

General Assembly approves \$5.4 billion UN budget for next two years

26 December 2017 – Concluding the main part of its 72nd session, the United Nations General Assembly on Sunday took a number of key actions, including approving a nearly \$5.4 billion programme budget for the Organization for the biennium 2018-2019.

The budget covers UN activities across a range of areas, including political affairs, international justice and law, regional cooperation for development, human rights and humanitarian affairs, and public information.

The approved amount is \$286 million (or 5 per cent) below the budget for the current two-year period 2016-2017 and \$193 million below the proposal made by the Secretary-General in October this year.

In addition to the budget, the 193-member General Assembly also adopted a number of key resolutions, including reforms in areas of peace and security, and of management.

Speaking at the closing session, Miroslav Lajčák, the President of the General Assembly, stated that progress is not measured by the number of resolutions adopted, but rather by the impact the United Nations makes on people's lives.

"Our work is not yet done. We have more to do next year," he said, noting areas, including the Global Compact for Migration, the peacebuilding and sustaining peace agenda, maintaining momentum on the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), as well as Security Council reform.

"To have meaningful outcomes from all these processes we need to talk, and more importantly, to listen, to one another. These agenda items represent global challenges. And multilateralism is the tool we need to solve them," he added.

The UN budget

In approving the budget, the General Assembly also endorsed the proposal to move from a biennial planning and budgeting period to annual programme budget on a trial basis, as of 2020.

"This signals one of the [most significant shifts](#) in the programme planning and budgeting process of the Organization since the 1970s," stated a note issued by the Spokesman for the Secretary-General.

Explaining the details of the new budget, Johannes Huisman, the Director of Programme Planning and Budget, in the Office of the Controller, told *UN News* that most of the cuts were under operating or "non-post" areas, such as information technology or travel.

To a lesser extent, reductions also applied to personnel or post resources, he said.

Emphasizing that the UN budget will ensure that there is value for money, he said "This is a reassurance we can give to the tax-payers that no stone will be left unturned to make sure that the money is spent properly and ultimately benefits the world community in the areas where the UN is needed."

Listen to the full interview below:

AUDIO: No stone left unturned to ensure budget benefits the world community

[UNICEF official calls 2017 'horrible' for children in Yemen](#)

26 December 2017 – Children in Yemen could not have a worse year than 2017, according to a senior official from the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)).

"2017 was a horrible year for the children of Yemen," UNICEF Representative in the country, Meritxell Relaño, told *UN News* by telephone from the capital, Sana'a.

More than 80 children were killed or injured in December alone, while millions face a cholera epidemic, looming famine, a disruption in health services and a blockade hampering delivery of much-needed supplies.

She urged a political solution for what she said was a man-made conflict and warned that without a political solution many more children would die.

Ms. Relaño recounted meeting a woman and her dying 7-year-old son Ali in a hospital in Aden.

"He was like skin on bones. I asked why they had not come sooner and the mother told me that she could not afford to ride the bus to the hospital. The levels of poverty in the families [have] now reached levels that are unsustainable," she said.

To offset some of this type of need, Ms. Relaño noted that some 1.3 million families, or about 8 million people, are being reached with emergency cash as part of a transfer project between UNICEF and the World Bank.

She also praised successful efforts to deliver vaccines and implement a polio immunization campaign this year to benefit some 5 million children and provide treatment for 200,000 children with acute malnutrition.

"Yemenis who work on the ground to support the Yemenis are the true heroes,"

she said, noting the efforts of local authorities, doctors, nurses and teachers in the country.

AUDIO: UNICEF official shares memories of “a horrible year” for children in Yemen

[Congo: UN chief welcomes ceasefire between Brazzaville, Reverend Pastor Ntumi](#)

26 December 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Tuesday welcomed the signing of a ceasefire between the Government of the Republic of the Congo and a group led by Reverend Pastor Ntumi.

In a statement from his spokesperson, the Secretary-General [said](#) he hoped the agreement would “lead to a sustainable peaceful resolution of the conflict in the Pool region of the country and the alleviation of the dire humanitarian situation there.”

The Pool refers to the Congo’s oil-producing southern region that includes the capital, Brazzaville. Fighting broke out in April of last year, and has since displaced one out of three people, and exposed residents to alleged human rights violations, including sexual violence and threats.

