

Addressing 'fragility' of societies key to preventing conflicts, stresses UN chief

21 April 2017 – Noting that a key trigger common to nearly all conflicts is the element of fragility – fragility of States, of institutions, or of societies – United Nations Secretary General António Guterres has called for increasing investments in preventative measures that address the problem of fragility before it turns into conflict.

“This means strengthening States, strengthening institutions, strengthening civil societies [and] combining the peace and security approach with the inclusive and sustainable development approach and with human rights,” explained Mr. Guterres, speaking at a World Bank-European Union event in Washington DC, where the Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are holding their annual Spring Meetings.

In his remarks at the panel discussion on , the UN chief noted that the traditional forms of development aid are not enough and said that new approaches that create the conditions for investments in building resilience of communities and addressing fragility is needed.

He also praised the World Bank for the innovations it has already in place in countries like Jordan and Lebanon, to help them cope with the refugee crisis in the region.

“In my opinion, this is essential and, [given the scale of needs] should also include the private sector,” he said, adding that it is essential to find ways to divert the massive use of resources in managing crises to what is necessary to do to prevent them and to build the capacity of societies to solve their own problems.

Prior to attending the panel discussion, Secretary-General Guterres met with top United States officials, including President Donald Trump and National Security Advisor General H.R. McMaster at the White House.

According to the UN chief’s spokesperson, Mr. Guterres and Mr. Trump had constructive discussion on cooperation between the US and the UN and agreed to meet again in the near future.

UN food relief agency air-lifts food,

medical supplies to 31,000 famine-stricken Somalis

21 April 2017 – As the drought intensifies in south and north-eastern Somalia, the United Nations emergency food relief agency today airlifted to Mogadishu enough high-energy biscuits to assist 31,000 people for three days.

The shipment, made on a Boeing 747 donated by the UPS Foundation from Dubai, also included medical assistance on behalf of the UN World Health Organization ([WHO](#)).

“A [rapid response](#) is crucial to support drought-affected families across Somalia,” said WFP Representative and Director of Gulf Office Abdallah Alwardat. “This airlift is a great example of WFP and its partners coming together to reach those furthest behind with life-saving assistance.”

The food is meant for the most vulnerable people – particularly children – who are displaced from their homes without access to food or cooking facilities, WFP said.

According to UN estimates, half of Somalia’s population, including 330,000 acutely malnourished children, is in need of urgent assistance.

The high-energy biscuits are rich in minerals and vitamins and do not require preparation, the UN agency said. WFP will provide other types of live-saving food assistance for the following days.

UN envoy welcomes restored Internet service in Cameroon’s English-speaking regions

21 April 2017 – The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Africa was relieved to learn that Cameroon President Paul Biya instructed that full internet services be restored in the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon.

“I welcome this measure, which is in line with those recently announced by the Government to address the demands of English-Speaking teachers and lawyers,” said François Louncény Fall, who also heads the UN Regional Office for Central Africa ([UNOCA](#)), in a [press statement](#).

He noted that the decision, which took effect from 20 April, “will go a long

way to help reduce tension and to create conditions conducive for the resolution of the crisis in the two regions.”

Mr. Fall said that he “counts on the Government of Cameroon to continue to promote appeasement and dialogue, and to take all other appropriate measures aimed at a speedy and lasting resolution of the crisis in order to strengthen unity, stability and prosperity in Cameroon.”

The Special Representative concluded by taking the opportunity “to express the wish that the Cameroonian people will maintain their spirit of patriotism and show restraint during this trying period, including by avoiding the use of the Internet to incite hatred or violence.”

[Cuba needs new laws and stronger action targeting human trafficking – UN rights expert](#)

21 April 2017 – A United Nations human rights expert has urged Cuba to consider introducing new legislation to ensure that everyone who falls victim to trafficking in persons can be identified and helped, and the authorities can take action against offenders.

“Although cases of trafficking in the country may appear to be limited, the number of criminal prosecutions and victims assisted is still too modest, and shows that a proactive approach to detection of the problem is needed,” said the UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, wrapping up a [five-day visit](#) to Cuba. Ms. Giammarinaro acknowledged the Government’s political will to address human trafficking and appreciated its strong aim on prevention, while underscoring that the protection of children from sexually motivated crimes should be extended to everyone under 18 years old. “The focus of Cuba’s anti-trafficking action so far has been sexual exploitation. However, recent developments which have created new opportunities for individual initiatives in the tourist sector require vigilance to stamp out any cases of labour exploitation; the use of foreign workers in the construction industry should also be monitored” she stressed. Based on a multi-disciplinary and coordinated approach to combat trafficking, Ms. Giammarinaro welcomed Cuba’s 2017-2020 Action Plan to prevent and fight against trafficking in persons and for protecting victims, which had been approved just before her visit – the first by a UN rights expert in 10 years. “The real challenge will be the implementation of measures provided for in the document, especially aimed at identifying and supporting victims, while respecting their human rights” the Special Rapporteur said. The UN expert praised Cuba’s universal and free systems for education, healthcare and social security, saying they helped to reduce the

