

UN development agency remains committed to support Lebanon, says agency head

Reverberations of the Syrian conflict – which has now lasted longer than World War II – are being felt throughout the region, including in Lebanon, which shares most of its land border with the war-torn country, and hosts hundreds of thousands of its refugees, the head of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) warned on Friday.

“Almost seven years into the Syrian conflict, Lebanon remains at the forefront of one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time and continues to show exceptional commitment and solidarity to people displaced by the war in Syria,” said Achim Steiner, the UNDP Administrator, [wrapping up](#) his first official visit to the country.

“[We] remain committed to supporting the Lebanese Government and local communities hosting refugees in their efforts to maintain stability and to continue its support to local communities hosting refugees.”

The ongoing Syria crisis has impacted Lebanon’s social services, infrastructure and jobs.

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During his visit, Mr. Steiner met with the Lebanese Prime Minister, Saad Hariri, as well as many other senior officials and discussed the challenges the nation faces, seven years into the Syria crisis.

The UNDP chief also visited Bourj Hammoud, an area hosting close to 20,000 Syrian refugees, and saw the impact of the crisis at the local level and how the Lebanese community and Syrian refugees manage day to day issues such as their children’s education, earning an income and accessing essential health services.

“Every refugee would like to return home but, in the meantime, until conditions permit, our role is to assist Lebanon in managing the global public good it provides,” he said, underscoring UNDP’s support for the upcoming Paris and Brussels Conferences.

During his visit, Mr. Steiner also attended a roundtable discussion on Lebanon’s efforts in pursuit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with officials from the Parliament and Government, alongside representatives of civil society and the private sector.

[In crisis-torn eastern DR Congo, UN food relief agency expands operations to stem hunger](#)

Escalating violence, daunting logistical challenges and insufficient funding have prompted the United Nations food relief agency to broaden its emergency operation in the war-ravaged Kasai region in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

To prevent famine in the Kasai region, the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) is stepping-up cash distributions to the most vulnerable, and specialist support to check acute malnutrition in women and young children.

“The nutrition and [cash programmes are life-saving](#), and must quickly expand,” Claude Jibidar, WFP’s Representative in DRC, said Friday.

Since last week’s cash initiative launch – a cost-efficient alternative to in-kind support that allows beneficiaries to buy what they want in recovering local markets – 38,000 people have each received the equivalent of \$15 for a month, enough to meet their basic food needs with the intention to more than double that reach in the coming weeks.

“We’re not doing nearly as much as we could in Kasai because the obstacles are huge,” Mr. Jibidar continued, “but unless we collectively rise to the challenges, many more people, including the weakest women and children, will die.”

Plumpy’Sup, a micronutrient-rich ready-to-use supplementary food, has been airlifted from France to enable a significant scale-up of WFP’s nutrition interventions in Kasai. Up from 21,000 in the final quarter of last year, 56,000 malnourished children were reached there in January with the expectation of a 20,000 a month increase to 140,000 by June.

Following the eruption of brutal political and ethnic violence in mid-2016, which claimed countless lives, razed entire villages and forced hundreds of thousands of families from their homes, WFP launched its assistance programme.

Assessments showed that 3.2 million people, a quarter of the region’s population of mostly subsistence farmers, were desperately short of food.

AUDIO CLIP: Claude Jibidar, WFP Country Director for Democratic Republic of Congo, by UN News – Audio

With no prior presence in Kasai, between September and December WFP achieved a tenfold increase in the number of people receiving food rations – to 400,000. However, lagging donations forced cereal, beans, vegetable oil and salt rations to be halved in November.

Continued funding constraints, an upsurge in fighting between pro- and anti-Government forces and a rapid, rainy season deterioration of the already poor road network saw the number receiving half-rations drop to 130,000 in January.

“That reversal has to be corrected, and quickly,” continued Mr. Jibidar.

Limited funding is also a major challenge in the eastern DRC provinces of Tanganyika and South Kivu, where WFP is scaling up to meet the needs of growing conflict-displaced populations as part of a broad push by UN agencies and non-governmental organizations.

“We’ve shown we have capacity to deliver, but to reach sufficient scale we need the fighting to stop and donors to step up,” he concluded.

[New UN high-profile panel set to take on noncommunicable diseases, cause of seven in 10 deaths globally](#)

Bold, innovative solutions are now on the table to accelerate the prevention and control of deadly noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) – such as heart and lung disease, cancers and diabetes – as a new United Nations health agency high-level commission gets set to begin its work.

“NCDs are the world’s [leading avoidable killers](#), but the world is not doing enough to prevent and control them,” said Tabaré Vázquez, President of Uruguay and co-chair of the World Health Organization’s ([WHO](#)) Independent Global High-level Commission on NCDs.

“We have to ask ourselves if we want to condemn future generations from dying too young, and living lives of ill health and lost opportunity. The answer clearly is ‘no.’ But there is so much we can do to safeguard and care for people, from protecting everyone from tobacco, harmful use of alcohol, and unhealthy foods and sugary drinks, to giving people the health services they need to stop NCDs in their tracks,” he added.

The NCD Commission is also co-chaired by President Maithripala Sirisena of Sri Lanka; President Sauli Niinistö of Finland; Veronika Skvortsova, Minister of Healthcare of the Russian Federation; and Sania Nishtar, former Federal

Minister of Pakistan.

