data, for example on the causes of death, from all population groups so that we know where we need to target resources.”

WHO is working with partners to establish a Health Data Collaborative in early 2016 that aims to support countries to build better health data systems.

**UN begins testing data collection system to help track, curb attacks against health workers**

8 December - The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) has announced that it now testing a new system for collecting data to ensure that attacks against healthcare workers in the line of fire – from Afghanistan to Ukraine and Yemen – do not go unnoticed and that they are better protected from violence and harm.

“The attacks and deaths are tragic enough, but the loss of health workers, services and facilities results in less care for people, compounding the suffering caused by conflicts and other emergencies,” the agency said.

Just yesterday, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) drew attention to the fact that in Syria, where almost 60 per cent of hospitals have been partially or completely destroyed, health facilities have been routinely hit by aerial bombing, and countless health workers have been killed or injured along with their patients. WHO added that more than half of Syria’s health workers have fled or been killed.

“Protecting health care workers is one of the most pressing responsibilities of the international community,” said Jim Campbell, director of WHO’s Health Workforce department. “Without health workers, there is no health care.”

According to WHO, data compiled from a range of sources has revealed that in 2014 alone, 603 health workers were killed and 958 injured in such attacks in 32 countries.

And until now, the agency said, data on attacks against health workers has been piecemeal and there has been no standard way of reporting them.

To ensure that these attacks don’t go unnoticed, WHO said it has developed a new system for collecting data and is being tested in Central African Republic, Syria and the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
“It will be available for use early next year,” according to WHO. “But the project doesn’t only aim to collect data. It also plans to use the information to identify patterns and find ways to avoid attacks or mitigate their consequences.”

Attacks on hospitals and clinics in conflict situations are just one of the threats health workers face. During West Africa’s Ebola epidemic, a team of eight people trying to raise awareness about the outbreak were killed in Guinea amid a climate of fear and suspicion. More than 400 health workers lost their lives after becoming infected while treating Ebola patients.

“Every time a doctor is too afraid to come to work, or a hospital is bombed, or supplies are looted, it impedes access to health care,” said Erin Kenney, who manages the WHO project that has developed the new system.

In December 2014, the UN General Assembly agreed to strengthen international efforts to ensure the safety of health personnel and to collect data on threats and attacks against health workers, and a WHO report calling for measures to improve security for workers and healthcare for patients is expected this month, the agency said.

**Security Council urges increased security steps, funds to uproot terrorism from Africa’s Sahel region**

8 December - Voicing grave concern at terrorist safe havens in Libya and the humanitarian crisis caused by Boko Haram terrorists in Nigeria, the United Nations Security Council today appealed for greater international security cooperation and more humanitarian aid to bring stability to sub-Saharan Africa.

In a presidential statement issued two weeks after the top UN regional official warned it that the sub-Saharan Sahel region will become fertile ground for recruiting terrorists among its tens of millions of disadvantaged people, the 15-member body Council called for a dual policy of combatting terrorism and its havens while eliminating its root causes through aid and development.

“The Security Council is gravely concerned that Libya remains a safe haven for terrorist groups operating in the Sahel region, and expresses deep concern at the threat posed by the widespread availability of unsecured arms and ammunition and their proliferation, which undermines stability in Libya and the Sahel region,” it said of the war-torn North African country.

It called for international aid to provide Libya and its neighbours with the security assistance needed to combat Al-Qaida-linked terrorists, urged all Libyan stakeholders to swiftly form a government of national accord to end the chaos, and appealed to regional counties to coordinate their efforts to stop terrorists crossing borders and seeking safe havens in the Sahel.

Last month, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Special Envoy for the Sahel, Hiroute Guebre Sellassie, warned the Council that up to 41 million youths under 25 years of age in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger alone face hopelessness and are at risk of radicalization and migration. She called for improved access to education and employment to avert the threat.

Today’s statement also urged the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the international community to address the root causes, warning that humanitarian aid for the Sahel continues to be underfunded.

“The Security Council calls on the international community and donors to fulfil all their pledges made towards boosting economic growth, eradicating poverty and supporting governance reforms, through projects that would support peace and security efforts,” it said, urging all UN entities along with Member States and regional organizations to fund such projects as a priority.

“The Security Council calls upon the Member States of the Sahel region, with the support of the international community, to initiate programmes aimed at creating opportunities that would engage the youth in productive activities to reverse the tide...
of radicalization and recruitment into terrorist groups,” it added, stressing the need for stepped up coordination to tackle migrant and human trafficking.

