

Early rains expose risks for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, but worst 'yet to come,' warns UN agency

The arrival of pre-Monsoon rains in southern Bangladesh have exposed alarming level of risks for Rohingya refugees, United Nations humanitarian agencies said, urging immediate funding to ensure support and protection can be provided to hundreds of thousands in desperate need.

“The arrival of the rains first marks the start of what is going to be an incredibly challenging period for the refugees and those working to support them,” said John McCue, an official at the UN [International Organization for Migration](#) (IOM), in Cox’s Bazar, where more than 700,000 refugees are residing.

“[The worst is yet to come](#) when cyclone and monsoon seasons hit in the coming weeks.”

UN agencies and partners have some heavy machinery and road clearing equipment and some more are expected to arrive. But humanitarian workers are facing severe shortage when it comes to other vital resources.

To date, just 7 per cent of the UN migration agency’s \$182 million appeal for 2018 has been secured.

“The grim reality is that most [refugees] are living under tarpaulins on highly unstable ground and are going to have to survive months of rain, floods, landslides and possible cyclones. They are in desperate need of support and protection and we simply do not have the funding we need to deliver a fraction of what is required,” said Mr. McCue.

Impossible to predict at-risk areas

Furthermore, the sheer scale of the crisis and the short period of time in which it unfolded has had a major impact on the topography of the area.

Trees and vegetation had to be cleared by people to set up shelters and as a result it is now impossible to predict where the most severe weather-related damage will occur, officials say.

Conservative estimates suggest 120,000 people will be at grave risk from flooding and landslides when Monsoon proper hits.

However, one thing is certain: protecting almost a million people from the life-threatening dangers of cyclones and other disasters far exceeds current financial resources and pledges.

Working flat out amid limited resources

In spite of the severe shortage of funds, IOM and partners on the ground, including the UN [World Food Programme](#) (WFP) and the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR) are working flat out to prepare.

IOM is establishing sites across the camps with emergency supplies to ensure that even if areas are temporarily cut off, people will still have access to aid. Teams of porters have also been readied to bring in supplies on foot, if roads are damaged.

UN agencies are also supporting the relocation of thousands of families from areas deemed most at risk and helping communities strengthen their resilience. They are also training refugees in first aid, search and rescue, and early warning systems as part of a cyclone preparedness programme.

[Liberia: Security Council seeks study of role played by UN mission in conflict resolution, political mediation](#)

Commending the remarkable achievements made by the people and Government of Liberia to consolidate lasting peace and stability in the wake of a 1999-2003 civil war, the Security Council on Thursday asked the United Nations Secretary-General to conduct a study of the role played by its peacekeeping mission in resolving conflicts and other challenges the country has faced.

In a Presidential Statement adopted Thursday, the 15-member body said it “looks forward to the results of this study,” which can be useful when considering ways to enhance the overall effectiveness of UN peacekeeping.

The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) closed on 30 March, ending a nearly 15-year presence in the West African country, which had been devastated by 14 years of civil war.

In the statement, the Council welcomed the continued implementation of the peacebuilding plan for Liberia submitted by UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) and stressed that the UN will continue to be an important partner of Liberia after the closure of UNMIL.

Addressing the Council, a senior UN peacekeeping official commended the people of Liberia whose resilience was the decisive factor in turning the page on crisis and conflict, and whose determination will ensure that the

hard-won peace is sustained.

“For nearly 25 years, the situation in Liberia was so concerning that it has been a constant presence on this Council’s agenda. But the country has turned an important corner,” said Alexander Zuev, Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions in the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations.



UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Alexander Zuev, Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, addresses the Security Council meeting on the situation in Liberia.

Earlier this year, President George Weah succeeded Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who had led Liberia since 2006, marking the first peaceful transfer of power between democratically-elected leaders in 71 years.

Mr. Zuev said that, now, with the people and Government of Liberia, lies the important work of continuing to build a nation – a unified, reconciled nation with an accountable Government committed to addressing corruption within its ranks, a nation where all citizens share the benefits of Liberia’s abundant natural and human resources, and a nation fully responsible for its own destiny, with institutions and a Government providing basic guarantees – of security, of protection, of services – to its citizens.

