

UN urges aid for civilians swept up in Central African Republic's 'new spiral of escalating violence'

1 June 2017 – Warning that violence in the Central African Republic (CAR) is quickly escalating, the top United Nations aid official in the country today urged the international community to assist the tens of thousands of newly displaced civilians.

Speaking to representatives of UN Member States in Geneva, Najat Rochdi, the Humanitarian Coordinator and UN Resident Coordinator in the country, said the frequency and brutality of attacks in Bangassou, Bria, Alindao and other localities have reached levels not seen since August 2014.

“In the past two weeks the signs are very clear, violence in the Central Africa Republic has entered a new spiral of escalating conflict and the situation is quickly deteriorating,” Ms. Rochdi said.

“Over 100,000 people have been newly displaced, family running for their lives, leaving everything behind,” she added.

Humanitarian actors are facing logistical and security challenges to reach the people in need, as well as funding shortages. The UN requested nearly \$400 million on behalf of the humanitarian community to meet CAR's needs. So far, only about 25 per cent have been received, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)).

Without sufficient resources, the most vulnerable people will be cut off from aid “many of them will be killed, and entire areas of the country abandoned,” warned Ms. Rochdi.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, plunged the country of 4.5 million people into civil conflict in 2013. According to the UN, more than half the population is in dire need of assistance. Despite significant progress and successful elections, CAR has remained in the grip of instability and sporadic unrest.

In her briefing today, she urged Governments to remain engaged in CAR: “This is not the time to let the people of the Central African Republic down. This is not the time to give up on peace.”

With innovative strategy, UN health agency launches new offensive against vector-borne diseases

1 June 2017 – Spread of the Zika virus disease and emerging threat of dengue and chikungunya were the result of weak mosquito control policies adopted nearly half a century ago, the United Nations health agency has said, vowing a renewed attack on global spread of such vector-borne diseases.

“What we are seeing now looks more and more like a dramatic resurgence of the threat from emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases,” Margaret Chan, the Director-General of the UN World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) told the sixty-ninth World Health Assembly, in May last year.

Starting in June 2016, the UN health agency began developing a comprehensive response to strategically guide countries and partners to urgently strengthen vector control as a fundamental approach to preventing disease and responding to outbreaks.

The unique fast-track process culminated this week with the adoption of the *Global Vector Control Response 2017–2030* by the World Health Assembly (at its seventieth session).

The Response is also expected to go a long way in supporting implementation of approaches to vector control and achieve disease-specific national and global goals as well as for the implementation of the [2030 Agenda](#) and the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

Of most direct relevance are Goals 3, 6 and 11 on ensuring health and well-being and clean water and sanitation, and on sustainable cities and communities.

Riding on wave of economic development

In particular, the Global Response calls for aggressive pursuit of promising new interventions such as new insecticides, spatial repellents and odour-baited traps, improved house screening, and developing common bacterium which can stop viruses from replicating inside mosquitoes.

At the same time, economic development can help bring solutions.

“If people lived in houses that had solid floors and windows with screens or air conditioning, they wouldn’t need a bednet,” said Professor Thomas Scott from the Department of Entomology and Nematology at the University of California, who co-led a group of eminent scientists and public health experts in the development of the Response.

“By improving people’s standard of living, we would significantly reduce these diseases,” he added.

At the same time, programmes targeting specific diseases have also yielded remarkable results.

One such example is Malaria: massive use of insecticide-treated bednets and use of residual insecticides inside houses has helped reduce the disease's incidence in sub-Saharan Africa by 45 per cent over the past 15 years.



A scientist collecting live mosquitos for study at a infectious diseases research facility in Cali, Colombia. Photo: PAHO/WHO

'Disappearing' public health entomologists

But that success has had a down side.

"We've been so successful, in some ways, with our control that we reduced the number of public health entomologists – the people who can do this stuff well," said Professor Steve Lindsay, a public health entomologist at Durham University in Britain. "We're a disappearing breed."

def.: entomologist

en·to·mol·o·gist (noun)

A scientist who focuses on the study of classification, life cycle, distribution, physiology, behaviour, ecology and population dynamics of insects and pests.

To counter this phenomenon, the Global Vector Control Response urges countries to invest in a vector-control workforce trained in public health entomology and empowered in health care responses.

"We now need more nuanced control – not one-size-fits-all, but to tailor control to local conditions," added Professor Lindsay, noting that under the new strategic approach, individual diseases such as Zika, dengue and chikungunya will no longer be considered as separate threats.

"What this represents is not three different diseases, but one mosquito – *Aedes aegypti*," said Professor Lindsay.

A change in mentality needed

Experts have also highlighted that while the task ahead will not be easy, the Global Response offers room for optimism.

"Most of all, this document is a call for action," said Dr. Ana Carolina Silva Santelli, who co-led the eminent group with Professor Scott, presently the deputy director for epidemiology in the Brasilia office of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, noting that integrating

vector-control efforts across different diseases will require more equipment, people and resources.

But above all, a change in mentality is needed, she noted. “The risk of inaction is greater [...] given the growing number of emerging disease threats.”

[‘Beginning of end for rogue fishing,’ says UN agency as more States back landmark treaty](#)

1 June 2017 – A new agreement aimed at stopping rogue fishing practices represents the capstone of years of diplomatic effort to combat the scourge of illegal fishing, according to the United Nations food agency.

