

[UNICEF urges G7 leaders to adopt six-point action plan to keep refugee children safe](#)

25 May 2017 – Ahead of the Group of Seven summit in Italy, the United Nations children’s agency has urged the leaders of G7 industrialized countries to adopt its six-point action plan for the protection of refugee and migrant children.

At least 36,000 of the [refugees and migrants](#) rescued since January have been taken to Sicily, the site of this year’s summit, and the Italian G7 presidency has made migration a priority for this year’s talks.

“Sicily stands as a symbol of hope for uprooted children seeking a better life, but it is also the endpoint of an extremely dangerous journey that has claimed the lives of many children along the way,” said Justin Forsyth, Deputy Executive Director of the UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)).

UNICEF’s call comes at a time when the dangerous Central Mediterranean migration journey from North Africa to Italy draws renewed attention.

At least 200 children have died while crossing the Central Mediterranean from North Africa to Italy so far this year, a rate of more than one child per day, according to the latest estimates from UNICEF.

Between 1 January and 23 May, more than 45,000 refugees and migrants arrived to Italy by sea, up 44 per cent over the same period last year. This includes some 5,500 unaccompanied and separated children, an increase of 22 per cent from 2016, who account for approximately 92 per cent of all children arriving to Italy via the Central Mediterranean route.



Italian Coastguard, children, volunteers and officials take part in a symbolic rescue of paper boats to send a message to the G7 leaders to take action to safeguard children on the move off a beach in Palermo, Italy, on Thursday, 25 May 2017. Photo: UNICEF/Salvatore Cavalli

A record high 26,000 unaccompanied and separated children arrived to Italy last year, but if current trends hold, that record will be smashed in 2017.

“That is not a record to be proud of, but a reminder of our collective failure to ensure the safety and wellbeing of refugee and migrant children,” Mr. Forsyth said.

Earlier today, on the eve of the G7 summit, children, volunteers, the Italian coastguard, Italian and UNICEF officials took part in a symbolic rescue of paper boats to commemorate the thousands of children who have risked their

lives crossing the Central Mediterranean and send a message to the G7 to take action to safeguard children on the move.

The action plan's six points are:

- Protect child refugees and migrants, particularly unaccompanied children, from exploitation and violence;
- End the detention of children seeking refugee status or migrating, by introducing a range of practical alternatives;
- Keep families together as the best way to protect children and give children legal status;
- Keep all refugee and migrant children learning and give them access to health and other quality services;
- Press for action on the underlying causes of large scale movements of refugees and migrants;
- Promote measures to combat xenophobia, discrimination and marginalization in countries of transit and destination.

In addition, UNICEF has also launched the “#AChildIsAChild” campaign, which has so far been supported on social media by more than 2 million people.

[Formal trade in Africa can improve region, prospects for women – UN agency reports](#)

25 May 2017 – Simplifying the requirements for a business license, offering incentives to tax payers, and tackling official corruption are among the recommendations by the United Nations agricultural organization to cut informal trade among African countries and boost economic prosperity, particularly for women.

“Informal cross-border trading, in which transactions are not compliant with local tax and other rules, accounts for a large share – between [20 and a hefty 70 per cent](#)

of employment in sub-Saharan Africa,” according to the UN Food and Agricultural Organization ([FAO](#)).

“Putting it on a regular footing can lift sustainable prosperity and markedly improve prospects for women,” FAO said in a new publication, [Formalization of informal trade in Africa](#).

Informal cross-border trade, often agricultural, is the result of poor access to government offices, a lack of administrative skills and improper understanding of import and custom-tax laws.

One of the main groups that would be affected by formalization is women, who constitute the largest share of informal traders – about 70 per cent in Southern Africa and more than half in other parts, according to the report.

Facilitating formalization is the only viable policy option for Africa's transformation agenda to realize its objectives," said Suffyan Koroma, FAO senior economist and lead author of the report.

The publication was presented today at a conference in Kigali, Rwanda. The event is part of ongoing FAO-supported work in the country, along with UN Women and other development partners, aimed at enabling women to benefit more from agri-food chains, a project geared to allowing women small traders access useful information as well as start-up capital.

South Sudan: 'Fighting stop now' so millions can be spared from famine, say UN agency chiefs

24 May 2017 – Despite "appalling conditions" in South Sudan, it is not too late to save more people from dying, the head of the United Nations agriculture agency said today, joining the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) chief in a call to all parties enmeshed in the country's conflict to end the violence and work together to ensure access to food and other life-saving support.

José Graziano da Silva, head of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) and WFP's David Beasley made the call during a visit to the former Unity state, one of the areas in South Sudan worst hit by the current hunger crisis.

"We can still avoid a worsening of the disaster, but the fighting has to stop now," Mr. Graziano da Silva said. "There can be no progress without peace. People must be given immediate access to food, and farmers need to be allowed to work on their fields and tend to their livestock," he added.

Around 5.5 million people in South Sudan, or almost half the population, face severe hunger ahead of the lean season, which peaks in July. Of these, more than 90,000 face starvation with famine declared in parts of former Unity state while another one million teeter on the brink. The UN stresses that this unprecedented situation reflects the impact of ongoing strife, obstacles to delivering humanitarian assistance and declining agricultural production.

Both UN officials stressed that an immediate, massive response is critical, combining emergency food assistance and support for agriculture, livestock and fisheries.

