

Progress against tropical diseases must be backed by poverty alleviation efforts – UN health agency

19 April 2017 – The United Nations today cited “record-breaking” progress in controlling neglected tropical diseases – which blind, maim, disfigure and debilitate millions of people worldwide, especially in its poorest areas – as an estimated one billion people were reached with treatment for at least one of these diseases in 2015 alone, according to the Organization’s health agency.

“[We have] observed record-breaking progress towards bringing ancient scourges like sleeping sickness and elephantiasis to their knees,” said Margaret Chan, the Director-General of the UN World Health Organization in a [news release](#) today on efforts to tackle the diseases, known as NTDs.

“Over the past 10 years, millions of people have been rescued from disability and poverty, thanks to one of the most effective global partnerships in modern public health.”

The UN agency’s new report, [Integrating Neglected Tropical Diseases into Global Health and Development](#), shows how political support, improvements in living conditions and supply of medicines have led to sustained expansion of disease control programmes in countries where these diseases are most prevalent.

Another major milestone was the endorsement of a NTD roadmap in 2012, in which WHO partners committed additional support and resources to eliminating 10 of the most common NTDs.



Remarkable progress has been made against neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) over the past 10 years. Photo: WHO

For sustaining this momentum, experts believe that wider progress towards realizing the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development will be crucial.

Meeting global targets for water and sanitation, such as those under the global Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) will be key.

WHO estimates that 2.4 billion people still lack basic sanitation facilities such as toilets and latrines, while more than 660 million continue to drink water from “unimproved” sources, such as surface water.

“Further gains [...] will depend on wider progress towards the [SDGs](#),” said Dirk Engels, Director of WHO’s Department of Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases.

Once widely prevalent, diseases are now restricted to tropical and sub-tropical regions with unsafe water, inadequate hygiene and sanitation, and poor housing conditions. More than 70 per cent of countries and territories that report the presence of NTDs are low or lower-middle income economies.

RELATED: [FEATURE: Eradication of yaws – a disease that ‘begins where roads end’ – is within sight, WHO doctor says in film](#)

The class of these illnesses include diseases such as [dengue](#), [rabies](#), [trachoma](#), [Buruli ulcer](#), [yaws](#), [leprosy](#), [human African trypanosomiasis](#) (sleeping sickness), [dracunculiasis](#) (guinea-worm disease), [schistosomiasis](#) (larval worm infection) etc.

Poor people living in remote, rural areas, urban slums, or conflict zones are most at risk.

[Discovery of more mass graves reveal ‘unfolding horror’ in DR Congo – UN rights chief](#)

19 April 2017 – Raising alarm over increasing reports of serious human rights violations in the Kasai Central and Kasai Oriental provinces of Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations human rights chief underscored that the scale and nature of the allegations could warrant an investigation by an international mechanism, such as the International Criminal Court ([ICC](#)).

[According](#) the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), between 5-7 April, a team of UN [human rights](#) and [police](#) officials found 17 further mass graves in the Kasai Central province, which had been the location of clashes between security forces and the Kamuina Nsapu, a local militia.

“The discovery of yet more mass graves and the reports of continued violations and abuses highlight the horror that has been unfolding in the Kasais over the last nine months,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said in a [news release](#), highlighting the need to monitor the situation closely.

“Should there be no effective national investigation, I will not hesitate to urge the international community to support an investigation by an international mechanism, including the International Criminal Court,” he added.

Fifteen of the recently discovered mass graves were in a cemetery in the town of Tshimbulu and two in the locality of Tshienke.

According to information received by the UN investigators, soldiers from the *Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo* (FARDC) had reportedly dug the graves, after clashing with presumed elements of the Kamuina Nsapu between 26-28 March. At least 74 people, including 30 children, were reported to have been killed by soldiers as a result of these clashes.

The militia, loyal to a local customary chief who was killed in August last year, has been accused of a number of crimes and human rights abuses, including killings and abduction, recruitment of children, and targeting schools, hospitals and churches.

