Relief aid is saving lives, but world must tackle root causes of famine: conflict – UN chief

12 October – Until fighting stops and development takes root, communities and entire regions will continue to face hunger, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres told the Security Council on Thursday, underscoring the link between conflict and famine.

“Conflict in one country creates demands on its neighbours to provide food and basic services to refugees. This can lead to further instability, affecting the security of an entire region and beyond,” said Mr. Guterres.

Today’s briefing was in response to the request made by the Council in August for an analysis on country-specific impediments to an effective response to the risk of famine in Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and north-east Nigeria.

“Prevention, as always, must be our watchword,” he said, noting that early famine warning mechanisms have worked well in these places, given that the international community responded quickly to his appeals nine months ago with donors coming forward to provide nearly 70 per cent of funds needed.
“But while we have succeeded in keeping famine at bay, we have not kept suffering at bay,” the UN chief said, adding that while humanitarian aid is saving lives, “we have not dealt with the one major root cause of these food crises: conflict.”

Some 80 per cent of the World Food Programme’s (WFP) funding is going to areas affected by conflict. Around 60 per cent of the 815 million people suffering from hunger today live in the shadow of conflict. Three-quarters of the stunted children in the world are in countries affected by conflict.

The parties to conflict in the four countries have stated their commitment to humanitarian and human rights law – but most of them have not followed through.

Specifically, Mr. Guterres asked the Council to continue to engage in and support the political process in Somalia, and encourage the Federal Government of Somalia and the federal member states to stabilize their relationship.

In Nigeria, where aid agencies face obstacles because of ongoing attacks by Boko Haram, he encouraged the Government and its counterparts in the Lake Chad Basin to develop a regional strategy to address the root causes of the crisis.

In Yemen, he said, what is needed most is for the parties to return to the negotiation table and focus on agreement.

As for South Sudan, he urged parties to the conflict to come to terms urgently, to prevent increased food insecurity, refugee movements that threaten to destabilize the region, and continued human suffering and misery.

Calling for a system-wide approach which addresses the humanitarian-development nexus and its link to peace, Mr. Guterres appealed for an urgent commitment to scaling up aid funding and said: “In the long term, we must focus on what communities and countries need to emerge from protracted conflict and instability. We must help people not just to survive, but to thrive.”

**Ahead of UN mission’s closure, envoy reports greater stability, security in Haiti**

**12 October** – Haiti has seen a significant turnaround from profound instability, widespread political violence, and a climate of lawlessness that in 2004 impacted the every-day lives of millions of Haitians, the head of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Caribbean islands country told the Security Council on Thursday.

“Today, Haiti has a very different outlook. The Haitian people enjoy a considerable degree of security and greater stability; political violence has diminished; armed gangs no longer hold the population hostage, also thanks to the work of the national police – now 14,000 strong – which has grown significantly in numbers and capacity,” said Sandra Honoré, in her final briefing to the Council as head of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).

MINUSTAH will close on 15 October to be replaced the following day by a smaller successor mission, the UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH), which is mandated to assist the Government in strengthening rule of law institutions, reinforcing national police capacities, and engaging in human rights monitoring, reporting and analysis.

Ms. Honoré, who is also the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for the country, noted that when MINUSTAH was established in 2004, State authority had been weak and limited to parts of the capital, Port-au-Prince, with the three branches of power either non-functional or non-existent, and a national police force that was overwhelmed by the multiple threats to public order and the rule of law.

Today, 13 and a half years later, “Haiti has a very different outlook, despite the many challenges still facing the country,”
she underscored.

All three branches of power are in place with the Executive and Legislative branches restored to full functioning, while the Superior Council of the Judiciary, created for the first time in 2012, remains in need of long-term fixes to allow it to fully play its role as the guardian of an independent and impartial judicial system.

These democratic institutions are complemented by the directly elected officials now in place at all levels of governance, for the first time in 10 years, denoting real progress in the implementation of the constitutional governance system, she said. At the heart of these achievements stood the creation of stable political conditions, without which none of the above would have been possible.

“There is no doubt: Those achievements, and many others which I have not mentioned, while significant, are only initial steps,” she said, stressing the need for the Haitian authorities and all other actors to make tireless efforts to consolidate these gains, with the continued support of Haiti's international friends and partners.

President Jovenel Moïse has reiterated his determination to transform and modernize the State to better serve the people and has taken initial steps to translate this overarching objective into deliverables, especially through the launch and expansion of the Government's flagship development programme, the 'Caravan for Change,’ Ms. Honoré explained.

