UN relief wing boosts emergency support to refugees fleeing Burundi crisis

1 June - The new head of the United Nations relief arm today released a fresh tranche of crisis funding from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) in order to support life-saving relief work for thousands of Burundian refugees dispersed between Rwanda and Tanzania, the Organization has announced.

Since early April, nearly 100,000 Burundians have fled across the borders, seeking safety in neighbouring Rwanda, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A cholera epidemic striking refugees gathered along the shores of Lake Tanganyika in Tanzania has only added to the miseries of the unfolding humanitarian crisis.

“Children are arriving at borders sick and malnourished. Many are unaccompanied or have been separated from their families.” Stephen O’Brien, the newly appointed head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said in a press release issued earlier today.

OCHA confirmed that the injection of CERF funds would deliver some $15 million to relief efforts targeting the refugees, with approximately $7.5 million destined for relief agencies in Tanzania and nearly $8 million aimed at supporting the scale-up of life-saving operations in Rwanda.

With the political situation in Burundi remaining tense and with continued violence reported, however, UN aid agencies fear that the number of refugees may double over the next six months.
According to a recent World Health Organization (WHO) assessment, over 4,000 cases of cholera have so far been reported with the number of new cases falling to 100 a day from a peak of 915 on 18 May. The deaths have been in the port town of Kigoma on Lake Tanganyika, in the nearby villages of Kagunga and Nyarugusu, and among people being transported by ferry from Kagunga to Kigoma.

WHO recently confirmed that the cholera outbreak was, in fact, improving but nonetheless warned that the risk of transmission remained high due to limited access to shelter, toilets, water and essential medical care.

At the same time, aid agencies in Rwanda remain concerned about high levels of malnutrition and child protection as an estimated 60 per cent of newly arrived refugees are children.

“This rapid allocation from CERF will be used to support refugees and the communities that are hosting them with urgently needed shelter, food, health and protection services,” continued Mr. O’Brien, who was officially sworn in today in his new role. “I also hope this will encourage others to step up their support.”

Tensions in Burundi have been rising ahead of planned presidential elections at the end of the month, and following an attempted coup 13 May, and the assassination last week of opposition leader Zedi Feruzi. The political crisis erupted when two-term President Pierre Nkurunziza was named by the ruling party in mid-April as its candidate for the presidential election.

**Ban condemns South Sudan’s decision to expel UN humanitarian coordinator**

1 June - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today condemned the Government of South Sudan's decision to expel his Deputy Special Representative and the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in the country, Toby Lanzer.

“The Secretary-General calls on the Government of South Sudan to reverse its decision immediately. He further urges the Government to cooperate fully with all United Nations entities present in South Sudan,” said a statement attributable to Mr. Ban’s spokesperson released today.

Mr. Lanzer, who also is Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), has been “instrumental”, read the statement, in “addressing the increasing humanitarian needs of conflict-affected communities in the country,” and “ensuring that life-saving humanitarian assistance reaches the most vulnerable,” according to the statement.

“This has been necessary because of continuing violence by both parties in the absence of a comprehensive peace agreement.”

Mr. Lanzer was coming to the end of his term, and in order to ensure continuity for this critical function, the Secretary-General has already appointed his successor, Eugene Owusu, whose nomination was announced on 29 May.

South Sudan’s ongoing conflict began in December 2013 and has been marked by brutal violence against civilians and deepening suffering across the country. Some 119,000 people are sheltered in UN compounds there while the Organization estimates that the number of people in need for 2015 will include an anticipated 1.95 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and a projected 293,000 refugees.

In recent weeks, however, the fighting in the country has worsened considerably, with reports of widespread killings, rapes, abductions and the burning and destruction of towns and villages, particularly throughout South Sudan’s Unity state.

In addition, UN human rights monitors have been denied access to various sites in the State by members of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLM/A) as they sought to verify the allegations.
In Iraq, UN reports insecurity and violence taking ‘terrible toll’ on civilians from all communities

1 June - At least 1,031 Iraqis were killed in May 2015 and another 1,684 injured in acts of terrorism, violence and armed conflict, according to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), which said the actions of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant’s (ISIL) were to blame for the growing number of casualties.

“Current developments in and around the city of Ramadi and in Anbar Governorate once again showed grave consequences of ISIL’s actions […], as around 237,786 individuals have been displaced from and within Anbar to date, while thousands were killed and injured, sometimes in the most horrendous way,” UNAMI chief Ján Kubiš said today on the release of the figures.

