

UN food relief agency working with Sri Lanka to end hunger and malnutrition

14 February 2017 – Sri Lanka is making efforts to achieve zero hunger and zero undernutrition, having launched a national review of food security and nutrition with the United Nations emergency food relief agency.

The review fulfils “the country’s potential to feed its own people” said the Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme (WFP), Ertharin Cousin, who participated in the official launch during a visit to Sri Lanka.

“This strategic review provides a framework for the partnerships across sectors that are vital to translate global aims into local actions,” Ms. Cousin said.

The Executive Director praised all the Government officials with whom she met – including President Maithripala Sirisena – saying that they are “clearly committed to developing sustainable food systems.”

In addition to Government officials, Ms. Cousin called for partnerships with the private sector, civil society, academia, non-governmental organizations and the UN system.

The launch is part of Sri Lanka’s effort to reach the second Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), which aims to end hunger, achieve improved food security and nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture by 2030.

During her visit, Ms. Cousin also travelled to Monaragala, one of the country’s poorest districts, to view WFP’s work to boost the resilience of vulnerable communities. She visited cash for work programmes involving organic home and community gardens and elephant fencing, designed to prevent the loss of lives homes and farms due to elephant-human conflict, which is likely to be exacerbated by the current drought.

According to the press release, WFP and the Government are planning to expand existing cash and food for work programmes to support farmers and rural communities who risk falling deeper into food insecurity because of the current drought, which means the upcoming Maha harvest could be the worst main agricultural harvest in decades.

Guinea-Bissau: Sustaining economic

growth requires political stability, says UN envoy

14 February 2017 – In the face of continued political crisis in Guinea-Bissau, a more sustained and well-coordinated approach is required to sustain economic gains, said the United Nations envoy for the country, calling for “faithful” implementation of a regionally-brokered road-map.

“Any breakthrough in the political dialogue would remain short-lived if the structural causes of the instability are not addressed,” Modibo Touré, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Guinea Bissau, told the UN Security Council today.

“It will therefore be critical for national actors to implement the provisions in the Conakry Agreement related to the review of the Constitution in order to clarify the provisions that have given rise to inter-institutional conflicts in the past,” he added in his briefing, parts of which were in French.

The Conakry Agreement was signed in October last year following talks between political leaders, civil society and religious leaders of Guinea-Bissau. The talks were hosted by the regional bloc Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) in Guinea’s capital Conakry.

However, the implementation of the Agreement and the ECOWAS roadmap has been challenging, Mr. Touré outlined.

Urging authorities of Guinea-Bissau to focus on revising the electoral law and the laws governing political parties, as envisaged in the Conakry Agreement, in preparation for legislative elections scheduled in 2018, the UN official also underlined that “at the same time, it is important not to lose sight of the critical reforms in the judicial, human rights, security and economic sectors.”

Despite political crisis, country’s economic performance has been remarkable

Further in the briefing, Mr. Touré highlighted that the national economy was estimated to have expanded by five per cent in 2016, on the back of very good cashew harvests and favourable terms of trade.

The growth last year follows favourable growth rates in 2015 and 2014.

He, however, added that sustaining the economic growth would require stability.

Furthermore, the Government successfully paid salary arrears of several months particularly in the health and education sectors. There was also progress in fostering national reconciliation and social cohesion, as evidenced in a recent symposium organized at the premises of the National Assembly and attended by the country’s President.

Mr. Touré also pointed out that in the absence of a fully functioning Government, the UN and international financial institutions must continue to coordinate efforts towards mitigating risks, reducing socioeconomic vulnerabilities, including through business for peace initiatives.

In pursuit of this objective, he said that the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), that he heads, is currently working to take forward a partnership initiative with the UNCT, the World Bank, and other interested bilateral and multilateral partners to effectively strengthen local resilience and promote peace in Guinea-Bissau, in line with relevant the Security Council resolution on a more integrated political, security and developmental approach to sustaining peace.

[In Oman, UN chief Guterres seeks ways to help bring peace to Middle East](#)

14 February 2017 – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today expressed his support for the countries like Oman that are in the forefront of mediation efforts to resolve conflict.

“This is my first visit to the region and the objective is to be able to consult the Government of Oman to see how I can be useful, recognizing that it’s Member States and the people that have the leadership in bringing peace to the region,” Mr. Guterres told the press, following a meeting with Oman’s foreign minister, Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah.