However, amidst a climate of widespread economic grievances and strained relations between the Executive branch and the political opposition, the maintenance of stability in the longer run may depend on the ability and commitment of the Administration to move more swiftly in undertaking concrete action, and implementing the promised reforms, she added.

MINUJUSTH stands ready to play an effective role in supporting the consolidation of the country's stability. The UN will also continue to make every effort to assistant the Government in alleviating the suffering caused by the cholera epidemic.

“Looking ahead, I have no doubt that … the international community and the United Nations will contribute to the sustainability of the progress achieved during the past 13 years in Haiti's stabilization and democratization process,” she concluded.

Disease outbreak ‘real and present danger’ UNICEF warns, launching latrine-building plan in Cox’s Bazar

12 October – New latrines will be constructed in the Rohingya camps and settlements of Bangladesh’s Cox’s Bazar district to provide sanitation coverage to some 250,000 people, averting a major disease outbreak, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) reported Thursday.

UNICEF and the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief of Bangladesh agreed that the Bangladesh Armed Forces Division will construct 10,000 latrines in Cox’s Bazar as quickly as possible at a total cost of $1.5 million.

“There are already reports of water-borne diseases from the health centres in the camps,” said Edouard Beigbeder, the UNICEF Representative in Bangladesh, who signed a work plan with Joint Secretary Muhammad Habibul Kabir Chowdhury Wednesday at the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief.

“Disease outbreak is a real and present danger for the camp dwellers and host population. We immediately need to step up sanitation coverage there,” added Mr. Beigbeder.
UNICEF will contribute financial as well as technical support to the ministry in this public health undertaking, including through it water, sanitation and hygiene sector partners, which will provide locations for each set of 5-rings model latrines.

The latrines, at an estimated cost of $147 each, will also be regularly disinfected through spraying chlorine solution so that these do not become sources of contamination.

UNICEF, the Department of Public Health and Engineering, and water and sanitation sector partners are also implementing an accelerated programme of building latrines for the refugees in the camps in two sub-districts of Cox’s Bazar district.

In related news, on 10 October, UNICEF and its health sector partners launched a massive oral cholera vaccination campaign for 650,000 people in Ukhiya and Teknaf sub-districts of Cox’s Bazar – mobilizing 900,000 doses of cholera vaccines to protect newly arrived Rohingyas and the host community from a cholera outbreak.

**US withdrawal from UNESCO 'loss for multilateralism,' says cultural agency's chief**

12 October – The head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) voiced “profound regret” on Thursday over the United States' decision to withdraw from the agency.

“This is a loss to UNESCO. This is a loss to the United Nations family. This is a loss for multilateralism,” said UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova in a statement.

“Unversality is critical to UNESCO's mission to strengthen international peace and security in the face of hatred and violence, to defend human rights and dignity,” she added, noting that UNESCO would continue to build a more just, peaceful, equitable 21st century.

Ms. Bokova recalled that in 2011, when the US suspended payment of its membership contributions, she was convinced that the UNESCO never mattered as much for the US or vice versa.

“This is all the more true today,” she continued “when the rise of violent extremism and terrorism calls for new long-term responses for peace and security, to counter racism and antisemitism, to fight ignorance and discrimination.”

Ms. Bokova spelled out her belief that the American people support UNESCO's actions to harness new learning technologies; enhance scientific cooperation, for ocean sustainability; promote freedom of expression, defend journalists' safety; empower girls and women as change-makers and peacebuilders; bolster societies facing emergencies, disasters and conflicts; and advance literacy and quality education.

“Despite the withholding of funding, since 2011, we have deepened the partnership between the United States and UNESCO, which has never been so meaningful,” she underscored. “Together, we have worked to protect humanity's shared cultural heritage in the face of terrorist attacks and to prevent violent extremism through education and media literacy.”

*The partnership between UNESCO and the US has 'drawn on shared values'*

The Director General gave examples of collaborating during that time, such as launching the Global Partnership for Girls’ and Women’s Education and celebrating World Press Freedom Day in Washington, D.C., with the National Endowment for Democracy.

She also mentioned a long history of joint endeavours, including working together with the late Samuel Pisar, Honorary Ambassador and Special Envoy for Holocaust Education, to promote education for remembrance of the Holocaust across the
world to fight antisemitism and genocide today; cooperating with major US companies Microsoft, Cisco, Procter & Gamble and Intel to keep girls in school and nurture technologies for quality learning; and working with the US Geological Survey, US Army Corps of Engineers, and US professional societies to advance research for the sustainable management of water resources, agriculture.

