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Children suffering ‘dire consequences’ of conflict in northern Nigeria – UN agency

20 January - Women and children make up the vast majority of the latest wave of refugees fleeing violence in northern Nigeria, the United Nations Children’s Fund warned today as it continued its efforts to provide basic assistance, including safe water, nutrition, health, education and protection services to affected children in the region.

“Children are suffering the dire consequences of the conflict in Nigeria, losing their homes, missing out on education and risking their lives,” UNICEF’s Christophe Boulierac told reporters in Geneva.

Boko Haram’s recent attacks on Baga led a fresh wave of refugees into neighbouring countries, worsening a humanitarian crisis in the region that sees 1 million people displaced from their homes and more than 135,000 seeking refuge in Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

About 9,000 people crossed into Chad this month, a mixture of Nigerian refugees and Chadian returnees, which has brought the total number of Nigerian refugees there to over 10,000. More than 100 children arrived without a parent or a caretaker, and Mr. Boulierac said UNICEF would scale-up its presence around Lake Chad, using its office in Mao to distribute lifesaving supplies, like hygiene kits and therapeutic food as well as blankets, clothing, tents and water supply.

In Cameroon, children represent 60 per cent of the 25,000 Nigerian refugees living in Minawao camp, and in Niger, women and children make up 70 per cent of the 100,000 Nigerian refugees and returnees.
Mr. Boulierac said a recent assessment of children in the Minawao camp revealed an alarming rate of malnutrition, noting that the UNICEF is working with the Red Cross to provide nutritional screening and treatment and to create child-friendly spaces where children could receive psycho-social support. In addition, the agency built 10 clean water facilities and 160 latrines, and distributed 1,300 hygiene kits.

Vaccination efforts in Niger saw over 96,000 children protected against measles between 28 December and 3 January, while school capacities are being reinforced so refugee children could study alongside locals.

UNICEF is working also with displaced children in Nigeria, where more than 65,000 children were being treated for severe acute malnutrition. Trained community volunteers have reached over 13,000 children with psychosocial support, and more than three million children have received vitamin A supplements.

Mr. Boulierac’s briefing comes the day after Security Council Members condemned in the ‘strongest terms’ the recent escalation in attacks conducted by Boko Haram, and expressed deep concern that the activities of the Islamist extremist group, including a spate of shocking suicide bombings across northern Nigeria, are undermining peace and stability in the West and Central African region and some ‘may amount to crimes against humanity.’

Overall, Boko Haram violence in Nigeria may have forced at least one million people to flee their homes, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said today, citing a combination of IOM and Nigerian government data on people displaced from 10 states including Borno, the heart of Boko Haram activity.

**UN urges immediate halt to hostilities in Yemen, calls on all sides to abide by commitments**

20 January - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the United Nations Security Council today expressed grave concern about the deteriorating situation in Yemen, calling for an immediate ceasefire and the restoration of full authority to legitimate Government institutions.

Mr. Ban, in a statement issued through his spokesperson, also condemned the recent kidnapping of Ahmed Awadh Bin Mubarak, Director of the Office of the President, and demanded the official’s immediate release.

The statement was issued amid reports that in the Yemeni capital, Sana’a, the presidential palace has been taken over amid renewed clashes and that the Prime Minister’s residence was also under attack from the street.

The UN chief’s statement says he deplores the heavy fighting between Ansarallah armed groups and Yemeni presidential guards throughout Sana’a.

“All sides must abide by their stated commitments to resolve differences through peaceful means to ensure the full implementation of the Peace and National Partnership Agreement in accordance with the outcome of the National Dialogue Conference and the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] Initiative and Implementation Mechanism,” according to the statement. “He also reminds all sides of their obligations under relevant Security Council resolutions.”

Security Council Members echoed many of the Secretary-General’s views, stressing the importance of adherence to Resolutions 2014 (2011), 2051 (2012) and 2140 (2014) and joining the Secretary-General in urging all sides to remain fully engaged with his Special Adviser on Yemen, Jamal Benomar.

The Council said Mr. Benomar, who had briefed the 15-member body earlier via videoconference, was well placed to support parties’ efforts to resolve their differences peacefully through the Presidential Committee and Members called for restraint in Marib, where tribal fighters were reported to be on high alert for an attack by Houthi rebels.

As well as underscoring the importance of full implementation of the terms of the Peace and National Partnership
Agreement, including its Security Annex, the National Dialogue Conference Outcomes, and the GCC Initiative and Implementation Mechanism, the Security Council also underlined that President Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi is the legitimate authority based on the GCC Initiative and on election results.

