In the headlines:

- Rohingya crisis one of the fastest growing in recent years, warns UN refugee agency
- UN condemns DPRK ballistic missile launch; stresses country cease such activities
- Global hunger rising again, driven by conflict and climate change – UN report
- Fresh violence in Central African Republic leads to more displaced – UN agency
- UN chief condemns deadly terrorist attack in southern Iraq
- UN dedicates annual Peace Day to safety, respect for refugees and migrants
- At annual event, UN invites Member States to join multilateral treaty framework
- Security Council approves mandate, operations and size of UN Verification Mission in Colombia
- INTERVIEW: UN should be flagbearer when it comes to gender parity, stresses top official

Rohingya crisis one of the fastest growing in recent years, warns UN refugee agency

15 September – The humanitarian situation in parts of Bangladesh sheltering hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees continues to deteriorate, making the crisis one of the fastest growing refugee crises of recent years, according to the United Nations.

“The crisis is] creating enormous humanitarian needs in an area of Bangladesh already affected by earlier refugee influxes, recent floods and not equipped to cope with large numbers of new arrivals,” Andrej Mahecic, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told journalists at a media briefing in Geneva today.

According to estimates, some 380,000 Rohingya refugees, fleeing violence in Myanmar, have crossed the border into Bangladesh since 25 August.

“A visit to the area this week by a UNHCR team, led by Assistant High Commissioner for Operations George Okoth-Obbo, found people suffering real hardship and some of the most difficult conditions seen in any current refugee situation,” said Mr. Mahecic.

Refugees continue to arrive daily outside of the two established camps which are already substantially overflowing, and many people have received little meaningful help to date, he added.
The UN agency has been responding to the situation and assisting those coming but its in-country stocks have been exhausted, noted the UNHCR spokesperson, adding that deliveries of more aid – flown in earlier this week – are currently underway.

*Children worst affected*

Challenges, however, are the greatest for children. According to the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), there are at least 240,000 children among the refugees, including about 36,000 who are less than a year old. There were also 52,000 pregnant and lactating women.

“Conditions are ripe for the spread of disease,” Marixie Mercado, a UNICEF spokesperson highlighted at the briefing, noting that refugees have little protection from the elements and lack drinking water.

“There is nowhere near enough latrines, and extreme mosquito activity has been forecast for the coming days. It is important to note that even before the crisis, half of the children in Rakhine state [in Myanmar] had suffered from chronic malnutrition, meaning they were vulnerable to disease,” she said.

To help cope with this situation, the World Health Organization (WHO) is stepping up its efforts, and starting 16 September, will launch a polio and measles vaccination campaign to cover 150,000 newly arrived children aged 6 months to 15 years old, said Tarik Jasarevic, a spokesperson for the UN agency.

“In the coming days, [we will also] distribute emergency medical kits to cover 100,000 people, 2 million water purification tablets and cholera kits for 20,000 people,” he added, noting that the UN health agency is also supporting the Government of Bangladesh in providing medical teams to new spontaneous settlements.

The World Food Programme (WFP), the UN’s emergency food assistance agency, has also upped its response, delivering high-energy food bars, and together with partners, hot food and rice for cooking to tens of thousands of refugees.

*‘Remarkable generosity’ of Bangladeshi communities*

Mr. Mahecic also noted that Bangladeshi communities have shown “remarkable generosity,” welcoming refugees into their homes and sharing resources with them.

However, as the number of new arrivals continues, UN agencies are in urgent need of additional funds to provide protection and life-saving assistance.

Among them, UNHCR has appealed for an initial amount of $30 million for its emergency response in the country until the end of year.

Similarly, UNICEF made an initial appeal for $7.3 million over three months, including almost $3 million for water and sanitation alone, but that amount was calculated on the basis of 200,000 people and that number had now doubled.
UN condemns DPRK ballistic missile launch; stresses country cease such activities

15 September – Condemning the launch of yet another ballistic missile by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres and the Security Council called on the country’s leadership to halt such activities and explore resumption of sincere dialogue on denuclearisation.

In a statement attributable to his spokesperson, the Secretary-General called on the DPRK leadership “to cease further testing, comply with the relevant Security Council resolutions, and allow space to explore the resumption of sincere dialogue on denuclearisation.”

The latest launch, which the statement referred to as a “manifest violation” of Security Council resolutions comes less than two weeks after the DPRK conducted a test of a nuclear device on 3 September and only three days after the Security Council unanimously adopted fresh sanctions against the country.