“The conclusion of UNMIL’s mandate [...] is a remarkable demonstration of confidence that the country is moving steadfastly along the path of sustained peace,” he stressed.

The meeting was also addressed by Deputy Ambassador Irina Schoulgin Nyoni of Sweden, which is the chair of the Peacebuilding Commission’s Liberia Configuration, as well as Chid Liberty, the chief executive officer of “Liberty & Justice.”

UN Mission chief calls Colombia's congressional elections 'a clear step forward' in peace process

In a milestone exercise that “transited the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) from weapons to politics,” last month’s congressional elections drew millions of Colombians to the polls amid a trend towards a reduction of electoral violence, the senior-most United Nations official in the country said on Thursday

The mid-March elections were the first after the signing in 2016 of a peace deal between the FARC-EP and the Colombian Government that ended the Western hemisphere’s longest-running conflict in which more than 200,000 people were killed.

“While it is too early to take stock of a peace process that has set ambitious and long-term goals, we already observed that it has achieved [a notable reduction of violence](#) in the congressional elections,” Jean Arnault, head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia, [set up two years ago](#) to monitor and support implementation of the peace deal.

He said that the presidential election is now five weeks away, “and against a background of political polarization, the campaign so far has confirmed the trend towards a reduction of electoral violence.”

Among legislative developments, he said the Constitutional Court had endorsed the Law on the Status of the Opposition, which among other things provides opposition parties with access to media, funding and representation in the Senate and the Chamber of Representatives for runners-ups in vice- and presidential elections.

It also declared constitutional FARC’s political participation, including 10 Congressional seats provided for in the Peace Agreement.

Turning to the socioeconomic reintegration of FARC members, under a new decree, the Superintendent of Banks can provide banking services to former FARC members in the reintegration process – excepting those on international sanctions lists.

The next few months provide an opportunity to bring together government institutions, local authorities and social organizations
– *Jean Arnault, Head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia*

Recognizing a number of new institutions as “a substantial change,” Mr.

Arnault said “the next few months provide an opportunity to bring together government institutions, local authorities and social organizations to press forward” with the peace agenda.

He also asserted that the last couple of weeks have brought new challenges to the peace process, such as the arrest of a FARC leader on drug trafficking, which “reverberated in a country that remains divided around the peace process.

Mr. Arnault added that both sides were calling for calm and continued to pursue the path of the Peace Agreement, calling it “very important in addressing misgivings and mistrust among former combatants in the reintegration areas.”

The Mission wholeheartedly supported the reintegration of former combatants on a more solid basis before the end of the Government’s mandate.

“Weaknesses in this effort can only increase the risk of the drift of some ex-combatants to criminal groups,” he explained. Citing the Secretary-General’s [report](#) on the Mission, he said “the ingredients for a breakthrough are known – viable productive projects, functional cooperatives and the availability of land – and much of the legal and technical preparation has been done.”

As negotiations between the Government and the National Liberation Army have resumed, Mr. Arnault told the Council that both parties have reiterated their interest in UN support to implement a future ceasefire.

“The Security Council will make the appropriate decisions in due time,” he continued. “Meanwhile we will do our best to ensure that the design of the ceasefire is as robust as possible.”

In implementing the Peace Agreement, Mr. Arnault stressed that circumstances have occasionally tested the commitment of the two parties, saying: “They have stayed the course.”

“The unanimous support consistently voiced by the Council have helped sustain their resolve. It will continue to be a source of confidence and strength,” he concluded.

[In annual memorial, UN pays tribute to 140 fallen staff members](#)

Were it not for the sacrifices of United Nations peacekeepers, humanitarians and other personnel, the people who needed urgent support in the most difficult and dangerous environments would have experienced greater

suffering, the top UN official said Thursday in an annual memorial service for fallen colleagues.

“I wish we never had to mourn [the loss of colleagues](#),” [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) said at the ceremony held at UN Headquarters in New York to remember 140 personnel who lost their lives in the line of duty between 1 July 2016 and 31 December 2017.

