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No humanitarian agencies left in besieged Afghan city of Kunduz after hospital bombing – UN

6 October - There are currently no humanitarian agencies left in Kunduz, the north-eastern Afghan city where an air strike hit the Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) hospital, causing the deaths and injuries of medical personnel, patients and other civilians, the United Nations said today.

Anecdotal evidence points to one or few MSF staff still in the hospital, trying to provide health services to the population, but this has not been confirmed, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) spokesman Jens Laerke told a briefing in Geneva.

“The big picture is that international aid agencies have been forced out of the city for the time being, so there is essentially no proper health and trauma care for those left there,” he said.

The MSF hospital had been the only facility of its kind in the entire north-eastern region, serving some 300,000 people in Kunduz alone. Fighting between armed groups and Government forces is ongoing, the airport is closed to civilian aircrafts and there is no road access into the city because of road side bombs, ambushes and road blocks, Mr. Laerke said.

An estimated 8,500 families have been displaced in the region by the fighting. Identifying and responding to the needs of these internally displaced people is now a high priority, but these are largely unquantified due to lack of access, although agencies do have available stock in the region and a small-scale response is being sporadically arranged where access allows, he added.
When a reporter said MSF was doing a job essentially under the UN umbrella, yet there was not really any UN support for their call for an independent investigation, adding that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has not said as much as he would were it a UN agency that was bombed, spokesmen strongly rebutted the charge.

Ahmad Fawzi, interim Director of the UN Information Service in Geneva, noted that it was Mr. Ban himself who had called over the weekend for a “thorough and impartial investigation into the attack in order to ensure accountability.”

Differentiating between UN staff and non-UN staff in the treatment of the issue is a false premise, he said, stressing that it was not accurate to say that, had it been UN staff instead of MSF, the Secretary-General would call for a UN or independent investigation.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are included in emergency security procedures covering UN staff, meaning there was care for non-UN workers, humanitarian workers, in areas of conflict and an impartial investigation carries more weight in the eyes of outsiders who view the work of the UN in a critical and constructive manner, he declared.

Mr. Laerke noted that Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Stephen O’Brien had also strongly condemned the attack.

A statement issued Saturday by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) noted that according to MSF, pro-Government forces had been informed of the precise location of the medical facilities.

While it has yet to be established whether or not the hospital or immediate surroundings were the target of the attack, or were recklessly endangered by it, airstrikes reportedly continued to hit the area for a further 30 minutes after pro-Government forces were informed they were endangering a medical facility. According to OHCHR, a United States spokesperson has reportedly been quoted saying US planes were carrying out airstrikes at around the time the hospital was hit.

**Foreign terrorist fighters pose ‘significant and evolving’ global threat, warns new UN report**

6 October - In the wake of last week’s meeting of world leaders at United Nations Headquarters on countering violent extremism, a new UN report released today throws into stark relief the growing threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters, especially in an era where extremist groups freely use social media and the Internet to disseminate their ideologies and even raise funds.

The report, released by the UN Security Council’s Counter-Terrorism Committee and its Executive Directorate (CTED), stressed that foreign terrorist fighters constitute a significant and evolving threat, and that groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) act in a quick and adaptable manner.

“Well with some 30,000 foreign terrorist fighters coming from over 100 countries, terrorism is a global threat, which requires a global response,” said Jean-Paul Laborde, Assistant Secretary-General of CTED in a statement.

“Attempts to resolve these issues effectively through a purely domestic approach will not work,” he continued. “Together, we need to urgently step up our efforts and reinforce our preventive capacity across the board – in a flexible and immediate way.”

Mr. Laborde also added that UN Member States have already reinforced border controls and prevented suspected foreign terrorist fighters from travelling, while private companies such as YouTube are also helping stem propaganda and the recruitment of foreign soldiers.

Most States, he added, have also developed the capacity to monitor Internet sites, including social media, to combat online incitement to commit acts of terrorism.
Despite these measures, “it is still easy for anybody wishing to join a terrorist organization or to travel to a conflict zone to make direct, anonymous contact with a terrorist recruiter,” Mr. Laborde warned.

As the report outlines, one way to combat this is the use of the advance passenger information (API) system, which enhances border and aviation security and enables States to detect the arrival and departure of potential foreign terrorist fighters.

Currently, despite the adoption of a Security Council resolution on the subject, which requires airlines operating in Member State territories to provide API, only 51 States have the technology and only half of these states actually use it, said Mr. Laborde.

“The international community needs to make better use of already existing Security Council resolutions,” he said.

