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Some $3.2 billion needed for Ebola recovery efforts in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone – UN

9 July - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will call for continued solidarity with the three West African countries most impacted by the unprecedented Ebola outbreak at tomorrow's International Ebola Recovery Conference in New York, which will seek to raise $3.2 billion over the next two years so that Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone can begin to recover from the crisis.

On the eve of the high-level segment of the Conference, scheduled to take place at UN Headquarters, Dr. David Nabarro, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Ebola, told reporters about "remarkable progress [that] has been made through the outstanding efforts of the people and governments of the affected countries."

"Most of the affected region is now free of Ebola," Dr. Nabarro said of the epidemic that began last year and has affected some 27,600 people, including more than 11,000 deaths, mostly in West Africa.

"The numbers of transmission chains have reduced in the last few weeks. There are some new cases, but when they do a merge they can easily be traced back to existing transmission chains," he said.

But at the same time, he stressed that the recent discovery of new cases in Liberia is "a reminder of the absolute importance of remaining vigilant until the very end of the outbreak and responding quickly to any new flare-ups when they occur […] and I'm delighted to say that the response to the Liberian recent flare-up has been rapid and effective."

But, he said, there is no need to wait to get to 'zero cases' before the recovery process begins, noting that the response and recovery phases of the outbreak are "intertwined" in order to get schools open and running safely and ensuring that health care services are in place and resilient.

Dr. Nabarro said Secretary-General Ban, who convened the conference, will stand alongside the leaders of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone as well as of the African Union and the Mano River Union, the West African regional organization, and
“call for continued solidarity as the affected countries and their people put in place their recovery strategies.”

At the same press conference, Sunil Saigal, Principal Coordinator of the UN Development Programme's (UNDP) Response to the Ebola Outbreak, spoke about the need to build resilience in these countries to lift themselves up and return to the state of the development they were in before the Ebola crisis.

Mr. Saigal said the technical consultations started today, led by the three impacted countries, which focused on discussions on the recovery process such as health, governance, and sanitation.

Finance ministers, as well as other senior representatives of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, made their presentation of their 24-month recovery plans. In addition, the Mano River Union presented a regional recovery plan.

He said the current funding gap identified by the three countries to help rebuild sustainable structures and systems over the next 24 month is $3.2 billion.

“The commitments and resources mobilized by this Conference will ensure that the building blocks of sustainable recovery are put in place,” according to UNDP.

The presidents of the affected countries, as well as Robert Mugabe, current Chair of the African Union, and high-level representatives from the African Development Bank, the European Union, the Islamic Development Bank and other partner organizations in the response are expected to participate in the morning portion of tomorrow’s conference.

The pledging segment in the afternoon will be chaired by UNDP Administrator Helen Clark. Also present will be Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), and other UN agency representatives who will give updates on the response.

The conference tomorrow is scheduled to be followed by an AU event to take stock in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea on 20 July.

UN agency rushes food relief to thousands of flood-affected people in Bangladesh

9 July - The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) is ramping up relief efforts aimed at reaching tens of thousands of Bangladeshis stranded by a spate of flash floods which struck the South Asian country last week.

According to a WFP press release issued earlier this morning, the UN agency is now targeting over 150,000 people in the coastal village of Cox’s Bazar and surrounding areas with over 100 metric tons of emergency food supplies transported by boat and truck.

Among the food assistance being distributed are vitamin and mineral-fortified high energy biscuits for the many rendered homeless by the flash floods and now vulnerable to food insecurity and worsening poverty.

“Flash floods and landslides made the distribution of food very challenging but even remote areas were reached within a matter of hours,” confirmed Christa Räder, the WFP Representative in Bangladesh.

A sudden onset of torrential rains last week unleashed widespread flash flooding across southern Bangladesh, affecting thousands of people in the region.

The country's Government has reported that some 120,000 people continue to remain stranded amid ongoing humanitarian efforts.
A week from presidential polls, Burundi on 'brink of devastating violence,' Security Council told

9 July - Two weeks after the contested legislative and communal elections that took place in Burundi and with presidential polls just days away, senior United Nations officials warned the Security Council today that situation prevailing in the Central African country is once again at risk of sliding into violence.

“Burundi is on the brink again [and] the grave danger the country faces should not be underestimated, given the increasing polarization and the apparent choice of Burundian leaders to put personal interest before those of the country,” declared UN Assistant-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Taye-Brook Zerihoun.