According to UNAMI’s latest figures, 665 civilians were killed and 1,313 injured, while a further 366 members of the Iraqi Security Forces lost their lives and another 371 were injured during the entire month of May. The data marks an uptick of 219 casualties compared to last month, although the confirmed numbers might not fully reflect an increasingly volatile situation, where civilians are also being displaced by the thousands.

Nonetheless, Baghdad was the worst affected Governorate with 1,044 civilian casualties (343 killed, 701 injured). According to its Health Directorate, the Anbar Governorate follows, with a total of 583 civilian casualties (102 killed, 481 injured).

Convinced that a military solution alone will be insufficient to defeat ISIL, Mr. Kubiš urged that the Government of Iraq to adopt a “set of confidence-building measures” towards disaffected communities, “enabling them to assume a share in governing their matters,” and “assuring them of the State’s ability to ensure their protection from violence.”

‘Give young people decent jobs and they will create a better future’ – UN chief

1 June - When young people have decent jobs, political weight, negotiating muscle and real influence in the world, they will create a better future, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today as he kicked off a Headquarters event on empowering youth through employment.

“A lack of jobs feeds insecurity. A jobs-rich country can have a wealth of stability. Young people are forced to bear the brunt of conflicts. They should be given the chance to carry the banner of peace,” Mr. Ban told the General Assembly.

“The world now has the largest generation of young people in history. I place great hopes in their power to shape our future. They are part of the first generation that can end poverty and the last that can avoid the worst impacts of climate change,” he added.

Today’s High-Level Event on the Demographic Dividend and Youth Employment essentially takes stock of how countries with large populations of young people and declining fertility rates stand poised to benefit the most from this so-called demographic dividend.

Co-organized by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), today’s event follows last Friday’s General Assembly meeting that marked the 20th anniversary of the World Programme of Action for Youth and will consist of two panel discussions on the demographic dividend and creating opportunities for employment.
“We renewed our commitment to the World Programme of Action,” Mr. Ban said about Friday’s meeting. “And I stressed that we cannot talk about sustainable development without the active involvement of youth.”

This year the United Nations hopes to change the course of human history by adopting the new development agenda at our special summit on sustainable development in New York in September and a universal climate change agreement at conference in Paris this December.

The UN chief, who was joined today by several ministers as well as his Youth Envoy, Ahmad Alhendawi and President of the General Assembly, Sam Kutesa, pointed out that some 74 million people worldwide still cannot find work. The #YouthNow campaign Mr. Ban launched in February and which has generated nearly a billion digital engagements demonstrates the significance of youth issues.

He highlighted the link between development and peace and urged empowering young people to address security matters. It is also critical to invest in young women and adolescent girls who face more obstacles than young men and boys and deserve special support in seizing opportunities and claiming their rights, the Secretary-General said.

To help harness the demographic dividend, Mr. Ban proposed four steps: first, he called for increasing access to family planning and reproductive health care services so that families are able to choose the number and timing of their children. Second, there is a need to ensure that young people get quality education and training to meet the needs of labour markets. Third, there needs to be investments with a focus on human rights and finally, social protection systems must help end poverty and fight persistent inequalities.

Also speaking today, General Assembly President Sam Kutesa said that countries with large populations of young people and declining fertility rates stand poised to benefit the most from the demographic dividend.

“The more young people grow into well-educated adults with fewer dependents and new opportunities to acquire wealth, savings and purchasing power, the more they will be able to accelerate economic growth and development,” he emphasized.

To harness the demographic dividend, right policies and interventions are needed in order to get a higher proportion of the youthful population into economically productive adults. For example, Asia experienced a seven-fold increase in gross domestic product (GDP) per capita by harnessing their demographic dividend, while Latin America experienced a two-fold increase.

Of the 1.8 billion young people worldwide, nine out of 10 of them live in least developed countries, and many in Africa, he added. And the number of young Africans aged 15-24 is set to double by 2045. By harnessing its demographic dividend, the African continent could add up to $500 billion per year to its economy, for as many as 30 years.

“Through vocational training, specialized and practical job-related skills can be developed that prepare young people for work in occupations more in-line with the job market needs,” the General Assembly President said.

Greater investments are required in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) to advance innovation. The empowerment of women and girls, particularly in educational opportunities and universal access to quality reproductive health knowledge is also critical.

