



In the headlines:

- Ban rejects reports of UN withdrawal from Afghanistan
- UN official still hopeful for strong climate deal as latest talks end
- Little progress in overcoming deadlock in Nepal's peace process, says UN envoy
- Displaced Sri Lankans increasingly returning home from camps – UN
- UN launches campaign harnessing support to end violence against women
- UN 's Asia-Pacific gathering wraps up with call for better trade deal for poorer States
- Tribal clashes uproot over 16,000 civilians in northern DR Congo, reports UN
- UN stepping up assistance to latest wave of conflict displaced Pakistanis
- Lebanon: UN envoy holds talks to try to end delays on formation of government
- UN agency helps officials in Cape Verde tackle outbreak of dengue fever
- UN agencies launch campaign lifting the lid on the damaging impact of corruption
- Assembly President calls on Israel, Palestinians to implement resolution on Gaza conflict

More stories inside

Ban rejects reports of UN withdrawal from Afghanistan



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon speaks to the press

6 November - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today rejected any notion that the United Nations is leaving Afghanistan, amid reports that the world body is pulling out of the country following the announcement that it will temporarily relocate some of its staff owing to security concerns.

“Let me be crystal clear: we are not evacuating. We will not, cannot and must not be deterred. Our work will continue,” Mr. Ban told reporters after briefing the Security Council in a closed-door meeting about the situation in Afghanistan.

The world body announced yesterday that it is taking immediate steps to strengthen security for UN employees in Afghanistan, in light of the 28 October attack on a guest house in Kabul that killed five UN staff members and injured nine others as well as “further ongoing threats.”

The measures include the short-term relocation of some of the roughly 1,100 international staff to safer sites within Afghanistan, as well as to duty stations in the region. The UN has around 6,000 staff working across the country in total.

The Secretary-General, who visited Kabul on Monday in a show of solidarity, stated that no critical staff will be moved, and that the UN's work on humanitarian and development needs will continue as before.

“I was able to see for myself that the determination and commitment of our staff in Afghanistan remains strong,” he stated,



while adding that colleagues there will have to manage, temporarily, with less administrative support.

Mr. Ban said he plans to provide the General Assembly in the coming days with specific proposals regarding additional resources for strengthening security for UN staff and premises.

While in Kabul, the Secretary-General also met with President Hamid Karzai and former presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah. Both Mr. Ban and his Special Representative, Kai Eide, have emphasized the need for the formation of new Government that is composed of competent, reform-oriented personalities that can move the country forward, he said.

In a statement read out to the press by Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Harting of Austria, which holds the rotating Council presidency for this month, Council members congratulated the Afghan people on their active engagement and participation in the elections and commended the efforts of those who worked to ensure a credible process.

“They called for the new Afghan Government to effectively address the issues facing the country, including security, good governance and the fight against corruption as well as economic recovery, improving the livelihood of its people, and the cross-cutting issue of counter-narcotics,” said the statement.

UN official still hopeful for strong climate deal as latest talks end



Yvo de Boer, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

6 November - As the last negotiating session before next month's United Nations climate change conference in Copenhagen concluded today, a senior official with the world body called on countries to push ahead to deliver on a strong international agreement to tackle global warming.

“Copenhagen can and must be the turning point in the international fight against climate change – nothing has changed my confidence in that,” said Yvo de Boer, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

“A powerful combination of commitment and compromise can and must make this happen,” he told a news conference in Barcelona, the site of the final round of talks ahead of the 7 to 18 December meeting in the Danish capital.

In Copenhagen, governments are expected to agree to a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, the 1997 treaty – part of the overall UNFCCC – which has strong, legally binding measures committing 37 industrialized States to cutting emissions by an average of 5 per cent against 1990 levels over the period from 2008 to 2012.

Over 4,500 participants from 181 countries participated in the five-day gathering, during which progress was made on the issues of adaptation, technology cooperation, reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries and mechanisms to disburse funds for developing countries.

Little progress was made, however, on mid-term emission reduction targets of developed countries and finance, according to a news release issued by the UNFCCC. These are two key issues that would allow developing countries to limit their emissions growth and adapt to the inevitable effects of climate change.