“An escalating pattern of politically motivated violence, coupled with this country's history of recurring bloodshed and atrocities, should alert us to the potential for serious crisis,” underlined UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein.

Both officials echoed similar concern as they briefed the Security Council on the situation in Burundi; Mr. Zehiroun on the electoral process and the political and security situations through the work of the UN Election Observation Mission (MENUB) and Mr. Zeid on the protection and promotion of human rights.

“On 2 July, MENUB assessed that the legislative and communal electoral process of June 29 took place against the background of a political crisis, and in a climate of widespread fear and intimidation in parts of the country,” said the Assistant Secretary-General.

Some opposition political parties and civil society organizations, notably those opposed to a third term for President Pierre Nkurunziza, called the elections a “sham” and declared they would not recognize the results.

Fundamental freedoms of participation, assembly, expression, opinion and information suffered increasing restrictions during the campaign period and as Election Day drew nearer, according to the MENUB observers deployed in all 18 provinces of Burundi.

In the past six months, went on to say Mr. Zeid, members of opposition parties, civil society activists and media figures have been targeted for intimidation, severe harassment and arbitrary detention.

“Peaceful protests have been met with unwarranted use of force, including lethal force, in violation of Burundi’s obligation under national and international law to guarantee the right to freedom of assembly. Demonstrators have been imprisoned and subjected to torture and ill-treatment. We have also received reports of extrajudicial killings. To date these violations have not been investigated, prosecuted or sanctioned.”

While MENUB assessed that the Independent National Election Commission adequately handled the voter registration and the nomination of candidates, opposition parties repeatedly accused the electoral management body of “lacking credibility and independence,” continued Mr. Zehiroun.

Preparations and arrangements for Election Day were largely sufficient, and instances of violence and explosions preceded, and in some cases took place alongside Election Day activities, mostly in Bujumbura, he pointed out.

“In view of its findings, MENUB concluded that the environment was not conducive for free, credible and inclusive elections. The African Union, the Eastern African Community, and the International Conference on Great Lakes Region expressed similar concerns.”

According to the Election Commission, the preliminary results of the legislative elections show that Conseil national pour la
défense de la démocratie-Forces pour la défense de la démocratie (CNDD-FDD), the party received 60.2 per cent of the votes, a result rejected by the opposition, Mr. Zehiroun said.

“Preparations for the presidential election are ongoing. Ballot papers have been printed with all the eight candidates approved by the Election Commission including those who have announced they would boycott the elections,” he stressed, adding that the political and security situations in Burundi have remained tense and volatile since the polls.

“The crisis arising from President Nkurunziza's decision to run for a third term in office has undermined a decade of steady progress in building democratic institutions, and precious gains in the sense of a common national community,” warned UN rights chief Zeid, stressing that more than 145,000 people have fled to neighbouring countries, and convinced that Burundi is on the brink of “devastating violence” again.

Contrary to some recent reports, the massive outflows of refuges appear to have been sparked, not by rumour, but by precise and targeted campaigns of intimidation and terror. Refugees interviewed by his Office in the Democratic republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Tanzania continue to refer to the Imbonerakure militia as the main threat, but some have also stated that militants from other groups are also employing violence – a new and disturbing development.

During an emergency summit on 6 July, the Assistant Secretary-General added, the East African Community (EAC) issued a Communiqué, in which were made a number of recommendations, including the postponement of the presidential elections to July 30th 2015; the formation of a government of national unity involving both who participated in the elections and those that did not; and the deployment of an EAC electoral mission to observe the presidential elections.

For Mr. Zehiroun, that Communiqué is a “clear path forward”.

According to the UN, civil unrest erupted on 26 April in Bujumbura after the ruling CNDD-FDD party elected President Pierre Nkurunziza on 25 April as its candidate for then-scheduled 26 June presidential election. Mr. Nkurunziza has been in office for two terms since 2005, and a broad array of actors warned that an attempt to seek a third term was unconstitutional and contrary to the spirit of the 2000 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi that ended a decade of civil war in the country.

Yemen: UN chief welcomes announcement of humanitarian ceasefire

9 July - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has welcomed the decision by Yemeni stakeholders to implement a humanitarian pause in the country's ongoing conflict and has reiterated his belief that the only sustainable solution to the crisis is through “peaceful and inclusive dialogue and negotiations,” the United Nations confirmed today.

The pause will commence on Friday, 10 July, to permit humanitarian actors to reach civilians in need and its acceptance was conveyed by Yemen's President Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi to the Secretary-General in a letter earlier this week.