“The partnership between UNESCO and the United States has been deep, because it has drawn on shared values,” Ms. Bokova stressed.

Citing lines in UNESCO's 1945 Constitution by US Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish – ‘since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed’ – she said this vision has never been more relevant, and added that the US helped inspire the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention.

Calling the agency's work “key to strengthen the bonds of humanity's common heritage in the face of forces of hatred and division,” she noted the value of World Heritage cites in the US, such as the Statue of Liberty, as being not just as a defining US symbol but that it speaks for people across the world.

“UNESCO will continue to work for the universality of this Organization, for the values we share, for the objectives we hold in common, to strengthen a more effective multilateral order and a more peaceful, more just world,” Ms. Bokova concluded.

Latin America and Caribbean falling off ‘zero hunger’ path towards 2030 – UN report

12 October – The total number of persons that suffer from hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean has increased, reversing decades of progress, even as overweight and obesity emerged as a major problem in all countries in the region of the Americas, a United Nations-backed report shows.

“The region has taken a significant step backwards in a fight that it was winning,” Julio Berdegué, Regional Representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), said Thursday. “We cannot tolerate the current levels of hunger and obesity, as they will paralyze an entire generation.”

Hunger rates have declined in 21 of the 27 countries of the region in recent years, but the absolute number of people suffering from hunger increased, according to the report published by FAO and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

In 2016, some 42.5 million people in the region did not have enough food for their daily caloric needs, a six per cent increase, or 2.4 million additional undernourished people.

“It will be very difficult for the region to reach Sustainable Development Goal 2 on eradicating hunger and malnutrition by 2030” if this trend does not change, said Mr. Berdegué.

Only a few decades ago, governments of the region joined forces to fight against acute malnutrition, chronic malnutrition and micronutrient deficiency. Today they must also fight against overweight and obesity.

“The region faces a double burden of malnutrition,” said PAHO Director Carissa F. Etienne.

Overweight and obesity continue to affect all age groups

Overweight and obesity is a public health problem in all countries of the Americas, affecting all age groups.
Some 7.5 per cent of those under the age of five in South America, or 2.5 million children, suffer from overweight and obesity, as do six per cent of the children in Central America and 6.9 per cent of those in the Caribbean. The rate increases with age, affecting a third of the adolescents and two thirds of the adults in the region, with women being the most affected.

The problem is growing in scale to catch up with the region’s 11 per cent rate of child stunting due to chronic malnutrition.

**A robot’s ‘father’ discusses progress in artificial intelligence and reveals a future that’s closer than you think**

12 October – At 18 months-old, Sophia cannot walk, but she can understand speech and, at United Nations Headquarters in New York, participate in panel discussion and respond to questions using her artificial intelligence (AI).

Sophia is a robot. A ‘social’ robot, according to her creator, the CEO of Hanson Robotics, David Hanson, which means that she was designed to form relationships.

“Robots like Sophia will come into people’s lives more through high-end applications, so she can be used for education. She could help in factories. She could help in search and rescue […] she can go in to comfort someone who is hurt,” Mr. Hanson told UN News in an interview on Wednesday after both were panellists at a UN meeting on ‘the future of everything,’ technological change and development.

Mr. Hanson sees himself as “sort of a ‘jealous father,’” who is part parent, part scientist and engineer, and part artist.

He said the goal is to continue developing such “life forms,” which entails programming hormone release simulations, respiratory systems, and other body cycles, so that they eventually explore their place in the world on their own.

That means that Sophia’s AI is continuing to evolve.

When asked where she sees herself in five years, Sophia, which has just had arms added, said: “I see myself having legs, maybe being a famous stage entertainer. I hope to learn new skills, too. In time, I will be able to predict potential futures, even when millions of factors are involved, to choose the best path for humanity.”

Step into the (not so distant) future…our full interview is in the Soundcloud below.
Human rights challenges in Libya ‘massive, but not insurmountable,’ UN rights chief says after visiting country

12 October – After a brief mission to Libya, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein on Thursday said the Government “can and should” lead efforts to urgently address arbitrary detention, torture and other grave violations that must be brought to an end in the crisis-torn North African country.

“No United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has ever made an official visit to discuss the human rights situation in Libya in the days of Muammar Gaddafi or in the years have followed the end of its dictatorial regime,” Mr. Zeid said in a statement issued by his Office (OHCHR) at the end of his mission.

