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UN labour agency unveils historic employment standards against informal work

12 June - A new global standard aimed at lifting hundreds of millions of workers out of the informal economy and into regularized employment was adopted today in a move the United Nations International Labour Organization (ILO) has labelled as “historic.”

The Recommendation – the first ever international labour standard designed to tackle the informal economy – was passed by 484 votes in favour and received “outstanding support” from the ILO’s so-called tripartite constituents, according to the UN agency, which added that the document acknowledges that most people enter the informal economy “not by choice but due to a lack of opportunities.”

“Over the years we’ve seen a growing consensus between governments, workers and employers that the right thing to do is to move people from an informal to a formal employment situation,” ILO Director-General Guy Ryder said in a press release issued in Geneva, where the International Labour Conference is under way through tomorrow 13 June.

“We know it is not easy, we know that these are processes are complicated and take time, but the great value of this Recommendation is that we now have an international framework of guidance to help Member States bring this about.”

According to the ILO, the new international standard provides guidance for Member States to facilitate the transition of workers and economic units from the informal to the formal economy; promote the creation, preservation and sustainability of enterprises and decent jobs in the formal economy; and prevent the ‘informalization’ of formal economy jobs, all within the context of the post-2015 development agenda.
However, Mr. Ryder continued, the adoption of the Recommendation was just the first step in an effort that aims to help somewhere between 45 and 90 per cent of informal workers, depending on the developing region.

In order to roll out the new standards, Member States will, in fact, be able to seek advice from the 12 guiding principles delineated by the ILO and which were modelled on the successful experiences already enjoyed by many countries in their transition to formality.

“It is not just the adoption of this Recommendation,” the ILO head declared, “it’s actually putting it into practice that will matter.”

**Syria: UN rights experts deplore government aerial attacks; warn of retaliation by armed groups**

12 June - Condemning the rising number of Government aerial attacks in Syria and the use of indiscriminate weapons, such as barrel bombs, including in civilian populated areas, a group of United Nations official today warned of retaliatory action by non-State armed groups, which could increase the vulnerability of religious and ethnic minorities perceived to support the Government.

“Government air strikes have reportedly killed more than a hundred civilians in the past week. Employing means or methods of combat which cannot distinguish civilian from military objectives is a clear violation of international humanitarian law. Not only has the Government of Syria failed in its responsibility to protect its populations from atrocity crimes, but it continues to attack its own people,” says the statement.

The statements was issued by: the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng; the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect, Jennifer Welsh; the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Rita Izsák; and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Heiner Bielefeldt.

The Special Advisers and the Special Rapporteurs sounded the alarm about the broader consequences of the aerial attacks by Government forces for particular communities in Syria. As a result of such strikes, they said, non-State armed groups could carry out large scale reprisal attacks against religious and ethnic minorities perceived to be associated with the Government, including Shia civilians who live in Aleppo and Idlib governorates, and Druze communities concentrated in As Suwayda governorate.

In addition, the experts reiterated their concern about the ongoing threat to the safety of minority groups in Syria, including Alawites, Armenians, Assyrians, Druze, Ismailis and Kurds, who are being killed, persecuted or otherwise targeted – primarily by non-state armed groups, including Jabhat al Nusra and the so-called ‘Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant’ – on the basis of their religious or ethnic identity.

“We call on all parties to respect international human rights and humanitarian law and immediately stop targeting people on the basis of who they are or what they believe and to do everything, in action as well as in words, to prevent further rifts and escalation of tensions along sectarian lines.”

The Special Advisers and the Special Rapporteurs also condemned advocacy of racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to violence in the traditional and social media against ethnic and religious minorities in Syria. In particular, they expressed outrage at recent speeches and media articles that dehumanise Alawites and Christians and call for their conversion, or death.

All parties to the conflict, including the Syrian Government and non-state armed groups, are alleged to have committed grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in Syria that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, adds the statement.

Denouncing the prevailing culture of impunity in Syria, the Special Advisers and the Special Rapporteurs warned that “it
must be made very clear to everyone carrying a gun, or holding a command position, that perpetrators of atrocity crimes in Syria will be held to account.”

