UN Daily News

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Issue DH/6970
Thursday, 20 August 2015

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UN refugee agency welcomes joint declaration by France and United Kingdom on situation in Calais

20 August - The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) today welcomed the joint declaration signed by the Governments of France and the United Kingdom on the situation in Calais and the associated action plan to deal with it.

“I appreciate that the two Governments have taken a common approach to address the complex situation in Calais,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres in a press release.

“I welcome, in particular, the humanitarian and protection elements of the plan, while fully recognizing the importance of combatting smuggling and trafficking, which exploit vulnerable individuals.”

Mr. Guterres highlighted that to be effective in cracking down on smugglers and traffickers, the number of legal avenues for people in need of protection to come to Europe must be increased.

“Many of those in Calais are likely to be in need of international protection, having come from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan and Syria. We look forward to working closely with France and the UK to support efforts to find solutions for them,” continued the High Commissioner.

UNHCR specifically welcomed measures to improve living and reception conditions in the Nord-Pas-de- Calais region – as well as in other locations – and the parallel efforts to address asylum access and accommodation issues. The action plan, which addresses the needs of the vulnerable in Calais, includes the rapidly growing group of women and children.

“Calais remains only a symptom of broader refugee and migration movements and UNHCR hopes for robust action to be taken in implementing the European Agenda on Migration and in establishing effective forms of international cooperation, including with countries of origin, first asylum and transit,” Mr. Guterres concluded.

The increased number of sea arrivals is due to the deadly and unabated conflict in Syria as well as the deteriorating conditions for Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries. Continued support to refugees and countries bearing the brunt of global forced displacement is vital.

Several thousand asylum-seekers and migrants from Syria, Iraq, Ethiopia, Sudan, Pakistan and Afghanistan are living in makeshift camps or in the streets in Calais, France. Photo: UNHCR/C. Vander Eecken
In early August, the High Commissioner called for a comprehensive response to the situation in Calais. According to UNHCR, there are now an estimated 3,000 refugees and migrants in Calais and in the northern coast of France – virtually the same number as last November. However, the rising death toll among refugees and migrants, at least 10 since the beginning of June, attempting to cross the Channel from Calais to the UK is a “worrying” development.

Central African Republic: UN mission determined to ‘stamp out’ sexual exploitation by peacekeepers

20 August - Condemning all cases of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by its personnel, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) today said that it is determined to “stamp out” this “extremely seriously problem.”

“It is a blight on the Mission and on the extremely good work that the overwhelming majority of MINUSCA personnel are doing. We are determined to solve this problem, and ensure that the UN Mission fulfills its mandate, serves the people of the Central African Republic (CAR), and that includes in particular the victims of these types of abuses,” Deputy Special Representative in CAR, Diane Corner, said today during a videoconference from the capital, Bangui.

She told journalists in New York that 13 cases of sexual abuse allegedly involving uniformed personnel of MINUSCA have been recorded since the re-hatting of the Mission on 15 September 2014. “Of these cases, 9 involve alleged attacks on minors,” Mrs. Corner pointed out.

These allegations come on the heels of a case reported on 11 August by the human rights group Amnesty International, also regarding MINUSCA “blue helmets.” The day after the incident was revealed, MINUSCA chief General Babacar Gaye, resigned at the request of the Secretary-General.

“The sharp rise in cases reported in the last 3 months is of concern. However, I believe that this is at least in part due to the rollout across CAR of MINUSCA’s network of field offices,” explained the Deputy Secretary-General, adding that 11 of those offices cover all regions of the country, are staffed by political, civil affairs, human rights, child and women protection officers, to whom such cases can be reported.

Some of the sexual exploitation cases have been reported to the Mission by local journalists and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and in some cases the families involved. “This shows a level of trust on the part of the population in MINUSCA personnel. We are seeking to do all we can to build this level of trust, by providing an account of our actions,” stressed the UN official.

The Mission’s response to these reports has been to establish quickly whether the allegations are credible, and then to look after the welfare of the victims, who receive medical and psychosocial care.

In cases involving MINUSCA’s troops, it is the responsibility of the troop contributing countries to investigate, while the Mission must preserve the evidence, which provides the basis for convictions, punishment to the perpetrators, Mrs. Corner continued.

“In all cases involving troops serving with a UN peacekeeping operation, the UN has to depend on [these countries] and their justice system to deliver accountability,” she underlined, noting that today, the Minister of justice of the Democratic Republic of Congo gave instructions to the military prosecutor to take action on the dossier presented by the Organization.

Devoting significant efforts to prevention, MINUSCA is making sure that its troops undergo training, including on sexual exploitation and abuse, prior to their deployment in country, and once on the field. Certain designated locations are out of bounds, and curfews apply to both civilian and military personnel, underscored Mrs. Corner.

“Protection of civilians is the first priority of our mandate, and we take this task extremely seriously.”
UN chief urges Burundian President to ‘pursue path of inclusivity and reconciliation’

**20 August** - Noting the inauguration today of Pierre Nkurunziza for his third term as President of Burundi, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged him to “pursue a path of inclusivity and reconciliation,” and reiterated his call on all Burundian stakeholders to undertake a broad and transparent political dialogue.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson in New York, Mr. Ban took note of President Nkurunziza’s inauguration and reiterated his call for all Burundian stakeholders to undertake an inclusive and transparent political dialogue under the leadership of the East African Community (EAC) Facilitator, President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda.

“He reiterates the readiness of the United Nations to support such a dialogue,” the statement continued, adding that the creation of a government of national unity, as called for in the 6 July EAC summit communiqué, needs to derive from “such a genuine and open dialogue, which is necessary to overcome existing deep political divisions.”

