

Thousands of migrants rescued on Mediterranean in a single day – UN agency

19 May 2017 – Nearly 3,000 migrants were rescued trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea, according to the United Nations migration agency, which also reported that more than a dozen rescue operations were under way in the area yesterday.

Citing the UN International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) in Rome, IOM spokesperson Joel Millman told reporters today at the regular bi-weekly press briefing in Geneva that: “2,139 migrants had been rescued on 18 May alone through more than a dozen different operations in Mediterranean international waters. Additionally, IOM learned of about 500 people rescued in Libyan waters that day.”

While exact casualty numbers were not known, IOM’s Libya office has reported the remains of six migrants that were found over the past four days in various spots and communities on the Libyan coast.

Mr. Millman noted that it is quite possible that some of those had been from a previous shipwreck or perhaps all from new wreckage, which IOM is still trying to determine.

He also highlighted the numbers who had been crossing from Greece in the first four months of 2017.

“Almost 6,000 people have come through Greece in 2017 – 5,200 through the end of April – which was a low number compared to the numbers in 2016 and 2015. Of those 6,000, half came from Syria and Iraq. Following those two countries, comes Congo, Algeria, Kuwait, or Cameroon, ahead of countries like Afghanistan or Iran, that have been countries of origin of many migrants in the past,” Mr. Millman explained.

“Observing this,” he continued “one could wonder about the degree to which Turkey continues to be an escape valve for the Iraq and Syria conflicts. It is surprising how many other country nationals seem to be accessing Turkey to make the voyage to Greece, including Haitians and Dominicans who have been seen coming to Greece through Turkey.”

Cholera outbreak in war-torn Yemen

spreading at 'unprecedented' speed, UN warns

19 May 2017 – As war-torn Yemen grapples with heavy rains, a collapsed healthcare system and crippled economy, a resurgent cholera outbreak has spread with “unprecedented” speed and taken medical professionals by surprise, the World Health Organization warned today.

According to WHO, more than 240 people have died from cholera in just the last three weeks, out of a total of 23,400 infections. The agency estimates that 7.6 million people live in areas at high risk of cholera transmission.

“I have to admit that when I see the data that I saw this morning, not officially released; are really taking us by surprise. The speed of the resurgence of the cholera epidemic is unprecedented” said Dr. Nevio Zagaria, the WHO representative in Yemen speaking to *UN News* in Geneva.

The current disease outbreak has its roots in an original episode last October. It peaked in December 2016 and never fully went away, amid conflict between Government and Houthi-backed opposition forces that has left over half the country’s medical facilities closed or damaged, and the economy in freefall.

The lack of local health centres – and the fact that staff haven’t been paid in seven months – have left Yemenis with no option but to seek help from hospitals, which WHO says are now “overwhelmed.”

Additional problems include massive damage to the country’s sewage and electricity infrastructure, which have left the water supply contaminated. A WHO map showing cholera hotspots in Yemen indicates the highest number of suspected cases – more than 6,000 – in the capital city, Sana’a.



Responding to the cholera outbreak in Yemen, WHO has so far distributed 32 tonnes of Intravenous fluids, over 300 cholera beds and 27 cholera kits. PH0: WHO Yemen

Few communities have been left untouched by the disease, which is characterized by severe diarrhoea that can kill within hours, if not treated promptly.

In some places the fatality rate is as high as four to five per cent, and WHO is extremely concerned that the disease is being passed from one person to another.

“But if the transmission goes on at this speed, we need to revise the figure and we need to expect something that can go up over 200, 250,000 cases over the next six months, in addition to the 50,000 cases that already occur [...]

so you can understand by yourself with this number the price we pay in terms of life is extremely high,” explained Dr. Zagaria, adding: “We have to do more.”

In response to the crisis, WHO has begun the task of setting up 350 cholera treatment centres and 2,000 oral rehydration points. It is also focusing on tracing infection hotspots, to reduce the risk of disease transmission.

The agency has stressed that the scale of the threat is “too big” for the Yemeni authorities to do on their own, and that to date only around 20 per cent of its \$22 million cholera appeal has been met.

[In wake of ‘WannaCry’ attacks, UN cybersecurity expert discusses Internet safety](#)

19 May 2017 – A United Nations cybersecurity expert says that cybercrime is ultimately preventable, and that the internet – even the hidden so-called ‘dark net’ – has very good elements to it.

That may seem difficult to believe for people in the 150 countries hit by the ‘WannaCry’ ransomware, some of whom have had to pay hundreds of dollars in digital currency, Bitcoin, to get back photos of their families and other files on their laptops, or the families unable to board a train in Germany or see a doctor in the United Kingdom.

