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As health needs rise in Somalia, funding hits new low, cutting off 1.5 million from care – UN

24 July - Somalia – a country where every two hours a mother dies due to pregnancy complications – is facing cuts in life-saving health services because of the lowest funding levels in seven years, according to the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO).

“We cannot afford to let the country slide back into a humanitarian crisis,” WHO Representative for Somalia Dr. Ghulam Popal said. “Otherwise, we would undermine all gains made until today.”

UN health partners in Somalia are expressing concern that they will face difficulties in continuing to provide life-saving health services at the scale required as a result of declining humanitarian funding for 2015 and the forecast for 2016, WHO warned in a press release issued Thursday.

The lack of funding for UN’s humanitarian response plan in 2015 has left more than 1.5 million people cut off from primary or secondary health care services, according to the press release. As of July 2015, out of a required $71.5 million, only $6.1 million (8.5 per cent) has been received, the lowest since 2008, despite ongoing early warnings and appeals for adequate funding.

According to WHO, there are currently 3.2 million people in need of humanitarian aid in Somalia, where every 2 hours a mother dies due to pregnancy complications, every hour, 8 Somali children below the age of 5 die; one in 4 children suffers from chronic malnourishment; and only 1 in 3 Somalis have access to safe water.
“Over the past 3 months, at least 10 hospitals in Somalia have either been closed or have majorly curtailed their services across the country, and at least 3 other hospitals are at risk of closure in the near future,” the agency said. “Basic health posts and clinics are currently struggling to meet primary health needs, and many aid agencies have withdrawn health workers from high-need areas.”

In quake-stricken Nepal, ‘emergency is not over yet,’ warns senior UN relief official

24 July - Three months after the first of the devastating earthquakes that hit Nepal, hundreds of thousands of survivors continue to require and rely on urgent humanitarian assistance, the top United Nations humanitarian official in the recovering country said today.

“The emergency is not over yet,” warned Jamie McGoldrick, the Humanitarian Coordinator in Nepal. “As long as humanitarian needs persist, relief agencies will continue to support the Government in addressing these vulnerabilities and ensuring the survival of communities affected.”

The cold and damp monsoon weather exposes those affected to further hazards and, together with customs delays, adds to the challenges aid agencies tackle daily. Shelter, food and livelihoods support, water and sanitation, medical and psychosocial care, and protection remain top priorities, he said.

In the last three months, the humanitarian community provided shelter assistance to 340,000 families, distributed food to over 2 million people and provided safe drinking water to some 2.5 million survivors in 14 most-affected districts, points out a press release issued by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Hundreds of thousands of children continue to benefit from education and psychosocial support. Almost all of health facilities also restored use of cash programming, which proved to be indispensable in achieving these goals and overcoming the topography challenge.

“I am heartened and encouraged by the dedication of the responders: the Government, the many volunteers, my colleagues. Together, we achieved a lot,” stated Mr. McGoldrick. “But we must continue.”

Basic shelter will continue to be provided to families who lost their homes, as more-durable shelter solutions are sought and implemented, underscore the press release. Aid agencies aim to assist more than 1.4 million people with food and another 1 million people with livelihoods support, and to provide safe drinking water and sanitation to 2.5 million people.

Medical camp kits will continue to replace damaged health infrastructure and temporary learning spaces are intended for additional 270,000 children. The humanitarian community is also planning ahead, to ensure the most vulnerable are assisted beyond the monsoon and prepared to survive through the harsh and cold wintery conditions.

“We cannot fail the most vulnerable communities, people who count on us more than ever with the monsoon season underway and the winter fast-approaching” stressed Mr. McGoldrick. “The humanitarian community can and will deliver on its commitments, provided that we receive the right support.”

To date, only $210 million, or 50 per cent, were received against the $422 million humanitarian appeal. An additional $222 million in support to post-earthquakes relief was provided directly to the Government of Nepal on a bilateral and in-kind basis.
Yemen: as conflict disrupts education for nearly two million children, UNICEF backs ‘catch-up’ classes

24 July - With intensive bombardments and street fighting in Yemen forcing more than 3,600 schools across the country to close and disrupting education for some 1.8 million children, the top United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) official there appealed today to the warring parties to respect the safety of schools.

“Giving Yemen’s children an education is crucial for their own futures as well as those of their families and communities,” Julien Harneis, UNICEF Representative in Yemen said in a press statement issued in the capital, Sana’a.

“We are doing all we can to return children to school so that they don’t completely lose out on their education,” Mr. Harneis said. “We urge the parties to the conflict to respect the safety of schools so as to give children a chance to learn.”