“The protection of the populations in [Syria] is the primary responsibility of the Syrian state. However, in face of the State’s failure to do so, and with a situation of continued attacks against civilians by all parties to the conflict, the international community – and in particular the Security Council – has the responsibility to take timely and decisive action to protect populations in Syria,” stated the group of experts.

**New UN-World Bank report shows world ‘a long way from achieving universal health coverage’**

**12 June** - Some 400 million people do not have access to health services and 6 per cent of people in low- and middle-income countries are tipped into or pushed further into extreme poverty because of the high cost of health spending, according to a report released today by the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank Group.

“The world’s most disadvantaged people are missing out on even the most basic services,” Dr. Marie-Paule Kieny, WHO Assistant Director-General, Health Systems and Innovation, said in a joint WHO/World Bank press release.

"A commitment to equity is at the heart of universal health coverage,” continued Dr. Kieny. “Health policies and programmes should focus on providing quality health services for the poorest people, women and children, people living in rural areas and those from minority groups.”

The joint WHO/World Bank report, Tracking universal health coverage: First global monitoring report, is the first of its kind to measure health service coverage and financial protection to assess countries’ progress towards universal health coverage.

Launched today, the report said more people have access to essential health services today than at any other time in history, and “for some health services, global population coverage already surpasses 80 per cent, and in the past decade there is some evidence that the proportion of people hit by health service-related catastrophic spending and impoverishment has dropped somewhat.”

“However,” the report said, “there is still a long way to go on the road to UHC [universal health coverage] both in terms of health service and financial protection coverage.”

The report looks at global access to essential health services – including family planning, antenatal care, skilled birth attendance, child immunization, antiretroviral therapy, tuberculosis treatment, and access to clean water and sanitation – in 2013, and found that at least 400 million people lacked access to at least one of these services.

In addition, across 37 countries, 6 per cent of the population was tipped or pushed further into extreme poverty ($1.25/day) because they had to pay for health services out of their own pockets.

The World Bank’s Senior Director of Health, Nutrition and Population, Dr. Tim Evans, noted that the report “is a wakeup call.”

“It shows that we’re a long way from achieving universal health coverage,” Dr. Evans said. “We must expand access to health and protect the poorest from health expenses that are causing them severe financial hardship.”

This is the first in a series of annual reports that WHO and the World Bank Group will produce on tracking progress towards UHC across countries.

WHO and the World Bank Group recommend that countries pursuing universal health coverage should aim to achieve a minimum of 80 per cent population coverage of essential health services, and that everyone everywhere should be protected from catastrophic and impoverishing health payments, according to a joint press release.
Yemen: UNESCO deplores destruction of Sana’a heritage site bearing ‘soul of Yemeni people’

12 June - The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) condemned the early morning bombing raid today on the Old City of the Yemeni capital Sana’a, saying “this heritage bears the soul of the Yemeni people, it is a symbol of a millennia history of knowledge and it belongs to all humankind.”

The United Nations announced that consultations on Yemen, previously scheduled to kick off Sunday, would instead begin on Monday, 15 June, in Geneva and that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon would attend.

“Coordinated by the United Nations Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, the Consultations mark an important step as the parties embark on the road towards a settlement,” UN spokesman Ahmad Fawzi told reporters at the UN briefing in Geneva.

Meanwhile, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) welcomed the announcement of an allocation of $100 million by Kuwait to allocate to help the people of Yemen. This is party of a larger donation from Kuwait that also included $200 million for strife-torn Iraq.

The World Health Organization (WHO), meanwhile, reported that the most recent casualty figures in Yemen as a result of the conflict was 2,584 deaths and 11,065 people injured.

UNESCO report that the early hours of this morning, the Old City of Sana’a, a UNESCO World Heritage site, was hit by a bombing raid and several houses and historic buildings were destroyed, causing human casualties.

“I am profoundly distressed by the loss of human lives as well as by the damage inflicted on one of the world’s oldest jewels of Islamic urban landscape,” UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova said in a statement.

The agency reported that in this morning’s raid on the Yemeni capital, the buildings destroyed, the agency said, was the “magnificent complex of traditional houses” in the Al-Qasimi neighbourhood.

“I am shocked by the images of these magnificent many-storeyed tower-houses and serene gardens reduced to rubble,” Ms. Bokova said. “This destruction will only exacerbate the humanitarian situation and I reiterate my call to all parties to respect and protect cultural heritage in Yemen.”

