

Yemen: As threat of famine looms, UN urges Saudi-led coalition to fully lift blockade of Red Sea ports

2 December 2017 – Top officials from across the United Nations system called on Saturday for the Saudi-led coalition to fully lift its blockade of Yemen's Red Sea ports, warning that unless commercial imports are resumed, the threat of widespread famine in a matter of months is very real.

The officials also announced that the United Nations is sending a team to Riyadh to discuss any concerns the coalition and Saudi Arabia may have in relation to these ports. "But we need the coalition to urgently grant unimpeded access for imports that are a lifeline for millions of people."

They acknowledged that the partial lifting of the blockade of Yemen's Red Sea ports in recent days is allowing humanitarian organizations to resume the provision of life-saving assistance to people in desperate need.

"But given the massive scale of Yemen's humanitarian crisis, [all this does is slow the collapse towards a massive humanitarian tragedy](#) costing millions of lives. It does not prevent it," said the UN leaders, who added: "Without the urgent resumption of commercial imports, especially food, fuel and medicines, millions of children, women and men risk mass hunger, disease and death."

The appeal came in a joint statement by the Director-General of the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Administrator of the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)), Achim Steiner, The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, the Executive Director of the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) Anthony Lake, the Executive Director of the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)), David Beasley, the Director General of the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)), William Lacy Swing, and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock.

RELATED: [More on the Yemen crisis](#)

More than two years of relentless conflict between the Government and Houthi and allied rebels in Yemen, already the Arab world's poorest country, has devastated the lives of millions of people. An alarming 20.7 million people in Yemen [need some kind of humanitarian or protection support](#), with some 9.8 million in acute need of assistance. This man-made disaster has been brutal on civilians.

In their statement today, the UN leaders said that the current ongoing commercial import restrictions have led to shortages of fuel, food and other essentials, driving up prices and wrecking lives and livelihoods. The price

of wheat flour has risen by 30 per cent, while the price of fuel has doubled and that of trucked water has skyrocketed by 600 per cent in some locations.

Urban water networks in seven cities have run out of fuel and now depend on humanitarian organizations to fill in the gap. Other cities will shortly be in a similar situation if the blockade is not lifted, which would leave 11 million people without safe water.

Yemen remains on the cusp of one of the largest famines in modern times

In other areas, people are reducing their food consumption to dangerous levels in order to pay for the rising cost of water trucking, or are turning to contaminated water sources to meet their basic needs. This further compounds the risk of disease, especially among children.

Less than half of the health facilities are functioning, and more hospitals and health centers will close should fuel and water supplies not improve. Sewage networks in six main cities are compromised, threatening a renewed spike in the country's cholera outbreak, which has reached almost 1 million suspected cases and killed over 2,200 people.

Yemen remains on the cusp of one of the largest famines in modern times, says the statement, explaining that nearly 400,000 children suffer from severe acute malnutrition and face an increased risk of death. In addition, some eight million people could starve without urgent food assistance coming into Yemen.

With 90 per cent of the country's food imported, the lack of commercial imports through Red Sea ports would alone push a further three million people into starvation. The threat of widespread famine in a matter of months is very real, the statement warns.

This imminent catastrophe is entirely avoidable, but it requires immediate action by the coalition, says the statement, noting that while three ships carrying food have been granted permission to berth at Hudaydah port in recent days, four fuel tankers and 10 ships carrying food have all been waiting for permission to enter port.

Together, we call on the coalition to urgently open up all Yemeni Red Sea ports fully and to facilitate the entry and free-flow of humanitarian and vital commercial goods.

UN chief condemns terrorist attack against college dormitory in Pakistan

1 December 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Friday condemned the terrorist attack against a university dormitory in northern Pakistan that killed at least nine people and injured many others.

The Secretary-General extends his condolences to the bereaved families and to the Government and people of Pakistan. He wishes a speedy recovery to the injured, said a statement issued by his Spokesman Stephane Dujarric, following the attack that took place in the city of Peshawar when dozens of people gathered to celebrate Eid al Milad-un Nabi, a sacred Muslim holiday.

Migration compact must balance regional, global realities, says UN envoy

1 December 2017 – A Global Compact on migration has to be “truly global” but it also has to take into account the regional specificities given the very diverse nature of the phenomenon, a senior United Nations official on international migration has said.

“There are some 250 million migrants in the world and they move and settle in very different circumstances,” said Louise Arbour, the UN Special Representative for International Migration, told *UN News* ahead of a [meeting](#) on the Global Compact, to be held Monday in Mexican city of Puerto Vallarta.