The Agreement on Port State Measures ([PSMA](#)) to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing, gives the world “all the instruments necessary to achieve our goal,” said José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation ([FAO](#)) in a [press statement](#).

Mr. Graziano da Silva spoke at the first Meeting of the Parties, hosted by the Government of Norway to hammer out details regarding the treaty’s implementation, such as defining the responsibilities of States, regional fisheries management organizations and other international bodies, including FAO.

Soon to have 48 parties – counting all 28 European Union members, with Japan and Montenegro about to join depositing their instruments of adherence – Mr. Graziano da Silva expressed confidence that more countries would join in the near future, saying “this gives the one-year-old treaty added heft.”

The FAO-brokered treaty restricts port access to fishing vessels that fail to comply with a set of rules, including proof that they have proper operating licenses and transparent disclosure of the species and quantity of fish caught.

Years of IUU fishing, which has yielded up to 26 million tons, worth some \$23 billion a year, represents a huge threat to all efforts to bolster sustainable fishing in the world’s oceans.

Parties to the PSMA currently account for more than two-thirds of the global fish trade, according to FAO.

Mr. Graziano da Silva also noted a number of its additional benefits, such as

promoting marine fisheries' sustainability, improving livelihoods and food security of coastal communities and reducing illegal activities often linked to IUU fishing, namely trafficking, labour abuses and slavery.

The PSMA also represents a large contribution toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal 14, which expressly calls for an end to IUU fishing by 2020.

Focus on implementation

Protocols under discussion include how to assure proper real-time exchange and information publication, as port States must signal eventual violations to a ship's flag State in addition to regional authorities.

Further technical requirements of developing States will also be addressed. An ad hoc working group will meet later this week to make recommendations on establishing suitable funding mechanisms to make sure all members, including Small Island Developing States located amid some of the world's most attractive fishing areas, can carry out their tasks. The PSMA treaty itself demands that members contribute to the capacity-building effort required to make the agreement work.

"This is a crucial moment," Mr. Graziano da Silva said, noting that FAO itself has already committed \$1.5 million of its own funds toward the effort.

[UN human rights chief urges repeal of repressive NGO law in Egypt](#)

1 June 2017 – The United Nations human rights chief today urged Egyptian officials to repeal a new law on non-governmental organizations, saying that it “further tightens the noose” around NGOs trying to hold the Government to account for human rights obligations.

Law 70 of 2017, which was enacted on 24 May, requires all NGOs to work in line with the Government's development and social welfare plans or face jail time.

“The crucial function of these NGOs to hold the State accountable for its human rights obligations has been severely hampered already through asset freezes, travel bans, smear campaigns and prosecutions,” [said](#) UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said. “This new law further tightens the noose.”

The law also requires civil society groups to report all information on their funding, activities and programmes to authorities, and to seek permission for conducting surveys and any other activities.

The latest law replaces Law 84 of 2002, which Mr. Zeid said was already repressive. In recent years, hundreds of civil society groups were dissolved or had their assets frozen under this legislation.

More than 37 Egyptian NGO workers and leaders have been accused of illegal receipt of foreign funding and working without legal permission, according to the Office of the High Commissioner ([OHCHR](#)). None of them have been officially charged.

The revised law places such tight restrictions on civil society that it effectively hands administration of NGOs to the Government, Mr. Zeid said.

He added that while national security is a consideration in Egypt, muzzling civil society is not the solution.

Civil society and media oversight of the Government are essential elements of a strong and stable society, where grievances can be openly aired. Muzzling dissent can only lead to further instability, he warned.

[UNICEF urges Governments to close data gaps on vulnerable children in residential care](#)

1 June 2017 – At least 2.7 million children live in residential care worldwide and face increased risk of violence, abuse and long-term damage to their cognitive, social and emotional development, a United Nations study says, warning that this is just tip of the iceberg.

According to the study [Child Abuse & Neglect](#), published by the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)), official records in many countries only capture a small fraction of the actual number of children living in residential care and children in privately owned centres are often not counted.

It is critical that governments [keep more accurate and comprehensive listings](#) of all existing residential care facilities, as well as regularly undertake thorough counts of children living in these facilities in order to help strengthen official records, said Claudia Cappa, Statistics Specialist at UNICEF and co-author of the study. That way we will be able to measure the breadth of the problem and work with governments to respond effectively.

In residential care, such as institutions or orphanages, children who are already vulnerable due to family separation are at increased risk of

violence, abuse and long-term damage to their cognitive, social and emotional development, said Cornelius Williams, Associate Director of Child Protection at UNICEF.

Research shows some of the key risk factors that result in children being placed in residential care include family breakdown, health issues, poor or unequal provision of social services, disability and poverty.

Governments are urged to reduce the number of children living in residential care by preventing family separation where possible, and by seeking homes for children in family-based care such as foster homes. Stronger investment in community-based family support programmes is also needed, UNICEF said.

UNICEF's new estimate is based on data from 140 countries. Central and Eastern Europe was found to have the highest rate worldwide, with 666 children per 100,000 living in residential care, over 5 times the global average of 120 children.

Industrialized countries have the second-highest rate with 192 children, followed by East Asia and the Pacific region at 153.