Each year, seven in 10 deaths globally are from NCDs, mostly from tobacco and alcohol use, unhealthy diets and physical inactivity.

More than 15 million people between 30 and 70 years old die annually from NCDs. Low- and lower-middle income countries are increasingly affected – with half of premature deaths from NCDs occurring in those countries.

“For the first time in history, more people are dying of noncommunicable diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes, than infectious diseases. This loss of human life spares no one – rich or poor, young or old – and it imposes heavy economic costs on nations,” said Michael R. Bloomberg, WHO Global Ambassador for Noncommunicable Diseases and Commission member.

Many lives can be saved from NCDs through early diagnosis and improved access to quality and affordable treatment, as well as a whole-of-government approach to reduce the main risk factors.

“The more public support we can build for government policies that are proven to save lives – as this Commission will work to do – the more progress we’ll be able to make around the world,” Mr. Bloomberg added.

The Commission was established by WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and runs until October 2019. It will contribute actionable recommendations to the Third UN General Assembly High-level Meeting on NCDs scheduled for later this year.

“Everybody deserves the right to a healthy life,” Mr. Tedros stressed. “We can beat the drivers of the NCD epidemic, which are among the world’s main obstacles to health.”

Dr. Nishtar argued that while there have been improvements in some countries and regions, the overall rate of progress has been unacceptably slow, “resulting in too many people suffering and dying needlessly from NCDs, and leaving families, communities and governments to bear the human and economic costs.”

“This year, governments will be held to account on progress they have made in protecting their citizens from NCDs,” she underscored.

UN, partners complete first aid delivery in months to Syria’s war-

battered east Ghouta

Thousands of civilians in east Ghouta now have life-saving food and medical supplies after the first aid convoy in nearly three months reached the besieged enclave just outside the Syrian capital of Damascus, the top United Nations humanitarian official in the country said on Friday.

“Whilst this development is welcome, it is absolutely insufficient. The people reached represent 2.6 per cent of the 272,500 people in need in east Ghouta,” the Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria, Ali Al-Za’tari, said in a statement Friday.

The supplies were delivered on 14 February. Aid workers have had no access to the besieged city for 78 days.

However, other supplies, including much-needed water and sanitation, education materials and non-food items, such as kitchen sets, blankets and plastic sheets, were not allowed to be loaded in the convoy, added the UN official.

As to the situation on the ground, the convoy – comprising UN agencies and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent – reported that the months-long isolation has left the local population “tired and exhausted.”

“Families are forced to skip meals, some only having one meal a day. A young ailing girl informed the team she has been eating yogurt and nothing else,” noted Mr. Al-Za’tari.

In addition, the stocks of basic commodities in the market are running dangerously low and prices are prohibitively expensive for the vast majority of people.

The rations delivered by the convoy will be shared among families, with five families sharing one basket.

This is not enough to sustain them for long and the impact of increasing levels of food insecurity – especially on children and pregnant women – is evident.

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The UN team witnessed a number of cases of severe acute malnutrition amid growing reports of an impending crisis. Healthcare workers at Shofiniyeh hospital reportedly screened 317 children under five in the last two weeks with 69 cases of acute malnutrition and 127 of children at risk.

Furthermore, caesarean-sections (C-sections) now account for 25 per cent of all births, likely caused by malnutrition among women and their lack of strength to give birth.

Paucity of medicines and health supplies taking a toll

The UN team also saw expired anaesthetics, the use of which has resulted in two deaths; and with vaccines running low, hundreds of children are feared to be at risk of disease.

Reports of cases of communicable diseases, such as tuberculosis, typhoid fever and scabies have emerged. Furthermore, with flare up of hostilities the number of people in need of urgent medical evacuation have also increased significantly.

The fighting has resulted in a surge of new displacement, with reports of hundreds of families desperate enough to seek refuge in other parts of east Ghouta – many of which are not safer – than the places they were forced to flee.

“People in need must be served, wherever they are. If Nashabiyeh is a sample of communities in need, then the situation is far graver than imagined,” said Mr. Al-Za’tari, calling on all parties to the conflict, and those with influence over them, to allow immediate, safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to all in need – particularly those in besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

“To do so, we repeat our call for an urgently required one-month cessation of hostilities. We will continue appealing for access to all those in need, and remind those responsible of their obligation to grant it under international humanitarian law,” he added.

[Service and Sacrifice: Honouring Nigeria’s contribution to UN peacekeeping](#)

Since the 1960s, Nigeria has been a major contributor of troops and police to United Nations peace operations, having served in dozens of missions. Most recently, Nigerian troops were the military backbone of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), from 2003-2018, helping to restore security throughout a country that had undergone a brutal civil war.

In January 2018, Liberians and the international community watched the first democratic transfer of power in the country in decades – thanks in no small

part to Nigeria and other troop and police contributing countries.

Liberia's new President, George Weah, recently commended UNMIL for its longstanding support to peace and stability, saying: "The Liberian people will forever remain grateful to you for your bravery and service to our great nation... Remember Liberia is your home."

Nigeria was one of the first countries to provide troops in Liberia in 2003, and was among the last to leave, its final troops flying out just last week.

Below is a snapshot of Nigeria's active participation in UN peacekeeping around the world over the years.