Likewise, Mr. Ban has also received assurances through his Special Envoy on Yemen, Ould Cheikh Ahmed, from the Houthis, the General People's Congress and other parties that the pause will be “fully respected and that there will be no violations from any combatants under their control.”

“It is imperative and urgent that humanitarian aid can reach all vulnerable people of Yemen unimpeded and through an unconditional humanitarian pause,” the Secretary-General's Spokesperson, Stéphane Dujarric, told reporters at UN Headquarters this afternoon, ahead of a statement issued by his Office.

“Full and unhindered access by humanitarian agencies to all parts of the country, including through sea and airports, should be ensured with a view to reaching people in need, including with essential medicines, vaccinations, food and water,” the statement added.
According to the latest UN data, the humanitarian crisis in Yemen has been steadily deteriorating since the outbreak of fighting in late March 2015.

In the past three months alone, some 3,000 Yemenis have been killed, half of them civilians, and 14,000 injured. Over a million people have had to flee their homes and 21 million need immediate help, close to 13 million people are unable to meet their food needs, 15 million people have no healthcare and outbreaks of dengue and malaria are raging unchecked.

Humanitarian partners have reached 4.4 million people with aid in the past three months, but this is a fraction of those in need, says the UN Spokesperson. The United Nations, the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and international non-governmental organizations working together have now activated the highest level of emergency response.

The first pause in the hostilities took place in mid-May.

“The Secretary-General reminds the parties to the conflict of their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and calls on all sides to contribute to preventing a humanitarian catastrophe in the country,” continued the statement.

The UN spokesperson added that Mr. Ban was “grateful” for Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed's ongoing efforts to engage with all Yemeni stakeholders to take confidence-building steps towards a durable cease-fire and develop a mechanism for the withdrawal of forces, release of political prisoners and the resumption of an inclusive political process.

In mid-June, Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed facilitated in Geneva a round of consultations among key Yemeni stakeholders.

These measures, he said, would ultimately form part of subsequent agreements which will require further consultations.

“The Secretary-General encourages all parties to the conflict to extend their full cooperation and support to his Special Envoy on the way forward,” the statement concluded. “The Secretary-General firmly believes that the only sustainable solution to the conflict in Yemen is through peaceful and all-inclusive political dialogue and negotiations.”

**UN envoy welcomes indictment of former Guinean leader over 2009 stadium deaths**

*9 July* - The United Nations Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict has welcomed the indictment against the former President of Guinea, Moussa Dadis Camara, in an investigation into the “horrific events” that took place in the nation's capital, Conakry, nearly five years ago.

“I commend the national authorities for exercising ownership, leadership and responsibility over this process which seeks to bring justice to victims of crimes committed during the horrific events which took place Conakry in broad daylight,” said Zainab Hawa Bangura in a press release issued late Wednesday.

“This indictment represents an important step in Guinea's fight against impunity for the crimes that were perpetrated against unarmed civilians,” she added.

A UN-led International Commission of Inquiry found that at least 156 people were killed, at least 109 women and girls raped and subjected to other forms of sexual violence, and more than 1,000 people injured as a result of the events in the stadium and the surrounding areas.

Mr. Camara was the President of Guinea's National Council for Democracy and Development at the time of the incidents on 28 September 2009.

In the framework of a Joint Communique between the UN and the Government of Guinea signed in November 2011, Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura

UN Photo/Loey Felipe
Bangura's Office, through the UN Team of Experts on the Rule of Law/Sexual Violence in Conflict, has been providing technical support to a Panel of Judges established by the Guinean authorities to investigate and prosecute these crimes.

Based on more than 400 hearings, which included 200 victims and witnesses of sexual violence, the Panel has already issued 15 indictments, including against high ranking military officers.

“I praise the courage and determination of the Panel of Judges to investigate the crimes committed, as well as the courage of the victims and witnesses to come forward," the Special Representative said. “This would not have happened without their relentless efforts in pursuit of justice.”

The United Nations will continue to support ongoing efforts by the Guinean authorities towards a successful conclusion of the process, including in the areas of protection of victims and witnesses, and reparations, she said.

**Forecasting positive 2015 world crop prospects, UN agency warns of food insecurity 'hotspots'

9 July - Favorable worldwide conditions for cereal crops will lead to better-than-expected production this growing season at the global level, today said the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

That is despite continuing apprehension over El Niño, growing concerns over a sharp shortfall in maize grown in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as poor production in other food insecure hotspot areas.

