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In the headlines:

- UN chief Guterres condemns deadly terrorist attack in Barcelona
- UN agencies rushing aid to more than 3,000 displaced in flood-hit Sierra Leone
- Protecting aid workers 'paramount,' UN official stresses ahead of International Day
- South Sudan refugees in Uganda exceed one million; UN renews appeal for help
- In East Darfur, UN refugee chief urges international support for Sudan
- Pregnant, breastfeeding women among most at risk in Yemen's cholera outbreak
- UN rights experts warn new EU policy on boat rescues will cause more people to drown
- ICC orders former Mali Islamist to pay more than $3 million for damage to Timbuktu cultural sites

UN chief Guterres condemns deadly terrorist attack in Barcelona

17 August – Condemning today's terrorist attack on Barcelona, Spain, Secretary-General António Guterres said the United Nations stands in solidarity with the Government and people of Spain in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

“He extends his heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of those killed and to the Government and people of Spain,” according to a statement issued by UN Deputy Spokesman Farhan Haq.

The statement added that Mr. Guterres wishes a speedy recovery to those injured and hopes that those responsible for this heinous violence will be swiftly brought to justice.

According to media reports, a van ran into a crowd of pedestrians walking through Barcelona's famed Las Ramblas area, killing at least 13 people and wounding dozens of others.

For information media - not an official record
UN agencies rushing aid to more than 3,000 displaced in flood-hit Sierra Leone

17 August – United Nations agencies are stepping up efforts to aid displaced families affected by the deadly flooding and landslides in Sierra Leon's capital, Freetown, and surrounding areas.

“‘The scale of the damage is unprecedented,’” said UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Representative Hamid El-Bashir Ibrahim.

He noted that at least 109 children are counted among the several hundred people killed in the disaster that struck on Monday.

“Children have been left homeless, vulnerable and terrified. We must do all we can to protect them from disease and exploitation,” he added.

UNICEF teams, working with the Government of Sierra Leone and partners, are providing safe drinking water and sanitation, and delivering supplies including medicines, tents and gloves following the Government's request for support. UNICEF is also offering psycho-social support to those traumatized by the events.

While the mudslides have left death and destruction behind them, the Director and Representative of the World Food Program (WFP) in Sierra Leone, Housainou Taal, said his UN agency is “focusing on survivors so that they can rise and move forward.”

The United Nations Resident Coordinator in Sierra Leone, Sunil Saigal, appointed Mr. Taal to coordinate the UN's humanitarian response to ensure timely distribution of aid, including food and shelter.

In the hours following the landslides in Freetown, WFP began distributing food aid to some 7,500 people affected by disasters. The aid, which includes rations of vegetable oil and vegetable oil lenses for at least two weeks, has been distributed to Regent, Sugar Loaf and Mortomeh – neighbourhoods around the affected area.

According to preliminary results of site assessments conducted by the Sierra Leone National Security Office and the United Nations Interagency Rapid Response Team, 1,039 households from several neighborhoods in Freetown (including Regent, Kamayamah, Dworzak, Culvert and Kaningo) and 100 individuals currently in a mountain cut shelter have been affected by floods and landslides.

Sierra Leone's Office of National Security (ONS) estimates that more than 3,000 people have lost their homes.
Protecting aid workers ‘paramount,’ UN official stresses ahead of International Day

17 August – As conflicts around the world continue to take a massive toll on people’s lives, the top United Nations relief official stressed the importance of ensuring that the brave men and women who risk their lives to help those in need are not themselves a target.

“The protection of aid workers is paramount,” Stephen O’Brien, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, underscored in an interview with UN News ahead of this year’s World Humanitarian Day.

The Day, observed annually on 19 August, seeks to pay tribute to aid workers who risk their lives in humanitarian service, and rally support for people affected by crises worldwide. It was designated by the General Assembly to coincide with the date of the 2003 bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad, Iraq, in which 22 staff lost their lives.

This year, humanitarian partners are coming together under the #NotATarget campaign to highlight the need to protect civilians caught in conflict, including humanitarian and medical workers.

“World Humanitarian Day is an opportunity for us to focus on protecting humanitarian aid workers, particularly in the medical field,” Mr. O’Brien noted.

Currently, he said, humanitarian workers are operating in 40 countries across the world, often for many years, despite insufferable difficulties.