The statement voiced concern at the scale of the growing humanitarian crisis caused by the Nigerian Boko Haram, which has displaced over 2.5 million people including an estimated 1.4 million children and sent 200,000 refugees fleeing to Cameroon, Chad and Niger, and urged international donors to support the regional Multinational Joint Task force set up to combat Boko Haram.

**Armed groups pose ‘critical threat’ to stability in Central Africa, UN envoy tells Security Council**

8 December - The violent activities of armed groups such as Boko Haram and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) have triggered a dire humanitarian and security crisis in Central Africa, the United Nations envoy on the region said today, telling the Security Council the challenges faced by the affected countries should not be underestimated and ongoing vigilance and international support is needed.

“[Boko Haram] stepped up its attacks against civilian and military targets in the Lake Chad Basin area, notably in Cameroon and Chad, leading to a further deterioration in the security, economic, humanitarian and human rights situation,” said the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), Abdoulaye Bathily, in his briefing.

He also added that the proximity of other regional conflicts near the Lake Chad Basin region, combined with the risks of radicalization, and the chronic poverty of already marginalized populations remain a serious concern.

Mr. Bathily noted that the influx of refugees into the Lake Chad Basin region has over-stretched Government capacities and further limited service delivery in the affected areas and the refugee situation comes in addition to a significant number of internally displaced persons and returnees who require immediate assistance.

At the same time, he observed that Boko Haram has been weakened as a result of the intensified military campaign by countries of the Lake Chad Basin, and has started resorting to attacks against soft targets. “The ongoing efforts to operationalize the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) underscore the commitment by the Lake Chad Basin Commission and Benin to coordinate action to fight Boko Haram,” he added.

Mr. Bathily also expressed hope that the joint summit of Central and West Africa Heads of State and Government, to explore concrete ways to address the root causes of terrorism and radicalization, will take place without further delay, and also called for increased support from international partners in the fight against terrorism, radicalization and armed violence.

Speaking about Central African Republic (CAR), the Special Representative noted that the recent spate of inter-communal violence that erupted in September generated additional refugee populations within the region, and gross human rights violations against local populations, particularly in the capital, Bangui. The violence, Mr. Bathily noted, had also weakened the national reconciliation process and the proliferation of small arms and gang-related criminality.

He stressed that Pope Francis’s recent visit to the country had been “timely” and his “message of peace and his prayers – in Catholic churches and Muslim mosques – were embraced by the population and welcomed as symbols of hope.”

Mr. Bathily said that in this context, it is critical to accelerate the pace of implementation of the recommendations of the Bangui Forum for National Reconciliation and for the presidential and legislative elections to take place peacefully to conclude the transition.

The Special Representative also noted that while the killings and attacks perpetrated by the LRA have diminished, the group continues to pose a threat to regional security, especially in CAR and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).
“The security and humanitarian crisis triggered by the LRA's activities, including looting and abductions should not be underestimated. The LRA has adapted to our strong collective response by keeping a low profile, buying time and taking advantage of coordination gaps,” said Mr. Bathily.

He also added that the UNOCA continues its active engagement on the LRA issue, including on the implementation of the UN regional strategy to address the threat and impact of the LRA.

Lastly, highlighting the approaching electoral cycles in several countries, the Special Representative said that the mounting tensions in the region, in part from disputes over national constitutions and lack of political consensus, must be addressed.

“I will continue to use my good offices to engage with stakeholders in the sub-region to encourage the peaceful resolution of disputes, including through inclusive political dialogue,” Mr. Bathily concluded.

**UN expert urges Brazilian Government to ensure timely access to safe drinking in wake after dam collapse**

8 December - Hundreds of thousands of people affected in catastrophic collapse of a mining dam in southeastern Brazil still lack full access to safe drinking water and sanitation more than one month after the disaster, a United Nations expert warned today, calling on the Government to urgently tackle the crisis and ensure people’s basic rights.

“I remind the Government of Brazil that it is the State’s human rights obligation to take action and ensure access to safe and sufficient water, and to alternative sanitation,” Léo Heller, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, said today in a news release.

One month later, thousands of people in Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo states are still suffering interruptions to the water supply, said Mr. Heller.

Further, insufficient and disorganized distribution of water has caused people hours’ long wait for inadequate portion of water, without giving the priority to the vulnerable groups. Moreover, violence has been ignited due to the growing discontent, he noted.

“[People] are also frustrated by the inconsistent and inadequate information on the safety of the water provided by the different authorities,” said Mr. Heller, citing growing concern over the water quality and stressing that providing relevant information is a basic right.

