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Yemen: UN relief agencies rush assessment teams, supplies to crisis-torn country

7 April - Amid ongoing heavy fighting in Yemen, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) says that a plane carrying humanitarian staff landed yesterday in the capital, Sana’a, and two more planes carrying medical supplies are expected later this week.

Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, said today OCHA announced plans are also underway for surgical teams to sail from Djibouti to Aden as soon as possible.

“In the last 24 hours, about 12 metric tonnes of medical supplies have arrived in Aden from Al Hudaydah, and distributed to health centres and hospitals,” he said, adding that medical assistance has also been delivered in Sa’ada. Monthly food supplies have been distributed to more than 300 displaced families in Hajjah.

OCHA reports that some 159 stranded Ethiopian migrants have returned home from Djibouti, including 131 people who had been stranded en route to Yemen, and 28 who were evacuated from Yemen by sea.

Meanwhile in Geneva, Christophe Boulierac, for the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), said with conflict escalating in many parts of Yemen, children continue to be killed, injured, displaced and put at increasing risk from disease. He emphasized that those children should be immediately afforded special respect and protection by all parties to the conflict, in line with international humanitarian law.

He said that wherever security conditions permitted, UNICEF teams were working with partners to provide families with safe water and essential health services. The agency is providing fuel for the running of water supply pumping in three cities in the south, including Aden, where water systems had been repeatedly damaged in the fighting.

For information media - not an official record
UNICEF is providing diesel to power generators to keep vaccine stores safe. Supplies prepositioned by the children’s organization in various cities are being put to use and supplies of therapeutic food for young children and oral rehydration salts - a simple but highly effective treatment for diarrheal disease - were being procured.

“The conflict is exacerbating the already precarious situation for children in one of the region’s poorest countries, with much of the country prone to food insecurity and with severe acute malnutrition widespread among young children, and with an increasing number for violations of child’s rights these last years,” said Mr. Boulierac, reiterating UNICEF’s warning that in the coming weeks, the discontinuation of basic health services and the deteriorating water and sanitation situation would lead to an increase in health needs, especially among women and children.

The situation in Yemen has been rapidly deteriorating since the country formed a new Government in November 2014 aimed at ending a period of political turbulence and bringing about a full transition towards democracy. The country continued to be plagued by violence and political demonstrations despite UN efforts to bring about a peaceful political resolution.

Security Council condemns Boko Haram attacks in northeast Nigeria, Chad

7 April - The members of the United Nations Security Council condemned today in the strongest terms the spate of recent terrorist attacks perpetrated by Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria and Chad.

In a press statement, Council members extended their condolences to the families of the victims and their sympathy to all those injured in the attacks in Kwajafa, Borno state, Nigeria, on 5 April, and in Tchoukou Telia, Chad, on 3 April 2015, and reminded States that they must ensure that measures taken to combat terrorism comply with all their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law.

They also reaffirmed that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including the actions of Boko Haram constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security, and that any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whosoever committed. Members stressed that it should be combated by all means, in accordance with the UN Charter.

The Council’s press statement urged the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and their members to adopt a common strategy and develop active cooperation and coordination to more effectively and urgently combat the threat posed by Boko Haram at their upcoming Summit.

It also stressed the need for a comprehensive approach to successfully combat Boko Haram and the threat it poses to the region and added that members welcomed the convening of a Joint ECOWAS-ECCAS experts meeting in Douala, Cameroon on 2 April 2015 as a step towards achieving this goal of enhanced cooperation.
UN relief wing spotlights deteriorating health situation for conflict-affected Ukrainians

7 April - The deteriorating health situation for internally displaced and others impacted by the conflict in Ukraine has drawn the serious concern of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), a UN spokesperson reported today.

According to Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, at the end of March, the Ukraine Ministry of Social Protection reported that there were nearly 1.2 million registered internally displaced persons (IDPs) across the country. However, difficulties in verifying residence procedures for them are affecting their ability to access to social services.