In line with that, the Council emphasized that all parties and political actors in Yemen must stand with President Hadi, Prime Minister Bahah, and Yemen’s Cabinet to keep the country on track to stability and security.

Welcoming completion of a draft constitution and its referral to the National Authority and looking forward to the start of the public consultation on the draft, Security Council members called for all parties to rapidly engage in finalising the constitution in a constructive manner which responds to the aspirations of the Yemeni people.

**ISIL unlawful ‘shari’a courts’ meting out ‘monstrous’ punishments, UN warns**

20 January - The United Nations human rights office today confirmed that the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has established unlawful, so-called ‘shari’a courts’ in the territory under its control that have been carrying out cruel and inhuman punishments against men, women and children.

Those who are punished are accused of ‘violating the group’s extremist interpretations of Islamic shari’a law or for suspected disloyalty,’ said Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), at a Geneva briefing this afternoon.

“The ruthless murder of two men, who were thrown off the top of a building after having been accused of homosexual acts by a so-called court in Mosul, is another terrible example of the kind of monstrous disregard for human life that characterised ISIL’s reign of terror over areas of Iraq that were under the group’s control,” she added.

Last week, ISIL also posted photos on the web of two men being ‘crucified’ after they were accused of banditry. The men were hung up by their arms and then shot dead. Photos were also posted of a woman being stoned to death, allegedly for adultery.

OHCHR has received numerous other reports of women who had been executed by ISIL in Mosul, Iraq, and other areas under the group’s control, often immediately following sentences passed by its ‘shari’a courts.’

“Educated, professional women, particularly women who had run as candidates in elections for public office seem to be particularly at risk. In just the first two weeks of the year, reports indicated that three female lawyers were executed,” said Ms. Shamdasani.

Other civilians who are suspected of violating ISIL’s rules, or who are suspected of supporting the Government of Iraq, have also been victims. Four doctors were recently killed in central Mosul, allegedly after refusing to treat ISIL fighters. On 1 January, ISIL reportedly executed 15 civilians from the Jumaili Sunni Arab tribe in al-Shihabi area, Garma district, Fallujah.

“They were apparently shot dead in front of a large crowd for their suspected cooperation with Iraqi Security Forces. In another incident, on 9 January, ISIL executed at least 14 men in a public square in Dour, north of Tikrit, for refusing to pledge allegiance to it,” Ms. Shamdasani confirmed.

OHCHR has also been following reports of the release of a group of sick and elderly Yazidis, which included accounts that a ransom was paid. There are also reports that a ransom has been demanded made for Japanese hostages. The Japanese Government is in the process of verifying whether the video of the hostages is authentic, she said in response to questions.

Finally, she said OHCHR will continue to document human rights abuses and violations taking place in Iraq and is expected to present a report to the Human Rights Council in March.
‘No room for complacency’ UN says, urging vigilance in Ebola fight as West Africa marks progress

20 January - One year has passed since Ebola began spreading in West Africa, ravaging villages and local economies, and yet, amid dramatic improvements in the three most affected countries, the United Nations can now report progress in the fight against the deadly virus. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced today as he urged the global community to help the region regain its footing following the unprecedented outbreak.

Delivering remarks to an informal UN General Assembly meeting on Ebola earlier today, the Secretary-General told a host of delegates and UN senior officials that his recent trip to West Africa convinced him that defeating the outbreak is ultimately possible but that the challenge remains in prevailing quickly and in minimizing overall suffering. This, he added, would demand ‘collective determination and clarity of focus’ by all international actors and national stakeholders.

The Secretary-General briefed Member States alongside General Assembly President Sam Kutesa, as well as Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, head of the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER), and the UN Special Envoy for Ebola, Dr. David Nabarro, who both joined in via videoconference.

“Strong national leadership with local community engagement and international support is slowing the incidence of new cases in many places,” Mr. Ban said. “Through all our efforts, we have learned that our response must be regional in nature to avoid a risk of re-transmission.”

According to the latest data from the UN World Health Organization (WHO), the three hardest hit countries – Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone – have all reported their lowest weekly total of new cases in months.

Guinea reported its lowest weekly total of new cases since 17 of August 2014. Liberia has had no confirmed cases nationally for the final two days of the week ending the 11th of January 2015. And Sierra Leone has recorded its lowest total of new cases since 31 August 2014.

However, despite peaking optimism and “massive support” from the international community, the Secretary-General also urged caution, noting that Ebola remained a versatile and fearsome adversary. Pockets of the disease, in fact, are alive in certain parts of West Africa with the western part of Sierra Leone still suffering from high incidences of transmission.

“The outbreak has taught us that there is no room for complacency,” he continued. “Resources continue to be required to adjust the response, monitor chains of transmission and end the outbreak.”