According to the latest release of the UN agency's monthly Food Price Index and the new edition of the quarterly Crop Prospects and Food Situation report, both issued today, world cereal production this year should amount to 2.5 billion tons. That represents a 1.1 percent decline from the record level in 2014, but an improvement from projections made last month.

Meanwhile, the Food Price Index declined 0.9 percent in June compared to May. At 165.1 points, it is now down 21 percent compared to a year ago and at its lowest level since September 2009.

The decline mainly came as a result of a drop of 6.6 percent in the price of sugar and of 4.1 percent in the prices of dairy products, which more than offset a rebound in palm oil and wheat quotations. Increasing worldwide demand for livestock feed, especially in Brazil, China and the United States, is supporting prices for coarse grains, including maize.

But those global price trends and favorable prospects for world cereal production mask localized hotspots of food insecurity, the report also cautioned.

Some 34 countries worldwide, including 28 in Africa – many hosting large numbers of refugees – are in need of external assistance for food, it says. Today's report in particular highlights “alarming” food security conditions in conflict-affected areas of South Sudan, where the number of severely food insecure people has almost doubled to an estimated 4.6 million since the beginning of 2015.

The study also points out that, despite better prospects, the Near East faces an escalating humanitarian crisis. 2015 cereal production in that region is expected to recover from last year's drought, driven by a projected 18 percent increase in output in Turkey. But conflicts continue to “severely” impact on agriculture and Iraq, Yemen and Syria continue to face an “escalating humanitarian crisis.”

Yemen in particular stands out, where of 12.9 million food insecure people about 6.1 million are in “Emergency” Phase, while 6.8 million are in “Crisis” Phase, representing a 21 percent increase over the previous year.

Finally, in Asia, a record crop in China and Pakistan is expected to offset declines elsewhere – mainly in India, as a result of a poor wheat harvest. Nepal has seen drops in food production due to earthquake damage, while in the Democratic Republic of...
of Korea, a severe dry spell is expected to result in reduced cereal production in 2015, adds the report.

**Syrian refugee numbers pass four million as war rages on – UN**

9 July - The exodus spawned by the four-year long Syrian conflict has now become the United Nations refugee agency’s largest crisis in almost a quarter of a century and risks deteriorating even further as fighting in the country shows no sign of abating.

In a news release issued earlier today, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) confirmed the latest figures received from the field indicating that more than 4 million Syrian refugees have fled the Middle Eastern nation since hostilities began there in March 2011.

“This is the biggest refugee population from a single conflict in a generation,” lamented UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres. “It is a population that deserves the support of the world but is instead living in dire conditions and sinking deeper into abject poverty.”

As it reaches the mid-point of its fifth year, the Syrian civil war has generated a steady outflow of refugees into neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Jordan, burdening those countries’ infrastructures and leading to overcrowded settlements where many refugees struggle amid high unemployment and precarious services.

According to the latest data available, Turkey alone is host to over 1,800,000 registered Syrian refugees – more than any other in the world – with about 259,000 living in 23 camps set up and managed by the Government.

In addition, the numbers are only slated to increase amid intensified fighting across Syria, the UN refugee agency noted. Today's 4 million milestone, in fact, comes barely 10 months since the total of three million was reached.

At the same time, however, life for Syrians in exile is becoming increasingly tough. The UN agency explained that some 86 per cent of refugees outside Jordanian resettlement camps live below the poverty line. In Lebanon, 55 per cent of refugees live in shelters considered to be “sub-standard.”

Meanwhile, in a recent report from the ground, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) similarly warned that as the Syrian crisis has dramatically reduced family livelihood opportunities and impoverished millions of households in the region, children have been steadily pushed into the job market and are now being widely employed in harmful working conditions, risking serious damage to their health and wellbeing.

“Worsening conditions are driving growing numbers towards Europe and further afield, but the overwhelming majority remain in the region,” Mr. Guterres continued. “We cannot afford to let them and the communities hosting them slide further into desperation.”

While the conflict continues to push a steady outflow of Syrians across the region, the conditions of those trapped inside the country's besieged cities remains equally dire.

The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has cautioned that some 12 million people in the Middle Eastern country today remain in need of humanitarian assistance – a twelve-fold increase since 2011. 7.6 million people have been displaced by the conflict and another 4.8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in hard to reach and besieged locations.

The humanitarian impact of the crisis is only further compounded by funding shortfalls which has seen wholesale cuts to the UN's delivery of humanitarian aid – from food assistance to lifesaving health services.