

Rohingya emergency one year on: UN says thousands of lives saved, but challenges remain

Significant progress has been made in protecting hundreds of thousands Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh in the 12 months since they fled violence in Myanmar, but lives “will once again be at risk” if funding is not urgently secured, UN officials said on Friday.

Dr. Peter Salama, Deputy Director-General of Emergency Preparedness and Response for the UN [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) told journalists in Geneva that “thousands of lives” had been saved so far, thanks to the joint efforts of the Bangladesh Government, WHO and partners.

Deadly disease outbreaks have also been held at bay in Cox’s Bazar despite “all the conditions being in place for a massive epidemic”, he said, noting that outbreaks of measles, diphtheria, polio, cholera and rubella have been contained thanks to preventive inoculation campaigns that have required four million doses of vaccine.

“We need to sustain the vigilance for early warnings of infectious diseases,” Dr. Salama said. “That is still a major risk due to the environmental situation, the poor sanitation, the massive overcrowding, the way these people are being housed and we need to maintain our ability to scale-up outbreak response as required.”

His call to scale up help was echoed in Geneva by [IOM](#), the UN migration agency, spokesperson Joel Millman.

“This was the fastest growing refugee crisis in the world and the challenges have been immense,” he said, highlighting comments by the agency’s Chief of Mission in Bangladesh Giorgi Gigauri. “Countless lives have been saved thanks to the generosity of the Government of Bangladesh, the local community and donors and the hard work of all those involved in the humanitarian response. But we now face the very real threat that if more funding is not urgently secured, lives will once again be at risk.”

One year on from the exodus sparked by a military operation likened to ethnic cleansing by UN human rights chief Zeid Ra’ad al Hussein, more than 720,000 Rohingya people have arrived in Cox’s Bazar in southern Bangladesh.

They have joined an estimated 200,000 Rohingya refugees who were previously displaced.

One of the camps, Kutupalong, shelters more than 600,000 refugees, making it the largest and most densely populated refugee settlement in the world, according to the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\)](#).

In addition to the challenge of providing people's basic needs – shelter, water and sanitation and healthcare – the agency has carried out huge engineering work to reduce the risk of landslides and flooding.

This also involved mobilizing and training hundreds of refugee volunteers to serve as first responders in the event of a natural disaster, although the camps have largely withstood the adverse weather.

Another key area of concern is the health of some 60,000 pregnant Rohingya women in the camps.

Many of them suffered gender-based violence “either prior or during the course of their flight” from Myanmar, WHO's Dr. Salama said, adding that only one fifth of them will give birth in a suitable healthcare facility.

Partner agency UNHCR also underlined the calls for the international community to step up support for the Rohingya, who are stateless and unable to return to Myanmar.

This is despite the UN's signing of an official Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Myanmar in June, to help establish conditions conducive for the safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation of the Rohingya.

According to OCHA, the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#), the mainly Muslim Rohingya communities that have stayed in Rakhine state require urgent – and in some cases lifesaving – help.

Some 660,000 people are in need across Rakhine state including more than 176,000 in Northern Rakhine, OCHA spokesperson Jens Laerke said.

“We stand ready to go there as soon as access allows,” he added.” Most humanitarian organizations that have been working in Northern Rakhine state for years have still not been able to resume programmes and services for these population which are some of the most vulnerable in the world.”

To date, the \$950 million Rohingya 2018 appeal is only just over 30 per cent funded.

[Central America: drought, resulting crop losses threaten food security of two million people, UN warns](#)

Recent drought has led to the loss of some 280,000 hectares of beans and maize in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, potentially affecting the food

and nutrition situation of more than two million people, two United Nations agencies warned on Friday.

The UN [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO) and the [World Food Programme](#) (WFP) are concerned by the fact that the months of June and July saw “lower-than-average rainfall” and “drier-than-average conditions”, which affected the first and principal crop cycle in Central America, known as the *primera*.

“Just when rural communities were recovering from the 2014 drought and the [El Niño](#) phenomenon of 2015 – the strongest recorded in recent history – a new drought is affecting the most vulnerable again,” [said](#) Miguel Barreto, WFP Regional Director for America and the Caribbean.

Maize and beans, main food staples in the region, have been the crops most-affected by the drought, according to the governments of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, which reported losses of 281,000 hectares of these crops, on which the food and nutrition security of much of their populations depend.

These losses will increase the cost of these foods for the entire population.

The UN agencies warn that this may be compounded by the possible arrival of an El Niño by the end of the year, which could worsen the already “precarious” food and nutrition security situation of vulnerable rural communities in the region.

“Total or partial loss of crops means that subsistence farmers and their families will not have enough food to eat or sell in coming months,” read the [joint statement](#) released on Friday.

The Honduran Government declared the emergency this month, while the Government of El Salvador declared a red alert in July.