Mr. Ban warned that his Trust Fund dedicated to Ebola response efforts had been “depleted to fund priority gaps” and he called on Member States “to sustain the tremendous momentum” achieved so far in fighting the epidemic.

At the same time, he noted, post-Ebola recovery efforts would also have to be considered in an effort to help revive those communities debilitated by the disease.

“The virus has eaten away at the fabric of society,” he concluded, “at how people live, how they love, how they die and care for loved ones in their final days.”

“We must, collectively, take stock of how we can build longer-term resilience to withstand future outbreaks.”

Echoing this sentiment, Assembly President Kutesa lauded the Ebola response for having made “significant improvements”
in reducing the spread of the disease through case identification and contact tracing, isolation and treatment, as well as safe burials and social mobilization. But, he warned, the rippling aftereffects of the outbreak were “not yet over.”

“As we shift from the immediacy of the initial outbreak, we must now direct our attention to the region’s long-term recovery effort,” he explained.

Throughout West Africa, Mr. Kutesa continued, markets for essential goods struggle to remain open, children are missing critical school time, and ‘critical’ planting cycles have been missed.

“The impact of Ebola is being felt all the way down to the village level,” he added.

From Freetown, Sierra Leone, Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed, in his first briefing to the Assembly, said that in the few weeks he has headed up UNMEER, he has travelled to all the affected countries and met with their respective presidents, as well as UN global response partners and religious leaders, Ebola survivors and care workers.

Over UNMEER’s first 90 days in existence, significant progress has been made in slowing and containing the world’s largest-ever Ebola outbreak. “Only three months ago, the epidemic was ravaging West Africa, with 4,000 people infected [in October] alone, and caseloads were doubling every three weeks,” he said, but, thanks to the global response, the most dire scenario – that 10,000 people would be infected every week by December – the epidemic had been slowed.

“We are now beginning to see an overall decline in the number of new cases,” he said, echoing the Secretary-General’s feeling that the goal of ending Ebola in Liberia is within reach. At the same time, the Government is aware that it must not give in to complacency. While western areas of Sierra Leone were still seeing new cases, thanks to the response plan enacted by the Government, the virus was slowing its spread.

Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed said that a large part of the progress to date was due to the actions of the affected communities themselves. Indeed, the affected communities had changed their behaviours adjusted traditional practices that increased the likelihood of virus transmission, such as the washing of bodies of the deceased pre-burial. Further, thanks to national, regional and global health workers, thousands of West Africans now knew how to spot the symptoms of Ebola and knew what to do to prevent its spread.

“The concerted efforts of the international community, the United Nations and its partners have also made a crucial contribution,” he continued, adding that the common thread exposed by the virus has been a truly global response to bring it to an end. “Donors have provided nearly $2.2 billion in humanitarian assistance and many countries have provided medical teams and logistical capacities to support the response,” he added, thanking, particularly the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as well as the many national and international non-governmental organizations working on the front lines to tackle the virus.

“However…stopping this outbreak will still require significant efforts,” he said, declaring that the philosophy that would guide his work from here on would be what he termed his ‘three c’s’ approach: recognizing the leadership of the countries affected; engaging communities; and coordinating effectively.
**Nepal: UN agency continues distribution of emergency health kits to flood survivors**

**20 January** - Five months after a series of landslides and subsequent flooding brought devastation to large swathes of Nepal, thousands of survivors continue to remain exposed to bitter temperatures and wintry conditions, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has warned.

The UN agency – which has a mandate to focus on improving sexual and reproductive health issues for women around the world – has been active on the ground since mid-August when the Government of Nepal launched an appeal for humanitarian assistance following the massive flooding and landslides which affected some 130,000 people across 23 of the country’s districts.

The agency has since been distributing so-called ‘dignity kits’ containing warm winter clothes, flashlights, soap, and sanitary napkins, as well as reproductive health kits to uprooted families. The reproductive health kits, for their part, are made up of medicines, equipment to support safe deliveries, family planning supplies and supplies to aid in the treatment of rape.

Overall, each kit is designed to provide reproductive health services to between 10,000 and 30,000 women for a three-month period.

In a press release issued last week, Giulia Vallese, UNFPA Representative to Nepal, confirmed that an extra push to distribute flood-response provisions in the four worst-affected districts – Banke, Bardiya, Dang, and Surkhet – had also taken place.

“This support is in accordance with UNFPA Nepal’s commitment to providing reproductive health services, prevent and respond to gender based violence, prevent transmission of HIV and provide much-needed hygiene supplies,” she explained.