According to UNICEF, months of intensive bombardment and street fighting have forced more than 3,600 schools to close and driven students and their families to safer areas of the country. At least 248 schools have been directly damaged; 270 others are hosting internally displaced people (IDPs) and 68 are occupied by armed groups.

To help ensure that children don’t completely miss out on their education, UNICEF is supporting catch-up classes for over 200,000 students – just some out of around 1.8 million children whose schooling has been interrupted for two months or more.

According to UNICEF, Yemen’s Ministry of Education is helping mobilize the necessary teachers, some of whom have themselves fled the violence, and if schools are damaged, or are being used by displaced people or armed groups, temporary learning spaces such as tents will be provided.

And UNICEF said it is providing teaching and learning resources, including notebooks, pencils and school bags to the students, given that the income of many families has been severely affected, while markets have been destroyed or closed making it difficult for students to acquire the materials they need.

“The next school year is scheduled to start on 5 September, but much will depend on the security situation,” the UN agency said. “Students at schools that are able to resume teaching will be provided with catch up classes to cover more than two months’ of school time lost as a result of the conflict.”

UNICEF is asking for $11 million dollars to support the rehabilitation of damaged schools, provision of teaching and learning resources, training of teachers and community workers to provide psychosocial support, and to carry out a ‘back-to-school’ campaign.
First-ever UN Nelson Mandela Prize winners honoured by General Assembly

24 July - The United Nations General Assembly today marked Nelson Mandela International Day – which is observed on 18 July – by awarding the first-ever UN Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela Prize, recognizing the South African leader’s contributions to democracy, justice and reconciliation and his dedication to the service of humanity.

“Nelson Mandela International Day is a global call to action for all citizens of the world, to take up the challenge and follow in the formidable footsteps of Madiba; a man who transformed his life, served his country and freed his people,” General Assembly President Sam Kutesa told an informal meeting of the 193-member body.

The Prize, he explained, was designed to honour and recognize the “outstanding achievements” of two distinguished individuals, one female and one male, who have dedicated their lives to the service to humanity, particularly in the promotion of reconciliation, social cohesion and community development.

The first two laureates of the Prize are Dr. Helena Ndume of Namibia and Jorge Fernando Branco Sampaio of Portugal. Dr. Ndume of Namibia is an ophthalmologist whose life’s work has been the treatment of blindness and eye-related illnesses, both in Namibia and throughout the developing world.

Mr. Sampaio of Portugal became a leader in the struggle for the restoration of democracy in Portugal, and served as Deputy Minister for External Co-operation; as Mayor of Lisbon from 1989 to 1995; and, from 1996 to 2006, as President of the country.

The Prize was also established to pay homage to Nelson Mandela’s extraordinary life and legacy of reconciliation, political transition and social transformation.

“Nelson Mandela inspired the world, inspired all of us,” said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in remarks delivered by his Chef de Cabinet, Susana Malcorra. “Although he suffered terrible atrocities, ‘Madiba’ never sank to the level of his oppressors; instead, he rose to the moment in history.”

The United Nations no longer has apartheid on its agenda, but the international community continues to confront racial and other forms of discrimination that drive abuses and violence in all countries, Ms. Malcorra stressed. “On this Day, let us pay tribute to Nelson Mandela by actively fighting for human rights, development and peace in our communities and our world.”

Every year, as part of the Take Action, Inspire Change campaign on Nelson Mandela International Day, individuals throughout the world are encouraged to devote 67 minutes to helping others – by volunteering in a hospital, tutoring a child, providing food for the homeless, or any other community service activity.

The campaign is based on people devoting one minute of their time for every year that Nelson Mandela devoted to public service – as a human rights lawyer, a prisoner of conscience, an international peacemaker and as the President of South Africa.

Later today, at The UN Headquarters, staff volunteers will partner with New York City Parks’ Green Thumb programme to tend community gardens in Manhattan, lending support to important green spaces in the city.

Some of the volunteers will be working in the newly established United Nations Food Garden, which will be officially opened today by Ms. Malcorra, along with the New York City Commissioner for International Affairs, Penny Abeywardena, and the New York City Commissioner for Parks and Recreation, Mitchell Silver.
The event will be hosted by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, Cristina Gallach.

The United Nations Food Garden is an initiative of a group of United Nations staff members who partnered with NYC Parks’ Green Thumb programme and Brooklyn Grange to transform unused land at the Headquarters complex into sustainable food gardens.

