

## UN aid chief urges international support to tackle 'spiralling humanitarian needs' in DR Congo

As fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has forced 4.5 million people to flee their homes over the past year and left more than 13 million in need of humanitarian assistance, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator has called on the international community to urgently address the crisis.

"We heard their [heart-wrenching stories](#), their descriptions of what they need, but also their hopes and their stories of resilience and courage in the face of unimaginable challenges," said Mark Lowcock, who is also the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, wrapping up his visit to the country with Sigrid Kaag, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation for the Netherlands.

With humanitarian needs having doubled since last year, more than 4.6 million Congolese children are acutely malnourished, including 2.2 million severely acute cases. Moreover, epidemics are spreading – counting the worst outbreak of cholera in 15 years.

"What we know is happening in many parts of the country, doesn't need to persist if we work together," continued Mr. Lowcock. "Every vulnerable Congolese family deserves all our support to rebuild their lives."

Mr. Lowcock and Ms. Kaag Tuesday travelled to Kalemie in the south-eastern province of Tanganyika where they visited the Katanika displacement site and spoke with some of the over 13,000 people who live there, having fled ethnic violence.

Ms. Kaag joined a group of women, including survivors of sexual violence, to listen to their experiences, needs, and hopes for the future. In Katanika, as in most Congolese provinces affected by displacement, women and children make up the majority of the severely affected people.

They also travelled to the Kalunga displacement site, which, since November 2016, has received nearly 3,500 displaced families. Humanitarian partners there have established education; water and sanitation; and agricultural to help meet the needs of displaced people.

On Monday, Mr. Lowcock and Ms. Kaag met with Jose Makila Sumanda, acting Prime Minister, and Bernard Biando Sango, Minister of Solidarity and Humanitarian Action and discussed the impact of insecurity on aid operations.

The Government representatives said they would facilitate the work of humanitarian organizations and reduce tariffs for humanitarian imports, including medicines and food

Humanitarian partners require nearly \$1.7 billion this year to address humanitarian needs in the country, including for 4.5 million internally displaced people. On 13 April in Geneva, the European Commission, the Netherlands and United Arab Emirates will co-host the first-ever DRC humanitarian donor conference.

---

## [As Syria conflict enters eighth year, UN agencies join call for peace and safe aid delivery](#)

The United Nations hunger relief agency on Wednesday joined a chorus of international organizations and partners in the quest for an end to seven years of conflict in Syria, urging warring parties to allow humanitarian access for the delivery of life-saving assistance to those desperately in need.

“Every day that goes by without a resolution to this crisis is another day where [we have failed the people of Syria](#),” Jakob Kern, World Food Programme (WFP) Representative and Country Director in Syria, said in a news release.

“The single greatest priority must be an end to this conflict. History will hold us accountable,” he added.

The conflict, which is entering its eighth year, has brought intolerable suffering to millions of people. In many parts of the country, the violence has reached unbearable levels and still.

Every day, families under bombardment and shelling face a nightmare and more innocent lives are lost. More than a third of Syria’s population is internally displaced.

Every day that goes by without a resolution to this crisis is another day where we have failed the people of Syria.

With this continuous displacement come alarmingly high levels of hunger and need. Some 6.5 million people in Syria are food insecure and another four million people – twice as many as a year ago – are at risk of becoming so.

Since the conflict started, food prices have soared beyond the reach of many. Bread is now eight times more expensive compared to pre-crisis times. Today, a shocking seven in ten Syrians live in extreme poverty.

In 2017, UN-led humanitarian convoys reached [820,200 people](#) inside Syria,

according to UN relief agencies.

“We are humans. We are civilians. We do not deserve this. My children are hungry and have no food to eat,” a resident in Eastern Ghouta told WFP during a rare delivery of humanitarian aid in February – rare because the fighting hardly ever lets up long enough for humanitarian convoys to reach the besieged enclave.

WFP, which each year assists some 80 million people in around 80 countries, said it adds its voice to the call for peace and safe, unhindered and unconditional humanitarian access in Syria.

---

## [Civil society in forefront of struggle for gender parity, UN chief tells townhall event](#)

The United Nations has embarked on an initiative to address the male-dominated power structure within its own ranks and now has more women than men in the senior management team, Secretary-General António Guterres told civil society activists on Tuesday.

“The struggle for gender equality is a tough struggle, and obviously it is tougher when we look at it from the perspective of Governments and institutions,” Mr. Guterres said during a town hall-style discussion at UN Headquarters in New York, an event held on the margins of the [62nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women \(CSW62\)](#), the UN’s largest gathering on gender equality.

“So it is civil society that is indeed being in the forefront of this struggle... Without civil society leadership and pressure, I doubt we would be where we are today,” he added.

The Commission is taking place from 12 to 23 March, with the theme, ‘Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls,’ bringing together global leaders, non-governmental organizations, private sector actors, UN partners and activists from around the world.

The UN chief stressed that the Organization must reach gender parity, starting from the upper echelons, noting that his Executive Office now has a staff ratio of 56 per cent for women against 44 per cent for men. The female-male ratio was 40 per cent to 60 per cent when he started as the top executive.