“How I can be useful in supporting all those like Oman, who has always been in the first line of mediation trying to bring together the parties to the conflict and trying to make sure that peace is possible?” the UN chief said.

On the conflict in Yemen, Mr. Guterres said that, known the Yemeni people for a long time, he wishes to be able to serve and support the efforts of all those who want peace to be re-established in Yemen. “They are a generous people who are suffering so much,” he said.

The Secretary-General is on his first major trip, which took him to Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). From Oman, he will travel to Qatar, Egypt and Germany.

Synthetic drugs are making headway in Afghanistan, UN agency reports

14 February 2017 – Methamphetamine is increasingly being seized by law enforcement in Afghanistan, and there is also evidence that it is being produced in the country, according to the first of its kind assessment on synthetic drugs released today by the United Nations drug and crime agency.

After spending eight-months gathering information on drugs known locally as 'glass,' 'tears of love' or 'sheesha,' the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) concluded that "there are strong indications that methamphetamine use is establishing itself among opiate users, which are already one of the most vulnerable parts of Afghan society."

"The report comes in a timely fashion, adding another layer of understanding to the very complex Afghan drugs situation," said UNODC's Director of Public Affairs, Jean-Luc Lemahieu.

He praised Afghan contribution to the report, noting that the country has had "impressive" growth in capacity.

The Afghanistan Synthetic Drugs Assessment includes missions to five provinces in Afghanistan, where interviews were conducted with over 100 key sources, drug users and law enforcement officials at government offices, health service centres and drug treatment providers.

"Although data and information remains scarce, reports from law enforcement officials, drug treatment providers, forensic experts and drug users in Afghanistan point to a differentiated market for synthetic drug," the investigators reported.

Source: UNODC's Afghanistan Synthetic Drugs Situation Assessment

"Increases in the number of methamphetamine seizures, together with reports of methamphetamine manufacture and increases in treatment registrations in certain parts of the country, suggest that synthetic drugs are of growing concern in Afghanistan," says the report.

Among its findings, the report noted that the largest number of methamphetamine treatment registrations have been reported by treatment centres in Kunduz province, in the north-east of Afghanistan, and Nimroz province, to the south-west of Afghanistan.

It also found that the current national drug control law seems to provide a much lower penalty framework for methamphetamine compared to other drugs such as heroin or cocaine.

Investigators conclude that the issue must be studied more thoroughly by

national and international partners.

[Drought drives food price spike in East Africa, UN warns](#)

14 February 2017 – East Africa’s ongoing drought has sharply curbed harvests and drive up the prices of cereals and other staple foods to unusually high levels, posing a heavy burden to households and special risks for pastoralists in the region, the United Nations agricultural agency said today.

“Sharply increasing prices are severely constraining food access for large numbers of households with alarming consequences in terms of food insecurity,” said Mario Zappacosta, a senior economist for the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in a news release.

Local prices of maize, sorghum and other cereals are near or at record levels in swathes of Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda and Tanzania, according to the latest Food Price Monitoring and Analysis Bulletin (FPMA).

Poor livestock body conditions due to pasture and water shortages and forcible culls mean animals command lower prices, leaving pastoralists with even less income to purchase basic foodstuffs.

Somalia’s maize and sorghum harvests are estimated to be 75 per cent down from their usual level. In Tanzania, maize prices in Arusha, Tanzania, have almost doubled since early 2016.

In South Sudan, food prices are now two to four times above their levels of a year earlier, while in Kenya, maize prices are up by around 30 per cent.

Beans now cost 40 per cent more in Kenya than a year earlier, while in Uganda, the prices of beans and cassava flour are both about 25 per cent higher than a year ago in the capital city, Kampala.

Drought-affected pastoral areas in the region face even harsher conditions. In Somalia, goat prices are up to 60 per cent lower than a year ago, while in pastoralist areas of Kenya the prices of goats declined by up to 30 per cent over the last 12 months.

Shortages of pasture and water caused livestock deaths and reduced body mass, prompting herders to sell animals while they can, as is also occurring in drought-wracked southern Ethiopia. This also pushes up the prices of milk, which is, for instance, up 40 per cent on the year in Somalia’s Gedo region.