UNFPA noted that it would continue to work with the Government and other UN agencies to ensure that the needs of those women and girls still reeling from the disaster continue to be met.

“For many women and their families, the hardships are likely to continue until spring,” the agency said.

**Ban welcomes transfer to ICC of alleged perpetrator of Uganda war crimes**

**20 January** - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has welcomed the transfer to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague today of senior Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) commander Dominic Ongwen, as well as his surrender on 6 January in the Central African Republic.

The ICC is currently escorting Mr. Ongwen – against whom the Court back in 2005 issued an arrest warrant for war crimes committed in Uganda – to its detention centre in the Netherlands. Upon arrival, Mr. Ongwen will receive a medical visit and will appear, as soon as possible, before the Judges in the presence of a Defence Lawyer. The date of the initial appearance hearing will be announced soon.

In a statement released by the Secretary-General’s spokesperson this afternoon, Mr. Ban highlighted that Mr. Ongwen's
transfer to the ICC marks an ‘important milestone in accountability,’ with the first LRA commander being brought before the Court.

“It is a step forward in efforts to bring justice to the thousands of victims of LRA violence in Uganda, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and CAR [Central African Republic] over the past 28 years,” the UN chief said.

The Secretary-General welcomed the cooperation among the Governments of the CAR, Uganda, the United States, Belgium and the Netherlands, and the support provided by the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the CAR (MINUSCA), the African Union Regional Task Force (AU-RTF) and the ICC in facilitating the expeditious transfer of Mr. Ongwen to The Hague.

Mr. Ban also paid tribute to the efforts of the AU-RTF and urged all troop-contributing countries of the region to remain committed to ending the threat posed by the LRA and bringing to justice LRA leader Joseph Kony. He called on the LRA to immediately disarm.

Mr. Ongwen, who was transferred to ICC custody on January 17, 2015, was the alleged Commander of the Sinia Brigade of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). On 8 July 2005, ICC Judges issued an arrest warrant against Mr. Ongwen for three counts of crimes against humanity (murder; enslavement; inhumane acts of inflicting serious bodily injury and suffering) and four counts of war crimes (murder; cruel treatment of civilians; intentionally directing an attack against a civilian population; pillaging) allegedly committed in 2004 within the context of the situation in Uganda.

He is part of a case that is also filed against Joseph Kony, Vincent Otti and Okot Odhiambo.

During the initial appearance hearing, the Judges of Pre-Trial Chamber II will verify the identity of the suspect and the language in which he is able to follow the proceedings. Mr Ongwen will be informed of the charges against him. The Judges will also schedule a date for the opening of the confirmation of charges hearing, a preliminary step to decide whether the case will be referred to a trial or not.

In a statement from ICC today, the President of the Assembly of States Parties (ASP) to the Court’s founding Rome Statute, Minister Sidiki Kab, said that Mr. Ongwen’s transfer to the custody of the Court constituted an important success for the Rome Statute system.

“The affected communities will have the opportunity to see international justice address the horrific violence that took place in Uganda. I join the Court in its appreciation to all those States and organizations whose cooperation made possible the successful implementation of the Court's decisions,” Mr. Kaba emphasized.

**Central African Republic: UN relief official calls for kidnapped aid worker’s release**

20 January - A senior United Nations relief official in the Central African Republic (CAR) has strongly condemned the abduction of a French aid worker by unknown assailants and called for her immediate release, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said today.

According to media reports, the unnamed 67-year old worker was kidnapped on Monday in the CAR capital of Bangui – the latest incident involving a humanitarian worker in the war-torn country. Since January 2014, 18 humanitarian workers have been killed in the country and more than 130 security incidents directed at such workers have been documented.

In a press release, the UN interim Humanitarian Coordinator, Mohamed Malick Fall, called upon the perpetrators for her ‘immediate and safe release’ and deplored such acts which, he said, come ‘at a time when the needs among the Central African people are so great.’

“This abduction threatens the whole humanitarian effort for displaced people and populations in need,” the press release
continued.

“The humanitarian community appeals to all Central Africans and international forces to work towards her immediate release as well as facilitate the delivery of urgent humanitarian assistance to people in need country-wide.”

More than two years of civil war and sectarian violence have displaced thousands of people in the CAR amid continuing clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka alliance and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian.

According to UN estimates, nearly 440,000 people remain displaced inside the country while some 190,000 have sought asylum across the borders. At the same time, more than 36,000 people – including the Peuhl ethnic group – remain trapped in enclaves across the country, hoping to find asylum in neighbouring States.