“The needs of countries with large youth populations should be considered in the context of our sustainable development objectives,” he added, highlighting the need for partnerships between governments, the private sector, and other stakeholders to make the necessary investments in order to empower youth.
Citing ‘pervasive abuse,’ new UN report presents recommendations on protecting LGBT rights

1 June - While some progress has been made since the first study four years ago spotlighting discrimination and violence against people based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, the overall picture remains one of pervasive, violent abuse, harassment and discrimination affecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBT/I) persons in all regions, according to a new United Nations report issued today.

“Violence motivated by homophobia and transphobia is often particularly brutal, and in some instances characterized by levels of cruelty exceeding that of other hate crimes,” according to the report by the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) (A/HRC/29/23) to be presented later this month to the UN Human Rights Council, which requested it.

The report notes that such violent acts include deep knife cuts, anal rape and genital mutilation, as well as stoning and dismemberment. “These constitute serious human rights violations, often perpetrated with impunity, indicating that current arrangements to protect the human rights of LGBT and intersex persons are inadequate,” it says.

It goes on to say that “there is as yet no dedicated human rights mechanism at the international level that has a systematic and comprehensive approach to the human rights situation of LGBT and intersex persons.”

The report contains 20 recommendations directed at the national governments. Among them:

- Repeal laws used to punish individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, including laws that criminalize consensual same-sex relationships cross-dressing, and restrict freedom of expression, association and assembly;
- Prohibit discrimination and incitement to hatred and violence against LGBT persons, and enact hate crime laws that punish those who target individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity;
- Legally recognize same-sex relationships;
- Ensure access to legal identity documents that reflect an individual’s self-identified gender, without imposing abusive pre-conditions; and
- End abusive therapies and treatments to which LGBT people are often subjected -- including so-called “conversion” therapy, forced sterilization of transgender persons and certain medical procedures on intersex children.

The recommendations, the report says, describe measures to protect individuals from the kinds of human rights violations documented in the report and draw from good practices observed in the course of compiling the report and recommendations of United Nations human rights mechanisms.

The report, the second such official study of its kind since 2011, notes that despite “some progress” during the past four years, “the overall picture remains one of continuing, pervasive, violent abuse, harassment and discrimination affecting LGBT and intersex persons in all regions.”

On killings, the report said: “Data are patchy but, wherever available, suggest alarmingly high rates of homicidal violence” and noted that “terrorist groups may target LGBT persons for punishment, including killings.”

As an example, the reported cited that “in February 2015, photos appeared to show several men, allegedly accused of homosexual acts, being pushed off a tower to their deaths by militants of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).”

While noting important recent advances in the protection LGBT people, the report presents evidence of “continuing,
At Geneva jobs summit, UN labour chief urges a global debate on the future of work

1 June - Addressing some 4,000 government, worker and employer representatives, the head of the United Nations International Labour Organization (ILO) called for a global debate on the future of work at the 104th International Labour Conference in Geneva today.

“The issues of jobs, equity, sustainability, human security, labour mobility, social dialogue, which need to be tackled in a future of work initiative, are almost by definition the key policy issues of our time,” said ILO Director-General Guy Ryder at the start of the Conference, which runs from 1 to 13 June.

He also called on delegates to “look at the longer term drivers of change, the transformational mega-trends, and what they imply for the goals we pursue in the ILO in its second century.”

Mr. Ryder’s proposal is contained in his report to the Conference, The Future of work centenary initiative, and is accompanied by an annual report on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories.

The proposed initiative would be structured around four conversations: work and society; the organization of work and production; decent jobs for all; and the governance of work. Subsequently, a high-level commission on the future of work would prepare a report to the ILO’s centenary Conference in 2019.

“We have the opportunity to adopt a Recommendation which, for the first time, will provide an international framework for the transition from informality to the formal economy, which commands increasing tripartite support as a policy priority,” the Director-General said.

“We have the chance also to look more closely at how the small and medium-sized enterprises which are so crucial to the global jobs challenge can be promoted as creators of decent and productive employment,” he added.

According to the latest World Employment and Social Outlook report, global unemployment reached 201 million in 2014, over 30 million higher than before the start of the global crisis in 2008.

Moreover, providing jobs to the more than 40 million additional people who enter the global labour market every year is proving to be a daunting challenge. In addition to widespread joblessness, the employment relationship itself is facing a major transformation that is bringing further challenges.