At the most-senior management level, gender parity was reached last month – for the first time in UN history – with 23 women against 21 men. “This is the clear symbol that when I talked about gender parity, it is not just an intention,” he said.

In April, he expects to increase the proportion of female resident coordinators from 47 per cent now to 50 per cent.

The next target for gender parity is the ranks of Special Representatives and Envoys, in which only one third of positions are held by women.

He also said he has issued a roadmap to achieve full gender parity in 2028, having already asked all UN departments and agencies to present their plans.

Mr. Guterres also said he is addressing the problem of UN staff sexually exploiting and abusing the people they serve as well as sexual harassments happening within the UN.

---

## [Report highlights UN progress in fight to stamp out sexual exploitation and abuse](#)

The number of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by personnel serving with the United Nations dropped from 165 in 2016 to 138 last year, according to the latest [report](#) by the UN Secretary-General on implementing a zero-tolerance policy for these crimes.

The Special Coordinator on Improving UN Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, [Jane Holl Lute](#), outlined some of its main messages during a press conference at UN Headquarters in New York on Tuesday.

“The report underscores the Secretary-General’s consistent message that no one serving under the UN flag should be associated with sexual exploitation and abuse,” she said.

“It remains one of his key priorities.”

Ms. Lute said data from 2017 indicates a “downward trend” in the number of allegations reported.

Overall, there were 138 allegations last year, compared to 165 in 2016.

Of this number, 62 concerned personnel deployed to UN peacekeeping and special political missions: down from 104 the previous year.

However, she said allegations emanating from other UN entities and their implementing partners increased over the same period: from 42 to 75.

At the same time, there was “a sharp decline” in allegations involving non-UN forces, from 18 in 2016 to one in 2017.

Ms. Lute reminded journalists of measures the UN has implemented over the past year since [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) launched [a system-wide strategy](#) to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse.

The initiatives focus on areas such as putting victims first, ending impunity and increasing partnerships; for example, with civil society.

They include the appointment of a [Victims’ Rights Advocate](#), responding rapidly to allegations and ensuring that UN staff [understand](#) their responsibilities and obligations to prevent and report incidents.

“On ending impunity, the Secretary-General has strengthened mandatory reporting through the development of a uniform incident reporting form,” Ms. Lute continued.

“We have strengthened investigations in cooperation with Member States. We have encouraged Member States to promptly appoint and deploy national investigation officers where allegations have been reported, and we continue to support the capacity building and training of national investigative officers.”

Ms. Lute added that a [trust fund](#) to support victims has seen a three-fold increase in contributions, and she encouraged countries to “maintain this positive momentum.”

The trust fund was established in March 2016. As of December 2017, it stood at \$1.89 million in commitments and/or contributions.

Additionally, grants have been made available or approved to support victims through projects, services and training in three countries: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and Liberia.

---

## [Rohingyas could face further violence if they return to Myanmar, UN adviser warns](#)

International crimes were committed against the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and those who fled the country could face further persecution if they return now, a senior United Nations official said Tuesday.

“Rohingya Muslims [have been killed](#), tortured, raped, burnt alive and humiliated, solely because of who they are,” said Adama Dieng, UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, following his visit to Bangladesh, where almost 700,000 Rohingyas from Myanmar had arrived in the space of just six months.

His visit from 7 to 13 March was to assess the situation of the Rohingya population who have crossed the border since the most recent violence in Myanmar’s northern Rakhine state in October 2016 and August 2017.

He visited refugee camps in Cox’s Bazaar, where survivors told horrifying stories of what they endured.

“All the information I have received indicates that the intent of the perpetrators was to cleanse northern Rakhine state of their existence, possibly even to destroy the Rohingya as such, which, if proven, would constitute the crime of genocide,” Mr. Dieng said.

The scorched earth campaign carried out by the Myanmar security forces since August 2017 against the Rohingya population was predictable and preventable. But the international community has buried its head in the sand.

“The scorched earth campaign carried out by the Myanmar security forces since August 2017 against the Rohingya population was predictable and preventable,” he stressed, noting that “the international community has buried its head in the sand” and failed to save the Rohingya from losing their lives, dignity and homes despite his numerous warnings of the risk of atrocity crimes.

Underscoring the need for the root causes of the problem to be addressed, Mr. Dieng said that “the Rohingya has been sealed since the day they were born” and that they must be given the opportunity that every human being should be afforded in life: to enjoy their fundamental human rights in freedom and safety.

He also said there must be accountability for the crimes that have been committed and the Rohingya must receive protection and support as refugees while in Bangladesh.

Mr. Dieng said that the majority of the Rohingya want to return to Myanmar, but only when they can do so in safety, dignity and with access to their basic rights.

“So far, the Myanmar authorities have shown no genuine efforts to allow this,” he said, noting that the international community also has a responsibility to protect this population from the risk of further atrocity crimes.

“Under the present conditions, returning to Myanmar will put the Rohingya population at risk of further crimes,” Mr. Dieng warned, stressing that, however, accepting the current *status quo* would be a victory for those who

planned the attacks.

“We must not accept either of these scenarios,” he concluded.

*Click here for Mr. Dieng's [full statement](#).*