The second crop cycle – known as the *postrera* – which usually makes up for the deficiencies of the first harvest, takes place in November, but the UN agencies warned that “even if El Niño turns out to be a weak one, it will have a significant impact on the outcome of the second harvest”.

“With the support of the international community, we have worked together with the governments and rural communities... to help them become more resilient to extreme climatic variations, but we need to redouble our efforts and reach more rural communities,” explained WFP’s Miguel Barreto added.

After what happened in 2014 and 2015, humanitarian organizations provided food assistance to thousands of people in vulnerable communities in the region, to improve food security and [strengthen resilience](#) at family, community and institutional level. These activities included the conservation of soil and water, better agricultural practices and training to deal with natural disasters, as well as the strengthening of monitoring systems for food and nutrition security.

“It is urgent to improve the climate resilience of the inhabitants of Central

America,” said the FAO Regional Representative, Julio Berdegué. “We are particularly concerned about the effect of this new drought on migration, in an international context that restricts the movement of thousands of people who, in their localities, will have great difficulty in securing the livelihood of their families,” he added.

To mitigate the risks this year, FAO and WFP, in close collaboration with governments and partners, plan to closely monitor the impact of the drought on the price of staple foods; develop analysis on the food and nutritional security of the most vulnerable; work on agreements to allow the regulated, safe and orderly temporary migration of people from the rural communities most affected by the drought; and mobilize resources to scale rainwater harvesting and storage systems and reduce the impact of future droughts.

[Embrace ‘people-centered multilateralism,’ UN-civil society forum urges](#)

Thursday afternoon, the 67th United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI)/Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) [Conference](#) concluded, pledging to “uplift those whose human rights are most under threat and to protect our planet by living in harmony with nature.”

“DPI is proud to work closely with civil society to plan this unique event for networking and examining together how the UN and the NGO community can work together solve global problems,” said Ms. Alison Smale, Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications.

The participants adopted by acclamation in the closing session an outcome document entitled ‘People Centered Multilateralism: A Call to Action,’ and which will be known by the shorthand the [New York Action Plan](#).

It contains specific civil society commitments, as well as calls for the UN Secretary-General, Member States, multinational corporations and the UN itself.

“We are heartened to see how strong support is for multilateralism among civil society and how committed they are to partner in the spirit of the [UN Charter](#),” Ms. Smale added.

The chair of this year’s Conference, Ms. Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of Oxfam International, said: “The outcome document sets us on a path to reimagine multilateralism – how we work together to tackle the global problems we face. I’m proud that that this week, we have had the audacity to

identify those daunting challenges and to respond boldly and with one voice.”

Youth played an integral role in planning and participating in the Conference, including with a dedicated ‘youth hub’. They also adopted a [Youth Declaration](#), “We the Future,” part of the outcome document, which offers a set of visions, commitments and recommendations, drafted by and for youth.

At the closing, Ms. Smale announced that next year, Utah’s Salt Lake City would host the 68th conference. from 26 to 28 August.

Salt Lake City Mayor Jackie Biskupski said: “As a city committed to being inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable, it is an honour to be the first US host city of the UN-DPI Conference.”

She underscored that Salt Lake City would be an excellent opportunity for the UN and the world’s NGOs “to expand awareness in this country of sustainable development goals and the value of global unity.”

Two years ago, in the city of Gyeongju, Republic of Korea, the DPI/NGO Conference embarked on “an ethos of global citizenship.”

In that same people-centred spirit, this year’s Conference re-committed to foster multilateralism dedicated both to human rights and sustainable development – with a pledge to uplift the rights of those most under threat.

ISIL continues to pose a ‘serious challenge’ worldwide – UN counter-terror chief

Despite serious military setbacks, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) may still have around 20,000 fighters and is continuing its dangerous transformation into a covert global network, while focusing on the activities of its regional offshoots, the United Nations Security Council was told.

These were among the key findings in a new United Nations report into the threats posed by ISIL presented to the UN [Security Council](#) on Thursday by senior UN counter-terrorism officials

The report also detailed how UN Member States and the UN system are continuing to strengthen, refine and promote the effective use of tools and measures to address the evolving transnational threat posed by the terrorist group and its affiliates

[Briefing](#) the Council, [Vladimir Voronkov](#), Under-Secretary-General of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, said that despite being militarily defeated in Iraq and in headlong retreat in Syria, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, otherwise known as ISIL, remains a serious and significant concern.

Mr. Voronkov was joined by Michèle Coninx, Executive Director of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate ([CTED](#)). The two senior officials broke the report down into three main areas, assuring the Council members that: “The global fight against ISIL and its affiliates continues.”

