

UN agencies launch cholera immunization campaign for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

10 October 2017 – In a race to prevent a cholera outbreak among the more than half a million Rohingya refugee arrivals over the past six weeks in Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh, United Nations agencies launched on Tuesday a massive immunization campaign.

“Emergency vaccination saves lives. The [risk of cholera is clear and present](#), and the need for decisive action apparent,” says Dr. N Paranietharan, World Health Organization Representative to Bangladesh said.

The campaign, which is led by the Ministry of Health and supported by the WHO and The UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)), is being held in Ukhiya and Teknaf, where more than half a million people have arrived from across the border since August, joining vast numbers already residing in a series of settlements and camps.

Some 900,000 doses of the vaccine have been mobilized and are being delivered by more than 200 mobile vaccination teams, making it the second largest oral cholera vaccination campaign ever, according to the UN.

“WHO is committed to mobilizing its full technical and operational capacity to support the Ministry and our partners to protect, promote and secure the health of this immensely vulnerable population,” he added.

After more than 10,292 cases of diarrhoea had been reported and treated from across the settlements and camps over the last week, WHO warned of the potential for a cholera outbreak.

“Cholera is a dangerous disease, especially among children living in cramped, unhygienic conditions. Prevention is essential,” said Edouard Beigbeder, UNICEF Representative in Bangladesh.

The International Organization for Migration's ([IOM](#)) Senior Regional Medical Officer for Asia and the Pacific, Patrick Duigan, welcomed the critically important initiative, but stressed, “there are still [multiple and serious public health risks](#) for this refugee population and a massive scale up of resources and the overall response is needed to mitigate further risks of life threatening illnesses.”

To help meet water, sanitation and hygiene needs, UNICEF is scaling up its interventions and communication on safe practices, and prepositioning critical supplies for case management and supporting the Ministry of Health to set up diarrhoea treatment centres, among other response-oriented interventions.

Meeting the arrival surge

In parallel, against the backdrop of Bangladesh border guards saying that more than 11,000 Rohingya refugees crossed by land on Monday alone into south-eastern Bangladesh through several points, the Office of the High Commissioner of Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) spokesperson Adrian Edwards told reporters at today's regular press briefing in Geneva that "UNHCR is working with the Bangladesh authorities on [a transit centre for a potential refugee influx](#) over the coming days."

UNHCR sources say that many of the new refugees came from the Buthidaung area in Myanmar's northern Rakhine state. Some said they fled torching and killings back home; one boy was seen with a big gash across his neck. Others said they left in fear ahead of anticipated violence.

To reach Bangladesh, they walked for up to 14 days. Many were carrying children and baskets containing whatever they could pack at short notice. They waded through marshland before swimming across the Naf river that divides the two countries. Many women and children could not swim and had to ride piggyback on volunteer swimmers. Some used inflated plastic bags and UNHCR tarpaulins as makeshift flotation devices.

"The new arrivals have now been moved away from the border areas into established camps and settlements in the Kutupalong and Balukhali area. UNHCR has trucked in plastic sheets and jerry cans for water. We are also coordinating with the government and partners to provide urgent services – food, water and healthcare – to these new refugees," flagged Mr. Edwards.

In preparation for the possible new arrivals, UNHCR's Government counterpart, the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission (RRRC), will lead preparedness activities with UNHCR in coordination with partners, including UNICEF, IOM, WHO and the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)).

UN health agency establishes high-level commission to tackle noncommunicable diseases

10 October 2017 – The United Nations health agency today announced the establishment of a high-level global commission on noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) to identify innovative ways to curb the world's biggest causes of death and extend life expectancy for millions of people.

"We urgently need new approaches and action on a dramatically different scale if we are to stop people [dying unnecessarily](#) from noncommunicable diseases," said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health

Organization ([WHO](#)), in a statement.

“I am committed to engaging the very best people in the world to address our health challenges,” he added.

The commission will be chaired by Sania Nishtar, a prominent global advocate for action against [noncommunicable diseases](#), former Federal Minister of the Government of Pakistan and civil society leader. She has also previously served as co-chair of the [WHO Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity](#).

NCDs – including cardiovascular disease, cancers, diabetes and respiratory disease, as well as suffering from mental health issues and the impacts of violence and injuries – kill about 40 million people globally each year, accounting for 70 per cent of all deaths.

About 15 million of those deaths are in people between the ages of 30 and 69. Low- and middle-income countries account for more than 80 per cent of all deaths from NCDs. Violence and injuries take an overwhelming toll on young people, particularly boys.

In 2015, world leaders committed to reduce premature deaths from the diseases by one third by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Recent WHO reports indicate that the world will struggle to meet that target.

Later this month, ministers and other health leaders from around the world will review progress on this target at the WHO Global Conference on Noncommunicable Diseases in Montevideo, Uruguay.

Governments and other stakeholders will meet again at the third United Nations High-level meeting on noncommunicable diseases in 2018.

[Disaster risk outpaces resilience in Asia-Pacific, warns UN regional commission](#)

10 October 2017 – Disaster risk is outpacing resilience in Asia-Pacific and putting people in this most disaster-prone region at risk of being pushed back into poverty, the latest report from a United Nations regional commission has revealed.

Disasters can very quickly strip poor people of their livelihoods bringing deeply [disruptive impacts](#) that push them back into absolute poverty or trap them in an intergenerational transmission of poverty, said Shamshad Akhtar, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific ([ESCAP](#)), as she launched the report in Bangkok

today.

Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2017 shows that the greatest impacts of disasters are in countries which have the least capacity to prepare or respond to these events. Between 2000 and 2015, the low- and lower middle-income countries in the region experienced almost 15 times more disaster deaths than the region's high-income countries.