“This heritage bears the soul of the Yemeni people, it is a symbol of a millennia history of knowledge and it belongs to all humankind,” she said.

UNESCO created the idea of World Heritage to protect sites of outstanding universal value as part of its mandate to protect heritage and support for cultural diversity.

Sana’a has been inhabited for more than 2,500 years and bears witness to the wealth and beauty of the Islamic civilization, according to UNESCO. By the first century, it emerged as a centre of the inland trade route and its houses and public buildings are an outstanding example of a traditional, Islamic human settlement. Sana’a’s dense rammed earth and burnt brick towers, strikingly decorated, are famous around the world and are an integral part of Yemen’s identity and pride.

Since the beginning of the conflict in Yemen, UNESCO reported, several houses within the heritage city of Sana’a have suffered damage and collapses as a consequence of shelling and explosions. On 9 June, the Ottoman era Al-Owrdhi historical compound, located just outside the walls of the Old City, were severely damaged. Historic residential buildings, monuments, museums, archaeological sites and places of worship have not been spared.
“The historic value and memories enshrined in these sites have been irreparably damaged or destroyed,” it said.

On the humanitarian front, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), said there were disturbing reports regarding stranded migrants in Yemen in the city of Haradh who were in a life threatening situation.

And WHO said between 27 March and 4 June 2015 there had been more than 3,000 cases of Dengue fever recorded in Yemen. Unconfirmed reports from the national authorities suggested that the number of cases of Dengue fever, especially in the Aden Governorate, could be much higher.

**Funding shortage forces UN agency to temporarily cut food aid to 500,000 refugees in Kenya**

12 June - The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has announced that starting next Monday, half a million refugees in two sprawling refugee camps in Kenya will receive 30 per cent less food due to shortage of funds for relief operations.

WFP said it is temporarily reducing the size of rations at the Dadaab and Kakuma camps in northern Kenya as the only way to make its supplies last longer. The agency says that the ration cuts could continue at least through September, unless new funds become available very quickly.

This is the second time in just over six months a shortage of funds is forcing WFP to reduce the size of food rations for refugees living in the camps – most of whom come from Somalia and South Sudan.

“We are very worried about how this cut may affect the people who rely on our assistance,” said Thomas Hansson, WFP’s Acting Country Director for Kenya.

“But our food stocks are running out, and reducing the size of rations is the only way to stretch our supplies to last longer. We hope that this is only a temporary measure and we continue to appeal to the international community to assist.”

The agency said it is currently struggling to raise $39.4 million to cover shortfalls through January next year, of which $12.4 million is urgently required to avoid a critical food gap in August and September.

WFP distributes 9,300 metric tons of food for 500,000 refugees each month at a cost of $9.6 million in the camps. Every two weeks, refugees collect a general food ration of cereals, pulses, vegetable oil, salt, and nutrient-enriched flour made from soya and maize. Together, these provide 2,100 kilocalories per person per day, the recommended minimum energy intake.

Starting on 15 June, the refugees’ daily food ration will contain a smaller quantity of cereals, and will provide only 1,520 kilocalories per day, a 30 percent decrease in their daily intake.

WFP’s food stocks for refugees are dwindling, and although a substantial contribution of food is expected to arrive in time to meet part of the needs for October, it is possible that deeper cuts may be necessary in the coming months if no new resources arrive.

If there is an immediate response from donors, however, WFP would be able to buy food available in the region and quickly transport it to the camps to reduce the impact of the cuts on refugees.

Last year in November, WFP said it was forced to cut rations by half but new funding helped to reduce the size of the cut and eventually resume distribution of full rations.
Welcoming progress towards MDGs, Ban encourages Uzbekistan to promote human rights

12 June - Continuing his visit to Central Asia, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today hailed Uzbekistan for the solid progress it achieved towards the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, in reducing poverty and maternal mortality, ensuring universal access to primary education, while recalling that there can be no peace and development without human rights.

“I also welcome Uzbekistan’s active participation in multilateral discussions at the United Nations and its contributions to addressing regional and global issues of concern,” he said, noting its contributions to supporting stability and development in Afghanistan, as well as initiating the Central Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty.