‘We should be outraged’ more not being done to end extreme violence against children in conflict – UNICEF chief

24 July - Millions of children around the world are caught up in adults’ wars, declared the head of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) today, marking the 10th anniversary of a UN Security Council resolution that established a monitoring and reporting mechanism on the use of child soldiers with a strong call for accountability and robust measures to end all “horrors” children face.

In a statement, UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake said that today, millions of children are deliberately killed, injured, raped, abducted. Their schools and homes are being destroyed; they are being denied food, water and health care. Tens of thousands are forced to join armed forces and groups.

“Ten years ago, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1612, to better protect children affected by conflict. Today, enormous efforts are being made to protect children in countries at war,” he said, noting that last year, more than 10,000 children were released from armed forces and groups worldwide, and received support returning to their communities.

“But violence involving children in conflicts has taken a darker turn,” Mr. Lake warned, spotlighting reports from Iraq, Nigeria and Syria that have revealed how children are being used by adults as perpetrators of extreme violence – children who have been forced to observe and participate in executions, encouraged to believe that violence is normal, their young and impressionable minds exposed to senseless brutality, in total disregard of the sanctity of childhood.

“Every child in a conflict who is killed or forced to kill, or who has witnessed the brutality of war, is a victim – an innocent who has borne the cost of conflict not of her or his making,” the UNICEF chief said, declaring: “We should be outraged that such suffering continues and that more is not being done to end these horrors and to hold those responsible to account.”

Despite economic crisis, Greece must take robust action to address refugee situation – UN agency

24 July - The United Nations refugee agency today expressed great apprehension over the refugee situation in Greece – where more than 100,000 people have sought shelter so far in 2015 – saying that notwithstanding its difficulties, Greece, with assistance from wider Europe, has a duty to assist them.

After announcing plans for Vincent Cochetel, Europe Bureau Director of the UN Office for the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to visit the country next week, the agency’s spokesperson, William Spindler told reporters in Geneva that in spite of its difficulties, Greece “needs to assume full responsibility for the refugee population, of whom only five per cent have stayed in the country.” The majority of refugees moved across the Balkans to Germany and Nordic countries.

As the country experiences “real hardship and the situation continues to deteriorate” – with local volunteers and tourists providing more assistance to refugees than the Greek authorities – UNHCR has been assisting on the ground, including by providing water, hygiene kits and interpreters. The UN agency said that Europe ought to take more robust action to help Greece deal with the situation.
When asked how much of the lack of attention is due to the austerity package, Mr. Spindler replied: “Clearly the economic crisis had indeed had its effect, but it is not a new problem as conditions in Greece have been substandard for years. Greece, as a part of the European Union, ought to be helped by the region as a whole.”

He went on to note that some 60 per cent of those arriving in Greece are Syrians coming from Turkey. UNHCR has received only 12 per cent of its funding appeal for operations in Turkey, which was hosting two million Syrian refugees. “Europe also needs to do more to support Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, which together hosted more than four million Syrian refugees,” he added.

Mr. Spindler explained that most people were coming from the Turkish coast to about 10 Greek islands. While the majority were Syrians, there were also Afghans, Iraqis and sub-Saharan Africans. “Local authorities said they lacked necessary resources, but it was also an issue of political will. Greece should assume its responsibility,” he stressed.

Responding to another question, Mr. Spindler said the registration process of new arrivals needed to be sped up. “Reception conditions, which are appalling, have to be urgently improved. Much more needs to be done.” Currently, local volunteers provided water and food upon initial reception.

On another question, the spokesperson said that a recent decision by the Justice and Home Affairs Council to take in 22,000 Syrian refugees for resettlement and relocating another 32,000 asylum seekers already in Europe was a move in the right direction, but more had to be done, and fast. He flagged, “There are many simultaneous crises around the world, which is why it is increasingly difficult to raise funds for all of them.”

In answer to where the refugees would go after leaving the country, Mr. Spindler said that the number of people seeking asylum in Greece had gone up, but it was still a small number percentage-wise. “Most others would transit through Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary on their way to Germany, the Netherlands and northern European countries. Sometimes the refugees face physical obstacles, and there have been cases of violence against them by border guards. A large percentage of those arriving in Greece and moving onwards have relatives in Germany and other countries.”

Mr. Spindler concluded: “Legal avenues for refugees to come to Europe ought to be looked into, and European countries should facilitate family reunification.”

**Winners of multilingual essay contest on new UN sustainability agenda honoured in New York**

24 July - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today welcomed the 70 winners of the United Nations-sponsored *Many Languages, One World*, contest who wrote “inspired” essays in languages not their own about a new sustainable development path that will lead to an end to poverty and a life of dignity for all.