Beyond the human costs, ESCAP research indicates that between 2015 and 2030, 40 per cent of global economic losses from disasters will be in Asia and the Pacific, while the region accounts for around 36 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP).

The greatest burden of the losses as a proportion of GDP will be borne by small island developing States with average annual losses close to 4 per cent of their GDP while the least developed countries will have annual losses of around 2.5 per cent of GDP.

Related story: [UN agencies aid millions affected by flooding, landslides in South Asia](#)

Ms. Akhtar said that action on early warning systems is critical, and called for cost-effective financing that is needed to decrease the existing resilience gaps.

"The absence of an institutionalized insurance culture and adequate post disaster financing threaten our extraordinary economic and developmental achievements. Promoting more, and deeper, collaboration among countries in the region on disaster risk financing will be an ESCAP priority," she added.

In recent months, the region has seen Typhoon Hato unleash large scale damage in Hong Kong, and Macau, that stretched all the way to Vietnam, along with torrential monsoon rains in Bangladesh, India and Nepal that claimed more than 900 lives and affected another 41 million people.

ESCAP argues that measures for disaster risk reduction should take account of the shifting risks associated with climate change, especially in risk hotspots where a greater likelihood of change coincides with a higher concentration of poor, vulnerable or marginalized people.

The report presented at the opening of the ESCAP Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction during the first ESCAP Disaster Resilience Week aims to assist policymakers, in both public and private sectors, to better understand disaster risk and take action in the context of the [2030 Agenda](#) on Sustainable Development and the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#).

UN Treaty ‘beginning of the end for nuclear weapons,’ say Nobel Peace Prize winners

9 October 2017 – Speaking to journalists at the United Nations Headquarters, in New York, the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize winners – International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) – urged countries around the globe to eliminate nuclear weapons.

The award represents a special recognition for the efforts of the “new generation” of campaigners – “people who grew up after the Cold War and don’t understand why we still have the [nuclear] weapons,” said Beatrice Fihn, the Executive Director of ICAN.

In particular, she highlighted that it is also a huge recognition of the efforts of the *Hibakusha* (the Japanese word for the surviving victims of the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki) in realizing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Adopted on 7 July at a UN conference in New York, the Treaty is the first multilateral legally-binding instrument for nuclear disarmament in two decades.

Quoting Setsuko Thurlow, a survivor of the Hiroshima atomic bomb, Ms. Fihn added: “7th of July marks the beginning of the end for nuclear weapons.”

Also at the press conference, Ray Acheson of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, an ICAN member organization, said diplomacy for dialogue and cooperation is all the more necessary right now given rising tensions in many parts of the world.

“I think it’s more important than ever for us to be emphasizing the importance and the utility and the practicality of working together,” she said, recalling the partnership between the civil society, governments and the UN in the realizing the Treaty.

At the press conference, the speakers outlined the dangers of by nuclear weapons as well as the rising tensions, including due to the nuclear weapons development programme of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the discussions over the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) [concerning](#) Iran’s nuclear programme.

Expressing that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons offered an alternative to a world – one without nuclear weapons – Tim Wright, the Asia-Pacific Director of ICAN, hoped that the Nobel Peace Prize will help ICAN to get countries to sign and ratify the Treaty.

“We’ll be working over coming weeks and months to persuade governments to do just that,” he added.

On World Day UN spotlights posts' contributions to development and people's lives

9 October 2017 – The post plays an important role in the everyday lives of people and businesses, as well as contributes to global social and economic development, the United Nations postal agency said Monday, marking World Post Day.

“It is important to constantly remind ourselves of the role that Posts play in our societies today, because some key trends are [turning our world upside down](#),” said Bishar Hussein, Director General of the Universal Postal Union, in his message for the [Day](#).

He specifically mentioned Internet pervasiveness; ever-more demanding customers; e-commerce and light logistics; as well as the world economy and international trade.

“Posts can only mitigate risks and seize opportunities if they engage in reform,” he emphasized.

“They need to reinvent themselves, embrace digitalization, redefine their value proposition, and develop new products and services. They also require political support and investments, as well as an appropriate regulatory framework for their activities,” he underscored.

Future gains could include more satisfied customers, stronger postal markets and more cohesive societies, Mr. Hussein said, adding: “With countries stepping up efforts to achieve the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), we should not forget that the postal sector is an enabler of inclusive development and an essential component of the global economy.”

“In the remotest and the most populated areas of our planet alike, it remains a key platform for delivering public services,” he continued.

As a specialized intergovernmental organization within the UN system, UPU strives to enable its 192 national networks of member countries to act as one.

“We offer platforms that let our members exchange views and find multilateral solutions to global issues. We provide affordable technical solutions and assistance to governments, regulators and postal operators wishing to upgrade their national postal infrastructure. And we are the only global knowledge centre for the sector, building on the power of postal big data to the benefit of all,” the Director General underscored.

Faithful to its mission, the UPU has chosen two main highlights for this year's World Post Day celebrations. Firstly, to recognize the top-ranked countries in the newly released Integrated Index for Postal Development.

"Providing a snapshot of postal development in 170 countries, this new index is a powerful tool which governments, regulators and postal operators can use to promote postal excellence," said Mr. Hussein – congratulating Switzerland, France and Japan along with the regional champions Brazil, Mauritius, Poland, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates.

He also gave a nod to "the younger generation, who are not losing the habit of writing even in this age of new technology," announcing Togo's fourteen-year-old Eva Giordano Palacios as the winner of UPU's International Letter-Writing Competition, who in a letter to [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres, called for increased efforts to help poor countries abolish old practices which persist because of a lack of socioeconomic development.

"As these examples show," he concluded "the postal world is very much alive. So let us adopt new technologies, and embrace transformation!"