“Without these two pieces of the puzzle in place, we will not have a deal in Copenhagen,” said Mr. de Boer, adding that “leadership at the highest level is required to unlock the pieces.”

At the high-level climate change summit held in New York in September, heads of State and government pledged to achieve a deal in Copenhagen that spells out ambitious emission reduction targets of industrialized countries, as well as nationally appropriate mitigation actions by developing countries with the necessary support, and significantly scaled-up financial and technological resources.

“I look to industrialised countries to raise their ambitions to meet the scale of the challenge we face,” said Mr. de Boer.

“And I look to industrialized nations for clarity on the amount of short- and long-term finance they will commit.”

Mr. de Boer said developed countries would need to provide at least \$10 billion to enable developing countries to immediately develop low-emission growth and adaptation strategies and to build internal capacity.

At the same time, developed countries will need to indicate how they intend to raise predictable and sustainable long-term financing and what their longer-term commitments will be.

“Negotiators must deliver a final text at Copenhagen which presents a strong, functioning architecture to kick start rapid action in the developing world,” said the Executive Secretary.

“And between now and Copenhagen, governments must deliver the clarity required to help the negotiators complete their work,” he added.

Little progress in overcoming deadlock in Nepal’s peace process, says UN envoy



Karin Landgren, Representative of the Secretary-General in Nepal

6 November - The top United Nations envoy to Nepal today lamented the fact that there has been limited progress in overcoming the political impasse that emerged in the country earlier this year, and little movement on the remaining tasks of the peace process.

Around 13,000 lives were lost during Nepal’s decade-long civil war, which came to an end in 2006 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government and Maoists.

Presenting Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s latest report on the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), Karin Landgren told the Security Council that the peace process in recent months has “faced protracted deadlock, with the added risk of confrontation.”

Ms. Landgren, the Secretary-General’s Representative and head of UNMIN, reported that the impasse that emerged following the events of May – when the President revoked the Army Chief’s dismissal, and consequently the United Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (UCPN-M) stepped down from the Government – remains unresolved.

“Despite continuing efforts, the level of trust among the major parties has continued to dwindle,” she stated.

Mr. Ban, in his report, voiced concern that key commitments in the peace process have not been implemented, and that persistent mistrust among the parties and their “absorption in day-to-day politics and internal party issues” are impeding talks.

Ms. Landgren noted that while much of the past three months has offered “the semblance of calm” in the country, the past few days have seen low-level clashes between the Maoist-affiliated Yong Communist League and the Unified Maoist-Leninist Youth Force in some eastern districts.

“In the current climate, these protest actions carry a significant risk of confrontation and violence,” she said. “There is an urgent need to de-escalate the tensions and to find a framework for taking the peace process forward.”

She added that the mandate of UNMIN – originally designed for supporting the election of the Constituent Assembly, and due to expire in less than three months time – cannot go on indefinitely.

During the next 11 weeks, she said, the parties need to “arrest the loss of momentum, and invest goodwill, realism and rigour” in their pursuit of sustainable peace in Nepal.

“Until the parties establish a clearer framework for cooperation, and find ways of moving forward on major elements of the



peace process, it is difficult to plot a structured exit for UNMIN.”

The Representative also said that, three years on, a review of the progress in the implementation of the major peace agreements may be overdue, and the principal parties should also be encouraged to take stock of the state of the peace process.

“The parties themselves have repeatedly underlined their continued commitment to this process, and their intention to see it through to a positive end,” she stated. “It would be tragic if the successes so far were permitted to unravel.”

Following closed-door discussions on Nepal, Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Harting of Austria, which holds the rotating Council presidency for this month, told reporters that the 15-member body “urged the Government of Nepal and all parties to work together in a spirit of compromise and in a forward-oriented manner to implement the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and take the necessary decisions that will allow UNMIN to complete its tasks within its current mandate.”

UN spokesperson Michele Montas, who was asked today about criticism made by some political parties in Nepal to the Secretary-General’s report, said that Mr. Ban’s observations are consistent with his repeated calls for unity and consensus among the political parties to ensure the success of the peace process.

“The report is intended to encourage Nepal’s political parties to achieve what they themselves have expressed about the desirability of a unity Government and does not in any way represent a form of interference,” she told reporters.