OCHA said there is a high incidence of cardio-vascular disease, mental health and acute respiratory infections. Reportedly, cases of malnutrition and acute diarrhoea are also increasing in non-government controlled areas.

The pressure on schools to accommodate displaced children is increasing because of limited number of available teachers and premises, added Mr. Dujarric.

Further, OCHA underscored the urgent need for mine risk education as well and humanitarian demining as mines and other unexploded ordnance are increasingly resulting in loss of life. The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) highlights that at least 109 children have been injured and 42 killed by landmines and unexploded ordnance in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts since March 2014.

Meanwhile, he said the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) has reported that as of 2 April, the total number of Ukrainians who have sought asylum, residence permits or other forms of legal stay in neighbouring countries has reached 777,000, with the vast majority of them in Russia.

Despite the great needs, funding for humanitarian operations remains very low, with only 18 per cent of the $316 million required for 2015 having been funded or even pledged so far.

Reflecting on Rwanda, Ban urges courage ‘to counter the cruelty taking place before our eyes’

7 April - The world must make use of the International Day of Reflection on the Genocide in Rwanda to look back on the past – and to squarely confront the challenges of the present, renewing collective resolve and summoning the courage to prevent such atrocities from happening again, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today.

“Our annual sombre observance is all the more meaningful this year as we mark the 70th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, said Mr. Ban in his message on the Day, which honours the memory of the more than 800,000 people – overwhelmingly Tutsi, and also moderate Hutu, Twa and others – systematically killed across Rwanda in less than three months just over two decades ago. It is also an occasion to recognize the pain and the courage of those who survived.

The Secretary-General’s message previews the 21st Commemoration of the Rwanda Genocide Memorial Ceremony, taking place at UN Headquarters this evening from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Organized by the UN Department of Public Information, in cooperation with the Permanent Mission of Rwanda to the
United Nations, the programme will include, among others, Mr. Ban, Sam Kutesa, President of the UN General Assembly, and Eugène-Richard Gasana, Ambassador of Rwanda and Minister in Charge of Cooperation.

In his message, Mr. Ban stressed that many countries today face grave security threats, with people being subjected to the brutality of violent conflicts and the indignities of poverty.

Discrimination persists in societies torn apart by war, as well as in democracies that largely enjoy peace. Hatred may manifest as institutionalized racism, ethnic strife, or episodes of intolerance or exclusion. In other instances, discrimination reflects the official, national version of history that denies the identity of some segments of the population.

“I deplore the conflicts and atrocity crimes in many parts of the world that continue to divide communities, killing and displacing people, undermining economies and destroying cultural heritage,” declared the Secretary-General, emphasizing that the international community’s first duty is always to prevent these situations and to protect vulnerable human beings in distress.

“My Human Rights Up Front initiative seeks to prevent serious human rights violations by acting on early warning signs before they become more serious,” he explained, adding that his Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect work to advance national and international efforts to protect populations from atrocity crimes.

“We aim to ensure swift and decisive action to save lives and stop abuses,” stressed the UN chief.

“On this Day, I appeal to the international community to do more than just speak about atrocity crimes and then fail to take timely action to prevent them. I call on all to summon the courage to act before situations deteriorate based on our collective moral responsibility. This is critical for the maintenance of international peace and security,” he said, recalling that at last year’s commemoration in the Rwandan capital, Kigali, he had urged the world to exercise ‘Umuganda’ – coming together in common purpose – “to avert what can be prevented and counter the cruelty taking place before our eyes.”

UN stresses importance of food safety – from farm to plate – on World Health Day

7 April - With the United Nations health agency highlighting food safety on World Health Day, the Secretary-General today called for unified efforts to ensure that production, distribution, and preparation of food is done safely.

“The health, agriculture, trade, and environment sectors need to work together,” said Ban Ki-moon. “We all have a role to play in keeping food safe – from farm to plate.”

Mr. Ban pointed to the more than 200 diseases that can come from contaminated food and to the constantly evolving threat from new production, distribution and consumption methods, as well as the emergence of resistant bacteria.

