

# Donors pledge over \$500 million to tackle growing needs in DR Congo; UN warns humanitarian crisis cannot be ignored

The first-ever [international conference](#) to help the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) opened at the United Nations Office at Geneva on Friday amid dire warnings of a growing humanitarian crisis in the vast African country.

Despite massive natural resources and major socio-economic changes driven by Government-led initiatives, years of violence by armed groups vying for control – along with ethnic strife in the country's restive east, and political and ethnic instability – have created massive food insecurity, according to the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA).

In Geneva, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock [told](#) donors that more than two million children are suffering from severe acute malnutrition in DRC and 13 million people require assistance there urgently – double the number of those in need last year.

He added that DRC is also facing “the worst outbreak of cholera in fifteen years,” as well as “an epidemic of sexual violence,” committed mainly against children.

“As I speak, the resurgence of an inter-ethnic conflict in Ituri in February is killing many people and leading to internal and cross-border displacement of even more,” he said.”

And thousands of farmers in the crisis gripped Kasais have missed three successive agricultural seasons, resulting in a drop in agricultural production.

Speaking to journalists in Geneva during a break in the conference, Mr. Lowcock said that he expected to confirm more than \$500 million in [pledges](#) before the end of the day.

Total needs for the DRC for this year are estimated at \$1.7 billion – nearly four times more than the amount secured last year.

An additional \$500 million is needed to support 807,000 Congolese refugees in neighbouring countries and more than 540,000 refugees from other countries who are in DRC.

The question of securing sufficient funding was underlined by UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) in his opening address to the pledging conference.

He urged Member States in Geneva via a [video message](#) to show solidarity for the “millions of people who are suffering” in one of the world’s largest humanitarian crises as the UN and the DRC Government work together to respond to needs.

During the conference, Jean-Philippe Chauzy, from the UN migration agency, spoke of the need to strengthen international support for the people of the DRC.

“Confronted with rising intercommunal tensions, political instability and an increasingly insecure environment, the international humanitarian community needs to [strengthen its support](#) and commitment to the Congolese people,” said Mr. Chauzy, who is DRC Chief of Mission for the [International Organization for Migration](#) (IOM).

He added: “We simply cannot ignore the speed, and magnitude of [this] crisis.”

Alongside the UN, the pledging conference was co-hosted by the Netherlands and the European Commission.

Sigrid Kaag, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands, described the DRC as a “forgotten” conflict that desperately needed more support from the international community.

She highlighted the impact of gender-based violence on girls and young women whom she had met on a recent visit to DRC.

Some had requested help in the form of rape kits, while others had asked how to look after the babies they had given birth to after their sexual assault.

That message was underlined by conference co-host Christos Stylianides, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, who spoke of the violence and “stories of unbelievable pain” that he heard while visiting the country in recent weeks.

Asked at the press conference about the decision by the DRC authorities not to attend the pledging conference, Mark Lowcock underlined the scale of the problems in the country – and the importance of securing funding for some 150 organizations working to support humanitarian action “under the leadership” of the DRC authorities in 20 provinces.

“I think everybody recognizes that there is a substantial crisis in the DRC, the Government recognizes that themselves, which [acknowledges] their own very substantial financial commitment to it,” he said, in reference to its \$100 million pledge to provide additional aid.

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## Conditions ‘not yet conducive’ for Rohingya refugee to return home to Myanmar – UN agency

The United Nations refugee agency and the Government of Bangladesh on Friday signed a cooperation agreement on the safe, dignified return of Rohingya refugees to their homes in Myanmar, “once conditions there are conducive.”

Noting that such conditions are not present at the moment, the UN refugee agency urged Myanmar authorities to create them as well as to take concrete measures to address the root causes of displacement.

“[The responsibility for creating such conditions](#) remains with the Myanmar authorities, and these must go beyond the preparation of physical infrastructure to facilitate logistical arrangements,” the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR) stressed.

The agency also noted that in the absence of a UNHCR-Myanmar-Bangladesh agreement, it has continued to engage with both Governments in negotiations on two separate memoranda of understanding (MOUs), meant to ensure that any future returns are conducted in line with the international standards.

More than 670,000 members of the Muslim minority Rohingya community fled violence in Myanmar since August 2017, joining an estimated 200,000 Rohingya who have sought shelter in Bangladesh, arriving in waves over the past decades.



UNHCR/Susan Hopper

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Filippo Grandi (centre right) and Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Mohammad Shahidul Haque (centre left) sign a MoU

relating to voluntary returns of Rohingya refugees.

According to UNHCR, the refugees have said that before considering return to Myanmar, they would need to see concrete progress in relation to their legal status and citizenship, security, and their ability to enjoy basic rights at home in Rakhine state.

UNHCR also urged the Myanmar Government to immediately provide full and unhindered access to refugees' places of origin in Rakhine, which would enable it to assess the situation and provide information to refugees about conditions in the places of origin, as well as to monitor any possible future return and reintegration of refugees.

"Another practical measure would be to ease restrictions on movement for the internally displaced persons encamped in the central townships of Rakhine state, which would also help to build confidence among refugees in Bangladesh," it added.