Displaced Sri Lankans increasingly returning home from camps – UN



Internally displaced persons on the move in Sri Lanka [File Photo]

6 November - About 90,000 Sri Lankans displaced by the conflict between Government forces and Tamil separatists have returned to their homes in the past three months, and the pace of returns has begun to accelerate, the United Nations refugee agency reported today.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesperson Andrej Mahecic told journalists that in the past two weeks alone, an estimated 39,000 people have returned to their former villages – mostly in the north and east of Sri Lanka – as part of the Government’s return plan.

Another 16,500 people have been released from the camps where they have been sheltering since the conflict ended in May and are being accommodated with host families, Mr. Mahecic said. This group includes many pregnant women and elderly persons. A number of persons with disabilities have also been released to specialized care institutions.

More than 270,000 Sri Lankans were staying in closed camps after hostilities between the military and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ended, and in recent months senior UN humanitarian and human rights officials have voiced concern over their safety.

About 163,000 people now remain, and Mr. Mahecic said conditions inside those camps are deteriorating.

“UNHCR and other UN agencies continue to advocate strongly with the Government of Sri Lanka to expedite the return of all remaining IDPs [internally displaced persons] to their areas of origin in safety and dignity and in line with international standards,” he told a press briefing in Geneva, where the agency is headquartered.

“We also continue to advocate for the full freedom of movement for those who are not able to immediately return to their homes or stay with friends and relatives once the ongoing phase of the return is complete.”

UNHCR, with the assistance of other UN aid agencies, has been distributing relief items such as sleeping mats, bed sheets and hurricane lamps to people returning to their former communities.



Returning families also receive a shelter grant equivalent to about \$250 so they can start rebuilding their homes.

In Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu districts, the agency has held talks with Government officials to ensure that minimum standards for safe returns, such as the completion of mine clearance activities and access to services, are met.

UNHCR has provided five demining flail machines to speed up mine-clearing operations in former conflict areas, and those machines are expected to arrive tomorrow.

The mine clearance operations will be carried out by the Sri Lankan Government with the help of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and other organizations.

UN launches campaign harnessing support to end violence against women



UNIFEM Goodwill Ambassador Nicole Kidman

6 November - The United Nations kicked off a campaign today mobilizing people around the world to take part in a drive to stop the pandemic of violence suffered by women at the hands of men.

The UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) launched a website to inspire individual efforts aimed at eradicating violence against women, such as reaching out to school students, volunteering at local shelters, advocating for legislation or donating funds for programmes that protect women and girls.

The Say NO – Unite to End Violence against Women initiative's website also aims to showcase the widespread problem – estimates say around 70 per cent of all women have been victim to some kind of violence – and demonstrate the groundswell of support by counting the number of deeds performed to combat the scourge.

“We know that violence against women is a problem with solutions,” said UNIFEM Executive Director Inés Alberdi after visiting patients at a one-stop health clinic for women victims of sexual violence in Nairobi, Kenya, to jump-start the international effort.

“What I have seen first-hand today in Kenya is the impact of effective work at the grassroots level, yet there is an urgent need for governments to make this issue a top priority and take decisive action,” said Ms. Alberdi.

Counting efforts by individuals, governments and civil society groups, the campaign has targeted 100,000 actions by March 2010 and 1 million by this time next year.

As an incentive, the luxury watch manufacturer OMEGA has pledged \$50,000 to the scheme for the first 50,000 actions registered on the website, thanks to efforts by UNIFEM Goodwill Ambassador Nicole Kidman.

Throughout November, the multi-lingual broadcaster Euro News will air a public service announcement with Ms. Kidman, which calls on every individual to say no to all forms of violence.

UN 's Asia-Pacific gathering wraps up with call for better trade deal for poorer States

6 November - Exports from the world's poorest countries should be granted duty- and quota-free access to markets, according to government officials, economists and academics attending a regional United Nations trade meeting as they warned against a turn towards protectionist policies.

More than 100 participants at the first session of the Committee on Trade and Investment of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), which wrapped up today in Bangkok, said protectionism could undermine the multilateral trading system and delay recovery from the global economic crisis.



ESCAP Executive Secretary Noeleen Heyzer

They called for the poorest States, classified as least developed countries (LDCs), to be granted better export rights, even without waiting for the completion of the so-called Doha round of negotiations on reducing international trade barriers.