Speaking to the press in the Uzbek capital Tashkent, while on his second official visit there as UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ban said that these achievements and commitments were the result of “steady and people-oriented socio-economic reforms initiated by President Islam Karimov.”

Mentioning the discussions he had with the head of State about a wide range of peace, development and human rights issues, the UN chief brought attention to the “tragedy” Uzbekistan is facing, along with other Central Asian countries, with the Aral Sea drying up.

“I will never forget my visit to Moynak and Nukus. What has happened to the Aral Sea has been a disaster long in the making,” he stated, assuring that the United Nations is thinking about ways to scale up the international community’s support to address and mitigate the impact of that phenomenon.

More generally, regional cooperation and preventive diplomacy can play an important role to overcome the many “shared challenges” in Central Asia, from water and energy issues to drug trafficking to terrorism and violent extremism, he emphasized, reminding about the support of the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in the region.

Convinced that there is no development without human rights, the Secretary-General acknowledged the “good laws” adopted by Uzbekistan to uphold the rule of law.

“But laws on the books should be made real in the lives of people,” he declared.

If the country has made important progress in eliminating child labour in the cotton sector, more must be done now to address “the mobilization of teachers, doctors and others in cotton harvesting, and prevent the maltreatment of prisoners.”

Welcoming the recent adoption by Uzbekistan of a National Action Plan on follow-up to the Universal Periodic Review by the United Nations Human Rights Council, the UN chief underlined that “implementation…is key” as it would help Uzbekistan’s compliance with its international human rights obligations, and bring wide-ranging benefits to its people.

“The United Nations – including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – stands ready to assist Uzbekistan in promoting and protecting fundamental freedoms and providing opportunities for public participation – including through independent media, democratic institutions, access to justice, a stronger voice for civil society, and safeguards that enable human rights defenders to do their vital work,” he stated.

In that regard, he was encouraged, he said, that the recently signed UN Development Assistance Framework between the Government and the United Nations system defines “broad areas of cooperation to further good governance and human rights.”
Sustainable transport essential to new global goals and low carbon economy – UN panel

12 June - A high-level United Nations advisory group established by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, agreed today to take measures that could accelerate a shift toward safer, healthier, more efficient and sustainable transport systems.

Meeting in Milan, Italy, the High-Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport agreed to develop a set of policy maker recommendations and to work to convene, in 2016, the first international conference on sustainable transport.

Also next year, the Advisory Group will produce the first global, sustainable transport outlook report, which will contain all transport modes and important issues – including road safety, climate impacts, health issues and clean fuels.

UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Wu Hongbo said in a press release: “We simply have to build better, safer and more sustainable transportation systems if we are going to promote prosperity and greater social well-being while protecting the environment.”

Sustainable transport is an increasingly important concern in a rapidly urbanizing planet where 54 per cent of the population lives in cities.

With 1.3 billion cars, vans, trucks and buses currently on the world’s roads, and all indications pointing to a continued pattern of motorization, the number of motor vehicles is expected to reach 1.6 billion by 2035. The transport sector is already responsible for nearly a quarter of all global energy-related emissions and transportation has been the largest energy consuming sector in 40 per cent of all countries.

The growing need for sustainable transport has gained prominence at the international level – such as at the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in Brazil and the 2014 Climate Summit in New York. The need for sustainable transport is well integrated into the proposed development goals to be presented for adoption at the Sustainable Development Summit this September.

On the Advisory Group, Mr. Wu elaborated that its purpose “is to provide recommendations to policy makers and business and civil society leaders that will help build sustainable transport systems that will effectively move people and goods while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and accidents at the same time.”

A Technical Working Group – comprised of experts from various UN organizations and non-UN institutions active in transport-related activities – provides technical and analytical inputs to the Advisory Group, which use them to base tier recommendations on sound technical foundations.
UN agency urges more funding to boost humanitarian aid to children in Sudan

12 June - Citing efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to children in Sudan who are affected by the war in South Sudan, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) stressed the huge demand and urgency of receiving more financial support to continue its relief work in the Country.

“We cannot make these boys and girls suffer even more by failing to provide timely, quality…humanitarian assistance and protection,” said Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Representative to Sudan, stressing that “children are the main victims of the intensification of conflict in South Sudan.”

