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Yemen: first UN food aid arrives in Aden as intense fighting takes ‘serious toll’ on civilians

21 July - In “a major breakthrough,” the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) announced that its first ship since conflict erupted in Yemen in March berthed today in the port of Aden after repeated attempts to reach huge numbers of increasingly desperate people and as intense fighting continues to take a serious toll on civilians.

“In the coming days we hope to reach more people, not only in Aden but throughout Yemen,” said Muhannad Hadi, WFP Regional Director for the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia and Eastern Europe.

Meanwhile, in the latest report on the toll the fighting is taking, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported that at least 165 civilians, including 53 children and 23 women, were killed between 3 and 15 July, and another 210 were injured during this period.

“The majority of the casualties are reported to have been caused by air strikes, but civilians are also regularly being injured and killed by mortar fire and in street fighting,” OHCHR Spokesperson Rupert Colville told reporters in Geneva, Switzerland.

“The total death toll since 26 March is now at least 1,693 civilians, with another 3,829 injured,” Mr. Colville said.

Reports suggest that Houthi-affiliated Popular Committees have actively been recruiting fighters, including children, who have been posted across the towns.

Ground clashes, shelling, sniping and detonation of Improvised Explosive Devices also continued between the Houthi-affiliated Popular Committees and armed groups loyal to former President Saleh on one side and the Local Popular Committees on the other side, the spokesman said.

As humanitarian needs mounted and intense fighting continued in Yemen, WFP announced that the MV Han Zhi, with 3,000...
metric tonnes of food – enough to feed 180,000 people for one month – docked at Aden’s oil port of Al-Buraiqa.

Although the ship had arrived off Aden on 26 June, it had been forced to wait over three weeks for a safe window to berth, according to the agency.

“This is a major breakthrough for our humanitarian response in Yemen. While we have been able to reach several southern areas by land, docking at the port of Aden allows us to accelerate our response to meet urgent needs in southern Yemen,” said WFP’s Mr. Hadi.

WFP said it had made repeated attempts to send ships to Aden, all of which until today were blocked due to severe fighting in the port area.

Despite insecurity and extreme difficulties reaching Aden by road, WFP said it had delivered food to displaced families in the governorate. Through its local partner, WFP last reached Aden on 14 July with emergency food assistance for more than 27,000 people.

“More WFP-chartered ships are on stand-by near Aden carrying fuel and more food,” the agency said.

The number of food-insecure people in Yemen is close to 13 million, including more than 6 million people who cannot survive without external assistance, it said.

The human rights spokesman said “the conflict continues to take a serious toll on civilians, both in terms of direct violence and in terms of the effect on many economic, social and cultural rights.”

**First half of 2015 ‘hottest six months on record’ – UN**

21 July - From January to June 2015, the globally averaged temperature over land and ocean surfaces was the hottest for such period on record, the United Nations World Meteorological Organization (WMO) reported today, citing new highs across the planet in June, with heatwaves across South Asia, Europe and pockets of the United States.

Over the past six months, the average temperature was 0.85°C above the 20th century average of 15.5°C, WMO spokesperson Clare Nullis told a press briefing in Geneva today, adding that the major concern was about the ocean heat that was constantly rising, according to the figures provided by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Indeed, the average global sea surface temperature of +0.65°C (+1.17°F) for the year-to-date was the highest for January–June on record, surpassing the previous record of 2010 by 0.04°C (0.07°F), points out a press release. Records date back to 1880.

June 2015 marks the third month this year that has broken its monthly temperature record, along with March and May. The fresh high’s set off warm weather alerts as heatwaves gripped places such as Austria, Spain and Australia. Moreover, the soaring temperatures killed hundreds of people in India and Pakistan last month.

WMO notes that the other months of 2015 were not far behind: January and February were each second warmest for their respective months and April was fourth warmest.

“Most of the world’s land areas were much warmer than average. These regions include nearly all of Eurasia, South America, Africa, and western North America, with pockets of record warmth across these areas. All of Australia was warmer than average,” states the WMO press release.

The Balkans and Southern Europe remain in the grips of a heatwave, Ms. Nullis said, explaining that there were red alerts in Hungary, parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and southern Switzerland. In the United States, the heat wave that
had been gripping southern and eastern parts of the country would continue today, with heat index values between 37.8 to 43.3 degrees Celsius.”

The very high temperatures that characterized the previous six months as the hottest on record had occurred ahead of the development of El Niño, which had an overall impact on temperatures. The Australian Bureau of Meteorology today indicated that El Niño was likely to strengthen, and expected to persist into early 2016.

US National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center on 9 July said there was a greater than 90 percent chance that El Niño would continue through Northern Hemisphere in winter 2015-2016 and around an 80 percent chance that it would last into early spring 2016.

WMO uses a combination of datasets to compile its annual Statement on the Global Climate. The provisional statement for 2015 will be released in November 2015.

Just about three weeks ago, WMO joined with the World Health Organization (WHO) to issue a new series of guidelines aimed at addressing the health risks posed by the increasing number and intensity of climate change-related heatwaves affecting the planet.