ESCAP Executive Secretary Noeleen Heyzer told the gathering that they were enormous opportunities for growth in South-South trade and investment, but high tariffs and procedural obstacles were the biggest stumbling blocks to that goal.

Supachai Panitchpakdi, Secretary-General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), said the Asia-Pacific region must not let the recovery from the current economic crisis be a jobless one.

“This financial crisis has turned into a social crisis for some countries in the Asia-Pacific region, with job losses and deterioration in social well-being,” he said.

Tribal clashes uproot over 16,000 civilians in northern DR Congo, reports UN



Villagers are fleeing their homes in the DRC. [File Photo]

6 November - Clashes between two tribes in northern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have caused more than 16,000 civilians to flee their homes since last week, crossing into neighbouring Republic of Congo to find safety, the United Nations refugee agency reported today.

Fighting first erupted in March between the Enyele and Munzaya tribes, whose dispute is over farming and fishing rights in the village of Dongo, in DRC's Equateur province.

In that first round of clashes, over 200 houses were burned and more than 1,200 residents fled to Republic of Congo, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees

(UNHCR).

This time some 60 people were killed and about 40 seriously injured, and the deadly clashes spread to surrounding villages, several of which were burned.

“UNHCR is seriously concerned about the intensity of the violence and its spread to nearby villages, which have been virtually emptied of people,” said spokesperson Andrej Mahecic.

The agency said the 16,100 asylum-seekers from DRC, who are mainly Munzayas, are staying in public buildings or with host communities across 11 villages alongside the Oubangui River, which they had to cross to reach the Republic of Congo.

According to a team from UNHCR that visited the group, they are in need of proper shelter, food and household items such as blankets, kitchen sets and jerry cans.

“Once a thorough assessment is made, we will work together with the Government to help them,” Mr. Mahecic told reporters in Geneva. “Some also need medical care, but an over-stretched mobile clinic run by a UNHCR partner cannot cope with all their needs.”

Before the current influx, there were already some 9,000 refugees in northern Republic of Congo who had sought safety from the civil war in the DRC.

Mr. Mahecic noted that although large numbers went home to the DRC after the war formally ended in 2003, these 9,000 preferred to settle permanently in the Republic of Congo, and UNHCR is working with the Government to find ways to make this possible.

UN stepping up assistance to latest wave of conflict displaced Pakistanis



More than 100,000 people have been uprooted by clashes in north-west Pakistan

6 November - The United Nations refugee agency said today it is stepping up aid to people uprooted by military operations in the Pakistani region of South Waziristan, while highlighting the ongoing needs of around one million people still displaced from an earlier offensive in the northwest.

Since September, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been distributing relief items such as kitchen sets, jerry cans, quilts and sleeping mats to an estimated 175,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) from South Waziristan.

“Security constraints have led to some intermittent disruptions to aid efforts, but distribution is continuing through our local partners,” UNHCR spokesperson Andrej

Mahecic told reporters in Geneva.

He said the agency will soon distribute some 35,000 tents to families staying with host communities in Dera Ismail Khan and Tank districts of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), to allow the displaced people to pitch tents in the grounds of households which are hosting them, and alleviate overcrowding.

UNHCR is also supporting the registration of displaced people from South Waziristan. Some 350,000 people have now been registered in Dera Ismail Khan and Tank, though only about 175,000 people have been verified so far by the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA).

The World Health Organization (WHO) said it has pre-positioned life-saving drugs in Dera Ismail Khan and Tank, including emergency health kits and cholera kits. It has also given over 50,800 doses of polio vaccine to displaced children being hosted in these two districts.

Among the key needs identified by WHO officials in conjunction with health chiefs in NWFP are to sustain a lifeline to provide medical and essential life-saving supplies to the two districts, and to strengthen the disease early warning system.

Meanwhile, an estimated one million people from previous waves of displacement out of Bajaur, Mohmand and Swat remain displaced and in need of ongoing humanitarian assistance, noted Mr. Mahecic.

UNHCR is currently preparing a package of extra relief supplies for winter for 88,000 people in this group who are in 10 camps in NWFP, and will replace existing tents with all-weather tents to provide extra protection.