“If you look at Asia for instance, even within the continent there are lots of different configurations of migrant workers: people who move permanently, others who move temporarily but sometimes for decades with the expectation of coming back home,” she explained.

At the three-day [stocktaking meeting](#), UN Member States, civil society and other stakeholders will jointly shape a vision for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

They will review the outcomes and recommendations gathered during the consultations phase of the Global Compact, held between April and November this year, as well as look at the process going forward.

Enumerating her hopes from the meeting, Ms. Arbour said that the Puerto

Vallarta is the “last opportunity” for Member States to “express clearly to each other” what their expectations are.

“We will probably be in a better position coming out of this meeting to understand where the work has to be done were there still room for potential disagreements or more problematic area. So I think it’s a critical really important step towards a Global Context.”

Full UN News interview below:

AUDIO: Migration compact needs to be ‘truly global,’ says UN Special Representative Louise Arbour

[A survivor’s journey for justice: HIV advocate and UN retiree Eric Sawyer](#)

1 December 2017 – “I contracted HIV before the discovery of the virus,” Eric Sawyer began, as he told his story to an audience of nearly 50,000 gathered in New York’s Central Park earlier this year. The cheers and applause his heartfelt speech received would have been unimaginable three decades ago.

In 1981, when a high rate of a rare cancer was first reported among gay men, nobody knew what was causing it. Researchers initially called the syndrome GRID, or gay-related immune deficiency.

It would be another three years before the virus was identified and eventually called HIV. Not long after the discovery, Eric lost someone close to him from AIDS – his boyfriend Scott Bernard. “He was definitely my soulmate,” the 63-year-old who hails from upstate New York said with a smile, while looking at old photographs. The smile, however, would quickly fade as he began relaying their experiences of discrimination.

Scott was very sick at that time. He had “no hair, looks like a skeleton, and covered with these purple colored lesions,” Eric recalled. The stigma associated with AIDS was palpable. Once, the couple went to a restaurant. Scott was drinking some water from a glass when a waitress came over to their table. Instead of taking their order, she took Scott’s glass of water and “wiped all of the silverware into the garbage can and started yelling: ‘Get out! Get out!’” She called them “diseased” and added a hateful slur to describe the gay couple. Thirty-three years later, Eric still feels the sting of such blatant and heartless discrimination.

The suffering of stigma was compounded by the rapid and uncontrollable rate of death. One weekend, Eric recalled, he would be going to a friend’s funeral and by the next “somebody else died of AIDS.”

VIDEO: This is the story of Eric Sawyer and his fight against the AIDS epidemic since the 1980s.

Medical advancements and new treatments were slow to arrive.

Channeling his grief and outrage into activism, Eric joined fellow activists to start a civil disobedience movement. In 1987, Eric co-founded ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition Unleash Power), an advocacy group determined to change the trajectory of the AIDS crisis.

ACT UP was known for its 'productively confrontational' style. From disrupting the New York Stock Exchange, to occupying the Food and Drug Association (FDA), the group aimed to draw public attention to the epidemic and put pressure on the United States Government to take appropriate action.

Efforts began to pay off, but despite growing mainstream media coverage on the AIDS crisis, the disease continued to take a heavy toll.

In October 1992, in an effort to help raise awareness about the devastating impact of the disease, ACT UP members brought the ashes of their loved ones who died of AIDS and scattered them on the White House lawn.



Eric Sawyer (left) takes part in a panel discussion at UN Headquarters in December 1995 in observance of World AIDS Day. UN Photo/Milton Grant

"We thought we are going to have about eight people's ashes," Eric recalled with visible emotion. In the end, hundreds showed up, including a grandmother who travelled on a bus across the country to bring her grandson's ashes "because she was infuriated that nothing was done to save her grandson's life," Eric explained.

A glimpse of hope finally came in 1996 when the FDA approved HAART, a combination antiretroviral therapy that is highly effective in treating HIV/AIDS. AIDS was no longer a death sentence.

But when Eric learned that the treatment was out of reach for 97 percent of the world's HIV-infected population, he became outraged at the injustice. "It is not fair that people like myself can have access to these state-of-the-art drugs when people in the developing world have no access whatsoever."