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It is absolutely vital that the Government takes meaningful steps, which to date have been lacking, to ensure that there is a prompt, transparent, and independent investigation to establish the facts and circumstances of alleged human rights violations and abuses perpetrated by all parties, underscored the UN rights chief.

The UN team also visited Kananga, a town in Kasai Central, where between 28-30 March, FARDC soldiers were reported to have shot dead at least 40 people, including 11 children and 12 women, in the town's Nganza commune, and injured at least 21 others. There are also allegations that at least two women and three girls had been raped by the soldiers during that operation.

The UN investigators were also informed of the killing of three individuals, including a 17-year-old boy and a one-month-old baby during search operations by the *Police Nationale Congolaise*.

Also in the statement, High Commissioner Zeid offered his Office's assistance in conducting a credible investigation into the reports and allegations but underscored that it must be provided with unfettered access.

We reiterate our request for access to all sites of mass graves, as well as to all witnesses, including those in detention, and other relevant information necessary to determine responsibility at all levels, he added.

[**UN envoy urges Palestinian unity to**](#)

resolve electricity crisis in Gaza

19 April 2017 – The United Nations envoy for the Middle East peace process today called on authorities in Gaza to work together with the international community to resolve a new energy crisis after the area's only power station shut down, saying the consequences of the crisis "should not be underestimated."

"All in Gaza must share the burden by [paying their bills](#). It is the poorest Palestinians in Gaza who pay the price for exceptions and privileges that others enjoy," said Nickolay Mladenov, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

He urged the "de facto authorities" in Gaza to ensure that collection rates are improved and that revenue collected in Gaza is returned to the "legitimate Palestinian authorities" in order to keep fuel and electricity supply flowing.

According to media reports, the two factions have been fighting over unpaid bills and taxes, forcing the local energy authority to shut down power.

Mr. Mladenov noted that Palestinians in Gaza have lived in a protracted humanitarian crisis and should not be held hostage by disagreements, divisions and closures.

"The social, economic and political consequences of this impending energy crisis should not be underestimated," he stressed.

The UN envoy said the international community can finance and support investment in upgrading the electrical grid "but it cannot do it alone." He urged the Palestinian Government to facilitate buying fuel for the Gaza Power plant, and voiced support for reforming the Gaza Electricity Distribution Company.

He also called on Israeli authorities to facilitate the entry of materials for repairs and maintenance of the power grid and plant, and noted the need to also upgrade Egyptian power lines.

Diseases and sexual violence threaten Somalis, South Sudanese escaping famine – UN

18 April 2017 – Millions of people are facing the peril of famine in Somalia

and South Sudan, and the situation is expected to worsen as the drought and violence fuelling the crises widen, cautioned senior United Nations officials who have just returned from the area.

Speaking to journalists in New York, John Ging, from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), said that situation in Somalia was “very fast moving” with more than 6.2 million people in need of food and water, and at risk for cholera and measles.

“My overall impression of the response in Somalia is that the needs are moving very quickly, escalating, but the response is currently keeping pace with those needs. That does not mean that we should be complacent, but it does mean that we have the right team on the ground doing an outstanding job,” said Mr. Ging, who led a team that also included representatives from the UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)), the UN Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)) and the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)).

The visit by the so-called emergency directors’ group was meant to ensure coordination among all those involved and to mobilize all the support possible for both countries.

Donors have funded 70 per cent of the \$825 million humanitarian appeal for Somalia – which is “unprecedented,” according to Mr. Ging.



Women who have been forced from their home by the drought line up to collect water at a UNICEF-supported water point in K13 IDP camp in Mogadishu, Somalia, Thursday, April 6, 2017. UNICEF/Mackenzie Knowles-Coursin



Angelina Nyanin, 25, holds her niece, Nyalel Gatcauk, 2, who suffers from malnutrition, as a UNICEF nutrition worker feeds the baby Plumpy’Nut, a peanut-based paste for treatment of severe acute malnutrition. UNICEF/Modola

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The financial support follows the collective failure in 2011 to stop an earlier famine in Somalia, the senior UN official said, and is today seen as a strong message from the international community to work with the Somali Government to prevent a reoccurrence.