Noting that the main water source in the region, Doce River, contains toxic elements exceeding safety levels, the human rights expert called on the authorities to urgently take preventative measures under the precautionary principle.

“The Government must strengthen its monitoring of both raw and treated water, improve water treatment, and disseminate clear information to the population in order to protect people’s human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation,” concluded Mr. Heller.

Special Rapporteurs, who are not UN staff and are independent from any government or organization, are appointed by and report to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council.
Nepal: UN aid agencies and partners appeal for access to life-saving medical supplies

8 December - United Nations agencies and their aid partners today expressed their “deepest concern” over critical and growing shortages of lifesaving medicines and supplies across Nepal and appealed to all sides to ease an effective blockade of the country’s southern border due to unrest over a new constitution.

“The health and humanitarian implications of the present scenario are grave,” said a joint statement by the World Health Organization (WHO), UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and their development partners from Germany, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Korea.

Weeks of unrest over the country’s new constitution have severely restricted vital supplies at Nepal’s southern border, prompting Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to call on all sides to lift these restrictions without further delay and UNICEF to warn that more than three million children under the age of 5 are at risk of death or disease during the harsh winter months in Nepal.

“In recognition of the right to timely access to quality health care services, as enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and as detailed in the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights General Comment No. 14 on the Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health, we emphasize the seriousness of the present situation and its humanitarian implications,” today’s statement said.

The agencies warned that the reduced ability to access quality health care services and treatment is already affecting the most vulnerable, including pregnant and postpartum women, older persons, children, earthquake-affected communities and persons with acute conditions.

They also said disruptions to public health programs, including routine immunization, will have an “extremely serious and lasting impact on the health of children.”

“Should the situation be prolonged, the effects will be exacerbated,” the statement said.

The agencies said they will form a working group to work closely with the Ministry of Health and Population “to jointly explore all options for the provision of immediate assistance and support.”

“We urge all sides to address restrictions on the import and free movement of essential supplies including vaccines, drugs and other medical goods as a means of respecting and facilitating the human right to access quality health care services,” the statement said.
DR Congo: UN report accuses security forces of summary executions and death threats ahead of elections

8 December - Security forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have used summary executions, death threats and arbitrary arrests against the opposition, media and civil society since the start of the year and ahead of key elections, according to a United Nations report issued today.

“I urge the Congolese authorities to ensure accountability for the very serious human rights violations documented in this report,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said of the document prepared by the UN Joint Human Rights Office in the DRC.

“This is particularly important as DRC is heading towards a very packed electoral period. If the upcoming elections are to be credible and peaceful, the authorities must ensure that all citizens, independently of their political opinions, can fully participate in an open and democratic debate, and that civil society activists, media workers and political opponents are able to carry out their activities without fear.”

The report documents 143 human rights violations linked to the electoral process. After the violent repression of demonstrations by security forces in January which resulted in the extrajudicial killing of at least 20 people by State agents, a second wave of human rights violations started in July.

Most violations took place in provinces where opposition parties and civil society are prominent, including Kinshasa, North and South Kivu and Eastern Kasai, with the Congolese national police (PNC) and the national intelligence agency (ANR) responsible for most of those documented.

At least 649 people were arbitrarily arrested and detained in connection with the electoral process during the first nine months of the year, many of whom were denied contact with families or lawyers, the report noted, with the ANR primarily responsible.

“Arbitrary arrests and detentions, in particular of political opponents, civil society activists or demonstrators, were a frequent means of intimidation used by the security forces to restrict freedoms of expression and of peaceful assembly,” the report said.

“Political interference into the course of trials and the lack of progress in the prosecution of some of the accused demonstrate the instrumentalization of justice in order to silence those individuals and as a result to intimidate civil society as a whole.”

It welcomed an accord between the national electoral and national human rights commissions to investigate all allegations of rights violations connected to elections, and acknowledged some progress in ensuring accountability for specific abuses. But, it added, there has so far been no investigation or legal proceedings for abuses related to the polls.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Special representative for DRC Maman S. Sidikou pledged to take up the issue with the DRC authorities and international partners, and take “appropriate steps to ensure a free, fair and credible electoral process.”

The UN Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO) was created in February 2008 and is comprised of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission (MONUSCO) Human Rights Division and the former Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in the DRC (OHCHR/DRC). The two offices have been fully integrated and the UNJHRO functions in accordance with their two mandates.
COP21: Ban tells private sector ‘how we do business today will determine if we can do business in the future’

8 December - Speaking at the United Nations climate change conference (COP21) today, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told a room full of business leaders that the global gathering will serve to share progress made in important areas and to establish even greater ambition for the future.