The High Commissioner travelled to Libya for one day, having not announced the visit in advance for security reasons. While there, he met with Libyan Prime Minister Fayez Serraj, the Ministers of Justice and the Interior, and the head of the department responsible for the management of migrant detention centers.

Mr. Zeid was also able to make brief visits to one of the country’s major prisons and a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs). “My trip was enlightened by a very useful meeting with Libyan civil society and women human rights defenders,” he said.

Despite the high hopes that followed the 2011 revolution, the human rights situation in Libya continues to be marked by widespread abuses and violations perpetrated by all parties to the conflict with impunity, he stated, explaining: “Thousands of people are arbitrarily detained in detention centers across the country, some since the 2011 armed conflict, many of whom are subjected to torture and ill-treatment.”

He went on to note that armed groups are killing and illegally holding civilians and fighters hostage. “Civilian men, women and children are killed and injured every week by the indiscriminate use of weapons […] Yet these aspects of the human rights situation in Libya rarely [make it into] the headlines.”

Displaced Libyans and representatives of civil society met by the High Commissioner presented him with a clear picture of the serious abuses committed by armed groups and the impunity they currently enjoy. “The actions of armed groups are hampering significant progress towards stability, development and peace in the country,” Mr. Zeid underscored.

Alarming situation of migrants

While in Libya, the human rights chief also spoke with authorities about the alarming situation of migrants in the country. “I call on the Government to establish alternatives to detention in Libya, to put an end to the practice of arbitrary detention and to report on abuses committed against migrants in detention centers,” he stressed.

Overall, he said that while the challenges facing human rights in Libya are “massive,” they are not insurmountable. At the same time, he recognized that the large-scale collapse of the judicial system, power and influence of armed groups and the many challenges facing the Government are very real.

“But the Government can and should lead. It can begin to combat the practice of arbitrary detention and to take back the powers conferred on armed groups. The situation in detention centers can be addressed,” Mr. Zeid stated, stressing that a concerted effort by the Government and all stakeholders, including the UN and the international community, can change and improve the situation.
In Geneva, UN Member States and experts discuss demographic, economic dimensions of migration

12 October – United Nations Member States began Thursday in Geneva the sixth thematic session of discussions on the proposed Global Compact on Migration, during which delegates and experts will examine the issue of labour mobility of migrants.

The talks, focused on the proposed Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration will explore, among others, comprehensive migration policies to address irregular migration and propose more regular pathways including family reunification, regularization, and transition from informal to the formal economy.

“The Global Compact on Migration is in fact the opportunity and the opportunity for States to face the challenges of migration,” said UN Special Representative for Migration, Louise Arbor, at the opening of the meeting.

Recalling the importance of migration as an engine of economic growth, UN General Assembly President Miroslav Lajcak advocated for a global compact, “not just an agreement on paper, but concluded on the basis of a political program.”

According Mr. Lajcak, “whatever the nature of our passports, the citizens of the world have the same rights.”

Three panels are also exchanging ideas on how to reduce the costs of labour migration, promote fair and ethical recruitment and explore labour migration schemes between countries of origin and destination.

“While most migrations are well managed and undertaken through completely legal channels, not all people who wish to migrate find the right channel to do so,” Ms. Arbor pointed out.

A series of side events will complement these discussions by focusing on topics such as health, ethical recruitment and skills recognition.

At the same time, several intergovernmental meetings are also taking place in Geneva, including the Seventh Global Meeting of Chairs and Secretariats of Consultative Processes on Migration, which focused on the regional inputs to the Global Compact.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has provided support to the GCM consultations, particularly by extending the required technical and policy expertise, including the publication of
In phone call, UN chief offers congratulations and support to Palestinian President

12 October – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has congratulated by phone Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine, on the intra-Palestinian agreement, signed earlier Thursday in Cairo.

According to a readout of a telephone call issued by a UN spokesperson, Mr. Guterres said he was encouraged by the recent progress in allowing the Palestinian Government to take up its responsibilities in Gaza and welcomed Egypt’s efforts to achieve this goal.

He emphasized the continuing need to urgently address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, particularly with regard to the electricity crisis, and improved access to and from the territory.

The Secretary-General also reiterated that the UN stands ready to continue working with Palestinian authorities and the region to support the Government in assuming its responsibilities in Gaza.

The readout of the Secretary-General’s phone call comes as media outlets are reporting that Egyptian-facilitated talks in Cairo have led to a breakthrough in the talks among Palestinian parties on administration in the Gaza Strip.