The Government and Pastor Ntumi signed an agreement on 23 December to cease hostilities in the area.

The UN, in today’s statement, said it stands ready to support the parties in implementing the agreement.

[Field teams working ‘around the clock’ in wake of deadly storm in the Philippines – UNICEF](#)

25 December 2017 – Relief supplies prepositioned by the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) are ready for dispatch to areas of Philippines hit by Tropical Storm Tembin (known locally as ‘Vinta’) and its field

teams are working around the clock to assess the scale of damage, the UN agency has said.

“Our heart goes out to the children and families affected and made vulnerable by storm Vinta at this time of the year when majority of Filipinos are getting ready to celebrate Christmas,” said Lotta Sylwander, the head of UNICEF operations in Philippines, in a news release Sunday.

“[We] stand ready to support the Government and partners to address risks on children’s life and health and alleviate suffering of affected communities as best as we can,” she added.

The relief materials prepositioned by UNICEF include water and sanitation supplies, such as water kits for families, large water tanks for community use, water purification tablets, jerry cans and tents.

According to the UN agency, the situation of the communities displaced from Marawi earlier this year is of particular concern as the camps they were staying in were badly hit by the storm and tents have been destroyed.

First priority is to ensure children’s lives are saved and protected UNICEF

Furthermore, in any emergency, children are among the most vulnerable and are at a heightened risk of contaminated water, lack of food and epidemics, and other hazards which often follow in the wake of a natural disaster.

Saving children’s lives and ensuring they are protected is, therefore, its first priority, stressed UNICEF.

According to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the Philippines, severe flooding and landslides have been reported in Cagayan de Oro City and in a number of towns in Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte and Zamboanga Sibugay provinces.

So far, some 268,000 people are reported to have been affected by the storm, of whom about 160,000 are said to have been displaced. The storm has claimed at least 200 lives and about 100 more are reported missing.

However, these figures could rise as reports from the field come in and search and rescue efforts by local authorities continue, OCHA said.

Tropical Storm Tembin made landfall in Davao Oriental on 22 December and swept through various provinces in Mindanao causing flash floods and landslides. Tembin followed another tropical storm, Kai-tak (known locally as Urduja), that struck central parts of the country, affecting some 1.7 million people and displaced about 425,000.

Vital that all Yemeni ports kept open for aid and commercial vessels, stresses UN humanitarian chief

24 December 2017 – With close to three-fourths of all people in Yemen in need of humanitarian assistance, the United Nations top relief official has underscored the need to keep all ports open to both aid and commercial vessels so that life-saving assistance reaches those in desperate need.

"I remain deeply concerned about the ongoing crisis in Yemen, where more than 22 million people need humanitarian assistance – 8.4 million of whom are [already on the edge of starvation](#)," said Mark Lowcock, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, in a statement Sunday.

The conflict in the country, well into its third year, has [resulted](#) in widespread hunger, malnutrition, internal displacement, the world's largest cholera outbreak, an alarming diphtheria outbreak and other complex [humanitarian challenges](#).

Amid such a situation, it is essential that commercial food, medicine and fuel imports – a lifeline for millions of civilians – can flow into all ports.

Commercial food imports are needed to keep food available and affordable in markets across the country, and fuel is essential to run generators in hospitals and health facilities as well as power critical services.

Furthermore, as aid supplies are often shipped on commercial vessels, it is all the more important to keep all ports open to humanitarian and commercial vessels, added Mr. Lowcock.

"I am committed to working with all stakeholders to achieve this as a matter of urgency, and I look forward to seeing commercial imports of critical supplies stabilize at adequate levels," he stated.

In that context, he said that he was "encouraged" by the news of the first commercial fuel imports docking on 24 December at the Hudaydah port (the closest port to the majority of Yemenis) since 6 November, while commercial food imports that resumed in recent weeks have continued.

Further in the statement, Mr. Lowcock, also the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, said that commercial imports alone will not be enough to address the vast humanitarian crisis in Yemen or to provide a sustainable solution.

"I therefore reiterate my call for all parties to the conflict to provide unconditional, sustained humanitarian access – for both staff and supplies – across the country and without interference," he said, adding:

“I also call on all parties to the conflict to cease hostilities and engage meaningfully with the UN to achieve an inclusive, negotiated political settlement.”