Representing over 60 per cent of the South Sudanese refugees, as well as over 60 per cent of the Sudanese returnees, children “have suffered from exposure to a brutal war which has uprooted them from their homes and separated them from their familiar environment.” Mr. Cappelaere warned.

While efforts have been made by UNICEF and its partners to support the Government of Sudan with lifesaving services such as water and sanitation, treatment of malnutrition, and immunization, the gaps remain critical as funds are available only until the end of the month for these multiple and urgent needs.

The high demand for education is another concern that strains the existing facilities for children sharing schools in refugee camps.

Further, the acute needs of children in Sudan go far beyond the impact of the South Sudan crisis. Over 3.2 million children require humanitarian assistance.

Unfortunately, the funding received covers only 16% of the $117 million required and will run out by the end of June.

Therefore, the UN children’s agency is calling upon the international donors to increase urgently its funding to help provide protection, education and a healthy life for the most vulnerable children in Sudan.

The agency is also calling on the Government of Sudan and non-governmental partners to guarantee an enabling environment for reaching all those children most in need with timely and sufficient services.

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.
Ban receives report probing new information on Dag Hammarskjöld’s death

12 June - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has been handed the report of experts he appointed a few months ago to examine and assess new information relating to the tragic death of Dag Hammarskjöld, and his party.

The second Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Hammarskjöld served from April 1953 until his death in a plane crash in September 1961. At the age of 47 years, he is the youngest to have held the post and was awarded a posthumous Nobel Prize.

“The Secretary-General is pleased to announce that the Independent Panel of Experts...has now submitted its report on its findings, conclusions and recommendations,” said a statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson in New York.

In March 2015, the Secretary-General appointed Mohamed Chande Othman, the Chief Justice of Tanzania, to head the Panel. The other two members are Kerryn Macaulay, Australia’s Representative on the Council of the UN International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), and Henrik Larsen, a ballistics expert at the National Center of Forensic Services in the Danish National Police.

“The [UN chief] wishes to thank them for their important contribution to the ongoing search for the truth about the conditions and circumstances related to the tragic death of...Dag Hammarskjöld, and the members of the party accompanying him on that fateful night of 17-18 September 1961;” reads the statement.

The Panel, says the spokesperson, visited Zambia to meet with new witnesses and gathered additional new information from Member States and other sources, including national and private archives in Belgium, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

“The Secretary-General will study the report carefully and expeditiously, and, subject to any considerations of a medical or private nature, will make the report of the Panel, as well as his own assessment and options on the way forward, available to Member States and the public as soon as possible,” adds the statement.

UNICEF urges more funding for relief efforts in Ukraine targeting children affected by conflict

12 June - Ukraine’s children once again find themselves under threat amid renewed fighting across the country’s eastern regions, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) said today as it warned about the growing challenges to accessibility facing the agency’s relief efforts.

Speaking to reporters at a press briefing in Geneva, UNICEF spokesperson Christophe Bouligerac voiced concern about the numbers of child casualties caused by the hostilities, noting that since the outbreak of fighting in March 2014, more than 240 children had been victims of the conflict, including 68 children killed and 180 injured.

Heavy weapons, landmines and explosives in Marinka, in the western area of Donetsk, were particularly dangerous for children, Mr. Bouligerac said, pointing to a recent UNICEF report which found that landmines in Donetsk had killed 42 children and injured 109.

In recent weeks, Marinka has witnessed a significant bout of fighting which has led to a critical deterioration in humanitarian needs and a lack of access to water.
The children in those areas, the UNICEF spokesperson continued, were paying the highest price as they had been consumed by high levels of stress and had witnessed violent fighting. He added that UNICEF was providing psychological support to more than 20,000 boys and girls since the beginning of 2015 while also funnelling safe drinking water to over 500,000 people across Donetsk and Lugansk.

At the same time, UNICEF had also launched a landmine education campaign which provided life-saving information about the risks of unexploded ordnance and similar weaponry.

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. Nevertheless, despite a September 2014 cease-fire agreed in Minsk, the fighting 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.”

Mr. Boulierac explained that UNICEF remained very worried that the continuing conflict would lead to a deteriorating humanitarian crisis and an increase in the number of child casualties, adding that the agency was appealing for $55.8 million to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of children and families in Ukraine.