Lebanon: UN envoy holds talks to try to end delays on formation of government



6 November - The United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon met today with the country's Prime Minister-designate and its parliamentary speaker as he continues his efforts to try to help end the political deadlock that has prevented the formation of a government, five months after national elections were held.

Michael Williams held discussions in Beirut with Saad Hariri, Lebanon's Prime Minister-designate, and with Nabih Berri, the Speaker of the Parliament, according to statements issued by the Special Coordinator's office.

Mr. Williams said that he and Mr. Berri talked about their mutual concern over the delays in the formation of a government.

"It is difficult to understand why an agreement has not been reached on this so far," he said in a statement. "We are now at a point where the government should be formed as soon as possible to focus on tackling the many challenges facing the country.

"It remains absolutely critical for Lebanon to have a government, not least to continue with the implementation of resolution 1701," he added, referring to the Security Council resolution adopted in 2006 that ended that year's month-long war between Israeli forces and Hizbollah.

The resolution, among other matters, calls for the disbanding of all Lebanese militias, especially Hizbollah, and the full control of all Lebanese territory by its Government.

Mr. Williams said that while he was pleased that a "generally calm atmosphere" had prevailed in southern Lebanon since 2006, "we are also concerned about the frequency of incidents that have taken place recently. Such incidents raise the possibility of an escalation and thus threaten the stability achieved so far.

"Naturally, we are also very, very mindful of the daily violations of Lebanese airspace, of Lebanon's sovereignty and of resolution 1701 by Israel."

In his latest report on the implementation of the resolution, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also voiced serious concern about the recent incidents, which include the firing of rockets from Lebanon into Israel and Israel's return of fire.

Mr. Williams, following his meeting with Mr. Hariri, commended the Prime Minister-designate for his policy of "open dialogue" regarding the efforts to form a national government.

"The delay in the process of government formation has put many important issues on hold, not least the urgent social and economic issues that affect the daily lives of the Lebanese people," Mr. Williams stressed

UN agency helps officials in Cape Verde tackle outbreak of dengue fever



6 November - Officials from the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) are at work in the Atlantic Ocean archipelago of Cape Verde to help local authorities battle the country's first reported epidemic of dengue fever.

Almost 6,000 suspected cases of dengue fever, a flu-like illness that is spread by mosquitoes, have been reported in four of Cape Verde's islands – Santiago, Brava, Fogo and Maio – since the start of October, WHO reported today.

The Pasteur Institute in Dakar, Senegal, which is a partner member of the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN), confirmed the existence of the outbreak from the first series of samples sent to the laboratory.

The Cape Verdean Government has set up a committee to spearhead its efforts to tackle the epidemic, and WHO is helping health officials and the public information technology agency maintain a rapid surveillance and reporting system by text message.

Last week officials from WHO's regional office and from its inter-country support team, as well as staff from the Pasteur Institute, arrived in Cape Verde to help authorities.

The team will provide laboratory, entomological and epidemiological support and set up laboratory diagnostics at one hospital, and it will also initiate activities to try to control the disease's spread.

Dengue fever outbreaks often occur when mosquitoes are able to breed in large numbers in artificial containers and improperly managed garbage, and the virus spreads through the bite of the female of the species.

Often persons infected with dengue suffer from mild flu-like symptoms, and may not realize they have the disease. Aside from joint pain, dengue victims experience rashes, nausea and headaches.

But some also suffer a potentially fatal form called dengue haemorrhagic fever, which causes internal bleeding and circulatory failure. Aspirin should be avoided in cases of dengue fever as it is known to increase the tendency to bleed. No vaccine has yet been found for any of the four strains of the virus, and none of the four confer immunity from the others.

UN agencies launch campaign lifting the lid on the damaging impact of corruption



6 November - A United Nations campaign kicked off today aimed at stopping the rot of corruption and exposing the corrosive effect it has on the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

Through a series of six posters and online information on a range of issues from vote rigging and embezzlement of funds to subverting the judicial system and obstructing access to education, the UN initiative raises awareness of how corruption blocks progress towards internationally agreed anti-poverty targets for poor countries, known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the UN Development Fund (UNDP) launched the campaign – “Your NO Counts” which calls on individuals to take a stand against corruption – ahead of next week’s gathering of countries signed up to a legally-binding anti-corruption treaty.