At a press conference at UN Headquarters on the launch of the report, Mr. Laborde echoed these themes, and also noted the importance of increasing the Organization’s work with regard to terrorist financing sources. He also added that more work needed to be done on the legal size, using tools such as e-Extradition.

“It is quite clear if we cannot sentence foreign terrorist fighters and people from ISIL, we will not show to the world that the international community works with efficiency against this phenomenon,” he said.

**Ban voices ‘profound alarm’ at growing number of deadly incidents in West Bank**

6 October - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon voiced “profound alarm” today at the growing number of deadly incidents in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

“The last few days of clashes, which resulted in the death of four Palestinians, including a 13-year old boy, and hundreds injured, are yet another worrisome sign of violence potentially spiralling out of control,” said Mr. Ban in a statement issued by his spokesperson in New York.

The Secretary-General condemned the killings and said he looks to the Government of Israel to conduct a prompt and transparent investigation into the incidents, including whether the use of force was proportional.

“He does not believe that the demolition of Palestinian houses or the construction of new Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian land will do anything other than inflame tensions still further,” the statement further noted.

In addition, the UN chief underlined that the escalation of violent incidents underscores the need for urgent action by both sides. He welcomed the commitment by Palestinian and Israeli officials to work together to curb the violence, including through continued security cooperation.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ban reiterated the readiness of the United Nations to work with all parties to create the conditions on the ground, in the region and internationally, for a political horizon including meaningful negotiations towards a two-state solution.
**Despite looting of aid agencies in Central African Republic UN pledges continued support**

6 October - Despite worsening security conditions and the recent looting of international aid offices in the Central African Republic (CAR), prompting the temporarily relocation of 200 personnel, the United Nations today pledged to keep bringing aid into the war-torn country, where over half the population urgently needs assistance.

“We must continue with the emergency response,” UN Humanitarian Coordinator in CAR Aurélien A. Agbénonci said. “Access to displaced populations is crucial. The needs of displaced persons are increasing every day and our main aim is to provide assistance to those in need, regardless of their political affiliation, race or ethnicity in compliance with the humanitarian principles of impartiality, independence and neutrality.”

The offices and residences of national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were looted during the sudden outbreak of violence that began on 26 September in Bangui, the capital, leaving 42 people dead and 414 injured and driving more than 37,000 people from their homes to seek refuge with host families and in 32 displacement sites in the city.

Some 200 humanitarian workers were temporarily relocated out of CAR and about 100 other non-essential staff were relocated to the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The security situation has deteriorated, impeding the freedom of movement of humanitarian workers since the beginning of the crisis.

“Despite the security constraints, humanitarian actors continue to provide assistance to the affected population,” Mr. Agbénonci said. “We remain firmly committed to maintaining our presence in the country and to providing the necessary assistance to the population in areas where humanitarian access is possible.”

Following the recent violence there are over 417,000 displaced people in CAR and about 2.7 million people, over half the population, are in urgent need of assistance.

The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), set up in April 2014 to help bring peace after a breakdown of governmental authority and vicious intercommunal fighting between mainly the Muslim Séléka group and the mainly Christian anti-Balaka movement, currently maintains nearly 11,000 uniformed personnel in the country, one of the world’s poorest.

**Top UN officials ‘shocked’ by allegations against former General Assembly President**

6 October - Top United Nations officials expressed today that they are “shocked” and “deeply troubled” to learn about the “very serious allegations” announced this morning by United States’ federal prosecutors against John Ashe, a former President of the UN General Assembly.

Prior to his appointment as leader of the 68th session of the General Assembly in September 2013, John Ashe had been Antigua and Barbuda’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations. He was arrested earlier today in New York.

Speaking at the regular UN briefing to news correspondents, the spokesperson of the UN Secretary-General, Stéphane Dujarric, said these allegations “go to the heart of the integrity of the United Nations.”
Asked about whether the UN was involved in the United States attorney’s investigation, Mr. Dujarric said the UN was not informed of the case until it was featured in the press.

“Obviously, if we’re contacted by the relevant US authorities we will cooperate with them,” he added.

Meanwhile, the current President of the General Assembly’s 70th session and former Speaker of the Danish Parliament, Mogens Lykketoft, held a press conference today, during which he underlined that he can only echo the UN Spokesperson.

“Coming from a country which is consistently number one on the world transparency index and having served for 34 years in Danish politics without being rich, I certainly am shocked about it and I think that the United Nations and its representatives should be held to the highest standards of transparency and ethics,” Mr. Lykketoft told reporters.