The statement also noted that Mr. Guterres will be discussing the situation on the Korean Peninsula with all concerned parties in the margins of the upcoming high level week of the UN General Assembly.

Also today, holding urgent consultations over the ballistic missile launch, the Security Council expressed its grave concern that the DPRK is, by conducting such a launch over Japan as well as its recent actions and public statements, deliberately undermining regional peace and stability and causing grave security concerns around the world.

Terming the ballistic missile launch as “highly provocative,” the Council members “condemned further the DPRK for its outrageous actions, and demanded that the [the country] immediately cease all such actions.”

“The Security Council stressed that these DPRK actions are not just a threat to the region, but to all UN Member States,” noted a press statement issued by the Council after the consultations, adding that all UN Member States must “fully, comprehensively, and immediately implement” all relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular 2375 (2017) and 2371 (2017).

The 15-member Security Council also emphasized the vital importance of the DPRK immediately showing sincere commitment to denuclearization through concrete action and stressed the importance of working to reduce tensions in the Korean Peninsula and beyond.

It also demanded that the DPRK comply with the relevant Security Council resolutions as well as the statements of its President by suspending all activities related to its ballistic missile programme and, in that context, re-establish its pre-existing commitments to a moratorium on missile launches.

The Security Council also reiterated the importance of maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in northeast Asia at large, and expressed its commitment to a peaceful, diplomatic and political solution to the situation, welcoming efforts by Council members, as well as other States, to facilitate a peaceful and comprehensive solution through dialogue.
Global hunger rising again, driven by conflict and climate change – UN report

15 September – The number of people hungry around the world is up for the first time in more than a decade, says a new United Nations report issued today, pointing to violent conflicts and climate change as the major drivers.

“This has set off alarm bells we cannot afford to ignore: we will not end hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2030 unless we address all the factors that undermine food security and nutrition. Securing peaceful and inclusive societies is a necessary condition to that end,” said the heads of five UN agencies in their joint foreword to the report.

The report, launched in Rome, is the first UN global assessment on food security and nutrition to be released following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which aims to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2030 as a top priority.

Some 815 million people were hungry last year – an increase of 38 million from the previous year – affecting some 11 per cent of the world population, according to UN figures.

Some of the highest proportions of food-insecure and malnourished children in the world are now concentrated in conflict zones, according to The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World.

Earlier this year, famine struck parts of South Sudan, and there is a threat of famine in conflict-affected countries such as Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen.

Even in regions that are more peaceful, droughts or floods linked in part to the El Niño weather phenomenon, as well as the global economic slowdown, have also seen food security and nutrition deteriorate, added the agencies – the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Cindy Holleman, senior economist with FAO, said the report is one of the first to review malnutrition among children, as well as obesity among children and adults.

“This is a growing problem worldwide and also has significant implications for people’s health and living,” said Ms. Holleman, noting that some countries have problems of malnutrition, as well as obesity.
Fresh violence in Central African Republic leads to more displaced – UN agency

15 September – Expressing concern over continued violence in the Central African Republic and the resulting “massive new levels” of displacement, the United Nations refugee agency has underscored the need to ensure that relief workers are not made targets of hostilities and are given the humanitarian security they need to carry out their mission.

“Since May, fresh and fierce clashes between armed groups in the CAR have wrought increasing suffering, deaths and destruction of property,” said Andrej Mahecic, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

“Many newly displaced people speak of having witnessed killings, robberies, lootings and kidnappings. Even after reaching safe locations, they often risk assault by armed groups, if they venture outside,” he added.

According to the UN agency, the crisis, well into its fourth year, has left one in every two Central African in need of humanitarian assistance or protection to survive and, if left to fester, the violence could negate the progress towards recovery in the country.

The violence has also driven over half a million people from CAR to seek refuge in neighbouring countries and displaced an additional 600,000 people within the country.

The level of insecurity has also prevented UNHCR and other relief organizations to fully assess the full extent of damage or displacement from the recent violence.

“Some of our planned humanitarian deliveries by air have also been delayed or blocked, due to the armed groups’ presence [and] aid agencies, including UNHCR, are increasingly among those targeted by armed groups and have, in some instances, been compelled to temporary withdraw their personnel,” said Mr. Mahecic.

“Despite the challenges, we continue to help those displaced in areas like the Haute-Kotto provincial capital of Bria, which was at the centre of much of the displacement in the east,” he added, noting that the UN agency’s response is struggling due to lack of resources.