“People put themselves at great risk to reach people in need, in some of the most dangerous environments, in protracted crises around the world,” he stated.

Just recently, seven Syrian volunteer rescuers, known as White Helmets, were killed. Mr. O’Brien acknowledged that such incidents are becoming too commonplace. “My heart grieves for the family and friends of those brave people who gave the ultimate sacrifice to help others,” he said.

Despite the difficulties and dangers, Mr. O’Brien stated that humanitarian work is moving forward “at every point.”

“Member States, humanitarian aid workers, coordinators of humanitarian relief – all of us continue to supply strength, determination, courage and conviction,” he said. “There is no higher international public good than seeking to save the lives and protect the civilians caught up in crisis.”

The #NotATarget campaign follows the launch earlier this year of the UN Secretary-General’s report on protection of civilians, in which he called for enhanced respect for international humanitarian and human rights law, and protection of civilians.

According to the report, those most in need of urgent humanitarian assistance and protection are civilians in urban areas; children; targets of sexual violence; humanitarian workers; health workers; and forcibly displaced people.

Mr. O’Brien said that making a difference on the ground requires “physical will and relationships with players in all the various places” to get the necessary access to those in need.

“We are in the business of trying to protect civilians. We are trying to put in place the right balance. To do this, we must...
make sure that the perpetrators of violence are held accountable for their actions,” he added.

It is important, he stressed, that everyone adhere to agreed international norms, laws and principles, “to make sure that people are held to account.”

**South Sudan refugees in Uganda exceed one million; UN renews appeal for help**

**17 August** – As the number of refugees from South Sudan in Uganda passes one million – the vast majority of whom are women and children – the United Nations refugee agency today reiterated its call for urgent additional support.

“Over the past 12 months, an average of 1,800 South Sudanese have been arriving in Uganda every day,” said the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in a statement to the press.

“In addition to the million there, a million or even more South Sudanese refugees are being hosted by Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Central African Republic,” it added.

More than 85 per cent of the refugees who have arrived in Uganda are women and children, below age 18 years.

“Recent arrivals continue to speak of barbaric violence, with armed groups reportedly burning down houses with civilians inside, people being killed in front of family members, sexual assaults of women and girls, and kidnapping of boys for forced conscription,” emphasized UNHCR, explaining that even as thousands of refugees arrive, aid deliveries are increasingly falling short.

The UN agency underscored that although $674 million is needed for South Sudanese refugees in Uganda this year, so far only a fifth of this amount, or 21 per cent, has been received.

“Elsewhere in the region, the picture is only marginally better,” the statement continued, saying that while a total of $883.5 million is needed for the South Sudan situation, only $250 million has been received.

The funding shortfall in Uganda is now significantly impacting the abilities to deliver life-saving aid and key basic services.

“In June, the World Food Programme was forced to cut food rations for refugees. Across settlements in northern Uganda, health clinics are being forced to provide vital medical care with too few doctors, healthcare workers and medicines,” UNHCR elaborated.

Meanwhile, schooling is also being impacted. Class sizes often exceed 200 pupils, with some lessons held in the open air. Many refugee children are dropping out of education as the nearest schools are too far away for them to easily access.

“Since December 2013, when South Sudan's crisis erupted in Juba, more than two million South Sudanese have fled to neighbouring countries, while another two million people are estimated to be internally displaced,” concluded the statement.
In East Darfur, UN refugee chief urges international support for Sudan

17 August – The United Nations refugee chief has called for international solidarity and resources to aid Sudan, which is one of the major hosting countries for refugees fleeing the conflict in South Sudan.

“Sudan's generosity must be matched with international solidarity and resources. Much more donor support is required – and urgently – so that we can help the hundreds of thousands of refugees in the country and the communities that are hosting them,” UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, said yesterday wrapping up his first visit as the head of UNHCR to Sudan.

The UN refugee chief also reiterated his call on the international community to do much more to end the fighting in South Sudan, which is causing the world's fastest growing forced displacement tragedy, without an immediate end in sight.

“Parties to the conflict, regional states and the international community need to put an end to this tragedy,” he said.

During the visit this week, Mr. Grandi met with South Sudanese refugees and their local hosts at the Al-Nimir refugee camp in East Darfur, Sudan.