He added that when he took office as the President of the UN General Assembly on 15 September, he committed himself to uphold these principles during his tenure, as “corruption has no place at the United Nations or anywhere else.”

**EU migration policy ‘will fail’ without comprehensive, human rights focus – UN rights chief**

6 October - Warning that Europe’s “narrow, exclusion-focused [migration] policies have clearly failed,” the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights today urged the European Union to make certain that upcoming policy discussions undertaken in light of the region’s refugee crisis are grounded firmly on the need to protect the human rights for all migrants.

“A migration policy that seeks simply to exclude irregular migrants, without taking into account a holistic analysis as to why they are moving, is unlikely to result in better management of migration,” Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said in a press release.

Instead, such policies are very likely to come at an unacceptable cost to the rights of migrants, including more deaths, detention and abuse of innocent people, he warned.

Speaking ahead of a key high-level meeting of the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council, Mr. Zeid also expressed concerns about the continued security-driven agenda that appears to dominate the EU’s response. He also expressed concerns about the nature of ‘hotspot’ approach.

“These ‘hotspots’ seem to be conceived not simply as a means of registering new arrivals, but also as a way of preventing them from moving further until it is decided whether they are in need of international protection or should be returned,” Mr. Zeid said.

“While we welcome the efforts of the EU to offer support to the frontline Member States receiving large numbers of migrants, States must ensure that these ‘hotspots’ are not, in effect, detention centres in disguise,” he added.

Mr. Zeid observed that Italy and Greece have reduced the use of immigration detention. He added that it is important to guard against a return to a practice which is fraught with human rights concerns centred on the legality and conditions of detention.

“I urge the EU and its individual Member States to avoid the ugly spectre of arbitrary or prolonged detention of people who are not criminals, and to ensure the adoption of human rights-based alternatives to detention,” he said.

He welcomed the earlier decision by the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council on the relocation of 120,000 asylum seekers from Greece and Italy and also commended the EU’s commitment to provide more funding to improve conditions for the millions of Syrians displaced to neighbouring countries.
However, he stressed retreating from the flawed view of considering law enforcement as the sole panacea to curtail contemporary migration issues, especially when scores of people are fleeing their countries due to severe human rights violations or collapsing economies.

“Increased border control and surveillance have not reduced the number of new arrivals; they have only forced them to use more dangerous routes, leading to increased human rights abuses and loss of life,” he said, adding that rather than ‘destroying the business model of smugglers,’ the emphasis on law enforcement coupled with the near absence of legal channels for refugees and migrants to enter EU territory have enabled unscrupulous smugglers to expand their business by preying on desperate individuals who have no other option.

He elaborated by pointing out that strengthening of border control and surveillance, including building a fence along Greece and the Turkish border, led to scores of desperate refugees and migrants crossing the risky Aegean Sea from Turkey to the Greek islands.

“A few years ago, most refugees and migrants entered Greece by land,” Zeid said. “It was the sealing of the land border which, more than anything else, pushed them to resort to the dangerous sea route instead,” he added.

**UNICEF calls for a joint vaccination plan in the Sudan**

6 October - Calling for a joint vaccination operational plan in the Sudan, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) today outlined the dire situation for thousands of children living in the Nuba Mountains, which remain inaccessible after four years while conflict in the country continues.

Speaking at a press briefing in Geneva, UNICEF Spokesperson Christopher Mr. Boulierac said the agency had begun the vaccination campaign in January 2015 when the first outbreaks had been reported. UNICEF, he continued, is urging all parties to the conflict to commit to the joint vaccination operational plan that has been in place over the last three years.

Mr. Boulierac said that access for humanitarian aid has not been granted to the three inaccessible areas of the Nuba Mountains, the Blue Nile and the Jebel Mara of North Darfur, and as a result, children there had not been vaccinated.

Currently, he added, UNICEF is “fully operational,” and he said he hoped that the call for the cessation of hostilities would “translate into vaccination of the 165,000 children under the age of five in those inaccessible areas.”

Sudan’s children, said Mr. Boulierac, continue to be affected by outbreaks of diseases including measles, dengue fever and diarrhoea. He added that it is children that continue to bear the greatest burden as the “double victims” of conflict and chronic under development. In additional, some two million children were severely and acutely malnourished, and in all 18 states of Sudan, malnutrition rates were over the emergency threshold of 15 per cent.

Mr. Boulierac also noted that the UNICEF Sudan humanitarian appeal for 2015 was 72 per cent underfunded. Total funding requirements in 2015 are approximately $ 117 million, of which almost $ 33 million has been received.
Mali: peace process ‘back on track’ but vigilance necessary, says UN envoy

6 October - The road towards peace and the implementation of an accord to end instability and violence in Mali is full of obstacles, the United Nations envoy for the country today told the Security Council, noting that these difficulties have been encountered sooner than he had expected.