“‘You were asked to do something inspired and challenging – to write an essay in an official United Nations language that is not your own,’ the UN chief said in a message delivered to the Global Youth Forum by Cristina Gallach, the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information. ‘You did so in the United Nations’ 70th anniversary year. You are our “70 for 70” team!

From a pool of over 1,200 entrants, the 70 students, from 42 countries representing 60 universities, were selected as winners of the essay contest, which was organized by ELS Educational Services, Inc., and the United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI).

The *Many Languages, One World*, contest challenged college and university students from around the globe to write an essay examining the post-2015 global development agenda of the United Nations. The essays were to be submitted in one of the six official United Nations languages, which was not the student’s first-language, or the principal language of instruction in their primary or secondary education. The official languages of the United Nations are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.
More than 3,500 people from 130 countries took part in the initial phase of the contest. The winners were invited to New York and given the opportunity today to speak in the UN General Assembly Hall.

In his remarks, the Secretary-General noted the importance of multilingualism, which “allows us to come together across diverse societies to work cooperatively to improve the state of the world.”

“This is, of course, is the central mission of the United Nations, and it is one that depends upon multilingualism,” he said.

Describing the year 2015 as “a special time,” Mr. Ban said this year represents “a historic opportunity to forge a new sustainable development path that will lead us to an end to poverty and a life of dignity for all.”

The students wrote about such topics as inclusive and equitable education for all; healthy lives and well-being for all ages; full and productive employment and decent work for all; and the importance of human rights and holding institutions accountable.

**UN health agency welcomes European regulators’ initial green light on malaria vaccine**

24 July - The World Health Organization (WHO) today welcomed a major regulatory hurdle cleared by a malaria vaccine, saying it expects to make a policy recommendation later this year on its use in the context of an overall panoply of public health tools for combating the disease which kills one African child a minute.

“This is the first time ever that a malaria vaccine has gotten to the point to be reviewed by a regulatory authority,” WHO spokesperson Gregory Hartl told reports in Geneva following the announcement by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) that it had adopted a “positive scientific opinion” for the vaccine Mosquirix for use outside the European Union.

Mr. Hartl hailed the decision as “a big development” but “not finished yet.”

The spokesperson said the EMA assessment will be reviewed by WHO in October, taking into account public health aspects of the vaccine such as affordability and cost-effectiveness, using the vaccine in field situations in developing countries, and other effective malaria control measures such as such as scaling up bed nets and rapid diagnosis tests.

Following that step, he said, the UN health agency’s policy recommendation – which will go beyond simply the efficacy, quality and safety issue aspects of the vaccine and look into whether or not this vaccine should be added to existing malaria control tools – is expected in November 2015.

There are currently no licensed vaccines against malaria, which is caused by a parasite called Plasmodium, which is transmitted via the bites of infected mosquitoes. In the human body, the parasites multiply in the liver, and then infect red blood cells.

Symptoms of malaria include fever, headache, and vomiting, and usually appear between 10 and 15 days after the mosquito bite. If not treated, malaria can quickly become life-threatening by disrupting the blood supply to vital organs.

According to the latest statistics available from WHO, there were nearly 200 million cases of malaria in 2013 and close to 600,000 deaths.

“Most deaths occur among children living in Africa where a child dies every minute from malaria,” according to WHO’s latest malaria fact sheet.

Mr. Hartl explained that the clearance given by the EMA did not constitute a regulatory authority approval, since the vaccine was not destined for use in the European Union. The EMA only gave an opinion on its efficacy, quality and safety.
He also clarified what “from a public health perspective” meant, namely, addressing its implementation, its use in the field in conjunction to other measures to combat malaria and measures to make the vaccine fit in with other vaccines.

Key interventions to control malaria include: prompt and effective treatment with artemisinin-based combination therapies; use of insecticidal nets by people at risk; and indoor residual spraying with insecticide to control the vector mosquitoes.

**Incoming President says main UN economic and social body must evolve and adapt to fast-changing world**

24 July - Opening the first meeting of its 2016 session today, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) elected Oh Joon, of Republic of Korea as its new President, who spotlighted the vital work – for the Council and the wider Organization – as the international community transitions from the landmark Millennium Development Goals to the post-2015 development agenda.

In his inaugural address to the main UN economic and social body, Mr. Oh said: “We are at the cusp of an important era. It is time for us to take a new step in the process to create a better world for all. But of course, all of our future efforts should be based on what we have achieved so far. Our systems and structures are in place. And the issues have been well defined.”

He noted that the Council would lead efforts to build an inclusive and engaging global partnership, “one that welcomes the significant contribution that all stakeholders can provide – particularly through the Development Cooperation Forum.”