Earlier this year, UNCHR issued an appeal for $209 million for its operations within the country as well as to assist refugees from the Central African Republic in neighbouring countries. However, only 9 per cent of the appeal has been funded thus far.
UN chief condemns deadly terrorist attack in southern Iraq

15 September – Secretary-General António Guterres today condemned the terrorist attacks in southern Iraq and called for the perpetrators to be quickly brought to justice.

In a statement from his spokesperson, the Secretary-General expressed “his sincere condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government and people of Iraq.”

Terrorists attacked the Thi-Qar province on 14 September, reportedly killing or wounding dozens of people.

In the statement, Mr. Guterres reiterated UN support to the Government and people of Iraq in fighting terrorism and violent extremism.

UN dedicates annual Peace Day to safety, respect for refugees and migrants

15 September – The United Nations in New York today marked the International Day of Peace with the annual ringing of the peace bell and calls for combatants worldwide to lay down their arms and observe a day of ceasefire and non-violence.

This year’s ceremony was dedicated to the more than 65 million people forced to flee their homes to escape conflict and persecution.

“When more and more doors and minds are being closed to refugees, let us show solidarity,” Secretary-General António Guterres said at the ceremony, which focuses attention this year on the spirit of Together, a global initiative led by the UN to promote respect, safety and dignity for refugees and migrants.

“Let us highlight the shared benefits of migration to economies and to nations. When others receive the support they need and deserve, we are all more secure and better off,” he added.

The Secretary-General, joined by UN Messenger of Peace Jane Goodall, as well as Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and the President of the General Assembly, Miroslav Lajčák, thanked those participating for their efforts in working towards world peace.

“Those of us fortunate enough to enjoy peace and prosperity should do everything we can to allow others to enjoy it as well,” Mr. Guterres said.

Young people made up much of the audience, alongside the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, Jayathma Wickramanayake, and young musicians who opened the ceremony.

Later in the day, Mr. Guterres addressed youth at a student observance, urging them to focus on what binds them as a human family, and not on what is different.

“To avoid war, we need to be able to build bridges, to combat discrimination, to struggle for justice and human rights for all, to make people respect each other, to make people see their identities respected but at the same time feel that they belong to the larger community where they are integrated, he said.
The UN is marking the Day before the annual 21 September date due to next week’s high-level General Assembly debate in New York.

The Day was established in 1981 by the UN General Assembly. Two decades later in 2001, the Assembly unanimously voted to designate the Day as a period of non-violence and ceasefire. The UN invites all nations and people to honour a cessation of hostilities during the Day, and to otherwise commemorate the Day through education and public awareness on issues related to peace.

**At annual event, UN invites Member States to join multilateral treaty framework**

15 September – The United Nations will be hosting the annual Treaty Event next week at its Headquarters in New York, inviting Member States to sign multilateral treaties deposited with the Secretary-General or to become parties to them by depositing instruments of ratification or accession.

“The spirit of the Treaty Event is simple – the Secretary-General invites high-level dignitaries to seize the opportunity of their presence in New York for the opening of the annual session of the General Assembly to join multilateral treaties,” Santiago Villalpando, the Chief of the Treaty Section in the UN Office of Legal Affairs, said at a press conference in New York.

“Multilateral treaties are a key instrument for States members to maintain international peace and security, develop friendly relations, and achieve international cooperation. Throughout the history of the Organization, hundreds of multilateral treaties have been adopted in all areas of international relations, ranging from human rights to telecommunications to protection of environment,” he added.

This year, the Treaty Event will focus on promoting multilateral treaties that safeguard humanity, such as treaties on human rights, refugees and stateless persons, health, trade, transport, terrorism and criminal matters, law of the sea, outer space, disarmament, climate change and other environmental issues.

One of the key instruments this year is the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which was adopted this July and will open for signature next week.

The Treaty – adopted by a vote of 122 in favour to one against (Netherlands), with one abstention (Singapore) – prohibits a full range of nuclear-weapon-related activities, such as undertaking to develop, test, produce, manufacture, acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, as well as the use or threat of use of these weapons.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is one of more than 560 multilateral treaties deposited with the Secretary-General, covering all aspects of the work of the Organization.

The Treaty Event, held annually since 2000, may be used to sign, ratify or accede to any of these treaties.
Security Council approves mandate, operations and size of UN Verification Mission in Colombia

14 September – The Security Council today approved the Secretary-General António Guterres’ recommendations regarding the size, operational aspects and mandate of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia.