“Violations of the ceasefire have limited progress in implementing the accord,” said Mongi Hamdi, Special Representative and head of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), in his briefing to Council diplomats. “Precious time has been lost.”

The Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali was signed in June by the Coordination of Movements of Azawad (CMA), following its signature in May by the Government and a third party, the Platform coalition of armed groups.

The Malian Government has been seeking to restore stability and rebuild following a series of setbacks since early 2012, including a military coup d'état, renewed fighting between Government forces and Tuareg rebels, and the seizure of its northern territory by radical extremists. The country has also been wracked by a series of humanitarian crises.

Since his last briefing to the Security Council in late June, Mr. Hamdi said MINUSMA has directed political and military efforts to overcome challenges to the peace accord.

“First, military resources were directed to the protection of civilians in Kidal and Anefis,” he explained. “Second, an enhanced effort was undertaken to survey the movement of armed groups. Third, and most importantly, to address the violations of the ceasefire, which often lead to serious human rights and international humanitarian law violations, I used my good offices to persuade the parties to abide by their commitments and avoid an escalation of tensions.”

He noted that at the end of August, Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta called on the Platform armed coalition to withdraw from Anefis, a commune in the Kidal region in the north of Mali where fighting has been erupting.

“He determined efforts, added to those of MINUSMA and the rest of the international community, succeeded in persuading the Platform to eventually withdraw,” the envoy confirmed.

But when confrontation broke out near In-Khalil not far from the Algerian border at the beginning of September, Mr. Hamdi said MINUSMA was “deeply concerned” that this could lead to the end of the peace process.

“I called the leadership of CMA and Platform and met with them separately to address the situation,” he informed the 15-member Council, detailing what the parties agreed.

“First, to cease hostilities, including provocative troop deployments. Second, the in-principle return to their initial positions prior to the 20 June signature of the peace agreement. Third, a return to the peace process […]. Fourth, agreement on the circulation of people without arms. Lastly, there was a general agreement to continue dialogue among the communities and resolve problems peacefully.”

Mr. Hamdi stated that he is pleased to report that the ceasefire and the terms of these agreements are now holding – but other issues have arose over the past few months, such as criminals resorting to looting and banditry, which fosters insecurity and fear among the population while reducing faith in the peace process.

To contribute to a more secure environment, Mr. Hamdi announced that MINUSMA is seeking to deploy longer range
unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), in hopes of freeing up troops previously dedicated to the protection of supply lines. He stressed that these moves would help the Mission to expand its presence in key areas of the north.

The envoy said he has also taken note of the recent decision of the Malian authorities to postpone local elections. “The postponement offers an opportunity to bring the electoral calendar in line with the terms outlined in the peace agreement,” he highlighted.

In conclusion, Mr. Hamdi underlined that “the process is back on track,” but that vigilance will be necessary. “It is my strong conviction that promoting the implementation of the agreement, through close support to the authorities, the CSA and its subsidiary bodies, provides the best opportunity for Mali to address its multiple challenges,” he stated.

**New UN trade report cites measures to ease financial uncertainty, boost growth in stagnant economies**

6 October - According to the 2015 Trade and Development Report, launched today by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), urgent measures must be taken to address critical issues in the global financial architecture to establish a more stable and inclusive international monetary system.

The report suggests measures to avoid a further global economic stagnation and calls for reforms in fiscal and monetary policies to manage capital flows and a more diversified International Monetary System (IMF).

“There remains a critical need for government support for long-term development finance, at both the international and domestic levels. This need has not been met, even by the emergence of innovative mechanisms for harnessing finance or by official development assistance (ODA), said UNCTAD Secretary-General Mukhisa Kituyi in the report’s overview.

The report examines a series of interconnected challenges facing the international monetary and financial system including liquidity provision, banking regulation, debt restructuring and long-term public financing. The measures suggested by the report are likely to produce progressive results only through the dedicated and collaborative action from the international community.

In addition, it argues that developing countries that have been integrated into the global financial markets have had adverse effects on their long-term development goals. According to studies conducted in 11 countries, private capital flows to developing countries have increased since early 2000s. The proportion of gross national income increased from 2.8 per cent in 2002 to a historic 6.6 per cent in 2007.

Coupled with the economic slowdown of 2008 and a decrease in the influx of capital, the financial markets of developing countries remained volatile and stagnant.

