

UN agencies rushing aid to more than 3,000 displaced in flood-hit Sierra Leone

17 August 2017 – United Nations agencies are stepping up efforts to aid displaced families affected by the deadly flooding and landslides in Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown, and surrounding areas.

"The scale of the damage is [unprecedented](#)," said UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Representative Hamid El-Bashir Ibrahim.

He noted that at least 109 children are counted among the several hundred people killed in the disaster that struck on Monday.

"Children have been left homeless, vulnerable and terrified. We must do all we can to protect them from disease and exploitation," he added.

UNICEF teams, working with the Government of Sierra Leone and partners, are providing safe drinking water and sanitation, and delivering supplies including medicines, tents and gloves following the Government's request for support. UNICEF is also offering psycho-social support to those traumatized by the events.

While the mudslides have left [death and destruction](#) behind them, the Director and Representative of the World Food Program (WFP) in Sierra Leone, Housainou Taal, said his UN agency is "focusing on survivors so that they can rise and move forward."

The United Nations Resident Coordinator in Sierra Leone, Sunil Saigal, appointed Mr. Taal to coordinate the UN's humanitarian response to ensure timely distribution of aid, including food and shelter.

In the hours following the landslides in Freetown, WFP began distributing food aid to some 7,500 people affected by disasters. The aid, which includes rations of vegetable oil and vegetable oil lenses for at least two weeks, has been distributed to Regent, Sugar Loaf and Mortomeh "neighbourhoods around the affected area.

According to preliminary results of site assessments conducted by the Sierra Leone National Security Office and the United Nations Interagency Rapid Response Team, 1,039 households from several neighborhoods in Freetown (including Regent, Kamayamah, Dworzak, Culvert and Kaningo) and 100 individuals currently in a mountain cut shelter have been affected by floods and landslides.

Sierra Leone's Office of National Security (ONS) estimates that more than 3,000 people have lost their homes.

South Sudan refugees in Uganda exceed one million; UN renews appeal for help

17 August 2017 – As the number of refugees from South Sudan in Uganda passes one million – the vast majority of whom are women and children – the United Nations refugee agency today reiterated its call for urgent additional support.

Over the past 12 months, [an average of 1,800 South Sudanese have been arriving](#) in Uganda every day, said the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in a statement to the press.

In addition to the million there, a million or even more South Sudanese refugees are being hosted by Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Central African Republic, it added.

More than 85 per cent of the refugees who have arrived in Uganda are women and children, below age 18 years.

Recent arrivals continue to speak of barbaric violence, with armed groups reportedly burning down houses with civilians inside, people being killed in front of family members, sexual assaults of women and girls, and kidnapping of boys for forced conscription, emphasized UNHCR, explaining that even as thousands of refugees arrive, aid deliveries are increasingly falling short.

The UN agency underscored that although \$674 million is needed for South Sudanese refugees in Uganda this year, so far only a fifth of this amount, or 21 per cent, has been received.

Elsewhere in the region, the picture is only marginally better, the statement continued, saying that while a total of \$883.5 million is needed for the South Sudan situation, only \$250 million has been received.

The funding shortfall in Uganda is now significantly impacting the abilities to deliver life-saving aid and key basic services.

In June, the World Food Programme was forced to cut food rations for refugees. Across settlements in northern Uganda, health clinics are being forced to provide vital medical care with too few doctors, healthcare workers and medicines, UNHCR elaborated.

Meanwhile, schooling is also being impacted. Class sizes often exceed 200 pupils, with some lessons held in the open air. Many refugee children are dropping out of education as the nearest schools are too far away for them to easily access.

Since December 2013, when South Sudan's crisis erupted in Juba, more than two million South Sudanese have fled to neighbouring countries, while another two million people are estimated to be internally displaced, concluded the statement.

[In East Darfur, UN refugee chief urges international support for Sudan](#)

17 August 2017 – The United Nations refugee chief has called for international solidarity and resources to aid Sudan, which is one of the major hosting countries for refugees fleeing the conflict in South Sudan.

Sudan's generosity [must be matched with international solidarity and resources](#). Much more donor support is required and urgently so that we can help the hundreds of thousands of refugees in the country and the communities that are hosting them, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, said yesterday wrapping up his first visit as the head of UNHCR to Sudan.

The UN refugee chief also reiterated his call on the international community to do much more to end the fighting in South Sudan, which is causing the world's fastest growing forced displacement tragedy, without an immediate end in sight.

Parties to the conflict, regional states and the international community need to put an end to this tragedy, he said.

During the visit this week, Mr. Grandi met with South Sudanese refugees and their local hosts at the Al-Nimir refugee camp in East Darfur, Sudan.