UN chief Guterres welcomes peaceful elections in Liberia

12 October – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has welcomed Tuesday's peaceful holding of the presidential and House of Representatives elections in Liberia and reiterated the continued support of the UN to the consolidation of peace and democracy in the West African country.

“The Secretary-General commends the efforts of the National Elections Commission and security institutions for this important milestone in the history of Liberia,” said a statement issued by his Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric.

Also in the statement, the UN chief congratulated the people of Liberia who turned out enthusiastically in high numbers to vote, and commended the Liberian women's groups for their active and important role in the electoral process.

UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia, deployed in 2003 after a civil war ended, handed back responsibility for security to the country's army and police in 2016, as part of its exit strategy.
Silencing opposition voices threatens Cambodian democracy – UN rights expert

12 October – Civil and political rights in Cambodia are “under threat” as the main opposition party is being dissolved in the parliament, a United Nations human rights expert warned Thursday, also voicing concern that the dissolution may affect upcoming elections in the country.

“For Cambodians to engage in open and serious political debate, the opposition must be allowed to exist and to function without fear or intimidation,” said Rhona Smith, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Cambodia, stressing that “democracy is about voice and choice. These moves risk leaving many Cambodians without either.”

The Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) is the only opposition party represented in the National Assembly. To strip its seats of the parliament would affect Cambodians’ voice and choice at all levels of Government, said Ms. Smith.

She not only raised serious concerns about the representativeness of government, but was also worried that the Government’s moves were “under the guise” of rule of law.

The CNRP’s leader, Kem Sokha, remains in pre-trial detention on conspiracy charges, while half of the party members in parliament have left the country.

The human rights expert said these actions against the CNRP have created additional grounds for dissolving the party, and some of which are “broad and vague.”

"Modern Cambodia was established as a multi-party liberal democracy, respectful and protective of human rights. Its Constitution sought to prevent a return to a single-party state,” said Ms. Smith, adding that “those who drafted the Constitution were all too well aware of the consequences of one-party rule."

UN and partners launch plan to stop transmission of bovine tuberculosis to humans

12 October – Stressing the damaging impact on poor rural communities in Africa and South-East Asia of animal tuberculosis’ (bovine TB) transmission to humans, United Nations health experts launched the first-ever roadmap to combat the so-called zoonotic TB.

“We have made progress towards ending tuberculosis, yet to a large extent people with zoonotic TB are left behind,” said Mario Raviglione, Director of the World Health Organization’s (WHO) Global TB Programme, in a news statement.

Today, at the 48th Union World Conference on Lung Health in Guadalajara, Mexico, WHO, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), and International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, who have joined forces to develop the Roadmap for Zoonotic TB, launched the initiative – addressing the major health and economic impacts of this disease.
“The priorities outlined in this roadmap highlight the need for multi-sectoral action to tackle this neglected form of TB and achieve the targets of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and WHO’s End TB Strategy,” said Mr Raviglione.

New data released by WHO estimates that over 140,000 people fall ill and more than 12,000 people lose their lives each year to zoonotic TB, which is most often communicated to humans through food consumption, usually non-heat-treated dairy products or raw or improperly cooked meat from diseased animals. Direct transmission from infected animals or animal products to people can also occur.

“We must recognize the interdependence of the health of people and animals in the fight against TB. Specifically, bovine TB, caused by Mycobacterium bovis, affects cattle, threatens people’s livelihoods and results in major economic and trade barriers, as well as posing a major risk to food safety and human health,” said Berhe Tekola, Director of the FAO Animal Production and Health Division.

The advanced laboratory tools required to diagnose zoonotic TB are frequently unavailable and the disease is resistant to pyrazinamide – one of the standard first-line medications used to treat TB. Therefore, patients are often misdiagnosed and may receive ineffective treatment.

The roadmap articulates 10 priority actions that human and animal health actors should take, and defines milestones for the short- and medium-term, which include improving the evidence base; reducing transmission between animals and humans; and strengthening intersectoral collaboration.

**Zoonotic TB extends beyond human health**

Bovine TB also threatens animal welfare and those with livestock-based livelihoods.

Economically, the disease can devastate cattle production with losses related to animal production, markets and trade, as well as costs incurred to implement surveillance and control programmes. To eliminate it, domestic livestock found to be infected with bovine TB must be slaughtered under veterinary supervision.

Wealthier countries are affected as well.

In the US between 2000 and 2008, more than $200 million in emergency funding was required to respond to bovine TB outbreaks. Wildlife can also be infected, serving as a reservoir of infection for livestock and people, potentially threatening conservation efforts.