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In July 1996, during the 11th International AIDS Conference held in Vancouver, where the focus was supposed to be highlighting the effectiveness of HAART, Eric sounded a wake-up call to participants. "Are you listening yet? The headline that people with AIDS want you to write from this

conference would read: 'Human rights violations and genocide continue to kill millions of impoverished people with AIDS!'" he declared from the podium.

Eric pushed for AIDS medicines to be distributed worldwide, especially to the poorest regions. In 1999, he cofounded Health GAP (Global Access Project), which seeks to bridge the gap between access to essential medicines in developed countries and the lack of access in the developing world.

"My activism both was targeted towards UNAIDS to make it do the right thing, but also working with UNAIDS to help them develop the policies and procedures to do the right things," he said, referring to the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS. Impressed by his commitment to justice for all people living with HIV, UNAIDS recruited Eric as a Civil Society Partnership Adviser in the service of ending the epidemic.

During his time at UNAIDS, Eric helped develop a numbers of its policy programmes, including the three zeros (zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths) and the ambitious treatment target to help end AIDS known as "90-90-90".

According to UNAIDS, 17 million people living with HIV still lack access to treatment – with the new HIV infection rate of young sub-Saharan African women especially at risk.



In October 1992, in an effort to help raise awareness about the devastating impact of the disease, ACT UP members brought the ashes of their loved ones who died of AIDS to the US capital to scatter them on the White House lawn. Credit: Tony Arena

Additionally, AIDS-related deaths have risen in the Middle East, North Africa, and also in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, where people who inject drugs account for nearly half of new infections.

To date, over 35 million people have died of AIDS worldwide.

Eric said he is motivated by "survivor's guilt". "I don't know why I got to survive to more than three decades with a fatal illness, when so many of my friends and loved ones died," he said, adding that he feels obligated to "fight as hard as I can to expand that excess" to care and treatment to the less privileged.

Eric retired from UNAIDS in 2016 and is now Vice President at Gay Men's Health Crisis, a leading AIDS service organization, continuing his lifelong fight for an AIDS-free world.

"As long as there are still tens of millions of people living without access to treatment, I am going to continue to use my voice to try to draw attention to the lives of people who are dying needlessly around the world still of HIV, until everybody has access to treatment and human rights protection and food security and housing and clean water, and all of the things that should

be a human right for everybody living with HIV.”

[Central African Republic: ‘Restoring hope,’ UN agriculture agency helps ex-fighters start anew](#)

1 December 2017 – Over 1,000 ex-fighters in the conflict-riddled Central African Republic (CAR) have traded their weapons for farming equipment, as part of a United Nations [initiative](#), according to the UN agriculture agency.

“This initiative is an important step towards [reaching peace](#) and restoring hope,” said Jean-Alexandre Scaglia, Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) Representative in CAR.

The FAO-supported UN programme’s message is simple: stop partaking in violence, put down your weapons and, in exchange, you’ll get help to start a new life. Participants get certified training in gardening, horticulture, rearing chickens and pigs as well as tools, seeds or baby animals.

“We are seeing violence rising again to levels as high as in 2013-2014,” asserted Mr. Scaglia, “so giving armed groups an option, a way out, couldn’t be timelier.”

While some ex-fighters rear chickens or grow and sell vegetables, others repair roads and public infrastructure destroyed by the fighting.

“The programme also brings considerable financial gains,” Mr. Scaglia explained.

“On average, the monthly earnings are about CFA 50,000 (\$85), but these activities bring about CFA 200,000 – 300,000 (\$300-500) per month. The programme doesn’t only help restore peace, it also boosts the economy and gives young people a chance to rebuild their country,” he added.

A three-month training programme is held in Bangui, Kaga Bandoro, Bambari and Haute Kotto – regions hardest hit by conflict that still host up to hundreds of thousands of displaced people.

Now, in brightly-coloured rooms in aging town halls or abandoned military quarters, the ex-fighters – men and women who not long ago engaged in a violence that divided the country and horrified the world – diligently sit at their desks, eager to learn.

FAO supports the expansion of the UN initiative for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and, as part of a new project, will

help ex-fighters access micro-credit schemes to start their own businesses.

A dire situation

Renewed violence pushed CAR into its fourth year of conflict as over half a million people have fled their homes across the borders or into sprawling internally displaced persons camps.

One in two people suffers from hunger, detailed the UN agriculture agency.

FAO urgently requires \$10 million by February to support more than 350,000 displaced people and vulnerable host communities to resume their agricultural activities and prepare for the March–April 2018 harvesting season by providing them with seeds and tools, and basic veterinary services for their livestock.