The guidelines, entitled *Heatwaves and Health: Guidance on Warning-System Development*, will seek to alert decision-makers, health services and the general public through the systematic development of so-called heatwave early warning systems which, in turn, will hope to trigger timely action in reducing the effects of hot-weather extremes on health.

**Ban urges parties in Burundi to refrain from violence during elections**

21 July - In a “worrisome context,” and following the decision of the government of Burundi to hold the presidential election on 21 July, the United Nations chief called yesterday on the authorities to do all in their power to ensure security and a peaceful atmosphere during the polls.

“Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon further calls on all parties to refrain from any acts of violence that could compromise the stability of Burundi and the region,” reads the statement issued by the UN Spokesperson.

Mr. Ban reiterates his appeal for the resumption of a frank dialogue and urges parties to avoid undermining the progress achieved in “building democracy” since the signing of the Arusha Agreements, adds the statement.

The inter-Burundian dialogue that started on 14 July 2015 under the facilitation of Uganda has been indefinitely suspended.

“The Secretary-General notes that the suspension of the dialogue took place without agreement being reached on a range of issues that would have contributed to the creation of a climate conducive to the holding of credible and peaceful elections, as contained in the relevant recommendations of the East African Community (EAC) and the African Union.”

Recalling that the United Nations Electoral Observation Mission has deployed observers countrywide, the UN Chief calls on all parties to facilitate their work and, “in particular,” on the government to ensure their security.

According to the UN, civil unrest erupted on 26 April in Bujumbura, Burundi’s capital, after the ruling Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces pour la défense de la démocratie (CNDD-FDD) party elected President Pierre Nkurunziza on 25 April as its candidate for the then-scheduled 26 June presidential election. It was postponed to July 15, then July 21.
Violence in Nigeria drives refugees deeper into neighbouring Cameroon, UN agency warns

21 July - Weeks after elections in Nigeria, violence and attacks continue to drive population movements within and outside the country, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) warned today, reporting a “steady flow” of Nigerian refugees now seeking safety some 100 kilometres inside the Cameroon border.

On average, some 100 people daily are registering at UNHCR’s Minawao camp in Cameroon – opened in July 2013 – causing a population surge from about 30,000 late last year to approximately 44,000 today.

“In Cameroon’s remote Far North Region, a steady flow of Nigerian refugees are moving from the volatile Nigeria-Cameroon border area and seeking shelter some 100 kilometres inland at the Minawao camp,” said Leo Dobbs, spokesperson for the UN refugee agency, at a pressing briefing in Geneva.

The arrivals at the camp are mainly Nigerian nationals who have previously fled to Cameroon to escape violence in north-east Nigeria, but stayed near the border – hoping for a quick return home. The refugees said they had fled militant attacks in Nigeria’s Borno state.

In recent weeks, there have been attacks and clashes on Cameroon territory, including a suicide bombing on 12 July, the first such attack in the country, on the far-northern town of Fotokol.

As part of its response to this unrest, the Government of Cameroon has begun registering Nigerian refugees in the immediate border area. UNHCR field staff reported that the registration process provoked fear among some refugees that they might be returned to Nigeria against their will.

Allaying fears, Mr. Dobbs explained, “UNHCR and the Government are in the process of consulting the refugees in the border area about where they want to go – some may opt to return to safe areas in Nigeria, while others may want to move to the Minawao camp. This process will continue over the coming days and weeks.”

Some arrivals said they ran out of food while taking refuge in the border area and hoped for food distributions at the Minawao camp. Many of the newcomers were being temporarily sheltered in a tarpaulin-construction school area currently closed for summer break. Although the school is due to reopen in September, a wood shortage will prevent the construction of community or family shelters for them.

“UNHCR has limited access in the Far North Region for security reasons, but estimates the number of unregistered refugees in the area to be some 12,000. The Cameroonian authorities say this number may be as high as 17,000” said Mr. Dobbs.

In a separate development in southern Niger’s Diffa region, over the past few days, authorities reported the arrival of some 2,500 Nigerians – mainly women, children and older people.

Following a militant attack early last week on the Nigerian town of Damassak, people arrived in the border villages of Chetimari and Gagamari, located 20 kilometres from the town. Niger authorities report that they continue to arrive – with 80 per cent Nigerian refugees and the remaining 20 per cent Niger returnees.

“Some of the new arrivals fled their homes last year after a first attack on Damassak and returned only recently. Some refugees are staying with the same host families they stayed with last year while others sleep in the open or in makeshift shelters,” Mr. Dobbs elaborated.
Most new arrivals said they preferred staying in Chetimari and Gagamari rather than the Sayam Forage refugee camp, further inland, hoping to return to Nigeria as soon as possible. Locals have been sharing their meagre resources with them, including water and food. UNHCR teams are unable to access the border area for security reasons.

Mr. Dobbs concluded, “More than 100,000 people have fled Nigeria and found refuge in Niger since mid-2013. The conflict has also displaced 18,400 Nigerians to Chad and left at least 1.5 million people displaced within Nigeria, mainly in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states.”

**UN human rights experts renew calls to visit US to advance criminal justice reforms**

21 July - Following last week’s unprecedented visit by United States President Barak Obama to a prison in Oklahoma, United Nations independent human rights experts today called on the US Government to facilitate their respective requests to carry out an official visit to the country to advance criminal justice reform.