Since September 2014, MINUSCA has arrested over 200 individuals in its support to the CAR authorities to maintain rule of law. Nonetheless, the situation in the country remains tenuous, with Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Hervé Ladsous, recently warning that the atmosphere in the Central African Republic was potentially explosive.

**UN chief appoints new Special Envoy in move to end Tuberculosis**

20 January - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appointed Eric Goosby of the United States as his new Special Envoy on Tuberculosis (TB), the UN Spokesperson’s office announced today.

According to a press release, Dr. Goosby will work towards boosting the profile of the fight against TB and promoting the adoption, financing and implementation of the UN World Health Organization’s (WHO) global End TB Strategy after 2015.

In addition, he will push for the achievement of the Strategy’s “ambitious international targets” for tuberculosis prevention, care and control while also pursuing the TB 2015 targets described in the Millennium Development Goals.

“Dr. Goosby will address these issues by raising the profile of TB in the global, regional and national political and development agendas and by calling for countries with high burden of tuberculosis, as well as donor countries, civil society and the private sector, to promote key actions that contribute to end the tuberculosis epidemic, including resource mobilization for research and development,” the Secretary-General’s spokesperson said.

UN data show that in 2013 an estimated 9 million people developed TB and 1.5 million men, women and children died from the disease which largely affects the poorest and most marginalized communities around the world.

Moreover, the problem of antimicrobial resistance, or drug resistance, poses a great threat to tuberculosis control and remains a major concern for global health security.

As a result, the End TB Strategy aims to end the global TB epidemic, with targets to reduce TB deaths by 95 per cent and to cut new cases by 90 per cent between 2015 and 2035.

Through his new appointment, Dr. Goosby will work closely with the WHO in providing support in carrying out what the Spokesperson’s office has described as a “crucial mission for global health.”
Southeast Asia: UN rights office appeals for halt in executions for drug crimes

20 January - The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) today expressed concern over the use of the death penalty for drug-related crimes in Southeast Asia and urged authorities to abolish the punishment amid reports that eight more people had been sentenced to death for heroin trafficking.

“According to international human rights jurisprudence, capital punishment could only be applied to the crime of murder or intentional killing,” OHCHR spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani told reporters in Geneva, where the Office is based.

“Drug-related offences, economic crimes, political crimes, adultery, and offences relating to consensual same-sex relationships did not fall under the threshold of ‘most serious crimes’ required under international law for application of the death penalty,” Ms. Shamdasani said.

OHCHR expressed its concern about the continued use of the death penalty for drug-related crimes in parts of South East Asia, where last Sunday, six people convicted of drug offences were executed in Indonesia in spite of several national and international appeals. Further, a court in Vietnam today reportedly sentenced eight people, including two women, to death for heroin trafficking.

The Office is particularly concerned about the respect for due process in such cases after Indonesian President Joko Widodo reportedly stated that he would reject all requests for clemency for drug-related crimes, the Spokeswomen said.

OHCHR urged the Indonesian authorities to reinstate a moratorium on the death penalty and to conduct a thorough review of all requests for pardon with a view to commutation of sentence, Ms. Shamdasani said.

According to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Indonesia has ratified, "anyone sentenced to death shall have the right to seek pardon or commutation of the sentence," according to the spokeswoman.

OHCHR also called on Vietnam not to carry out those executions of the eight people sentenced today, to ensure judicial review of the sentences, and to consider elimination of the death penalty for drug-related crimes.

In Southeast Asia, drug-related crimes are punishable by death in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.

While those crimes are also punishable by death in Brunei Darussalam, the Lao Peoples’ Democratic Republic and Myanmar, those three countries have not carried out executions since 1957, 1989 and 1988, respectively.

The OHCHR Spokesperson said the International Narcotics Control Board had encouraged States that still imposed the death penalty for drug-related offenses to abolish that punishment.
UN agencies ramp up aid efforts to flood-hit Southern Africa

20 January - With Malawi, Mozambique and Madagascar continuing to face torrential rains and worsening floods, United Nations agencies are scaling up relief efforts to assist those affected and displaced in the southern African countries.

In Madagascar, ‘despite the severe impact, aid workers on the ground estimate that the in-country response capacities, including prepositioned stocks, of the Government and its UN and NGO [non-governmental organization] partners could address the current needs,’ Jens Laerke, spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), told journalists in Geneva today regarding the situation in the country.

The tropical storm Chedza has now killed some 14 people and displaced over 44,000 in Madagascar. A total of 101,000 people have been affected by the storm and the flooding.

“There has been severe damage of infrastructure as nearly 4,000 houses have been destroyed or damaged,” said Mr. Laerke, adding that “the storm also damaged eight health centres and 200 schools.”

