

Somalia: UN, global partners commend creation of National Security Council

17 April 2017 – The United Nations and other members of the international community today commended Somalia's Federal Government and the Federal Member States for agreeing to form a National Security Council, as well as decisions taken on priorities such as fighting corruption and drought response.

These decisions follow two days of consultations held in the capital, Mogadishu, led by Somali President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo and other senior officials.

"This agreement marks a [major milestone](#) for Somalia. It is a cornerstone of the federal state building process and is a basis upon which strengthened security can be built," said Michael Keating, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Somalia, referring to the creation of a National Security Council.

President Farmajo will head the National Security Council, whose members will include regional leaders.

Mr. Keating, who is also the head of the UN political mission in Somalia ([UNSON](#)), said that the international community is committed to supporting the Government's priorities.

He made the statement on behalf of the UN, noting that the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the European Union (EU), Italy, Ethiopia, Sweden, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States all express their support for the outcome of the consultations.

The political leaders also agreed to aid drought-stricken Somalia avert a potential famine. About half of the Somali population is in need of assistance, including 330,000 children.

Also today, the UN reported that an explosion occurred near Mogadishu, potentially targeting a convoy from the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)). At the time of the incident, the convoy was returning from an area outside of Mogadishu to provide life-saving emergency food to people impacted by the drought.

A UN spokesperson told journalists in New York that the occupants of the vehicles – including WFP staff and a visiting journalist – were "all safe, although two private security guards escorting the team were wounded."

Haiti: UN inaugurates water supply system in Lascahobas as part of anti-cholera fight

17 April 2017 – Historically, the people in the Madan Mak and Loncy areas of the Lascahobas Commune have always had serious problems with access to safe drinking water.

Situated in a mountainous region of Haiti's Central Plateau, a few hundred kilometres from the capital Port-au-Prince, the two communities – up to just a few weeks ago – were among the 42 per cent of the country's population still without access to safe drinking water in 2017.

When the cholera epidemic hit the Plateau Central, the need for safe potable water became crucial to eliminate the transmission of the disease.

“Before the water came here, we had to do a lot of work to find drinking water. We were forever obliged to go fetch water from Mont-Désir, which is miles away,” says Maria-Rose Joseph, a resident of Loncy. When she could not travel the distance, Ms. Joseph was obliged to use a source of unsafe water – despite the risks of transmission of water-borne diseases such as diarrhoea, dysentery, typhoid, and cholera.

The top United Nations humanitarian official in Haiti stressed that all efforts to ensure the provision of safe water and sanitation are crucial to eliminate cholera.

“Elimination of cholera can be achieved in the medium term – two or three years – if emphasis is placed on immediate action. That is to say an emphasis put on response capacity, management and immediate treatment of water. But nothing can be done without an investment in water, sanitation and hygiene,” explains El-Mostafa Benlamlah, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Haiti.

Elimination of cholera can be achieved in the medium term – two or three years – if emphasis is placed on immediate action
El-Mostafa Benlamlah, Deputy Special Representative for Haiti

To address the concerns of those living in Mangoule, the Department of Artibonite proposed a new project to the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti ([MINUSTAH](#)). “It was an essential project for the area because the residents had no drinking water. Other areas also have the same problem but, for now, we do not have the resources to carry out these other essential projects,” said Fritson Jean-Baptiste, adviser to the Department of Artibonite.

“The entire Petit-Fond area benefits from safe water provision. Certainly, without the help of MINUSTAH the project would never have happened and that

is why we want to thank all those involved," he added.

The project involved the capture of water from the Mangoule spring, following which a sedimentation basin of 8 cubic metres was built. Then a 60-cubic-metre tank to store the water to supply the eight kiosks and three water points were constructed. The total cost of the project was \$94,280 – of which \$89,195 was financed by MINUSTAH.

VIDEO: El-Mostafa Benlamlih, Deputy Special Representative for Haiti, discusses progress on safe water and sanitation in Haiti's Central Plateau – a move critical for eliminating cholera in the country.

Recently inaugurated in the presence of the local authorities and the MINUSTAH leadership, the project now makes it possible to meet the needs of more than 14,000 people by making access to drinking water easier.

"Our water needs are crystal clear and with the implementation of every successful new project, one can really see the change and improvement in the people's living conditions," says Lehon Johasse, Coordinator for Actions en Santé et en Développement d'Haïti, one of the local implementing agencies for this type of project.

For Mr. Benlamlih, investment in the water, sanitation and hygiene sectors must continue, and donor support is vital for this effort. "Haiti needs its partners and donors. It's a collective effort – and the United Nations is there to help, coordinate, act and work with NGOs, work with national authorities and national institutions. We need donor support. That support is absolutely necessary.

"We must not relax our efforts," he added. "There is no guarantee that cholera will not resume and surpass our capabilities. So we must not let go – and it is here that friends, partners and donors must continue to support and invest in this effort."

Part of this particular initiative – the project to capture the Mangoule source – aims to help the Haitian authorities to improve public infrastructure and the living conditions of its population. As part of its new approach to tackle cholera, the UN wants to step up its support to the Haitian Government in the construction of drinking water, sanitation and health care systems, while developing a support package to provide material assistance to Haitians most directly affected by the disease.

Since 2010, the cholera epidemic has directly affected 805,000 people and taken the lives of more than 9,480 [official figures as of 11 March 2017]. The UN-backed national and international efforts led to a 90 per cent reduction in the number of suspected cases of cholera compared with the peak of the epidemic in 2011.

Under its new approach launched last year, the UN is intensifying support to the Haitian Government in building sound water, sanitation and health systems.