“My coming here has one reason – just as I did in Uganda, Ethiopia and from Juba itself, to appeal to the leadership of South Sudan, to the opposition of South Sudan, to the States in the region and to the international community at large, to inject some sense of urgency in the quest of peace in South Sudan itself,” Mr. Grandi said.

The High Commissioners met with Sudan's President, Omar al-Bashir, and, according to a UNHCR press release, welcomed the President's assurances that Sudan will continue providing safety to those fleeing conflict and persecution – including those who arrive from South Sudan, and other countries in the region.

Sudan has hosted over 416,000 South Sudanese refugees since 2013, including some 170,000 new arrivals in 2017, making it one of the largest refugee-receiving countries in the region, UNHCR reported.

Hundreds of thousands of other South Sudanese who stayed in Sudan following the separation of the two countries are also in need of humanitarian assistance. Sudan also continues to host refugees from Eritrea, Syria, Yemen, Chad and other countries.
Pregnant, breastfeeding women among most at risk in Yemen's cholera outbreak

17 August – In the midst of the cholera outbreak in Yemen, where an average 5,000 people fall sick every day, the United Nations population agency is warning about the dangers to pregnant and breastfeeding women.

“Pregnant and breastfeeding women, especially those who are malnourished, are particularly vulnerable. An estimated 1.1 million malnourished pregnant women are at risk, requiring immediate care,” the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) recently said.

One of these women is Ibtisam, who contracted cholera when she was nine months pregnant.

“I went to a health facility in my hometown in Rayma Governorate, but they did not know what was wrong with me,” she told UNFPA. “I felt I was going to die and lose my baby. I was going to have my first child, and I was desperate not to lose my child.”

Pregnant and breastfeeding women are especially vulnerable to malnutrition, and those weakened by the nutrition crisis are more prone to infections, including cholera.

Ibtisam and her husband then travelled five hours to the nearest hospital in the capital, Sana'a, where she was diagnosed and treated for cholera.

“Ibtisam was in her last month of pregnancy. If she [arrived] a day or two later, we are not sure we could have saved her or her baby,” Dr. Farea, who helped treat her, told the UN agency.

UNFPA has said that the cholera crisis in Yemen is the worst in the world, and its magnitude is linked to the ongoing conflict and displacement crisis, the breakdown of health and sanitation systems, and serious food insecurity.

Women as agents of change

While among the most vulnerable, women can also play a key role in controlling the spread of cholera because they are traditionally tasked with preparing food. Cholera often spreads through contaminated food or water.

“If women are made aware about the steps they can take to prevent cholera and detect its symptoms at an early stage, we can save a lot of lives,” Dr. Farea said.

Aman'a, a 35-year-old mother of five, told UNFAP that was aware of the need for good hygiene, but hardship conditions have made disease prevention difficult.

“At home, I take all the precautions when preparing food, and make sure my children follow the same. Yet I was infected after visiting one of my relatives,” she said. “I try to tell my friends and family to maintain good hygiene and wash fruits and vegetables with clean water several times before cooking.”

The UN agency said it has stepped up efforts to assist women and girls in Yemen, distributing dignity kits – which contain soap, sanitary napkins and basic clothes – and supporting midwives, mobile clinics and community outreach.
UN rights experts warn new EU policy on boat rescues will cause more people to drown

17 August – The European Union’s new policy on Mediterranean Sea rescues threatens life and breaches international standards, two United Nations independent human experts today cautioned.

“The EU’s proposed new action plan, including a code of conduct for organizations operating rescue boats, threatens life and breaches international standards by condemning people to face further human rights violations in Libya,” said the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Felipe González Morales, and the Special Rapporteur on torture, Nils Melzer.

“The solution is not to restrict access to international waters or firing weapons to threaten boats, as Libya has reportedly done repeatedly. This will result in more deaths of migrants at sea and is in contravention of the obligation to rescue people in distress,” the experts added.

The code – drawn up by Italy with support from the European Commission – aims to stop privately-operated ships ferrying refugees to safety in Italy from waters off the Libyan coast.

It is part of a new plan to support Italy and reduce the pressure of migrant arrivals.

Earlier this week, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Agnes Callamard, also had harsh words for the proposed change, saying the code of conduct and the overall plan “suggest that Italy, the European Commission and EU Member States deem the risks and reality of deaths at sea a price worth paying in order to deter migrants and refugees.”