Firstly, Mr. Voronkov [said](#) that despite a major loss of territory, there are still around 20,000 ISIL members in both Iraq and Syria, and a core of fighters is expected to survive, thanks to ongoing conflict and instability. A significant number of ISIL-affiliated militants also exist in Afghanistan, South-East Asia, West Africa and Libya, and to a lesser extent in Sinai, Yemen, Somalia and the Sahel.



UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, addresses the Security Council.

ISIL continues to exert a presence and influence across a wide spectrum of countries and regions: Indonesia was hit by a series of deadly suicide bombings in May, whilst in Europe, there is concern over commercially encrypted messages and radicalization in prisons.

The terror group is even attempting to expand its presence in Afghanistan: Mr. Voronkov revealed that during his mission to Kabul, the Afghan capital, on August 14 and 15, President Ashraf Ghani proposed a high-level conference in Kabul next year, with the support of partners, to develop a regional counter-terrorism strategy with a focus on Afghanistan.

Secondly, whilst the flow of foreign ISIL fighters returning home is slower than feared, the dangers posed by bomb-making expertise gained in conflict

zones (such as the preparation of improvised explosive devices and weaponized drones) is a major cause for concern.

Former fighters back in their home countries have the potential to radicalize others, whether in the prison system or wider society, and Member States continue to experience difficulties in assessing the risks they pose, and must develop tailored strategies for their returning and relocation.

And third, the evolution of ISIL (from a proto-State structure into a covert network) has driven the group's finances underground, making them much harder to detect: it still has the capacity to channel funds across borders, often via intermediate countries, to their final destination.

Referring to the report, Mr. Voronkov noted that Member States and the international community must renew their efforts to counter the evolving, global threat from ISIL.



UN Photo/Loey Felipe

Michèle Coninsx, Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED) addresses the Security Council.

Within the UN, several entities are working closely together to counter the group, addressing such critical areas as financing of terrorism, international judicial cooperation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration.

Ms. Coninsx [added](#) that the UN is supporting Member States with the most up-to-date technologies to secure their borders, providing guidance for the effective use of these technologies in full compliance with international human rights law.

"We also continue to forge new and innovative partnerships with the private sector, including in particular in the area of information and communications technologies," she said, stressing that such engagement is essential, for

example, with respect to gathering digital evidence in terrorism cases.

[Economy on a steady rise in Latin America and Caribbean region 'despite international turbulence' – UN report](#)

Amid external uncertainty and volatility, the economies of Latin America and the Caribbean will grow by an average of 1.5 per cent this year, thanks to a rebound in private consumption and a slight increase in investment, according to a [United Nations flagship report](#) issued on Thursday.

“Our [region continues to grow](#), although at a slower pace than what was projected several months ago, despite international turbulence, said Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean ([ECLAC](#)) during a press conference in Mexico City.

While she noted that this steady growth is “positive,” she noted that “it demands that we redouble our efforts to prompt a reactivation, without resorting to excessive fiscal adjustments.

“Regional integration can play an important role here, and we must aim in that direction,” she added.

The report, which covers a total of 30 countries, highlights great heterogeneity among the various economies and sub-regions: South America is expected to grow by 1.2 per cent in 2018, while Central America will notch 3.4 per cent growth and the Caribbean, 1.7 per cent.

Regarding countries, the Dominican Republic and Panama will lead the region’s growth, with increases in gross domestic product (GDP) of 5.4 per cent and 5.2 per cent respectively, followed by Paraguay, Bolivia, Antigua and Barbuda, Chile and Honduras, which range between 4.4 and 3.9 per cent.

The survey notes that this growth is occurring in the midst of a complex global scenario, including trade disputes between the United States, China and other nations; growing geopolitical risks; a decline in capital flows toward emerging markets in the last few months and a rise in sovereign risk levels; depreciations of local currencies against the US dollar; and a global economic expansion that is tending to lose momentum.

According to the findings, average inflation remains within expected values overall, the regional urban unemployment rate has stopped growing (forecast at 9.2 per cent), thanks to greater creation of salaried jobs. Measures aimed at fiscal consolidation in Latin America have brought about an expected

reduction in the primary deficit, which is forecast to narrow from an average deficit of 0.8 per cent of GDP in 2017 to 0.5 per cent in 2018.

While the report shows that the region has increased its investment levels in the last two decades and closed the gap with other regions of the world, ECLAC warns that additional efforts are needed to promote the productive linkages of this investment and thereby bolster economic growth.

As, in 2017, private investment levels (80.3 per cent) surpassed those of public investment (19.7 per cent), the head of ECLAC stressed that “it is necessary to have a strategic vision regarding public investment, since it plays an important role in boosting private investment... as well as in the provision of central public goods to drive growth”.

“The region has made significant efforts to increase investment flows, but we face the challenge of improving its sectoral composition to incentivize our economies’ productivity. There is still much to be done,” Ms. Bárcena insisted.