The resulting policy decisions made in advanced economies were also applied to in developing markets due to its dependence on capital flows and economic pricing.

“Managing the persistent volatility of financial short-term flows requires an internationally coordinated policy response,” Mr. Kituyi said, not merely a financial correction with few serious consequences for the real economy. “With developing countries contributing over 60 per cent of global growth since 2011, the knock-on effects of recent emerging market difficulties could be widely felt,” he added.

The report suggests that a monetary and fiscal policy mix aimed at better managing private capital flows would help developing countries to face the challenges and to enhance the gains made overall from integrating into global financial markets.

The report further notes that advanced countries are currently facing a ‘secular stagnation’ where there is a long-term economic growth slowdown which is unrelated to normal economic cycles. It also noted that despite taking compliant
monetary policy measures, the developed economies still seem to rely on its former policies of mounting debt and asset bubbles.

On the contrary, public investments such as infrastructure have had multiple positive effects in stagnating economies in developed countries. This is because of the resultant effect it has on creation of demand which creates outlets for private investment thereby increasing further benefits. This leads to higher wage incomes, which reduces financial pressure on pension schemes and increasing consumption without adding to household debts, according to the report.

**Libya: Ban calls for urgent agreement on formation of Government of National Accord**

On 2 October in New York on the margins of the General Assembly’s annual debate.

“The Secretary-General commends the political will and courage of Libyans who remain committed to resolving the current crisis through dialogue,” said a statement issued today by his spokesperson.

“He encourages them to seize the opportunity of the agreement to start rebuilding Libya and confronting the country’s urgent challenges. Only a Government of National Accord will unite the Libyans and enable them, with the support of the international community, to address these challenges,” said the statement.

Mr. Ban also added that he remains committed to supporting the Libyan people through his Special Representative and the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).

**UN agencies launch new standards to improve adolescent care worldwide**

“These standards provide simple yet powerful steps that countries – both rich and poor – can immediately take to improve the health and wellbeing of their adolescents,” said Dr. Anthony Costello, Director of Maternal, Children’s and Adolescents’ Health at WHO, in a press release.

WHO and UNAIDS are underlining that existing health services often fail the world’s adolescents, with many suffering from mental health disorders, substance use, poor nutrition, intentional injuries and chronic illness, while not having access to critical prevention and care services.

According to the UN, adolescents form a unique group, rapidly developing both physically and emotionally but are often dependent on their parents or guardians. The Global Standards for quality health-care services for adolescents recommend making services more “adolescent friendly”, providing free or low-cost consultations, and making medically accurate age-appropriate health information available.

They also highlight the need for adolescents to be able to access services without necessarily having to make an appointment.
or requiring parental consent, safe in the knowledge that any consultation remains confidential, and certain that they will not experience discrimination.

“If we want to keep adolescents healthy, we have to treat them with respect,” Dr. Costello continued. “Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to certain health issues.”

The top three causes of death among adolescents are reportedly road traffic injuries, AIDS-related illnesses and suicide.

“AIDS is the leading cause of death among adolescents in Africa and the second primary cause of death among adolescents globally,” said Dr. Mariângela Simão, Director of Rights, Gender, Prevention and Community Mobilization at UNAIDS. “All adolescents, including key populations, have a right to the information and services that will empower them to protect themselves from HIV.”

WHO and UNAIDS further note that not only is adolescence a period of life when people are particularly vulnerable to certain health issues, it is also a time when critical behaviours are shaped that will affect health in the future.

“So many behaviours – healthy or unhealthy – that impact the rest of our lives begin in adolescence,” Dr. Costello explained. “The health sector cannot stand there and tell people they are sick because of the ways they use tobacco and alcohol, and their attitudes to diet and exercise, if it does not do a better job of helping people develop healthy habits as adolescents.”

Meanwhile, Dr. Valentina Baltag, an adolescent health expert at WHO, said there are countries where every fifth citizen is an adolescent. “Yet most students in medical and nursing schools graduate with no understanding of the specific needs of adolescents in accessing healthcare. This is unacceptable,” she warned.

In light of all these issues, the Global Standards for quality health-care services for adolescents call for an inclusive package of information, counselling, diagnostic, treatment and care services that go beyond the traditional focus on sexual and reproductive health.

They also push for adolescents to be meaningfully involved in planning, monitoring and providing feedback on health services and in decisions regarding their own care.

The UN agencies have reported that more than 25 low and middle-income countries have already adopted national standards for improving adolescent health services, while their global standards are built on research from these countries, as well as feedback from health providers and more than 1000 adolescents worldwide.