Making the call, UN Special Rapporteur on torture Juan E. Méndez, and the Chairperson of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Seong-Phil Hong, also cited President Obama’s speech on criminal justice reform to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), in which he addressed unacceptably high rates of incarceration, the disparate impact of such policy on racial minorities, overcrowding and the extensive use of solitary confinement.

“I look forward to working with the US Department of Justice on the special study commissioned by the President on the need to regulate solitary confinement, which affects 80,000 inmates in the United States, in most cases for periods of months and years,” Mr. Méndez said in a press release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

“The practice of prolonged or indefinite solitary confinement inflicts pain and suffering of a psychological nature, which is strictly prohibited by the Convention against Torture,” he continued. “Reform along such lines will have considerable impact not only in the United States but in many countries around the world.”

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has asked the US Government for an opportunity to visit federal and state institutions where persons are deprived of their liberty.

Mr. Hong underscored, “a visit to the United States will be an excellent opportunity to discuss with authorities the Basic Principles and Guidelines on the right to anyone deprived of their liberty to bring proceedings before a court, and to promote its use by the civil society.”

The expert noted that the freshly drafted Principles and Guidelines, which will be considered by the UN Human Rights Council in September, “will help to establish effective mechanisms to ensure Judicial oversight over all situations of deprivation of liberty.”

“We hope the President’s recent actions will ensure concrete steps are taken to facilitate these visits to US detention facilities, including private interviews with detainees, take place as soon as possible,” the experts stated. “We stand ready to provide any additional expertise to ensure that prison reforms are implemented in accordance with international human rights standards.”

The two UN human rights experts recalled that in March 2015 in Cape Town, South Africa, the review process of the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners produced a document called the Mandela Rules, expected to be approved by late 2015, to strengthen procedural safeguards and improve conditions of detention.

The proposed rules include the prohibition of indefinite or prolonged solitary confinement – determined as exceeding 15 days – as well as a complete ban on isolation for children, pregnant of breast-feeding women and any person with a mental
Independent experts or special rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

**Middle East: Arthur David Gawn of New Zealand appointed Head of Truce Supervision Organisation**

21 July - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today announced the appointment of Major General Arthur David Gawn, of New Zealand, as Head of Mission and Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO).

He succeeds Major General Michael Finn of Ireland, who will complete his assignment on 31 July 2015, after two years of “dedicated leadership.”

“Mr. Gawn brings to the position extensive command experience and knowledge of peacekeeping attained through service at the national and international levels”, said a statement issued by a UN spokesperson.

Currently the Chief of Army of New Zealand, a position he has held since 2013, Major General Gawn also held a number of senior positions, including Commander Joint Forces New Zealand, Deputy Chief of Army, Land Component Commander and Commander Third Land Force Group.


Set up in May 1948, UNTSO was the first ever peacekeeping operation established by the United Nations. Since then, UNTSO military observers have remained in the Middle East to monitor ceasefires, supervise armistice agreements, prevent isolated incidents from escalating and assist other UN peacekeeping operations in the region to fulfil their respective mandates.

**UN relief chief heads to South Sudan to bolster humanitarian response as country's challenges mount**

21 July - The top United Nations humanitarian official is heading to South Sudan where a new cholera outbreak has claimed nearly 40 lives, more than 2.2 million people have been uprooted from their homes by conflict and nearly 8 million others are expected to face food shortages during the rainy reason.

Over 1,210 cholera cases, including 39 deaths, have been reported in Juba and Bor counties, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Most of the cases, and 38 of the deaths, were reported in Juba County.

“In response to the outbreak, health partners have set up cholera treatment centres and oral rehydration point in both counties, and are conducting cholera prevention activities, including hygiene promotion and improvement of access to safe drinking water,” the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported today.

OCHA added that some 99,000 people have received cholera vaccines in two counties, Juba and Bentiu.

The UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O’Brien, who is also the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, is heading to South Sudan to bolster the humanitarian response as country's challenges mount.

WHO is supporting oral cholera vaccination campaigns in South Sudan as part of the efforts to prevent a potentially large-scale outbreak.
Affairs, is scheduled to visit Juba and Unity state in South Sudan beginning Wednesday on a four-day visit to see first-hand the humanitarian consequences of the conflict, and efforts by aid organizations to respond to escalating needs, his office announced today.

More than 2.2 million people have been uprooted from their homes by the conflict, including 1.6 million people who have been internally displaced and over 600,000 who have fled to Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda as refugees, according to OCHA.

“During his visit Mr. O’Brien is expected to meet communities affected by the violence, senior Government officials, humanitarian partners and the diplomatic community, to discuss the crisis and ways of strengthening the humanitarian operation,” his office said.

OCHA also reported an “alarmingly” food security situation with nearly 70 percent of the country’s population – 7.9 million out of 11.6 million people – expected to face food insecurity this rainy season.

“The lives of more than a quarter of a million children are at risk from rapidly worsening nutrition,” it said. “In half the states, one in three children suffers from acute malnutrition.”