In addition to humanitarian aid, families are also receiving more cash-for-work as part of a project led by UNDP and partners. UNDP’s Mourad Wahba said the project is part of an effort to help families “take it into their own hands to decide how aid should be spent.”

The scale-up on the funding side in Somalia is in sharp contrast to the situation in South Sudan, where only about 27 per cent of the \$1.6 billion appeal has been met.

“That really leaves our operations very vulnerable at the scale and needs that are required,” said Mr. Ging.

The scale of the needs in South Sudan is bigger – with 7.5 million people in need, roughly half of them displaced within the country and as refugees in neighbouring countries.

VIDEO: Speaking to reporters in New York, OCHA operations chief John Ging says that Somalia and South Sudan are in “catastrophic” food insecure situations.

In addition, South Sudan is now considered one of the most dangerous places for humanitarian workers. Since the latest outbreak of violence in South Sudan, 82 aid workers have been killed – nine just in the past month.

The face of the famine, however, is a woman with her child, according to Ugochi Daniels, Chief of the Humanitarian and Fragile Contexts Branch at UNFPA.

“In both countries, we have over 200,000 pregnant women who are affected. Because of the impact of the drought, men stayed behind on the farms and to tend livestock. Women are the ones walking with children,” Ms. Daniels said, underscoring the risk for sexual violence and protection concerns.

In South Sudan, sexual violence against girls and women is particularly grave with much younger children and elderly women being attacked.

Manuel Fontaine, Director of UNICEF’s Office of Emergency Operations, noted that more than 200,000 children in Somalia already face severe malnutrition which is expected to worsen as rains dry up over the coming months.

He also expressed concern about cholera, noting an increase in cases of 700 per cent from the same period last year in the Horn of Africa nation.

[Unity within Security Council vital to prevent mass atrocities – UN chief Guterres](#)

18 April 2017 – Briefing the Security Council, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today stressed the importance of unity in the 15-member body to effectively address human rights violations as well as to prevent mass atrocities.

“Article 24 of the [UN Charter](#) is clear: the primary responsibility for the

maintenance of international peace and security rests with this Council 'in order to ensure prompt and effective action'," [said](#) Mr. Guterres, speaking on the theme of *Human Rights and the Prevention of Armed Conflict*.

"We must collectively draw strength from the letter and spirit of the Charter to better prevent armed conflict and sustain peace through development [by] ensuring effective protection of all human rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural," he added.

Noting that peace, security, sustainable development and human rights are mutually reinforcing, the UN chief underscored that peace must be "relentlessly pursued" along the gamut of prevention, conflict resolution and peacekeeping to peacebuilding and long-term development.

He further stressed that close cooperation between the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) and all relevant UN bodies, including the Security Council, is vital given that human rights concerns are fundamental to maintaining peace and security as well as essential to informing Security Council deliberations and decision-making.

Failure to put an end to suffering of Syrian people 'shames us all' – Secretary-General

Mr. Guterres also underscored the importance of unity within the Security Council and called on its members to "spare no effort to put an end to the intolerable suffering of the Syrian people". "The failure to do so is a tragedy that shames us all," he stressed.

Speaking on initiatives already taken by the Security Council, such as incorporating a human rights component in the mandate of UN peace missions, the UN chief noted that the systematic monitoring and reporting of human rights violations not only gave "a voice" to victims but also helped the fight against impunity.

That work also contributed to the protection of civilians under threat, helped build capacities and, in some circumstances, preserved democratic space.

"[However] despite all these efforts, millions of people still need to be protected from crises and far more time and resources continue to be spent responding to crises rather than preventing them," noted the Secretary-General, underscoring that preventative efforts needed to be prioritized and root causes of conflict had to be addressed.

"That is the lesson of so many conflicts."

He also stressed that ensuring improved and less politicised action on human rights is also vital for progressing on the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

Concluding his briefing, the UN chief informed the Security Council that he has set in motion various reforms of the Secretariat which will enable it to play its role better and in keeping with the mandates and trust the UN Member States have place in it.

“The resolutions on sustaining peace and the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development are cause for hope,” he said, noting: “Progress on human rights aspects would further complement these advances.”