"Such concrete measures would help demonstrate to refugees that the Government of Myanmar is committed to a sustainable solution."

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## **More than 1,000 children in northeastern Nigeria abducted by Boko Haram since 2013 – UNICEF**

At least 1,000 children have been abducted by the Boko Haram insurgent group in northeastern Nigeria since 2013 amid repeated attacks on schools, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said Friday, calling for an end to such violence and the release of those who have yet to be returned.

Since the conflict started in northeastern Nigeria nearly nine years ago, at least 2,295 teachers have been killed and more than 1,400 schools have been destroyed. Most of these schools have not reopened because of extensive damage or ongoing insecurity.

The issue of child abduction drew renewed attention when 276 girls were taken from a school in the town of Chibok in 2014.

Four years on from this tragic incident, more than 100 girls have yet to be returned to their families, said UNICEF.

The recent attack on a school in Dapchi, in which five girls lost their lives is just the latest indication that there are few safe spaces left for children in the northeast.

“These [repeated attacks against children](#) in schools are unconscionable,” said UNICEF Representative in Nigeria Mohamed Malick Fall. “Children have the right to education and protection, and the classroom must be a place where they are safe from harm.”

UNICEF stands with Nigerian authorities, who have made a commitment to make schools safer by protecting educational facilities from violence and military use during armed conflict.

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## [Global youth must be empowered to combat terrorism, UN forum declares](#)

Young people are prime targets of extremist recruiters but they can also play leadership roles in fighting terrorism and creating greater opportunities for all, said speakers at a United Nations forum on Thursday called ‘Investing in Youth to Counter Terrorism.’

“I do not agree that young people are the leaders of tomorrow. More and more, they are the [leaders of today](#),” [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) told the event.

“I thank all the young women and men who are stepping up and assuming those responsibilities,” he added.

“Nearly half the world’s population – 46 per cent – is 24 years-old or younger,” Mr. Guterres said. “Africa and the Middle East have the highest proportions of young people.”

The radicalization of young people is a source of deep concern in rich and poor countries alike, as poisonous ideas flow across borders at the touch of a button or the tap of a tweet.

Terrorist groups exploit social, economic and political injustices to entice young people through false propaganda that glorifies distorted ideologies, while unscrupulous recruiters use social media to lure unsuspecting teenagers down dangerous roads.

Mr. Guterres observed that “violent extremist groups target and invest in young people because they are aware of their potential and their strong desire for change.”

For her part, the Secretary-General’s [Envoy on Youth](#), Jayathma Wickramanayake, asserted, “the fact is, the vast majority of youth are peaceful, and are not in danger of participating in violence.”

“On the contrary,” she continued, “young people’s resilience is transforming



local communities while combating extremist movements.”



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Jayathma Wickramanayake, Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, addresses the special event on “Investing in Youth to Counter Terrorism.”

Discussions at the event at UN Headquarters in New York centered on meeting the needs of youth at risk of disempowerment and alienation – making them susceptible to extremist narratives and recruitment.

“If we are serious about prevention, and particularly about preventing conflict, we need to be serious about engaging with and investing in young women and men,” underscored the UN chief.

“We need their involvement and commitment, if we are to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), take effective action on climate change, and create a safer and more peaceful world,” he continued.

Both the [Security Council](#) and the [General Assembly](#) have also recognized the importance of engaging youth, and continue seeking ways for their inclusive representation in decision-making in local, national, regional and international institutions.

## **A place at the table**

An overarching theme of Thursday's meeting was the need to include young people in efforts to prevent and resolve conflict, including violent extremism.

In calling for the engagement of young people, Mr. Guterres described their main needs as: “Education, jobs, and vocational training. Investment, interest, role models and goals. Meaningful participation in decisions that affect them.”

He emphasized that youth have a voice and a place at the table, adding: “More than that, we must be prepared to go to their table, sit down and listen.”

The joint event was sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Norway and Pakistan and the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism ([UNOCT](#)). That office assists Member States in strengthening their capacities to combat terrorism and ensures that counter-terrorism remains a priority across the Organization, in accordance with the [UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy](#).

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## **[South Sudan: UN migration agency and partners reach more than 140,000 people with vaccination campaigns](#)**

The United Nations migration agency and its partners are set to begin a second round of an oral cholera vaccination campaign in Malakal and Wau, South Sudan, after the initial round reached more than 60,400 people in March of this year.

Following an outbreak in February, the [International Organization for Migration](#) (IOM) has also been leading a reactive measles vaccination campaign in Aweil East, which reached more than 83,700 children last month.

“Children are extremely vulnerable to outbreaks of measles and other contagious diseases,” [explained](#) Derebe Tadesse, IOM Migration Health Officer. “The measles vaccine will save lives. With just one dose, 85 percent of children over nine months and 95 percent of children over twelve months of age are immune.”

Since the start of the conflict in 2013, protracted displacement and poor health conditions have contributed to yearly cholera outbreaks in South Sudan.

In 2017, IOM reached more than 469,800 people with oral cholera vaccination campaigns in Unity, Warrap, and Eastern Equatoria. With an estimated 5.1 million people in need of emergency health care assistance, IOM continues to work country-wide to provide aid to vulnerable populations affected by the conflict.