In order to fulfil the new responsibilities of the post-2015 agenda, ECOSOC needs to be more relevant to what is happening in the world, he said, underscoring: “Relevance is the key word. If we, in the ECOSOC, look like continuing the same debate that we have had for decades, it is time for us to look out to see what is happening in the world.”

Mr. Oh said the Council needs to “consolidate its niche by being more flexible in its agenda and its coverage of issues. We should continue to evolve and adapt as necessary to keep ECOSOC up-to-date to this fast changing world.”

Outgoing ECOSOC President, Martin Sajdik, pointed to youth employment, eradication of poverty and a cleaner environment as some of the driving forces of his stewardship.

In his speech, Mr. Sajdik noted that he had been “nothing short of impressed” by the level of engagement that youth had brought to the UN as part of the ECOSOC Youth Forum.

“During my tenure, the ECOCOC Youth Forum has reached new records in attendance, in the room and outside of it, through social media, involving young people from all corners of the world,” adding, “The Youth Forum has also been a call to all of us to reach out, to engage and communicate our aims to the world.”

Turning to the post-2015 development agenda, Mr. Sajdik emphasized that with ECOSOC, as a multi-stakeholder platform, the Council’s past work had ensured that the seeds sown in September fall on fertile grounds.

The ECOSOC Bureau includes each of five world regions – Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, East Europe, and West Europe and the other developed countries. Each year, a representative from a different region is chosen to head the Council as its President.

The 54-member body – which serves as the principal organ for the socioeconomic and related work of the United Nations – also elected four Vice-Presidents.

The four newly elected vice presidents are Argentina Ambassador Maria Cristina Perceval, Croatian Ambassador Vladimir Drobnjak, Swiss Ambassador Paul Seger and Zimbabwe Ambassador Frederick Musiwa Makamure Shava.
UN rights office renews concern after Cambodian Senate adopts law with ‘chilling effect’ on civil society

24 July - A draft law adopted today by Cambodia’s legislative wing “threatens the very existence of a free and independent civil society” and the crucial work that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) carry out in the country, the United Nations human rights office has warned.

“The Cambodian Senate has adopted a draft law on associations and non-governmental organizations which falls significantly short of international human rights laws and norms governing the right to freedom of association,” explained Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) during a press briefing in Geneva.

Already adopted by the National Assembly on 13 July, the law would now have to be examined by the Constitutional Council, she added.

“OHCHR urges the Council to reject the bill, which carried provisions that breached the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which Cambodia had ratified and which was recognized in the country’s Constitution.”

Laws like this, Ms. Shamdasani said, allow the authorities to de-register associations that they considered not to be “politically neutral”. This one would give the Government the right to deny registration on ill-defined bases, including if the purpose and goal of the association is perceived to “endanger the security, stability and public order or jeopardize national security, national unity, culture, traditions, and customs of Cambodian national society.”

Those broad provisions, plus the criminal penalties in the bill against NGOs that operate without registration, would cause a “chilling effect” on the work of such groups, warned the spokesperson.

In another worrying development, Ms. Shamdasani reported that 11 Cambodian opposition activists were convicted and sentenced on 21 July to between seven and 20 years in prison for participating or leading an “insurrection,” following a post-election protest which had turned violent, on 15 July 2015.

OHCHR, she said, is concerned about the convictions, especially as there had been “irregularities” in the conduct of the trial, which the Office had monitored. The ruling relied on the use of witness statements by individuals who had not been available for cross examination so that their credibility could be tested.

“There was also no evidence presented in open court to prove that the defendants had directly committed any acts of violence or that the violence would endanger the institutions of the country at the time,” underscored the spokesperson.

The perception of governmental interference in that case undermined public trust in the Cambodian justice system and, “should the 11 activists chose to appeal,” OHCHR calls for the fair trial defects to be corrected then, she concluded.
Ban condemns deadly twin suicide bombings in northern Cameroon

24 July - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has condemned the twin suicide bombings that targeted the city of Maroua, the capital of Cameroon’s Extreme North province, on 22 July.

“The Secretary-General extends his heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government and people of Cameroon and wishes a speedy recovery to those injured in the terrorist attacks,” says a statement issued yesterday evening by the UN Spokesperson.

The Secretary-General, adds the statement, reiterates his support for the Government of Cameroon and countries of the region, encouraging them to further strengthen their cooperation in addressing the threat posed by Boko Haram, as well as ensuring strict compliance with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law.

According to the media, two women detonated bombs attached to their bodies in crowded markets, killing at least 13 people.