“I am so glad I can have water now. We need the water and before we had to set off at 4 a.m. to secure drinking water. I am so satisfied with this successful project that it is necessary to say it loud and clear. We had no water to wash, no water to drink – and the cholera came to take away our lives. Now we have water and we are delivered,” said Sonia Verville, a beneficiary of the project in Madan Mak.

[New UN guidelines to make international trade in plants and seeds safer](#)

17 April 2017 – A United Nations commission overseeing plant health has adopted a new global standard to ensure that international trade in plants and seeds – vital to feed the world’s population – is free from agricultural pests and disease-causing bugs.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)), the threat of transmission of pests – unwanted stowaways – on ships and containers transporting agricultural cargo, especially seeds, is a growing concern around the world.

“Unlike other agricultural products that are destined for consumption, such as wheat, barley or lentils, seeds are a cause for greater concern,” said the UN agency in a news release.

“[As they are] destined for planting, there is a greater risk that any pests they carry could establish themselves and spread after planting,” it added.

For instance, once ashore, pests such as the gypsy moths, giant African snails or Argentine ants can invade new environments, devastate crops and cause much hardship.

Adopted last Thursday by the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures, the governing body of the International Plant Protection Convention ([IPPC](#)), the new standard will help harmonize the ways countries deal with the complexities of the international seed trade.

The efforts are also expected to facilitate trade in seeds – valued at about \$12 billion annually – while ensuring that such shipments safeguard food supplies for a growing global population.

In the news release, FAO further underscored that such steps are important to protect global food security as well as for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), particularly those related to combatting hunger.

Because the IPPC is the only organization to set government-recognized plant health standards that facilitate international trade, the decisions made here will be essential to further protecting the world's plant resources, the very foundation of life," said Kundhavi Kadiresan, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific.

FAO's vision of a world without hunger can only be accomplished with healthy plants that are free from regulated pests," she underscored.

The twelfth session of the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures, which concluded last week in Incheon, Republic of Korea, also discussed guidelines for an import regulatory system, and a series of treatments that stop pests from burrowing into wooden packaging materials and methods to stop fruit flies from attacking citrus fruits.

Scale of civilians fleeing Iraq's Mosul 'staggering' – senior UN relief official

17 April 2017 – Noting that nearly half a million people have fled Mosul since the start of military operations to retake the city from Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) terrorists, a senior United Nations humanitarian official in Iraq warned that the scale of the displacement has stretched relief efforts to their operational limits.

"Our worst case scenario when the fighting started was that up to one million civilians may flee Mosul. Already, more than 493,000 people have left, leaving almost everything behind," Lise Grande, the Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, [said in a news release](#) issued by the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

"The sheer volume of civilians still fleeing Mosul city is staggering [...] we are doing everything we can but this has been a long battle and the assault on the old city hasn't started," she added.

According to estimates, as many as 500,000 people still remain in ISIL-controlled areas in western Mosul, including about 400,000 in the densely populated old city.

Humanitarian agencies are scaling up their response, preparing emergency sites and camps to shelter the hundreds of thousands more who may flee in coming days and weeks, but they are under increasing strain.

Since the [fighting began last October](#), some 1.9 million people have been

provided live-saving assistance, including food, water, shelter, emergency kits, medical support and psycho-social services, since fighting began last October.

“We’re reaching families who have fled and families who have stayed [but] Mosul has pushed us to our operational limits,” said the Humanitarian Coordinator.

‘Nothing is more important than protecting civilians & nothing’

The battle for western Mosul is very different from the one in the east and so is the consequent impact on civilians. More trauma injuries are reported and there are fears that food stocks and drinking water could run out.

“Civilians in Mosul face incredible, terrifying risks. They are being shot at, there are artillery barrages, families are running out of supplies, medicines are scarce and water is cut-off,” noted the UN humanitarian official.

The news release also underscored that all parties to the conflict are obliged, under International Humanitarian Law, to do everything possible to protect civilians, ensure they have the assistance they need, and limit damage to civilian infrastructure.

“Nothing is more important than protecting civilians & nothing,” stressed Ms. Grande.

‘Monstrous, cowardly’ attack on Syrian evacuees a show of shameless disregard for human life – UN aid chief

16 April 2017 – Expressing “horror” at the attack on civilians evacuating from the besieged Syrian towns of Foah and Kefraya, the United Nations humanitarian chief has called on all parties to the conflict to uphold their obligations under international law and protect civilians.

“The perpetrators of such a monstrous and cowardly attack displayed a shameless disregard for human life,” Stephen O’Brien, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, said in a [statement](#).

“International humanitarian law is very clear: warring parties must protect civilians and distinguish between military and civilian targets,” he underscored.

Some 5,000 people were travelling from the two towns to Government-controlled

areas when an [explosion occurred near their convoy as it passed Rasheedin](#), western Aleppo, yesterday. Scores of people have been killed and many injured.

In the aftermath of the attack, humanitarian organizations, including the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and UN partners, are providing assistance to the injured, including transferring them to hospitals.

The evacuation from Foah and Kefraya was a part of an agreement, popularly referred to as the "Four Towns" Agreement meant to facilitate humanitarian access to the people in need in those besieged towns. In addition to these two places in Idlib, the Agreement also includes Madaya and Zabadani in rural Damascus.

In the statement, the UN humanitarian chief further noted that while the UN was not involved in the agreement or evacuation process, it stands ready to scale up its support to evacuees.

"In that regard, I call on all parties to the conflict to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, and to facilitate safe and unimpeded access for the UN and its partners to bring life-saving help to those in need," he said.

Also in the statement, Mr. O'Brien, who is also the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, expressed his deepest sympathies to the families of those killed and injured.