“The collective momentum among the private sector for climate action is growing daily,” said Mr. Ban alongside the United States Secretary of States, John Kerry, and the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Laurent Fabius, at a high-level meeting of the UN Global Compact’s Caring for Business Forum.

Held over two days on the sidelines of COP21, the third annual meeting of the Forum aims to provide a platform for dialogue and action among business, investors, civil society, the UN and government officials.

Since 30 November, the conference site in the north-east of the French capital has been at the heart of climate-related discussions, with thousands of people from all corners of the globe coming together to push for a new universal climate change agreement that will limit global temperature rise to less than two degrees Celsius.

“Across the world, businesses and investors are standing up for a strong agreement in Paris that sends the right market signals,” Mr. Ban underlined. “They are asking for a clear message that the transition to cleaner, low emissions energy sources is necessary, inevitable, irreversible and beneficial.”

With “business” as one of the central themes of COP21 on Tuesday, the UN chief stressed that it should be clear “there is no turning back,” and that all parts of society – CEOs, cities and citizens – must be part of the solution.

“Just over a year ago at my Climate Summit in New York, I called on business to make their voices heard and to demonstrate that green business is good business. Companies from around the globe have responded. Leading companies are showing that they can address climate change and thrive financially,” he insisted.

He noted that more companies and investors are leading on climate action than at any time in history, and that they are doing so “because they understand the risks of climate change, and the opportunities inherent in addressing it.”

“We have seen the power of collaboration first-hand through our UN Caring for Climate initiative. This is now the largest coalition of businesses actively engaging on climate,” he explained, adding that one hundred companies are setting ambitious emissions reduction goals through the science-based targets initiative.

On the issue of carbon pricing, he indicated that companies have been “instrumental” in ensuring that a price on carbon is recognized as a necessary and effective tool. According to the Carbon Disclosure Project, more than 1,000 companies now say that they have set an internal price or plan to in the future. This reportedly compares to just over 100 companies a year ago – nearly a ten-fold increase.

“In the past year alone, over 2,000 companies and 500 investors have registered climate commitments through the UNFCCC NAZCA portal. But to limit global temperature rise to less than two degrees we must go much further and faster,” he warned.

Finally, Mr. Ban addressed all the private sector leaders in the room, telling them that as they leave Paris, he hopes they will carry with them a clear message to their consumers, employees, peers – and Governments – “that how we do business today will determine if we can do business in the future.”
Syria: UNICEF plans to reach 2.6 million children with winter supplies and cash assistance

8 December - Warning of harsh winter conditions looming for more than eight million Syrian children living inside the war-ravaged country or as refugees around the region and beyond, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) announced a package of assistance for 2.6 million Syrian children, including cash assistance, in addition to ongoing humanitarian programmes.

“These months are particularly brutal for children. They are at higher risk of developing respiratory infections in the cold weather, and – tragically – they are also in danger when families burn plastic or other toxic materials inside their shelters to keep warm,” said UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, Peter Salama in a news release.

According to UNICEF, early weather reports indicate that this winter could be harsher than last year’s with temperatures in some mountainous areas dropping as low as minus 13°C during the coldest days of December and January, along with possible storms and heavy snowfall which could cause hardship for families who are struggling to survive even in normal conditions.

The Syrian crisis has displaced more than three million children inside the country, sometimes multiple times and in neighbouring Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt more than 2.2 million children are now living as refugees, UNICEF said.

The UN agency said that many families’ financial resources are exhausted after five years of continued crises, making purchases of even essentials like warm coats and scarves impossible.

The package of assistance to be provided by UNICEF will support 2.6 million Syrian children living inside the country and across the region, with the focus mainly on children who have been hit the hardest, including the internally displaced and those living in hard-to-reach areas or in informal tented settlements.

According to UNICEF, work is underway in Syria to provide up to one million children with winter support, including the distribution of locally procured clothing kits, blankets and school heaters in addition to the distribution of cash vouchers – allowing families to buy their own winter needs.

The agency said that an additional 100,000 children will be reached through cross border initiatives from Turkey and Jordan. Vouchers and cash transfers make up the bulk of UNICEF’s winter response in Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan.

UNICEF said that the support will be an addition to ongoing programmes in health, education, water and sanitation and protection which continue to reach millions of children around the region, and the recently introduced programme to provide cash assistance and vouchers to families with children up to 15 years of age.

UNICEF launched its annual appeal for funds yesterday, to support its programmes overall inside Syria and neighbouring countries, seeking US$ 1.1 billion for 2016.