'The fighting must end' so investment in children can begin, WFP's Beasley

In the former Unity state, they visited people coping with the hunger crisis with the support of both agencies and met with people facing famine on Kok Island, a refuge in the Nile River where many people have sought shelter from fighting.

The two agency heads saw aid workers from international and local partner organizations distributing WFP food and nutrition treatments, as well as seeds and FAO fishing kits.

"Food, treatment for malnourished kids, kits that help people fish and grow vegetables – these are the difference between life and death for people we met in Unity state," Mr. Beasley said. "But we can't keep scaling up forever. The fighting has to end to make the kind of investments that give the children of South Sudan any hope for the future they deserve."

'Saving livelihoods saves lives,' says FAO's Graziano da Silva

The two UN agency heads visited an FAO project aiming to provide women farmers and pastoralists with a place to process milk. With rising malnutrition levels across the country, the project is an innovative way to increase the availability of safe, quality milk and milk products – a major dietary staple and a source of protein vitamins and minerals, essential components for a healthy diet.

Mr. Graziano da Silva highlighted that saving livelihoods also saves lives, saying "South Sudan has great potential – it has land, water and courageous people. If it also has peace, then together we can work to end hunger."

Both agency heads underscored the need for further international support to confront a \$182 million funding gap over the next six months.

Mr. Beasley assured that while WFP would continue to stand by the South Sudanese, its leaders "must show good faith by facilitating humanitarian efforts, including getting rid of unnecessary fees and procedures that delay and hinder aid."

[Yemen: UN envoy raises concern over attack on his convoy during visit to](#)

Sana'a

24 May 2017 – The United Nations envoy for conflict-torn Yemen today expressed deep concern over the attack on his convoy while traveling from the airport to the UN compound on Monday.

“It is the responsibility of the local authorities to ensure the safety of all UN personnel in the country and urged them to investigate the incident, hold those responsible to account, and prevent any such incidents in the future,” said Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, the UN Special Envoy to Yemen, according to a [note](#) issued by the Office of the Spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General.

Concluding a three-day visit to the country's capital, Sana'a, the Special Envoy indicated that the incident increased his determination to continue with his efforts to find a negotiated political settlement that serves the best interests of the Yemeni people.

Prior to Sana'a, he visited Saudi Arabia and Qatar, where he met with government officials as part of his efforts to find a political solution to the conflict in Yemen.

In Sana'a, he met with political leaders from Ansar'Allah and the General People's Congress and Representatives of other political parties, the note said, adding that the talks focused on possible agreements which would prevent the spread of military activities to Hudeidah and practical ways to ensure the resumption of salaries to all Yemeni civil servants nationwide.

Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed also met with members of the Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security and representatives of civil society organizations to discuss current political challenges and security concerns in addition to the economic crisis and recent outbreak of cholera, the note said.

In a meeting with Yemeni youth, the Special Envoy discussed mechanisms for greater youth contribution to international efforts to reach a peaceful resolution to the conflict, in addition to possible solutions to reopen Sana'a International Airport and prevent further deterioration of the economic and humanitarian situation.

He also met with senior World Bank officials in order to support the World Bank-UN collaboration to address the growing food insecurity and economic crisis in Yemen, the note added.

Preserving cultural heritage, diversity vital for peacebuilding in Middle East – UNESCO chief

24 May 2017 – Protecting cultural diversity is vital for peacebuilding in the Middle East, the head of the United Nations cultural agency said today, pledging solidarity with the victims of ethnic and religious violence in the region, and highlighting the need for both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ power.

Irina Bokova, the Director-General of the UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), [made this call](#) at the Madrid Conference, hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain. The conference is a follow up to a [open debate](#) in the UN Security Council and the [Paris Conference](#) on the victims of ethnic and religious violence in the Middle East.

Citing the ongoing cultural destruction and the dramatic situation of persons belonging to communities targeted and threatened for ethnic or religious reasons in the Middle East, the UNESCO chief said: “Violent extremists target both heritage and human lives – they target victims and minorities from all backgrounds, Shebak, Turkmen, Yezidis, Muslims, Christians..., as symbols of the pluralism they abhor.”

“Violent extremists target schools, because they know the power of knowledge to counter their rhetoric drawing on false visions of faith and history, they destroy culture, because they know it can foster dialogue and help people live together in their diversity,” she added.

RELATED: [World needs ‘soft power’ of education, culture, sciences, to combat ‘ancient hatreds’– UNESCO chief](#)

The aim of the Madrid Conference is to examine actions taken and determine most urgent priorities, as well as identifying programmes, projects and actions to enable displaced populations to return and to foster reconciliation and stabilization.

Also attending the event was Spain’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alfonso Maria Dastis Quecedo, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Jordan, Ayman H. Safadi and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Ibrahim Al-Jaafari.

At the conference, Ms. Bokova also highlighted the role of the international community in tackling the complex issue. “We need ‘hard power’ to respond, we need ‘soft power’ to prevent, through education, culture and information,” she said. “This is the role of UNESCO and the goal of the United Nations, its Counter-Terrorism Strategy in support of Member States.”

The Director-General went on to note the importance of teaching peace and providing people with the skills to overcome mistrust and division, and to

build dialogue. This underpins all of UNESCO's action to prevent violent extremism through emergency education and the protection of heritage.