vulnerability of Cuban citizens to trafficking. However, citing thousands who, in 2015, were exposed to trafficking and exploitation, she said that migration in unsafe conditions created situations that could lead to trafficking. Ms. Giammarinaro spoke with a few of the survivors, who said that they had signed apparently legal contracts and been promised good working conditions abroad, “but, at their destination, their passports were confiscated, and they found themselves in the hands of gangs determined to exploit them for work without payment.” “When efforts were made to force them into prostitution/sex work, the women managed to communicate with their families in Cuba and were rescued thanks to the immediate action of Cuban embassies. However, we don’t know how many young women may have been obliged to stay in exploitative situations abroad,” the expert said. Ms. Giammarinaro called for the social stigma surrounding prostitution/sex work to be removed, and for the closure of so-called ‘rehabilitation centres’ where women are detained even though prostitution is not a crime. “Any fear of being punished is a major obstacle for victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation to report their plight and the abuse they have suffered,” she stressed. Special Rapporteurs 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.

[‘Large majority’ of millions living with hepatitis have no access to testing or treatment – UN agency](#)

21 April 2017 – New data published by the United Nations health agency has revealed that a vast majority of the estimated 325 million people living with chronic hepatitis B virus or hepatitis C virus infection lack access to life-saving testing and treatment, placing them at a great risk of chronic liver disease, cancer, and even death.

According to the UN World Health Organization ([WHO](#))’s 2017 Global Hepatitis Report, just 9 per cent of all hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV) infections were diagnosed in 2015. An even smaller fraction – merely 8 per cent and 7 per cent– of those diagnosed with HBV and HCV, respectively, started curative treatment during that year.

“Viral hepatitis is now recognized as a major public health challenge that requires an urgent response,” said Margaret Chan, the Director-General of WHO, in a [news release](#) announcing the findings.

“Vaccines and medicines to tackle hepatitis exist, and [we] are committed to helping ensure these tools reach all those who need them.”

The report also revealed that increased coverage of HBV vaccinations among children have contributed substantially to preventing deaths from that virus.

Globally, 84 per cent of children born in 2015 received the three recommended doses of HBV vaccine.

However, an estimated 257 million people, mostly adults born before the introduction of the HBV vaccine, were living with chronic HBV infection in 2015. There is also currently no vaccine against HCV, and access to treatment for both HBV and HCV is low.

HBV infection requires lifelong treatment, and Hepatitis C can be cured within a relatively short time using the correct medicines, making the need for testing and treatment all the more important.

“We are still at an early stage of the viral hepatitis response, but the way forward looks promising,” said Gottfried Hirnschall, Director of WHO’s Department of HIV and the Global Hepatitis Programme, adding: “More countries are making hepatitis services available for people in need – a diagnostic test costs less than \$1 and the cure for HCV can be below \$200.”

Western Pacific, African regions bear greatest burdens

Findings have also revealed that Hepatitis B levels vary across the planet. WHO’s Western Pacific Region (115 million people) and its African Region (60 million people) have the highest number of such patients. These roughly equate to 6.2 per cent and 6.1 per cent of their respective total populations.

Similarly, HCV prevalence by regions varies from about seven million (in WHO Americas Region) to 15 million (in the UN agency’s Eastern Mediterranean Region).

The report has also shown that despite challenges, some countries have made strides in scaling-up hepatitis services.

China, for instance, achieved a high coverage of nearly 96 per cent for the timely birth dose of HBV vaccines, and reached the Hepatitis B control goal of less than one per cent prevalence in children under the age of five in 2015.

Mongolia, too, has improved the uptake of hepatitis treatment by including HBV and HCV medicines in its National Health Insurance Scheme, which covers 98 per cent of its population.

Similarly, generic competition among medicines has also contributed substantially, in Egypt, for example, the price of a 3-month cure for Hepatitis C has reduced to less than \$200 (in 2016) from \$900 (in 2015) also, in Pakistan, the same course currently costs as little as \$100.

WHO’s [Global Health Sector Strategy](#) on viral hepatitis aims to test 90 per cent and treat 80 per cent of people with HBV and HCV by 2030.