“With the food supply chain stretching around the world, the need to strengthen food safety systems within and among countries is becoming more critical,” he said. “That is why, on World Health Day, the World Health Organization (WHO) is calling on countries and all actors to improve food safety from farm to plate and everywhere in between.”

To mark the day, the WHO released new data on the harm caused by foodborne illnesses and the global threat posed by unsafe foods.

“Food production has been industrialized and its trade and distribution have been globalised,” said WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan. “These changes introduce multiple new opportunities for food to become contaminated with harmful bacteria, viruses, parasites, or chemicals.”

The WHO's findings are part of a broader ongoing analysis of the global burden of foodborne diseases, the full results of
which will be released in October, and they show that 582 million cases of 22 different foodborne diseases were reported in 2010, with 351,000 deaths from diseases including Salmonella, E.Coli and norovirus.

Most cases were recorded Africa and South-East Asia and 40 per cent of those suffering from food-borne diseases from contaminated food were children under five years-old.

In response, Dr Chan stressed the need for coordinated, cross-border action across the entire food supply chain to ensure food safety as she launched World Health Day under the slogan 'From farm to plate, make food safe.'

“A local food safety problem can rapidly become an international emergency,” she said. “Investigation of an outbreak of foodborne disease is vastly more complicated when a single plate or package of food contains ingredients from multiple countries.”

The global impact posed by unsafe food was not just found in the health impacts, with the economic impacts also high. Germany’s 2011 E.coli outbreak, for example, reportedly caused $1.3 billion in losses for farmers and industries and $236 million in emergency aid payments to 22 European Union Member States.

To counter such emergencies, robust food safety systems are needed that drive Government and public action to safeguard against chemical or microbial contamination of food. The joint WHO-Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) is aimed at ensuring effective and rapid communication during food safety emergencies.

“It often takes a crisis for the collective consciousness on food safety to be stirred and any serious response to be taken,” says Dr Kazuaki Miyagishima, Director of WHO’s Department of Food Safety and Zoonoses. “The impacts on public health and economies can be great. A sustainable response, therefore, is needed that ensures standards, checks and networks are in place to protect against food safety risks.”

Consumers also play important roles in promoting food safety, from practising safe food hygiene and learning how to take care when cooking potentially hazardous foods, like chicken, to reading labels when buying and preparing food. The WHO’s ‘Five Keys to Safer Food’ explain the basic principles that each individual should know all over the world to prevent foodborne diseases.

**New arrivals at UN camp add to largest number of displaced in South Sudan since conflict began**

7 April - Around 4,500 people have recently sought shelter on the premises of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan in Malakal, Upper Nile state, the spokesperson for the Secretary-General said during a press briefing at Headquarters today.

The new arrivals bring the total number of civilians in that site close to 26,000, with a total of 115,000 sheltering in UN compounds elsewhere in the country.

That takes the number of displaced people being sheltered in UN compounds to its highest level since the start of the conflict in December 2013.

Despite that lugubrious statistic, new displacements of population continue to be reported by the UN’s humanitarian partners in other parts of the country, including 31,000 in Jonglei state, and the total number displaced around the country is around 1.5 million, with a further half a million people forced to flee the country.
African Union-UN mission condemns bombings in central Darfur

The Joint African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) has confirmed the dropping of 10 bombs which led to the killing of 14 civilians and the wounding of 18 others in Rowata, Central Darfur, on 1 April.

According to a UN spokesperson, yesterday, a verification patrol was dispatched to Rowata. While at the village, the team witnessed another aerial bombardment, consisting of five bombs dropped close to where they were standing.

“The UN Mission strongly condemns such aerial bombings, which cause widespread death, destruction and displacement of populations,” the spokesperson said.

Cyprus: UN special envoy sees ‘no obstacle’ to early resumption of talks

The Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Cyprus, Espen Barth Eide, told reporters in Nicosia today that he sees no obstacle to a very early resumption of talks between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot negotiators once the elections in the north of the country are over.