Meanwhile, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) is providing emergency food assistance to some 15,000 people affected by the passage of the storm in the southwest and southeast of Madagascar and in the country’s capital, Antananarivo, added Elisabeth Byrs, spokesperson for WFP, in the same briefing.

Moreover, WFP has distributed two tons of nutritious energy biscuits to young children and vulnerable people who are accommodated in temporary housing in Antananarivo, as an addition to rations food received from local authorities to boost nutrition.

According to Ms. Byrs, WFP will also assist 5,000 people staying in temporary accommodation of very precarious conditions in a poor neighbourhood of Antananarivo, by providing 23 tonnes of rice, pulses and high energy biscuits.

In addition, WFP has distributed 17 tons of rice, pulses and enriched oil in Manakara Vohipeno and the southeast of the country.

Turning to Malawi, Mr. Laerke said that search and rescue operations continue with relief supplies being dispatched to affected areas, and such assistance includes food and non-food items and chlorine for water treatment in affected communities.

WFP began to deliver maize, beans, oil and super-cereal – a fortified corn blend – from in-country stocks to those displaced in Chikwawa district of Malawi on Saturday. However, Ms. Byrs stressed that the stocks need to be replaced once the crisis is over.

Distributions continue in that district and emergencies rations are due to arrive in Malawi today from WFP-managed Dubai Humanitarian Depot.

The estimated number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) remains at 121,000, with at least 50 people killed and 153 missing. The number of IDPs may increase as need assessments are still ongoing, Mr. Laerke noted.

In Mozambique, rescue activities are still ongoing, but mainly by air, as over 90,000 people have been affected by the floods in the central and southern parts of the country.

According to Mr. Laerke, at least 2,500 people have been brought to safety by the national Civil Protection Unit. He also added that latest report shows that 34 accommodation centres are hosting more than 28,000 people, as over 10,000 houses and 383 classrooms have been destroyed.
International Monetary Fund downgrades global growth forecast, despite cheaper oil

20 January - Despite a sharp decline in oil prices, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its latest economic outlook today lowered growth expectations for this year and the next for most countries due to slowdown in investment, and urged governments and central banks to pursue economic stimulation policies and structural reforms to boost growth.

According to its World Economic Outlook (WEO) update, the IMF now expects growth of 3.5 per cent this year, compared with the previous estimate of 3.8 per cent which it made in October. The growth forecast for 2016 has also been cut, to 3.7 per cent. It also showed increased growth prospects for the United States.

In addition, the Outlook, released on the eve of the annual Davos World Economic Forum, found increasing divergence between the United States, on the one hand, and the euro area and Japan, on the other.

For 2015, the U.S. economic growth has been revised up to 3.6 per cent, largely due to more robust private domestic demand. But the euro area has been revised down 1.1 per cent, due mostly to weaker investment prospects and despite the support from lower oil prices, further monetary policy easing, a more neutral fiscal policy stance, and the recent euro depreciation.

“In the medium run, the future [in Europe] doesn’t look as bright. Investment is weak and so, for most countries, we’re revising down, not much, but down. Now, this being said, I think we may be a bit pessimistic about the effects of the price of oil so in the jargon of economists there’s an upside risk, in which, in fact, the price of oil will help more and things will turn out better, but we can’t count on it,” said Olivier Blanchard, IMF’s chief economist.

In Japan, where the economy fell into technical recession in the third quarter of 2014, growth has been revised down as well. However, policy responses, together with the oil price boost and yen depreciation, are expected to strengthen growth this year and the next.

In emerging markets and developing economies, growth is projected to remain broadly stable at 4.3 per cent in 2015 and to increase to 4.7 percent in 2016 – a weaker pace than forecast last October.

In China, where investment growth has slowed, the forecast has been marked down to below 7 per cent. “The policy makers in China have decided to reduce some of the dangers that they were facing on housing, on shadow banking, are taking the right measures. They are also trying to reorient growth from investment to consumption so all this is desirable but it’s leading to a lower growth rate,” Mr. Blanchard explained.

“Now, this is having an effect on the rest of the world through trade so Asian countries around China will have other things equal, lower growth, because they will be exporting less. We think the effect is relatively small. If you wanted a number, one percent less growth in China leads to about .3 per cent less growth in Asia,” he added.

The sharpest decline of all is for Russia, whose economic outlook is much weaker, with growth forecast at – 3.0 per cent for 2015, as a result of the economic impact of sharply lower oil prices and increased geopolitical tensions.
DR Congo: UN Mission deplores loss of life as police, protesters clash in capital

20 January - The head of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) today condemned the deaths and injuries that occurred when protests turned violent on Monday in the country’s capital, Kinshasa.