The Secretary-General also noted President Nkurunziza’s stated intention to serve as President of all Burundians and “he urges the President to pursue a path of inclusivity and reconciliation in this spirit,” the statement concluded.

Burundi has been in the grips of a political crisis since late April, when Mr. Nkurunziza was put on the ballot for a controversial third term. Tensions intensified when he won the July 21 election. More than 100,000 people have fled to neighbouring countries in the weeks ahead of and following the polls.

Tensions remain high – just last week, the UN human rights office warned that the situation is spiralling out of control amid a spate of deadly election related violence – and Mr. Ban has repeatedly appealed for an end to politically – motivated violence and urged all Burundians to peacefully settle their differences without delay.

During a phone call with Mr. Nkurunziza on 6 August, the Secretary-General urged him to resume the political dialogue, which had been suspended since 19 July. He also encouraged the Burundian authorities to work closely with the Ugandan-led facilitation on behalf of the East African Community.

At Security Council, UN officials spotlight need for effective and accountable security institutions

**20 August** - The Security Council today turned its attention to the need to develop effective, affordable and accountable security institutions, with senior United Nations officials representing peacekeeping, development and conflict-related sexual violence outlining concrete steps to lay the foundations for rule of law, peace and sustainable development.

“Only by promoting people’s security and safety, human rights and democratic oversight in the security sector can we lay the foundations for rule of law, peace and sustainable development,” Assistant Administrator for the Crisis Response Unit of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Izumi Nakamitsu told the 15-member Council.

Joining Ms. Nakamitsu at the Council’s special briefing on security sector reform were Dmitry Titov, the Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and Zainab Bangura Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual
Violence in Conflict.

Ms. Nakamitsu said security sector reform required both concerted efforts in the lifetime of UN peace operations and longer-term, sustained support. It was critical, therefore, to sequence and strategically prioritize various tasks. Addressing the negative power bases in the security services of post-conflict countries is one of the most challenging aspects of post-conflict reconstruction, she said, stressing the need for predictable and reliable funding sources for national capacity-building efforts.

“We must look at security in the broader context of promoting safe and secure environments for communities, especially for women, and in terms of facilitating people's participation in efforts to strengthen security institutions,” she said. “We must also pay more attention to advancing gender equality and security for women.”

“These complex situations require a comprehensive and coordinated response from the UN system and international community,” the UNDP official said.

In her remarks, Ms. Bangura said “a comprehensive response to conflict-related sexual violence must include proactive and purposeful engagement with the security sector, particularly in settings where the security services may have been involved in the commission of sexual violence.”

Citing “the critical nexus between sexual violence crimes and dysfunctional security sector reform processes, or the incomplete disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants,” Ms. Bangura gave “tangible results” from initiatives underway such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Guinea.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), she said, in the 2014 reporting period, military tribunals convicted 135 individuals, including 76 members of the armed forces, 41 members of the national police and 18 members of armed groups, of sexual violence crimes,” she said.

And in Guinea, Ms. Bangura continued, a team of experts has provided technical support to a domestic panel of judges established to investigate and prosecute crimes committed against opposition supporters, including at least 109 cases of sexual violence, has resulted in 16 indictments, including against high-ranking military officials, and, most recently, former president Dadis Camara.

Moving forward, she stressed that sexual violence prevention should be mainstreamed in all reform processes and be viewed as a fundamental indicator of programme success. Greater representation of women in security institutions at all levels was particularly important to help create forces that respected and protected women and children, in times both of war and peace.

For his part, Mr. Titov stressed that security sector professionalization should be at the core of the mandates and activities of UN peace operations where appropriate. “Well-trained, well-supported and service-oriented police and military professionals are a country’s best defence against the violence and instability that threaten both lives and livelihoods,” he said.

While peace-operation engagement in security sector reform must concentrate on post-conflict situations, it often has a preventive purpose in some circumstances and should be incorporated early in all relevant operations, he said. Special agreements for such engagements could be facilitated by the Security Council, which could also encourage the Peacekeeping Department to provide more details on national and international efforts in that vital area. In any case, all peace operations should “ideally leave behind at least a basic, functioning security and rule of law system”, he concluded.
**Following Tianjin explosion, UN expert calls on China to ensure transparent investigation**

**20 August** - The Government of China and relevant businesses in the country should ensure complete transparency in the investigation of the chemical disaster in Tianjin, including both causes and effects of the explosion, says an independent United Nations human rights expert.

“The Chinese authorities should also assess whether China’s laws for hazardous substances and wastes are consistent with international human rights standards, including the right to information,” said the Special Rapporteur on human rights and hazardous substances and wastes, Baskut Tuncak, in a press release.

Under international human rights standards, the Special Rapporteur noted, the State has an obligation to generate, assess, update and disseminate information about hazardous substances, while businesses have a responsibility to respect human rights, including effectively communicating information.

“This chemical disaster serves as yet another tragic example of the need of information about hazardous substances to protect, respect and realize human rights,” the expert underlined.

“The lack of information when needed – information that could have mitigated or perhaps even prevented this disaster – is truly tragic,” he stressed. “Moreover, the reported restrictions on public access to health and safety information and freedom of the press in the aftermath are deeply disturbing, particularly to the extent it risks increasing the number of victims of this disaster.”

Mr. Tuncak underscored that information about hazardous substances must be available and accessible in order to protect and respect the rights to life, health, meaningful public participation and an effective remedy, as well as freedoms of expression and the press.

On 16 September, the Special Rapporteur will present a report on the right to information in the context of hazardous substances to the UN Human Rights Council.