“Reasons why talks could not happen are gone, at least for the foreseeable future, and that makes it possible to prepare for the resumption of talks in a structured, results oriented and fast manner,” said Mr. Eide.

“I have shared this perspective with both leaders today, with Mr. Anastasiades, representing the Greek Cypriot community and Mr. Dervis Eroglu, representing the Turkish Cypriot community, and they both agreed that the circumstances are now right.”

Mr. Eide said he strongly feels that 2015 is going to be a decisive year, that he hopes it will be a decisive one in the right direction.

“The conditions are in place,” he said. “We also have behind us a crisis that illustrates the broader dimensions of the Cyprus problem and why it is maybe more important than ever before to work towards a settlement in line with the Joint Declaration and the principles already laid out, both there, and also in the statement that was presented here on 17 September.”

He said the absence of a settlement was the big problem that all Cypriots share and he associated that with young people leaving the island, with investments that could have happened not happening, why the benefits of economies of scale had not yet been fully realized, and why it had been hard to prepare for Cyprus’s hydrocarbons phase of its history.

“I want to call on all Cypriots to realize that this is a decisive moment, not only for political leaders, but also for everybody living on this island,” said Mr. Eide.

He said he felt every single issue open for discussion could be resolved with dedication and sustained will and he said that while there was no date set for the resumption of talks, that would change once the outcome of the election in the north was known.

“I think that this is really a time to think strategically and not tactically,” he said. “Not only at the leaders’ level but across all elements of society, and understand that this is an opportunity that has to be grasped. It is a window of opportunity.”
Geothermal energy can help developing countries boost food security, says UN agency report

7 April - A new report released today by the United Nations agricultural agency says that the heat energy generated by the earth’s core can be used for cost efficient, sustainable food production and processing in developing countries.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report Uses of Geothermal Energy in Food and Agriculture says that geothermal energy can help prevent the huge post-harvest currently faced by many developing countries, and can be a prime source of heat for greenhouses, soils and water for fish farming.

“It’s an energy source that’s renewable, clean and low-cost once you’ve made the initial investment to harness it,” says Carlos da Silva, Senior Agribusiness Economist in FAO’s Rural Infrastructure and Agro-Industries Division (AGS). “By using a clean energy source, you’re not only addressing cost but also the environmental impacts of food production and processing.”

Heat energy can be used for processing to boost food security and drying foods, pasteurizing milk and sterilizing produce are particularly viable options for developing countries, prolonging shelf lives of nutritious foods like fish and vegetables and making them available year-round, including in times of drought.

Countries in the so-called ‘Ring of Fire’ along the Pacific Plate, such as Mexico, Indonesia, the Philippines and various nations along the Pacific Coast of South America are particularly feasible locations, as are Ethiopia and Kenya in Africa’s Rift Valley, as are Romania and Macedonia in Eastern Europe.

Worldwide, 38 countries currently use geothermal energy for direct application in agricultural production and 24 harness it to generate electricity, with Iceland, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Kenya, New Zealand and the Philippines deriving more than 10 percent of their electricity needs from natural heat sources.

Among developing countries, 23 use geothermal energy, with most apply it to space heating and recreational purposes like bathing, leaving its significant potential for agricultural uses generally untapped.

“Geothermal energy for agriculture can be done even at small-scales and can significantly contribute to income generation, providing employment and improving food and nutrition security in developing countries,” said Divine Njie, AGS Deputy Director, who co-edited the report.

The FAO’s news release points to projects which show that the challenges associated with establishing geothermal energy, such as high start-up costs, are not insurmountable, particularly with Government support.

“The FAO report also shows that there are direct-use opportunities which do not require high-cost exploration and exploitation,” he added.

Examples include a Government-funded project in Algeria which supports the building of fish farms that use hot water from drill holes to heat Tilapia ponds, and a project in Thailand where chillies and garlic, which are highly popular, were dried using waste heat from a geothermal power plant.