This year’s Conference will discuss various other issues, including climate change, a proposed first ever international standard on the transition from the informal to the formal economy; the role of small and medium enterprises as a major job creation engine; and how to ensure labour protection (wages, working time, maternity protection and occupational safety and health).

High-level discussions on climate change and the world of work, as well as child labour will take place on 11 and 12 June, and there will be a focus on encouraging ratification by member States of the 2014 protocol to the ILO Convention on Forced Labour to enable it to enter into force.
‘Persistent and grave’ human rights violations in eastern Ukraine – UN report

1 June - Serious human rights violations and abuses persist in eastern Ukraine, including shelling, executions, arbitrary and illegal detentions, torture, ill-treatment, human trafficking and the lack of justice and accountability, as well as deprivation of economic and social rights, deeply affecting the 5 million people living in the conflict-affected areas, a new United Nations report said today.

“Between mid-April 2014 and 30 May 2015, at least 6,417 people, including at least 626 women and girls, have been documented as killed and 15,962 as wounded in the conflict zone of eastern Ukraine,” according to the 10th report by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Team in Ukraine, which covers the period from 16 February to 15 May 2015.

The report described the casualty figures estimated by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the World Health Organization (WHO) as “a conservative estimate” and that the actual numbers could be “considerably higher.”

In a press release on the report, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein said his Office has also documented “alarming reports of summary executions by armed groups” as well as “similar allegations against Ukrainian armed forces.”

“We also have horrific accounts of torture and ill-treatment in detention, both by armed groups and Ukrainian law enforcers,” he said.

The report also states that there has been a notable decrease in indiscriminate shelling after the adoption of the 12 February Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements, but notes, the shelling has not stopped, nor have armed hostilities between Ukrainian armed forces and armed groups, meaning that civilians continue to live in fear.

“Civilian casualties from landmines and unexploded ordnance are still considerable,” it said.

The report said the vicinity of Donetsk airport and the contested village of Shyrokyne in the Donetsk region remain the “major flashpoints where heavy weapons were intensively used. Reports of sophisticated heavy weaponry and fighters being supplied from the Russian Federation persisted,” the report notes.

“Serious human rights abuses, intimidation and harassment of the local population perpetrated by the armed groups continued to be reported. The [monitoring mission] received new allegations of killings, torture and ill-treatment, as well as cases of illegal deprivation of liberty, forced labour, looting, ransom demands and extortion of money on the territories controlled by the armed groups,” the report said.

The impact of the conflict on the economic and social rights of civilians is dramatic, the report states, adding that “the interruption of access to basic services is life-threatening and can have a life-long impact on a large portion of the population, hindering the post-conflict recovery of the society.” The difficult economic situation has also led to a worrying, increased risk in human trafficking.

High Commissioner Zeid said “millions of ordinary women, men and children in Ukraine have suffered tremendous hardship, violence and have been living in fear for more than a year now” and “too many have had their homes and livelihoods destroyed and their lives torn apart, with no sign of justice, accountability, compensation or redress.”
He urged all parties to seek common ground, through sustained dialogue, to fully implement the 12 February Package of Measures, to end the fighting, and to ensure that all violations of human rights and international humanitarian law are investigated, regardless of the perpetrators.

In late February 2014, the situation in Ukraine transcended what was initially seen as an internal Ukrainian political crisis into violent clashes in parts of the country, later reaching full-scale conflict in the east. Despite a September 2014 cease-fire agreed in Minsk, the situation in Ukraine has since continuously deteriorated, with serious consequences for the country’s unity, territorial integrity and stability. In February 2015, the parties in Ukraine and the Trilateral Contact Group signed a “Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements.”

**At first-ever conference, UN takes aim at cyber-threats against nuclear safety**

1 June - The international community must intensify efforts to protect the world’s nuclear facilities from cyberattacks, the head of the United Nations nuclear watchdog declared today as he opened the Organization’s first-ever conference on the issue at the International Atomic Energy Agency’s (IAEA) headquarters in Vienna.

Sounding the alarm in front of more than 650 experts from 92 member States, IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano said the inaugural International Conference on Computer Security in a Nuclear World sent “an important message” that the world is finally “serious about protecting nuclear and other radioactive material.”