Unanimously adopting a new resolution, the Council welcomed the Secretary-General's recent report, which states that the Mission would begin its activities on 26 September.

Further to that report, the Mission will aim to consolidate the peace process and assist the parties in their efforts to ensure that full social, economic and political reintegration of former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) members is achieved “in the shortest time possible,” and that the rural areas of the country hardest hit by the conflict can recover the peace and security to which their communities aspire.

The Verification Mission is expected to oversee the next phase of the 2016 peace agreement between the Government of Colombia and the FARC-EP. The Council established the Verification Mission through the adoption of a resolution on 10 July, as a successor to the UN Mission in Colombia.

That Mission had been responsible for monitoring and verifying the laying down of arms by the FARC-EP and the bilateral ceasefire and cessation of hostilities between the Government and the FARC-EP. In November last year, the two sides signed a peace deal, ending a 50-year conflict.

In a briefing to the Security Council last week, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Colombia, Jean Arnault, said that as the Verification Mission prepares to begin its activities, he hoped that, with the Council's support, the new operation should be able to strengthen the country's confidence for a stable peace.

“Over the past months, the peace process between the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) has slowly but steadily tipped the scales in favour of hope,” he said, noting that the formal transformation of the FARC-EP into a political party highlighted the momentous developments that have taken place in the country over the past year.
INTERVIEW: UN should be flagbearer when it comes to gender parity, stresses top official

15 September – This week Secretary-General António Guterres launched a new strategy to achieve gender parity across the United Nations – something he described as “an urgent need, a moral duty, an operational necessity – and a personal priority.”

The System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity provides a roadmap to reach parity at the senior levels of leadership by 2021, and across the board by 2028. In particular, it covers targets and accountability; special measures; an enabling environment; senior appointments; and mission settings.

A key focus of the strategy is increasing the recruitment and advancement of women, in particular in the middle to senior management levels, where the gaps are the greatest and a glass-ceiling persists.

Leading this key element of the Secretary-General’s effort to create a modern Organization and workforce is his Senior Adviser on Policy, Ana Maria Menéndez, a national of Spain who brings to the position more than 30 years of experience in diplomatic service involving bilateral, regional and global issues.

“This is not only about numbers, though numbers are very important,” Ms. Menéndez said in an interview with UN News. “But it also has to do with being able to attract and retain and motivate women. It also has to do with special, temporary measures when situations need to be corrected because of this parity gap.”

The Special Adviser, who was appointed in June, also discussed why it is important for the UN to set an example in the area of gender parity, the vital role of Member States in advancing this goal, as well as other steps being taken in this area.

UN News: The Secretary-General has, this week, released his strategy to achieve gender parity in the UN. Can you tell us a bit about this goal? Why is it important? Where the UN currently is? And how this strategy will make an impact?

Ana Maria Menéndez: As you know very well, the Secretary-General has established gender parity as a priority, ever since taking office in January. This is a very important issue for him, and to prove that he really means it, this week we are presenting the gender parity strategy. The gender parity strategy is very important, not only because it is a right, but it’s also going to have – I am sure – an impact on the effectiveness and credibility of the United Nations. I can say that, for example, at the beginning of this year, for 2017, the situation in the system was that there were 50 per cent women at Professional levels that can be considered the beginning of one’s career – that is to say P1, P2. But when you went into senior positions, there were only 29 per cent women. So you see that the higher the grade, the larger the parity gap.

Obviously, another problem is that if you go into the middle levels, you notice that for women it is very difficult to be promoted from the level of P3 to D1, D2, ASG, USG levels. So we have this situation, and it is really necessary to work on it so that the situation is reversed and corrected. The Secretary-General has appointed to the Senior Management Group, 17 women and 15 men. That’s getting very much closer to parity, but [there is] still, of course, a long way to go.

I must say also that the gender parity strategy is very specific. There are plenty of recommendations with a lot of concrete and specific measures that are going to be put into place. This is important because parity has been a long-standing goal of the Organization but we never reached it. Perhaps because we were not able to take these specific measures in a structured and coherent way – such as we have now in the gender parity strategy.

And this is not only about numbers, although numbers are very important. But it also has to do with being able to attract and retain and motivate women. It also has to do with special, temporary measures when situations need to be corrected because
of this parity gap. It also has to do with creating an enabling environment because there is a cultural aspect to it. And we also need a cultural shift. So as I said, I think this time we have targets that are bold but are realistic – that parity at the senior level should be reached in 2021. In most of the [UN] system, [parity] should be reached by 2026, and there will be a few outliers that will go until 2028. That is the ultimate target.