“Law enforcement and diplomats have been warning people of ransomware for some time, but this is really the first time that we’ve seen an attack of this size,” said Neil Walsh, Chief of Cyber and Emerging Crime at the UN Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)).

Last Friday’s attack was due to a strain of Windows ransomware – which like the name suggests, encrypts files and holds them ransom. It entered individual systems as a compressed zip file through a security loophole in the Windows operating systems, and went on to scramble information in hundreds of thousands of machines belonging to hospitals, banks and other organizations around the world.

Mr. Walsh told *UN News* that the attack attributes its success to the fact that the operating systems used by those companies were old and did not have a security patch.

His advice boils down to clicking yes to software updates, using an up-to-date antivirus system, and backing up data into a device separate from the computer.

"If you weren't expecting an attachment from someone, or it looks strange, don't open it," Mr. Walsh added.



Neil Walsh, UNODC's Chief of Cyber and Emerging Crime, at a cybercrime training in East African. Photo: Credit UNODC

Headquartered in Vienna, and with teams in Guatemala, El Salvador, Tunisia and Thailand, Mr. Walsh's role is to help create an inter-governmental response to cybercrime. That involves, in part, public outreach about internet risk, including to children and their parents, and working with police, prosecutors and judges around the world to improve how cases are investigated and tried.

Despite the increased number of cybercrimes in the past several years, some governments do not understand cyber risk, he said.

"It still never fails to amaze me that some governments say we don't have cybercrime in our country, we don't see any threat here," Mr. Walsh noted. "And technically that means that they don't have the capability to identify, to look for and to respond to it. So my role, and the role of my people, is to help governments understand that and to help them put strategies in place to minimize that risk to them."

His teams also work with victims, to make sure that they have avenues to report crimes to the police, and sometimes seeking redress from a non-governmental organization or charity.

"There's no such thing as a victimless crime, and that's the same in cyberspace as in crime committed in the physical world," he added.

From 'I Love You' to Botnets

Cybercrime has evolved since the "Melissa" and "I Love You" computer worms in 1999 and 2000, becoming more common and more destructive.

"If we look back on some of the attacks we've seen over even in the past six months, one of the most common threats outside of ransomware that we've seen is called a botnet," Mr. Walsh said.

Bots are malware that sneak into a person's computer and quietly wait for commands. These zombie-like devices can then be used as part of a network, or botnet, for possible attacks.



Law enforcement experts from 22 countries and UNODC staff in a training course on cryptocurrencies, such as Bitcoin. Photo: Credit UNODC

"What that means is that cyber criminals have taken over lots of different devices that are connected to the internet. Now I don't mean traditional

computers or smart phones, I mean everything from refrigerators to CCTV cameras to TVs. By compromising these devices, it's possible for a cybercriminal to cause real harm," the UN expert said.

That means more than getting a shopping password or stealing a credit card number – it could be shutting down the telephone system in a country or compromising a nuclear plant.

"If we consider this sort of weaponization of cyberspace and the impact that that could have, especially on developing countries, it could be enormous. If you had a significant cyberattack on a country that had no real capability to respond to a threat to its critical national infrastructure, you could have an immediate and long-standing impact."

Despite these threats, cybersecurity is still often viewed as the role of an IT department. There is not even an agreed-on definition of cybercrime around the world.

"It's one of those things that has become quite politically nuanced," Mr. Walsh said. "Our role here at UNODC is to help those political and diplomatic discussions, but also to help the investigations happen, irrespective of the definition behind it, because the crime still happens irrespective of what we're calling it."

In that context, UNODC has advocated for a free and open internet that would only be used for good, the UN expert said.

"Cybercrime is ultimately preventable," he said. "If you know what the risk is, you're less likely to become a victim."

Southern Africa: UN agencies, Mozambique host first-ever forum to fight trafficking of people with albinism

19 May 2017 – United Nations agencies are joining forces with governments in Southern Africa in a push to strengthen protections for persons with albinism, who often fall victim to a raft of abuses, including maiming, trafficking and even murder, linked to the belief that their parts have magical powers in witchcraft potions.

A two-day regional forum on preventing and combating human trafficking and protecting people with albinism in Mozambique, Malawi and Tanzania is currently underway in Pemba, northern Mozambique. The first-of-its-kind

workshop was organized by the UN International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) in partnership with the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)), the General Prosecutor of the Republic of Mozambique and the Prosecutor of Cabo Delgado province.

"UNICEF is supporting the Government to enhance civil registration by investing in the establishment and expansion of a digitalized system of birth registration to ensure the basic rights of every child to name, identity and nationality," [said](#) the UNICEF Representative in Mozambique, Marcoluigi Corsi.