Martin Kobler, head of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission (MONUSCO), deplored the deaths and injuries in the wake of the clashes that occurred yesterday morning as “a result of violent demonstrations and the ensuing use of lethal force by the security force.”

“The use of force by law enforcement officers must always be necessary, proportionate, and a measure of last resort,” he emphasized in a statement from his office.

According to MONUSCO, the protests came following the Government opposition’s call for protests against the revision of the electoral law voted by the National Assembly on Saturday evening. Demonstrators gathered in front of the ‘Palais du Peuple’ and a violent crackdown by security forces with tear gas and live ammunition ensued.

Clashes with law enforcement officers took place in Lemba, Matete, Ngaba and Victoire, neighbourhoods surrounding the ‘Palais du Peuple’ in Kinshasa.

In some districts of the capital city, shops were looted and buses torched.

“I also appeal to the opposition to demonstrate peacefully. Protests must be calm and carried out in compliance with the law,” said Mr. Kobler.

Preliminary reports put the estimated toll at several dead and injured among both the demonstrators and the law enforcement officers.

Protests also took place yesterday morning in Goma, in North Kivu province and Bukavu, in South Kivu province.

UN lauds Somalia as country ratifies landmark children’s rights treaty

20 January - The United Nations today applauded Somalia’s ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – a move which was praised as being an “important step” towards protecting and promoting the rights of all children in the war-torn nation and an explicit commitment towards improving the lives of its youngest citizens.

“By ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the government of Somalia is making an investment in the wellbeing of its children, and thus in the future of its society,” Anthony Lake, Executive Director of the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), declared in a press release, as he welcomed the news.

“The central message of the Convention is that every child deserves a fair start in life,” he continued. “What can be more important than that?”

The CRC was adopted by the General Assembly on 20 November 1989 and has been ratified by 195 countries, including
Somalia, making it the most widely ratified international human rights treaty in history. As of today, only two countries have yet to ratify the landmark treaty – South Sudan and the United States.

Nonetheless, its widespread adoption marked the first time that children were explicitly recognized as having specific rights and the treaty itself is considered to be a powerful human rights tool.

At a ceremony marking the ratification and held at a local school in the Somali capital of Mogadishu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia (SRSG), Nicholas Kay, welcomed the Somali Government’s dedication to improving the lives of its children alongside Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and before hundreds of schoolchildren.

“As the nation recovers from decades of conflict, the Federal Government and its international partners have a duty to protect and serve Somalia’s most vulnerable communities,” Mr. Kay affirmed.

“I hope Somalia will now also begin the process of becoming party to the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child,” he added, promising the UN’s support to Somali authorities in that regard.

While the CRC is a universally agreed set of non-negotiable standards and obligations, providing protection and support for the rights of children, its three Optional Protocols deal, respectively, with protecting children from trafficking, prostitution and child pornography; prohibiting their recruitment in armed conflict; and allowing children to bring forward their complaints to the UN if their rights are being abused.

For her part, Leila Zerrougui, the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, celebrated Somalia’s move in bringing us closer to our common objective of protecting the country’s children from the impact of conflict,’ and echoed Mr. Kay’s appeal for the Somali authorities to move forward in ratifying the Optional Protocols, including the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

In addition, she called on the Government to maintain its commitment to the objectives of the Children, Not Soldiers campaign by working towards a child-free army by the end of 2016.

The ratification process will be finalized once the Government of Somalia deposits the instruments of ratification at UN Headquarters in New York.

UN study predicts rising global unemployment due to slower growth, inequality, turbulence

20 January - An extra 10 million people worldwide are likely to be unemployed by 2019, a new United Nations report has said today, pointing to slower growth, widening inequalities and economic turbulence as reasons behind the trend.

According to the World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2015 (WESO) report, released today by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the next four years will see the total number of people out of work worldwide climb from the current 201 million to 212 million.

“More than 61 million jobs have been lost since the start of the global crisis in 2008,” said ILO Director-General Guy Ryder. “This means the jobs crisis is far from over so there is no place for complacency.”

Young workers aged 15-24 are particularly hit by the crisis, with a global youth unemployment rate of almost 13 per cent in 2014 and a further increase expected in coming years. By contrast, older workers have fared relatively well since the start of the global financial crisis in 2008.

“The good news is that the number of workers in vulnerable jobs and working poverty has fallen around the globe. However, it is still not acceptable that almost half of the world’s workers lack access to basic necessities and decent work,” Ryder said. “The situation is even worse for women.”
Inequality is rising and is predicted to continue doing so, according to the report, with the world’s richest 10 per cent earning 30 to 40 per cent of total income and the poorest 10 per cent earn between just two and seven per cent. The situation creates uncertainty for enterprise investment and has slowed the rebound from the financial crisis.