The week-long meeting of over two-thirds of the 192 UN Member States which have ratified the Convention against Corruption will be held in Doha, Qatar, to discuss the implementation of the treaty.

The Convention, overseen by UNODC, helps countries ensure judicial integrity, improve legislation and develop strategies to fight corruption effectively.

Assembly President calls on Israel, Palestinians to implement resolution on Gaza conflict



General Assembly President Ali Treki briefs the media

6 November - General Assembly President Ali Treki today urged Israel and the Palestinians to heed the body's call to conduct credible investigations into charges that both sides were guilty of serious human rights violations during the conflict in the Gaza Strip at the start of the year.

Mr. Treki noted that the 192-member Assembly yesterday adopted a resolution on the report of the United Nations fact-finding mission on the Gaza conflict, which found that Israeli forces and Palestinian militants had committed serious war crimes and breaches of humanitarian law, possibly amounting to crimes against humanity, during the conflict in December 2008 and January 2009. Assembly resolutions are non-binding.

"This vote was an important declaration against impunity, it was a call for justice and accountability," Mr. Treki told reporters in New York, calling for both the Israelis and Palestinians to carry out independent inquiries within three months as required in the resolution.

"While the General Assembly has fulfilled its responsibility and will remain seized over the matter, it is vital that all concerned now devote efforts to implement the resolution and ensure follow up," he added.

Mr. Treki also voiced pleasure at the "smooth" and cooperative discussions in the General Assembly on the Goldstone report, as well as recent reports from the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the International Criminal Court (ICC) the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

UN providing essential health services to displaced persons in northern Yemen



Thousands of people in Sa'ada, Yemen, are in need of humanitarian aid

6 November - The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) is providing vital health services to thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have been driven from their homes since clashes between Government forces and Al Houthi rebels resumed across Sa'dah province in northern Yemen in mid-August.

The WHO-supported clinics in Al Mazrak, Al-Jawf and Amran camps have treated more than 21,000 patients since the start of the conflict, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Diarrhoea, skin infections, respiratory problems, urinary infections and malaria are among the major concerns of patients attending the clinics.

WHO, in coordination with the local health office, is also conducting a vaccination campaign for measles, polio, and tetanus. Children are receiving routine vaccinations while female IDPs are being provided with reproductive health services.

The agency and Yemen's public health and population ministry undertook a visit to Al-Mazrak camp last week to monitor and supervise health activities. They reported that the clinic is fully functional, with staff on duty at all times.

More than 6,500 consultations were provided in the Al-Mazrak camp throughout October, while nearly 5,000 were provided in the Amran camp and 1082 in Al-Jawf.

The United Nations' Population Fund (UNFPA) is supporting the Yemen Family Care Association (YFCA), which has strengthened reproductive health services through the provision of three fully equipped mobile clinics, staffed with midwives and female doctors.

Earlier this year, the WHO received surgical supplies from the Italian Government for 400 major surgical operations, as well as medical supplies for 20,000 IDPs for three months and diarrhoeal disease treatment for 1,500 victims of severe to moderate dehydration.

An estimated 150,000 people have been driven from their homes since the resumption of hostilities earlier this year, and senior UN officials have voiced concerns about the humanitarian impact on civilians.

Kenya: UN seeks urgent funds to respond to flooding in refugee camps



A refugee child looks out from one of the three overcrowded camps in Dadaab, Kenya [file photo]

6 November - The United Nations refugee agency is appealing for \$2.8 million to provide essential supplies and respond to possible disease outbreaks among more than 300,000 refugees in two camps in Kenya threatened by flooding.

Andrej Mahecic, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told reporters in Geneva that the agency has already begun to make engineering improvements in the two camps – Kakuma in north-western Kenya and Dadaab in the east.

Located some 90 kilometres from the border with Somalia, Dadaab – the largest refugee site in the world – is actually a complex of three camps that were built to house 90,000 people but today are home to more than three times that number.

“We fear that the looming El Niño phenomenon – a change in the atmosphere and ocean of the tropical Pacific region that produces floods, droughts and other weather disturbances in many regions of the world – may now threaten the 338,000 mostly Somali refugees in the two camps, which in any case usually are flooded for three months every year,” he said.