My coming here has one reason just as I did in Uganda, Ethiopia and from Juba itself, to appeal to the leadership of South Sudan, to the opposition of South Sudan, to the States in the region and to the international community at large, [to inject some sense of urgency](#) in the quest of peace in South Sudan itself, Mr. Grandi said.

The High Commissioners met with Sudan's President, Omar al-Bashir, and, according to a UNHCR press release, welcomed the President's assurances that Sudan will continue providing safety to those fleeing conflict and persecution including those who arrive from South Sudan, and other countries in the region.

Sudan has hosted over 416,000 South Sudanese refugees since 2013, including some 170,000 new arrivals in 2017, making it one of the largest refugee-receiving countries in the region, UNHCR reported.

Hundreds of thousands of other South Sudanese who stayed in Sudan following the separation of the two countries are also in need of humanitarian assistance. Sudan also continues to host refugees from Eritrea, Syria, Yemen, Chad and other countries.

[UN rights experts warn new EU policy on boat rescues will cause more people to drown](#)

17 August 2017 – The European Union’s new policy on Mediterranean Sea rescues threatens life and breaches international standards, two United Nations independent human experts today cautioned.

“The EU’s proposed new action plan, including a code of conduct for organizations operating rescue boats, [threatens life and breaches international standards](#) by condemning people to face further human rights violations in Libya,” said the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Felipe González Morales, and the Special Rapporteur on torture, Nils Melzer.

“The solution is not to restrict access to international waters or firing weapons to threaten boats, as Libya has reportedly done repeatedly. This will result in more deaths of migrants at sea and is in contravention of the obligation to rescue people in distress,” the experts added.

The code drawn up by Italy with support from the European Commission aims to stop privately-operated ships ferrying refugees to safety in Italy from waters off the Libyan coast.

It is part of a new plan to support Italy and reduce the pressure of migrant arrivals.

Earlier this week, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Agnes Callamard, also had harsh words for the proposed change, saying the code of conduct and the overall plan suggest that Italy, the European Commission and EU Member States deem the risks and reality of deaths at sea [a price worth paying](#) in order to deter migrants and refugees.

Libya has also announced a search and rescue zone beyond its territorial waters, and is restricting access to international waters by humanitarian vessels.

“The solution is not to restrict access to international waters or firing weapons to threaten boats, as Libya has reportedly done repeatedly.

This will result in more deaths of migrants at sea and is in contravention of the obligation to rescue people in distress,” Mr. Morales and Mr. Melzer said.

They added that international organizations were making “tremendous rescue efforts,” with their vessels providing up to 40 per cent of all search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean.

The Special Rapporteurs also expressed concern that Brussels was “trying to move Europe's borders to Libya,” according to a press release from the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)).

They highlighted that, under international law, migrants should be allowed to disembark at the nearest port where their lives and freedom would not be threatened, and should then receive information, care and equitable processing of their asylum claims.

“Libya simply cannot be regarded as a safe place to disembark and the EU policy is in denial of this fact,” they said. “Migrants intercepted by the Libyan coast guard will face indefinite detention in dire and inhumane conditions, at risk of death, torture or other severe human rights violations, without any judicial review.”

They warned that it was “high time” to tackle the real issue, which was the disproportionate impact on frontline countries, such as Greece and Italy, and to relocate migrants and refugees to the other 26 European countries that under the Schengen Agreement allow for unrestricted movement of people.

“States should expand their visa regimes and provide more options for refugee settlement, temporary protection, visitors, family reunification, work, resident, retirement and student visas,” they added, “in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and to ensure that migrants no longer have to embark on such deadly journeys.”

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

'Racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or Islamophobia are poisoning our societies' – UN chief

16 August 2017 – Urging people everywhere to speak out against hate speech

and hate crimes, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today reiterated his call for tolerance, respect for the other and the importance of recognizing diversity.

“Racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or Islamophobia are, as I mentioned yesterday, poisoning our societies,” the Secretary-General told journalists today at a briefing at the UN Headquarters in New York.

“It is [absolutely essential](#) for us all to stand up against them everywhere and every time,” he added.

Addressing questions from a journalist about the situation in the US, where a weekend protest and counter-protest over the removal of a Civil War statue in Charlottesville, Virginia, sparked discussions about race, Mr. Guterres said “these demons are appearing a little bit everywhere.”

A Portuguese national, Mr. Guterres said that as a European, he is proud that Europe created the values of Enlightenment: tolerance, the respect for the other, and the importance of recognition of diversity.

“To be able to stand for these values and to... at the same time, to condemn all forms of irrationality that undermine those values is essential, at the present moment, be it in the United States or everywhere else in the world,” the head of the UN said.