“If low wages lead people to consume less, and investment remains subdued, this obviously has a negative impact on growth. Income inequality in some advanced economies now approach levels observed among emerging economies. By contrast, the emerging economies made some progress in reducing their high levels of inequality,” said the ILO head.

The inequality trends have also undermined trust in Governments, keeping the risk of social unrest high, particularly in countries where unemployment is highest or rising quickest. Social unrest has shot up since the beginning of the financial crisis in 2008, with only developed economies and countries in South-East Asia and the Pacific region seeing a reduction – though even there, levels are significantly above historical averages.

Unemployment growth is fuelled in part by structural factors, like major shifts in demand for skills. Globally, there is a shorter supply of routine middle-skilled jobs, like bookkeepers and clerical workers, while availability of both low-skilled, non-routine jobs, such as security personnel, and high-skilled non-routine cognitive jobs, such as lawyers and software engineers has increased.

“The trends we see are worrying but we can improve the overall economic picture if we tackle underlying weaknesses, in particular the continued lack of aggregate demand, stagnation in the Eurozone, uncertain prospects for productive investment, especially among small enterprises, and mounting inequality,” said Ryder.

World Bank: worst-affected countries ‘crippled’ by economic impact of Ebola

20 January - While the Ebola epidemic shows its first signs of slowing and confidence grows about stopping the outbreak and reaching the target of zero new cases, a new World Bank Group report on economic impacts of the disease says its effects will continue to cripple the economies of hard-hit Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

“As welcome as these latest signs are, we cannot afford to be complacent,” said Jim Yong Kim, President of the World Bank Group. “Until we have zero new Ebola cases, the risk of continued severe economic impact to the three countries and beyond remains unacceptably high.”

Despite transmission rates in the three worst-affected countries showing significant signs of slowing, the Bank expects around $1.6 billion of lost economic growth to be recorded in those States over the course of 2015, according to its report – The Economic Impact of Ebola on Sub-Saharan Africa: Updated Estimates for 2015 – released today ahead of the 2015 World Economic Forum in Davos.

The report describes a four per cent fall over 2014 in the 11.3 per cent growth rate projected for Sierra Leone before the crisis. Guinea and Liberia are also expected to see large reductions, with the total fiscal impact for the three countries in 2014 topping $500 million, about five per cent of their combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

With investors steering clear, growth estimates for 2015 have also been revised down, the report notes. Guinea and Sierra Leone are expected to see their economies contract – by 0.2 per cent and two percent respectively – while predicted growth for Liberia has been reduced to three percent. Pre-Ebola growth estimates for 2015 in Guinea were 4.3 per cent; in Sierra Leone were 8.9 per cent; and in Liberia were 6.8 per cent.

That implies total forgone income in 2015 of around $1.6 billion, with around $500 million lost by Guinea, $900 million by Sierra Leone and $200 million by Liberia – more than 12 per cent of their combined gross domestic products (GDPs).

Despite its warnings, the new report revises the Bank’s previous estimate of the probability of the epidemic’s spread and the associated economic costs beyond the three most-affected countries.
Thanks in large part to the intensive global and national responses over the past several months, the projected downside scenario of $25 billion in economic losses for 2015 no longer applies. For sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, the range of downside risk extends from a low of $500 million to a high of $6.2 billion.

Region-wide losses could be closer to the report's higher end estimate of $6 billion if Ebola does spread beyond the three worst affected countries, while the minimum expected loss of $500 million is attributed to eroded consumer and investor confidence since the outbreak, as well as disruption to travel and cross-border trade.

Containment and preparedness efforts have dramatically limited the potential impact, as have public health improvements, such as safer burials, better detection, public awareness campaigns, more health workers and facilities, and better contact tracing. At the same time, neighbouring countries have contributed to reduced risk of spread across borders having adopted fast and effective containment measures.

“This report demonstrates why all countries should make investing in pandemic preparedness a top priority for 2015,” said Mr. Kim, noting that a major lesson from the outbreak is the need for much quicker global responses to disease outbreaks.

“It points to the need for a global pandemic emergency financing facility that will enable the world to respond much more quickly and effectively to any future deadly outbreaks, and avoid the tragic and unnecessary human and economic costs that have resulted from the Ebola epidemic.”

The Bank Group is mobilizing nearly US$1 billion in financing for the countries hardest hit by the Ebola crisis. This includes US$518 million from IDA for the epidemic response, and at least $450 million from IFC, a member of the World Bank Group, to enable trade, investment, and employment in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.