UNHCR began digging trenches and placing sandbags around hospitals, boreholes and other strategic locations in both camps when the heavy rains began three weeks ago. The agency noted that if not for these and other measures, many sections of the camp would have been inundated.

Mr. Mahecic added that UNHCR is preparing to locate to higher ground within the camps refugees who might be worst affected by the floods, particularly the chronically ill, disabled people, the elderly and children and teenagers on their own.

It has also diverted two seasonal rivers, the Tarach and Lodoket, to protect refugees in Kakuma, the camp that has been hardest hit by floods in the past.

This is not the first time these two camps have had to deal with the impacts of severe flooding, UNHCR pointed out. The worst flooding in Kakuma was recorded in May 2003, during which the homes of some 16,800 refugees were destroyed. In addition, a number of latrines overflowed and collapsed, leading to the spread of water-borne diseases, including cholera and dysentery.

The overcrowded Dadaab complex last experienced severe flooding in 2006, the agency added.

Meanwhile, flooding in neighbouring Somalia has displaced at least 16,000 people in the country’s Hiraan, Gedo and Lower Shabelle regions, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported today.

Most of the displaced have sought accommodation with relatives, whose homes are located on higher ground, to escape the floods that have damaged river embankments, collapsed latrines and contaminated shallow wells.

UN anti-malaria official commends UNICEF for funding 20 million mosquito nets



Mosquito nets, if properly used and maintained, can provide a physical barrier to hungry mosquitoes

6 November - The official tasked with spearheading United Nations efforts against malaria has welcomed the decision of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) to allocate more than \$8 million in new funds to distribute insecticide-treated mosquito nets in eight countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Ray Chambers, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Malaria, said yesterday that the 20 million long-lasting mosquito nets – which are being provided by UNITAID, a tool to finance the purchase of drugs against major diseases – will lead to the protection of 40 million people.

UNICEF's contribution, which follows a previous allocation of \$4.8 million, "establishes a critical link in the path to universal access to these life-saving interventions by the end of 2010," Mr. Chambers said in a statement.

"With over 150 million nets set to be delivered by next year, I remain extremely grateful for Ann Veneman's leadership in saving so many from this disease," he added, referring to the Executive Director of UNICEF.

Last year Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon issued a call for the world to work towards universal access to malaria-prevention tools by the end of 2010 and then a target of near-zero malaria deaths by 2015.

About 56 per cent of the population in malaria-affected areas currently has access to insecticide-treated mosquito nets. Last week the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria announced it would provide 30 million nets in Nigeria, one of the countries worst affected by malaria.

UN calls for strengthening of environmental laws in armed conflict



6 November - Environmental protection laws in times of conflict should be clarified, strengthened and enforced to better protect States' natural assets during times of war, according to a report released today by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP).

The report, drawing on the expertise of 20 legal specialists, underlines the need to modernize international law regulating warfare, and include a new legal instrument that will "demilitarize" and protect ecosystems such as groundwater aquifers, agricultural and grazing lands, parks, national forests and habitats of endangered species.

International law regulating warfare was developed in an era of State-against-State conflicts, but today the overwhelming majority of conflicts are internal, meaning that many environmental provisions are not applicable.

"I call on Member States to clarify and expand law on environmental protection in times of war," Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in a message released today.

"Existing legal instruments should be adapted to reflect the predominantly internal nature of today's armed conflicts."

While the Geneva Convention addresses environmental protection, experts deem its wording too "stringent and imprecise," and recommend that the threshold for environmental damage be defined as severe environmental impacts over several hundred square kilometers and damage that persists for a period of several months or over a season.

At the outset of any conflict, critical natural resources and areas of ecological importance would be delineated and

designated as “demilitarized zones,” according to the report, entitled *Protecting the Environment during Armed Conflict: An Inventory and Analysis of International Law*.

“Destroying and damaging the natural assets and ecological infrastructure of a country or community should be an issue of highest humanitarian concern,” said Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director.

“The loss of freshwaters and grazing lands to croplands and forests not only leads to direct suffering, but also undermines the survival, the livelihoods and the opportunities for people to recover during and after a conflict,” he added.

The report calls on the General Assembly to request the International Law Commission to carry out a review of the existing laws relating to the environment and conflict, and to create a UN body to monitor violations and process compensation for environmental damage.