“But the sad fact is that people do lose their lives while serving the United Nations, and it is our duty to honour their service and sacrifice,” he said.

Of the 140 killed, 123 were military personnel; three police; and 14 civilians. They came from 42 nations.

During his remarks, he invited the bereaved families and others in attendance to join him in observing a moment of silence.

Mr. Guterres noted that over the past years, respect for those wearing UN symbols has diminished, making them a target of those who oppose peace “despite all our efforts to ensure the safety and security of our personnel.”



UN Photo/Mark Garten

UN Secretary-General António Guterres addresses an annual memorial service for fallen UN staff.

As UN High Commissioner for Refugees between 2005 and 2015, he remembered that symbols like the Red Cross, Red Crescent and UN used to be respected even by militant groups.

He said he saw how this respect was progressively being lost and in the end, he was starting to see situations in which UN staff were targeted exactly because they were UN staff.

Mr. Guterres, however, stressed that all around the world, the blue UN flag represents the hopes of some of the world's most vulnerable people for peace, security and an opportunity for a better future.

Since 2011, the UN Secretariat has held an annual memorial service to honour fallen colleagues.

Mr. Guterres said that the UN faces "a terrible dilemma" about sending staff into the most difficult areas at the most dangerous moments because if they don't go, "the people we care for will suffer even more, facing even more dangerous situations and circumstances."

[Mosquito-packed drones ready to join fight against Zika and other deadly diseases – UN agency](#)

Robotics may soon be a critical ally in the fight against disease-spreading bugs, a United Nations agency said Thursday after a successful test releasing sterile mosquitos from aerial drones as part of efforts to suppress the insect that spreads Zika and other diseases.

The drone-based mechanism overcomes a critical bottleneck in the application of Sterile Insect Technique (SIT) to control insect pests, [said](#) the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which developed the system in partnership with the UN [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO) and the non-profit group WeRobotics.

"The use of drones is a breakthrough, and paves the way for large-scale and cost-efficient releases, also over densely populated areas," said Jeremy Bouyer, medical entomologist at the Joint FAO/IAEA Division of Nuclear Techniques in Food and Agriculture.

SIT, a form of insect birth control, uses radiation to sterilize male mosquitos, which are then released to mate with wild females. As these do not produce any offspring, the insect population declines over time.

However, to be effective, the technique requires the uniform release of large numbers of insects in good condition over a given area.

For instance, *Aedes* mosquitos, responsible for the spread of diseases like dengue or yellow fever, do not disperse for more than 100 meters in their lifetime. They are also fragile, and high-altitude releases by airplanes – often used in the application of SIT for other insects – can damage their wings and legs.

The drone-based system overcomes this problem.



IAEA/Dean Calma

Aedes aegypti mosquitoes that can carry Zika as well as Dengue and Chikungunya viruses.

“We’re pleased with initial tests that show less than 10 per cent mortality through the entire chilling, transport and aerial release process,” said Adam Klaptocz, co-founder of WeRobotics.

The breakthrough technology is also cost-effective – almost half as cheap.

Until now, sterile mosquitos have been released using time-consuming and labour-intensive ground methods.

“With the drone, we can treat 20 hectares in five minutes,” said Mr. Bouyer.

Weighing less than 10 kilograms, the drone can carry 50,000 sterile mosquitos per flight and at 10,000 Euro per drone, its use also reduces the cost of releasing mosquitos by half.

The IAEA and its partners are now working to reduce the drone’s weight and to increase its capacity to carry up to 150,000 mosquitos per flight.

The testing of the system was carried out last month in Brazil, a country hit hard by the 2015-16 [Zika epidemic](#), which also spread to other parts of South and North America and affected several islands in the Pacific, and South-east Asia.

Brazil plans to start using the drone-based system in selected urban and rural areas from January 2019, at the peak of the summer and mosquito season.

“We are hopeful about the application of SIT for the control of *Aedes aegypti* in Brazil with the results from the drone tests,” said Jair Virginio, Director of Brazil-based Moscamed, a recently-designated IAEA Collaborating Centre.