“Reports of actual or attempted cyberattacks are now virtually a daily occurrence,” Mr. Amano affirmed, warning that the nuclear industry had not been immune from the global threat. “Last year alone, there were cases of random malware-based attacks at nuclear power plants and of such facilities being specifically targeted.”

The threat of cybercrime and cyberattacks has been steadily growing over recent years and particularly in developing countries where criminals can exploit legal loopholes and weak security measures, according to recent findings by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

The Conference – organized in cooperation with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) – will run until 5 June and illustrate ways member States and stakeholders can better anticipate and protect themselves from cyber-attacks.

In addition, notes the IAEA on its website, member States will also address a range of issues pertaining to trends in cyberattack and defence, computer security management in nuclear security, computer security threat analysis, computer security for industrial control systems and operator experience in implementing computer security.

“Staff responsible for nuclear security should know how to repel cyber-attacks and to limit the damage if systems are actually penetrated,” Mr. Amano continued.

“The IAEA is doing what it can to help governments, organizations, and individuals adapt to evolving technology-driven threats from skilled cyber adversaries.”
Ending statelessness in Europe is realistic goal by 2014, UN refugee agency says

1 June - The United Nations refugee agency, which has launched a campaign, #IBelong, to end the suffering of some 10 million stateless people across the world by the year 2024, said today that addressing the plight for 600,000 people at the margins of society in Europe “is doable” in that timeframe.

“In Europe, we take many things for granted such as access to education, health care, employment and travel, but some 600,000 people across the continent still do not enjoy these basic rights,” said Vincent Cochetel, the Director for Europe for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). “They are stateless.”

Mr. Cochetel spoke in an interview about the strategy to end statelessness and the risks of more people becoming stateless on the eve of a conference UNHCR and its partners have scheduled in Budapest, Hungary, tomorrow and Wednesday that will be focusing on the need to help stateless children, who make up a third of the world’s stateless and if they have children of their own, this generation will also be stateless.

“Making statelessness disappear is a realistic objective in Europe,” he said. “A lot of mapping of stateless populations has been undertaken; the problem is identified and manageable. I am convinced that all European countries will become state parties to the statelessness conventions before the end of the [UNHCR] #IBelong campaign in 2024.”

“By then, no child should be born stateless in Europe,” he said. “This is doable. Reducing statelessness in Europe, to a large extent, is a question of political will.”

Last year, UNHCR launched the #IBelong campaign to end the suffering of an estimated 10 million stateless people across the world by the year 2024, including those in Europe. As part of this drive, the UN refugee agency advises governments on how to reduce or prevent statelessness and helps them respect the human rights of these people.

Mr. Cochetel flagged three major obstacles to ending statelessness in Europe, namely “statelessness at birth among populations living in precarious conditions” such as the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian minorities in the Balkans and in Central Europe, and a couple of countries, like the Russian Federation, arguing that their domestic legislation provides better guarantees against statelessness than the two international instruments relating to statelessness, and some stateless people who want to remain stateless because, this way.

He also noted that despite assumptions that there would be no more wars and displacement in Europe, the conflict in Ukraine, [which has displaced 1.3 million people, has been a reminder that there is no such guarantee and that stateless people may have difficulties with civil registration which represents a new risk of statelessness.

Another risk, Mr. Cochetel noted, was that there are “more and more non-state entities in Europe controlling territory: the Turkish republic of northern Cyprus, Nagorno Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria and those parts of eastern Ukraine that are not controlled by the government.”

“Although we may not look at these situations through the lens of statelessness, in the longer term they could give rise to statelessness,” according to the veteran UNHCR representative.

“But with political will, I am convinced ending statelessness by 2024 is a realistic objective in Europe,” he concluded.

UNHCR was mandated in the 1970s to assist stateless people under the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and its role was consolidated in 1995.
As UN marks Buddhist holiday, Ban pays tribute to the victims of Nepal earthquake

1 June - On the Day of Vesak, which acknowledges the contribution of Buddhism to the spirituality of humanity, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is paying special tribute to the victims of the devastating earthquake that struck Nepal over a month ago.

“I extend special greetings to the victims of the earthquake in Nepal, a country that was instrumental in leading the United Nations General Assembly to designate this observance. I hope that the Nepalese people observing this holiday amid the rubble are able to take some measure of comfort from its message of human solidarity”, Mr. Ban said.