### Hundreds of thousands in need of critical aid in Myanmar, warns UN humanitarian arm

**12 June** - Nearly half a million people continue to require humanitarian assistance three years after inter-communal violence raked Myanmar’s western Rakhine state, the United Nations relief arm reported today.

According to the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), over 416,000 people remain in need of relief, including almost 140,000 displaced people living in dire conditions in camps and many others without citizenship in isolated villages.

To that point, OCHA confirmed that up to 40,000 of the displaced people in Rakhine state live in camps within 500 metres of the coastline, leaving them vulnerable to the elements amid an imminent monsoon season.

The UN body added that access to adequate healthcare and livelihoods remained a major concern for displaced people and vulnerable communities across Rakhine state while restrictions on the freedom of movement of hundreds of thousands of people had severely compromised their basic rights to food, healthcare, education, livelihoods and other basic services, leaving them dependent on humanitarian aid.

The tensions in Rakhine state have contributed to a growing exodus of ethnic Rohingya who have been risking their lives by crossing the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea for nearby states.

The UN refugee agency recently reported that more than 1,000 new Rohingya arrivals have been registered in Indonesia, which has distributed relief supplies and are counselling dozens of new arrivals in southern Thailand, and in Malaysia the refugee agency is scaling up to meet the needs of arrivals.
Alarming levels of insecurity in Nigeria driving civilian displacement, UN agency warns

12 June - The World Food Programme (WFP) expressed today its particular concern about the consequences of insecurity in Nigeria, which has displaced so far 200,000 people, a number of them seeking refuge in Niger, Cameroon and Chad, while others are waiting at the borders.

“Nearly half a million people – refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons and local communities – face an acute food security and livelihood crisis,” added WFP spokesperson Elisabeth Byrs during a press conference in Geneva.

Civilians in the northeast Nigeria are fleeing attacks perpetrated by the armed insurgent group Boko Haram.

Emphasizing the plight of newly arriving refugee children in Niger and Cameroon, Ms. Byrs said malnutrition rates have surpassed emergency thresholds. “In some violence-affected areas near the Cameroon-Nigeria border, acute malnutrition rates among children under five years of age could be as high as 36 per cent,” she warned.

With the arrival of the rainy season, already stretched health centres would struggle to cope, she continued. As food became scarce, some 4,000 refugees have moved to the Minawao refugee camp since the end of April. “Displaced people said they could not rely for help on host communities which are already struggling to access food”, she added.

Making up 75 per cent of Nigerian refugees in Cameroon, 84 per cent of internally displaced persons in Cameroon, and more than 80 per cent of the Nigerian refugees in Niger, women and children are the most exposed.

WFP aims to provide food to nearly 400,000 people each month but it is impossible without urgent funding, stressed the spokesperson. The Programme is less than 50 per cent funded – with $41.6 million needed until the end of the year.

“In April-May, WFP provided food to about half of the people it was planning to assist and, in some instances, the ration size was reduced”, concluded Ms. Byrs.

Western Balkans experiencing surge in migrant, refugee crossings, warns UN agency

12 June - Southern Europe’s migrant and refugee crisis has reached the Western Balkans where an increasing number of asylum-seekers are using the region’s migration routes to flee their home countries, the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) has confirmed.

Addressing a press conference in Geneva earlier today, UNHCR spokesperson Adrian Edwards told reporters of a dramatic uptick in the number of men, women and children using the so-called ‘Western Balkans route’ as they seek to reach Western Europe. Many are also registering for asylum in the Western Balkans – a region which has seen a four-fold increase in the number of asylum-seekers since 2012. In 2015, Mr. Edwards added, Serbia alone has seen over 22,000 asylum claims lodged in the first four months of the year.

As migrants and refugees – many of whom originate from refugee-producing countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, and Somalia – course across mountain paths and train tracks in order to pierce through the Western Balkans’ borders, they remain dangerously vulnerable to violence, abuse and accidents. According to UNHCR, many have been also moving through the region irregularly with the help of smugglers, only adding to the dangers to which they are exposed.
Overall, the UN’s official figures show that as of 8 June a total of 103,000 refugees and migrants have arrived in Europe: 54,000 in Italy, 48,000 in Greece, 91 on Malta and 920 in Spain. The latest tally includes around 6,000 migrants and refugees who were disembarked in southern Italy last weekend in a major rescue operation coordinated by the Italian Coast Guard and joined by navy ships deployed by Frontex and from Italy, Germany, Britain, Ireland, and Spain.