Libya has also announced a search and rescue zone beyond its territorial waters, and is restricting access to international waters by humanitarian vessels.

“The solution is not to restrict access to international waters or firing weapons to threaten boats, as Libya has reportedly done repeatedly. This will result in more deaths of migrants at sea and is in contravention of the obligation to rescue people in distress,” Mr. Morales and Mr. Melzer said.

They added that international organizations were making “tremendous rescue efforts,” with their vessels providing up to 40 per cent of all search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean.

The Special Rapporteurs also expressed concern that Brussels was “trying to move Europe’s borders to Libya,” according to a press release from the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR).

They highlighted that, under international law, migrants should be allowed to disembark at the nearest port where their lives and freedom would not be threatened, and should then receive information, care and equitable processing of their asylum claims.

“Libya simply cannot be regarded as a safe place to disembark and the EU policy is in denial of this fact,” they said. “Migrants intercepted by the Libyan coast guard will face indefinite detention in dire and inhumane conditions, at risk of death, torture or other severe human rights violations, without any judicial review.”

They warned that it was “high time” to tackle the real issue, which was the disproportionate impact on frontline countries, such as Greece and Italy, and to relocate migrants and refugees to the other 26 European countries that under the Schengen
Agreement allow for unrestricted movement of people.

“States should expand their visa regimes and provide more options for refugee settlement, temporary protection, visitors, family reunification, work, resident, retirement and student visas,” they added, “in line with the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals and to ensure that migrants no longer have to embark on such deadly journeys.”

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

**ICC orders former Mali Islamist to pay more than $3 million for damage to Timbuktu cultural sites**

17 August – For deliberately attacking religious and historic buildings in Timbuktu, Mali, the International Criminal Court (ICC) today issued to Malian Islamist a nearly three million euros Reparations Order, due on 16 February 2018.

“The Chamber highlighted the importance of cultural heritage and stressed that, because of their purpose and symbolism, most cultural property and cultural heritage are unique and of sentimental value,” said the Court, based in The Hague and the world's only permanent war crimes tribunal.

“Their destruction thus carries a message of terror and helplessness; destroys part of humanity's shared memory and collective consciousness, and renders humanity unable to transmit its values and knowledge to future generations,” it added.

ICC Trial Chamber VIII issued the Reparations Order in the case of The Prosecutor v. Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi, concluding that Mr. Al Mahdi is liable for 2.7 million euros (roughly $3.2 million) in expenses for individual and collective reparations to the Timbuktu community for intentionally directing attacks against religious and historic buildings in that city.

Noting that Mr Al Mahdi is indigent, the Chamber encouraged the Trust Funds for Victims (“TFV”) to complement the reparations award, directing it to submit a draft implementation plan for 16 February 2018.

Covering the three categories of damage to the attacked historic and religious buildings; consequential economic loss; and moral harm, the ICC stated: “Reparations may assist in promoting reconciliation between the victims of the crime, the affected communities and the convicted person.”

**Reparations for site rehabilitation and wider Timbuktu community**

“Reparations are to be collective for rehabilitation of the sites and for the community of Timbuktu as a whole to address the financial loss and economic harm as well as the emotional distress suffered as a result of the attack. It may also include symbolic measures – such as a memorial, commemoration or forgiveness ceremony – to give public recognition of the moral harm suffered by the Timbuktu community and those within it,” the ICC statement elaborated.

The Chamber also ordered individual reparations for those whose livelihoods exclusively depended upon the attacked buildings and those whose ancestors' burial sites were damaged in the attack.

As a symbolic measure, the Chamber ordered the Registry to post an excerpt of the video of Mr. Al Mahdi's apology, which it considers “genuine, categorical and empathetic” on the Court's website.
Given the specific nature of the case, it also ordered one symbolic euro to be received by the Malian State and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Upon subsequent approval by the Chamber, the TFV will identify projects and discrete implementation partners for the Chamber's final approval.

On 27 September 2016, Trial Chamber VIII – composed of Judge Raul C. Pangalangan (Presiding), Judge Antoine Kesia-Mbe Mindua and Judge Bertram Schmitt – unanimously found Mr. Al Mahdi to nine years in prison for committing a war crime by deliberately destroying in 2012 nine mausoleums and the secret gate of the Sidi Yahia mosque in the UNESCO World Heritage site of Timbuktu in Mali.