Participants include representatives of Mozambique, Malawi and Tanzania's counter-trafficking coordination bodies, prosecutors, criminal investigation police, national human rights institutions, NGOs concerned with the protection of people with albinism and traditional healers.

"This will in turn prevent and address disappearance of children, abandonment or assist in investigations when children with albinism are affected. Following new instances of kidnapping and killing of children and people with albinism in Mozambique, UNICEF launched in August 2015 a social media campaign called #TodosIguais to create awareness on this issue. The ongoing campaign has so far reached over five million people," Mr. Corsi added.

Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania share common borders and are either countries of origin or destination for the trafficking of people with albinism and their body parts. The forum will result in a plan of action on cross-border cooperation for the prevention and prosecution of human trafficking-related crimes and the protection of the rights of people with albinism, eventually resulting in more effective investigation and prosecution, as well as victim protection.

"A regional approach like this that complements national efforts in Mozambique, Malawi and Tanzania is the only way we will improve cross-border coordination and investigation to protect people with albinism," said Katharina Schnoering, IOM Chief of Mission in Mozambique. "This regional approach to investigation, research and cooperation was recommended in a recent report by the [UN independent expert](#) who visited Mozambique in 2016," she added.

IOM is working in partnership with the Governments to assist trafficking victims and provide strengthened national counter-trafficking responses in the three African countries.

UNICEF backs the strengthening of child-friendly justice systems through capacity-building support to the police, judiciary and public prosecution to enhance accountability for violence and crimes against children.

The agency also endorses the strengthening of multi-sectoral case management systems to enable adequate channelling of cases of violence, harmful practices, including ritualistic killings or trafficking, child abandonment or any other risks that children face. UNICEF's health and education programmes help increase access to health and education services, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalized children.

UN agency micro-loan helps courageous Palestine refugee's small business thrive amid rubble of Syrian war

19 May 2017 – Hidden literally under the rubble of the Syrian war is the economic success story of a widow who, refusing to submit to despair, founded a thriving micro-enterprise venture with assistance from a United Nations agency loan.

Hanan Odah is a 30-year-old Palestine refugee who, living in the Jaramana refugee camp in the Syrian capital, Damascus, supports her displaced family of three with a stationery and perfume business that she first founded with a loan from the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East ([UNRWA](#)).

“Young, innovative and courageous, she is living proof that as large businesses have collapsed, small scale enterprises can survive and even thrive in the markets opening up at the grassroots,” said UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl in an [opinion piece](#) published today.

As senior leaders and key business figures gather this week at the World Economic Forum in Jordan, Mr. Krähenbühl hopes that they find Hanan's story “revealing, instructive and perhaps even inspiring,” flagging UNRWA's micro finance initiative as a rare but significant example of optimism in the country.

Calling her “an extraordinary young woman who in the face of untold adversity is bravely transforming her community from within, one business plan at a time,” he adds that that “is what the World Economic Forum, at its best, is striving to achieve.”

According to the Syrian Centre for Policy Research, de-industrialization has inflicted \$254.7 billion in economic damage on Syria. In 2015 alone GDP loss was \$ 163.3 billion. As a result of the economic collapse, more than 85 per cent of Syrians were living in poverty by the end of 2015, with more than 69 per cent of the population barely surviving in extreme poverty. Nearly three million jobs have been lost and unemployment is now over 50 per cent.

However, Mr. Krähenbühl pointed out: “With recent donor funding, in particular \$1 million from the European Union, we have expanded our micro finance outreach. Always searching for new openings, we have been actively mapping new locations of internally displaced people to reach the Palestine refugees we serve and to deliver loan products where market opportunities open up.”

In a country where nearly three million jobs have been lost and unemployment

is over 50 per cent, the UN has expanded its [Microfinance programme in Palestine](#). Worth nearly \$2 million, UNRWA's programme supports the resilience of Palestine refugees and Syrians alike.

For many beneficiaries these loans are vital to support their families and rebuild their homes but, most importantly, they provide a renewed sense of hope and dignity in a country devastated by six years of conflict.

"Across Syria, UNRWA's Micro Finance Department disbursed a staggering 9,520 loans in 2016, worth nearly two million dollars. We can build on this track record and expand with the support of donors and partners," stressed Mr. Krähenbühl.

"Our loans have also developed flexibly in response to the evolving conflict. There are currently five products that respond to the deepening emergency situations in Syria and help Palestine refugees re-build their houses and maintain stable incomes for themselves and extended families; no small achievement as war rages relentlessly in the country," he concluded.