The General Assembly, in 1999, recognized internationally the Day of Vesak, which marks the birth, enlightenment and passing of Buddha, and is celebrated by Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

The spirit of Vesak can help to animate a global response to the challenges of our day, noted the Secretary-General. “As the United Nations works for the adoption this year of a set of new sustainable development goals and a meaningful new agreement on climate change”, he added, “the Lord Buddha’s observation that all peoples are interconnected reminds us of the importance of uniting as one human family resolved to address our shared struggles based on common values.”

That is why the head of the Organization asked members and leaders of all faith communities to join the UN in responding to the recent dangerous and destabilizing rise of violent extremism. “Toward that end, we recently welcomed eminent figures from the world’s major religions to two days of meetings at the United Nations on promoting tolerance and reconciliation”, he said, referring to a thematic debate of the General Assembly that took place on 21 and 22 April.

In Nepal, UN rushes to replace quake-damaged healthcare facilities ahead of monsoon

1 June - The United Nations health agency is racing critical medical supplies to fourteen of Nepal's most earthquake-affected districts in an effort to restore health services before the onset of monsoon season.

In a press release issued earlier this morning, the World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed it will be distributing 50 medical camp kits, also known as MCKs, in collaboration with Nepal's Ministry of Health and Population and the World Food Programme (WFP) as part of the UN's continuing on-the-ground relief efforts aimed at patching up the country's beleaguered healthcare networks.

“The MCKs will ensure continuity of care during the rainy season as there is no time to build permanent structures,” Dr. Frank Paulin, the WHO's Acting Representative in Nepal, explained.

“The Foreign Medical Teams (FMTs) have done a wonderful job but there are only a few FMTs in each district, which means that the majority of health posts are nonfunctional and patients must travel long distances to reach facilities,” he added. “The MCKs will therefore improve availability and accessibility of health care.”

The 25 April earthquake, and its 7.3 magnitude follow-up on 12 May, damaged 26 of Nepal's hospitals and over 1,100 health facilities while affecting some 5.6 million people, half of whom have been displaced. An estimated 8,500 people were killed by the two quakes.
In addition, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has confirmed that 8.1 million people are in need of humanitarian support while another 1.9 million require food assistance.

Nevertheless, among the major obstacles facing emergency responders is Nepal's unique and challenging mountainous topography which has rendered many affected communities difficult to reach. According to OCHA, some 315,000 people in the 14 most affected districts remain in areas inaccessible by road while 75,000 others cannot even be reached by air.

With monsoon season no more than three weeks away, time is now of the essence as affected communities – without shelter and short on food supplies – remain more vulnerable than ever to potential landslides and torrential rains, the UN has warned.

Michel Tomaszek, the WHO's chief in-country logistician, observed that the MCKs being distributed were tailored to the precise needs of affected areas and populations and robust enough to withstand the imminent torrential rains.

Among the main concerns, he said, was the issue of whether or not the land on which they are to be developed is clear and resistant to flooding in the case of sudden downpours. In addition, the locations in which the MCKs are placed must not be areas prone to landslides.

“We have developed these kits from previous relief operations, and with our partners have tailored them to the specific health care needs of the country,” assured Mr. Tomaszek. “We will be able to set them up quickly and soon they will provide both outpatient and inpatient facilities.”

“These camps have been designed with the rainy season in mind, and they will be in use until at least the end of monsoon. This will provide time to rebuild damaged facilities,” he concluded.

### Amid reports of fighting, UN ship with vital food aid for Yemen diverted from Aden

**1 June** - A United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) chartered ship carrying vital food assistance destined for the Yemeni port of Aden was diverted yesterday to the port of Hudaydah following reports of ongoing fighting and security threats.

The MV Amsterdam was on its way from Djibouti carrying over 5,700 metric tons of food including wheat, pulses, vegetable oil and micronutrient powder, which is used to protect young children against malnutrition and anaemia, said a statement released from WFP today.

“We will continue to try to reach Aden and surrounding areas by sending supplies from Hudaydah by road as millions of people are in desperate need of food in areas that have been inaccessible for a long time due to the fighting,” said Tahir Nour, WFP Emergency Coordinator for Yemen in the same note.

“Yemen has hit a critical stage in terms of food availability as there is not as much food in the markets and that is now pushing more people into hunger,” Mr. Nour added.

The rations on the diverted vessel are enough to feed around 60,000 Yemenis for a month. It was expected to berth in Aden on Saturday when the port authorities issued a security warning that made it change its course.