Nevertheless, Mr. Edwards warned, a growing number of refugees are accessing Europe via the Western Balkans following a surge in the number of sea arrivals in Greece — the second major front in Southern Europe’s migration crisis.

UNHCR recently reported record numbers of the refugees are arriving in flimsy rubber dinghies and wooden boats on the Greek island of Lesvos, putting an enormous strain on its services and resources. Half of some 600 refugees, mainly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, who arrive daily in Greece, now come ashore on Lesvos. Arrivals there have grown from 737 in January to 5,000 in April and over 7,200 in May.

Hundreds of refugees leave the island for the Greek mainland every day after being identified, screened and registered. At present, however, there are around 2,200 to 2,500 waiting there for registration by the authorities. A screening centre in the village of Moria, a former detention centre for migrants waiting to be deported, is currently housing over 1,000 refugees.

The UN agency has long been advocating for improvements to the asylum systems across the Western Balkans and has cautioned that existing capacities remain inadequate for the scale of arrivals.

**On World Day, UN launches education appeal in fight against child labour**

12 June - The United Nations has announced it is marking the 2015 edition of the World Day Against Child Labour with a call for the international community to invest in quality education as a key step in the fight against child employment – a scourge that consumes over one hundred million children worldwide.

According to data from the UN’s International Labour Organization (ILO), an estimated 168 million children around the world between the ages of five and 14 work, many full-time and more than half in conditions deemed hazardous to their health, keeping them out of school and ensuring that their hopes for a more prosperous future remain unrealized.

“As things stand, the aspirations of many parents for their children and of children themselves for a decent education will remain unfulfilled dreams,” ILO Director-General Guy Ryder confirmed in his statement for the Day.

“Many girls and boys have no chance to attend school. Some try to combine school and work, but all too often must drop out of school well before reaching the legal age of employment and become child labourers.”

Despite some dramatic improvements which have seen the total number of child labourers shrink by one-third since the year 2000, the situation on the ground nevertheless remains dire. As a region, Asia and the Pacific still has the largest total numbers at 78 million but Sub-Saharan Africa continues to be the region with the highest incidence of child labour with some 59 million, or over 21 per cent of the child population, engaged in work which, more often than note, entails long hours in agricultural and services industries.

Mr. Ryder noted that the child labour situation was also being further aggravated by the preponderance of conflicts and crises around the globe as schoolchildren, educational facilities, and teachers suffered undue hardships caused by flare-ups in violence. With children fleeing the hostilities, added the ILO Director-General, they are often compelled to travel alone, embarking on paths that frequently lead to child labour and exploitation.

“Without adequate education, former child labourers are more likely than others to end up in poorly paid and insecure work as adults or to be unemployed. And there is a high probability that they will live in poverty and that their children will share the same fate,” he continued.
“A collective challenge and responsibility is to enable all children, girls and boys, to have access to education, quality education. Second-class education perpetuates second-class citizens. We all know that a solid education and good teachers can make a world of difference to the lives and futures of children and young people.”

As the UN mobilizes to raise awareness on the issue, it is seizing the opportunity to review the reasons for the failure to reach development targets on education and rebooting with a series of new goals and strategies.

In particular, the Organization and its affiliates are pointing to three specific calls for action including the implementation of free, compulsory and quality education for all children at least to the minimum age for admission to employment and action to reach those presently in child labour; new efforts to ensure that national policies on child labour and education are consistent and effective; and policies that ensure access to quality education and investment in the teaching profession.

Joining the call for a greater global emphasis on child education, President of the General Assembly, Sam Kutesa, similarly urged Member States to imagine a world “in which every child attended school and nobody was forced to work against their will.”

“By pursuing increasingly successful, integrated approaches - treating not just the symptoms of child labour but also targeting its roots, we have made prevention the heart of our response,” Mr. Kutesa stated.

“I call on Member States to recognize that social protection is a right, one that is central to the task of ending child labour. We must work to ensure that children have access to basic resources including nutrition, health and education, so that they may fully realize their potential.”