UN News: Does the UN have a particular role to play in achieving gender parity?

Ana María Menéndez: Indeed, it has a role to play because, as you know very well, the UN, among other things, is a standard-setting Organization. So it is very important that we lead by example, that we enact the principles that we stand for, and that we serve the peoples of the world. So this is very important. Of course, I have to say that many Member States have implemented measures and they are closer to parity, and many CEOs are also working to close the parity gap at the level of corporations and private institutions. So we need to learn from them. And if we reach parity, I think that will be a good example for everybody. So I think it is mutually reinforcing, but certainly the United Nations should be the flagbearer of this.

UN News: What is the specific role of the Member States in supporting this strategy?

Ana María Menéndez: Member States can really support us in a lot of ways, and we are already in dialogue with them, because we really need their help and they can contribute and they are eager to do it. I must say that there is a lot of enthusiasm for this strategy. I can perhaps give you a few examples of how they can work with us. For example, they can put forward names for senior managers, names of women. They can also contribute with campaigns, both to disseminate strategies and to try to recruit more personnel, more women in those areas that lag a little bit behind – for instance, the peace operations, especially in the field.

They can also provide some donor support. It is not that we are asking for a lot of money, but it will help if we can have some financial support for some measures, especially at the beginning, that need to be [used for] modernizing our system – human resources system – for tracking and monitoring. In general terms, be supportive. We have a Group of Friends for Gender Parity, which has 126 Member States, which is almost a record. We have also the Gender Champions network. So they can contribute a lot in a very substantive way.

UN News: The focus on parity has been described by the Secretary-General as a first step towards empowerment and equality by the UN. Can you tell us a bit more about any other efforts being undertaken to strengthen the UN’s work on gender equality?

Ana María Menéndez: I think gender parity is of course part of a larger picture, which is gender equality. And [the] Secretary-General is of course very committed to the mainstreaming of gender equality across the system. The creation of UN Women is of course fundamental and essential to this. But by no means is it only UN Women who should be doing this work. It is really all of us; all entities have to contribute to this. I will also mention that there is of course Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goal 5. I think that mainstreaming this goal and working on this goal is very important, and gender equality is something that is cross-cutting and it’s going to be present in all of the different strands of reforms that the Secretary-General is undertaking.

UN News: Your other core area of work is on prevention. Can you tell us a bit about this portfolio and about your efforts to bring your two portfolios on gender and prevention together?

Ana María Menéndez: Yes. Gender parity and prevention are both really intimately linked. As you know, another priority of the Secretary-General is the prevention agenda. He has a vision for prevention. But it is really large and very encompassing. We are working on it, trying to develop it and make it more specific. There is, as I said, a close connection because we know that the more women are empowered, the more they participate in the political, economic life of their countries, of their communities. The more this happens, the less conflict you have, the more development you have, the more societies are resilient. This is established; this is not a theoretical thing I am saying. There is data for it. So we know these concepts are linked. We need to count on women, at all levels, including in mediation, which is something that the Secretary-General is also encouraging and supporting in order to really make prevention a reality.

UN News: In your wide-ranging work as a diplomat, have you ever experienced gender discrimination first-hand?
Ana Maria Menéndez: You know when you have some age, and you have worked in a system for long – I worked for more than 30 years in diplomacy – there are certainly moments where you can experience discrimination. It is not that it is systematic, but I mean, from time to time, for sure. But we need to learn a lesson from this. You need to speak up. It is good to have a conversation. Because it is important that both men and women are involved in the conversation. This is part of the cultural shift that I was mentioning before.

When talking [with] the members of the group that has worked on the strategy – by the way, I want to express publicly my gratitude for all the people who have been working so hard for months – but also in my contacts with the gender focal points, I have said that the strategy is fundamental; that we of course have to implement recommendations, we have to be very serious, and people have to be accountable, senior managers have to be accountable, but it is also important to keep the dialogue going, to keep the conversation going. So we are aware that we may face obstacles, we may be confronted with difficulties, but we need to talk about it and really overcome these obstacles.

UN News: By the time you finish this work, what do you hope to be able to say about your efforts?

Ana Maria Menéndez: I would love to say that we have [achieved] 50/50, of course, but anything that brings us closer to that would be successful. I think that we can do it, we can make it. I am sure that we can make it together. If we really implement this strategy, I think that we will be there, by the deadline we have set for ourselves. And I want to be optimistic even before. Because if we really mean it, if we work together, we can be there.