Another vessel, the MV Celine, which is carrying 7,000 metric tons of wheat flour, also docked in Hudaydah on May 31 as previously scheduled. Some 70,000 Yemenis are expected to benefit from this shipment.

WFP says it plans to send more food by sea in the next few weeks from a base that the agency created in Djibouti to send food and urgently needed humanitarian supplies to Yemen. But transporting food across Yemen by road remains difficult because of the ongoing clashes.
Since April, WFP has distributed more than 20,000 metric tons of food in nine governorates reaching more 1.5 million Yemenis. More distributions are still needed as the recent conflict added around 2.5 million Yemenis to the 10 million people already considered “food-insecure,” who were struggling to get enough food for a normal life even before the conflict began.

Yemen, the poorest country in the region, imports almost 90 percent of its food from abroad.

**In Burundi, UN Special Adviser urges all parties to engage in talks to calm tensions**

31 May - At the conclusion of his two-day visit to Burundi, Adama Dieng, the United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, warned of increased tensions and the risk of further violence, unless all parties engage in open dialogue to resolve the crisis and calm tensions.

“He urged the Government to guarantee respect for human rights, including freedom of opinion and expression, noting that the absence of independent voices through non-State media was contributing to tensions,” said a statement released from Burundi's capital of Bujumbura.

During his visit to East African nation, Mr. Dieng held meetings with the President of Burundi and senior government officials, political party leaders, civil society, representatives of the media and other key actors.

They discussed escalating tensions in Burundi in the pre-electoral period and the risk that what has been primarily a political crisis could escalate to a level that would pose a high risk of atrocity crimes being committed.

Leaders have also gathered in Tanzania for an East African community summit over the weekend in hopes to reinforce dialogue among the Burundian parties amid concerns raised by UN agencies that the current political instability could lead to a humanitarian crisis.

“Given Burundi's history of ethnic violence and in light of ongoing fears of attacks based on ethnicity, the Special Adviser strongly encouraged Burundian parties to use their influence to prevent any action that could increase the risk of violence against individuals or groups on the basis of their identity, including political affiliation, religious and ethnic identity,” the note said.

Special Adviser Dieng emphasized the critical importance of ensuring respect for fundamental human rights and the rule of law, particularly during periods of tension, in accordance with international human rights obligations.

He also recalled that the primary responsibility for protecting populations from atrocity crimes lies with the Government of Burundi and warned that those responsible for serious human rights violations and atrocity crimes would be held accountable by national and international judicial bodies and if need be, by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Mr. Dieng also reiterated the continued commitment of the international community, including regional actors, to support Burundi to secure peace and create conducive conditions for free and transparent elections.
UN rights chief urges inquiry into violations by international forces in Central African Republic

31 May - The United Nations human rights chief has urged several States to intensify their efforts to investigate long-standing allegations that soldiers in their forces sent to keep the peace in the Central African Republic (CAR) may have committed very serious violations, including killing of civilians and sexual exploitation of local women.

“These allegations were extremely disturbing,” High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said today in a statement released by his Office (OHCHR).

“People in CAR were desperate for protection. The role of international forces in halting the worst of the fighting and sectarian slaughter in CAR has been invaluable, and their presence has unquestionably saved many, many lives. Yet, in some cases the longed-for protectors turned into predators,” he added.

“In the wake of the revelations of alleged serious sexual abuse of children, currently under investigation by the French authorities, my Office has taken a deeper look into these issues and the extent of the follow-up into alleged serious violations by soldiers belonging to several other international contingents,” Mr. Zeid said.

“Some of these incidents have been at least partly investigated, and some States have apparently sanctioned some of the soldiers involved, but the fact that a number of foreign contingents may have been implicated is in itself a matter of enormous concern.”

Several incidents, including ones involving excessive use of force, enforced disappearances and sexual exploitation and violence, were investigated promptly by UN human rights officers on the ground, and subsequently by the International Commission of Inquiry on the CAR, which reported on a range of violations by international forces in December 2014.

The forces involved in these incidents were not operating under the United Nations flag, according to the OHCHR. Nevertheless, foreign soldiers, including UN peacekeepers, have in the past been implicated in crimes, including sexual exploitation and abuse.

“This is a recurring problem involving foreign soldiers operating on other territories and clearly more needs to be done to stop it,” Zeid said.

The High Commissioner said that in addition to requesting concerned States to provide more information about the steps they have taken to investigate the allegations, and prosecute anyone found to have committed crimes, he is sending a team from his Geneva headquarters to the Central African Republic to look into possible further measures to address violations.

“The punishment must fit the crime, and some other incidents were reported that may not have been fully followed up on by the States concerned, and we need to get to the bottom of what precisely was done by whom and when. There must be accountability for serious crimes, no matter who commits them,” Mr. Zeid emphasised.
**Syria: UN envoy condemns death of at least 70 civilians in Aleppo**

31 May - The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, has strongly condemned the death of at least 70 civilians in Syria's northern Aleppo province by barrel bombs dropped from government helicopters.

"The news of aerial bombing by Syrian helicopters on a civilian market area of the Aleppo neighbourhood of Al Shaar deserves the strongest international condemnation," the Special Envoy said in a statement issued shortly after the attack.

According to news reports, at least 70 people were killed and many more wounded in the attack on al-Bab's busy market on Saturday morning after government helicopters dropped two barrel bombs in quick succession.

Many of the victims were blown to pieces or burnt beyond recognition by the blasts, which devastated the market, shops and vehicles.

"While it is true that, unfortunately, the UN proposed freeze of heavy bombing in Aleppo did not materialize, it is nevertheless totally unacceptable that the Syrian airforce attacks its own territory in an indiscriminate way, killing its own citizens, as it brutally happened today in Aleppo," Mr. de Mistura said.

"The use of barrel bombs must stop," he continued. "All evidence shows that the overwhelming majority of the civilian victims in the Syrian conflict have been caused by the use of such indiscriminate aerial weapons."

Mr. de Mistura stressed that the protection of civilians during armed conflicts is a cornerstone of international humanitarian law, and applies in all circumstances and without distinction.

**On World No Tobacco Day, UN launches fight against illicit tobacco trade to save lives**

31 May - The elimination of the world's illicit tobacco trade will not only save millions of lives but also generate billions of dollars in windfall for governments, the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) announced today as it marked the 2015 edition of World No Tobacco Day.

"On this World No Tobacco Day, I call for boosting the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control to eradicate the illicit trade in cheaper tobacco products which tend to lure younger and poorer groups into addiction while depleting the ability of States to charge taxes that could support health services," Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in his remarks today.

"By striking at the criminal gangs and tobacco companies that engage in this reprehensible trade, we will advance public health and sustainable development," he added.

The Day – observed annually by the global community on 31 May to highlight the health risks associated with tobacco use and advocate for effective policies to reduce tobacco consumption – will this year see the WHO and the UN system as a whole urge Member States to sign the Protocol to Eliminate the Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products in order to improve public health, help cut crime, and curb an important revenue source for the tobacco industry.
“The Protocol offers the world a unique legal instrument to counter and eventually eliminate a sophisticated criminal activity,” Dr. Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General declared in a press release. “Fully implemented, it will replenish government revenues and allow more spending on health.”

Nearly 80 per cent of the world’s one billion smokers live in low- and middle-income countries, where the burden of tobacco-related illness and death is heaviest, according to WHO.

The UN agency has further warned that tobacco, which caused 100 million deaths in the 20th century, may cause one billion deaths in the 21st century if current trends continue. Unless urgent action is taken, the annual death toll from tobacco consumption could rise to more than eight million by 2030.

The Protocol, a supplementary treaty to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, requires a wide range of measures relating to the tobacco supply chain, including the licensing of imports, exports and manufacture of tobacco products; the establishment of tracking and tracing systems and the imposition of penal sanctions on those responsible for illicit trade. It would also criminalise illicit production and cross border smuggling.

“Public health is engaged in a pitched battle against a ruthless industry,” added Dr. Douglas Bettcher, Director of the WHO’s Department for the Prevention of Noncommunicable Diseases.

“On this World No Tobacco Day, WHO and its partners are showing the ends that the tobacco industry goes to in the search for profits, including on the black market, and by ensnaring new targets, including young children, to expand its deadly trade.”

According to WHO eliminating the illicit trade in tobacco would generate an annual tax windfall of $31 billion for governments, improve public health, help cut crime and curb an important revenue source for the tobacco industry.

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control entered into force in February 2005. Since then, it has become one of the most widely embraced treaties in the history of the United Nations with 180 Parties covering 90 per cent of the world’s population.