

Disease outbreaks threaten Papua New Guinea's quake-hit communities – UN

In earthquake-hit Papua New Guinea, United Nations agencies on the ground are warning of a new looming threat: water-borne disease outbreaks, such as that of diarrhoea and measles.

According to the [UN Children's Fund](#) (UNICEF) and the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), there is a "high potential" of such outbreaks amid water contamination due to landslides, poor sanitation and personal hygiene management, and generally low vaccination coverage.

"At this stage of the emergency response, it is critical to restore the delivery of basic health services to the affected communities, such as the immunization of children," said Dr. Luo Dapeng, the head of WHO operations in Papua New Guinea.

"We will continue to work closely with [national and provincial authorities] and partners to respond to these risks and to prevent a secondary emergency arising from disease outbreaks," he added.

UNICEF and WHO are also stepping up the effort to improve water and sanitation systems and hygiene practices in affected areas. Specific projects include distribution of hygiene kits and water purification tablets, and setting up emergency pit latrines and rain water collection tanks.

The agencies have also created child-friendly spaces at temporary shelters so children can learn about good hygiene practices and ways to protect themselves from diseases.

Supporting the Government to conduct a measles and rubella immunization campaign in the earthquake-hit areas for children under the age of five is also a part of the multi-agency effort to curb the risk of potential outbreaks.

However, with children living in crowded shelters, ensuring their overall health is a major concern.

"We are really worried because a majority of children in the affected areas already have low immunity," said Karen Allen, the head of UNICEF programmes in the country.

"Now, as they are living in the crowded shelters with poor-hygiene conditions, inadequate clean water and little knowledge to protect themselves, children are becoming much more vulnerable to diseases, including vaccine-preventable and water-borne diseases."

More than 270,000 people – of them 125,000 children – remain dependent on humanitarian assistance across the Pacific island nation after it was hit by

a devastating 7.5 magnitude earthquake in February.

The temblor was followed by a series of severe aftershocks throughout March, causing widespread damage to infrastructure and health services.

[Guterres renews call for Security Council unity over Syria; UN agencies warn 'desperate' situation becoming worse for civilians](#)

Reports of new alleged chemical weapons attack in Syria's Eastern Ghouta over the weekend have been condemned by United Nations [Secretary-General António Guterres](#), who on Tuesday repeated his call for the Security Council to "find unity" on the issue and ensure accountability.

In a statement, the UN chief [expressed his outrage](#) at reports that civilians in the last opposition-held area of Rural Damascus have continued to be targeted by toxic agents.

The Secretary-General's call comes after UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, told the Security Council late Monday that at least 49 people had been killed, and hundreds were injured in an alleged chemical attack in Douma on Saturday evening.

Mr. Guterres condemned the incident as "abhorrent" – echoing a statement issued in March – amid what he called "persistent allegations" of the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

In both statements, the UN chief underlined his support for the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons ([OPCW](#)) – the body which investigates allegations of such attacks.

His latest statement also underlined his call for the Council to "redouble its efforts" to uphold norms against chemical weapons and agree on a mechanism that would ensure accountability.

UN agencies sound alarm over rising civilian casualties, new displacement

Meanwhile, in Geneva on Tuesday, UN humanitarian agencies expressed alarm at ongoing violence in several areas of Syria which has caused the mass displacement of civilians to spiral.

Asked by journalists about the alleged chemical attacks, both the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)) said they were not in a position to confirm anything.

OCHA spokesperson Jens Laerke confirmed that aid workers were in place in eight shelters for the displaced, but not in Douma, site of the alleged attack:

“I’m not sure everyone understands that, we are not in Douma, Eastern Ghouta is still under siege. Occasionally we are able to go in with a convoy and we leave again immediately. We are in place outside of Eastern Ghouta in those eight centres where we can provide some aid. We are not in Eastern Ghouta. And for these, as you say, extremely serious allegations with very severe ramifications; political, military and otherwise, we need to be absolutely sure that what we say is correct.”

According to UN refugee agency, tens of thousands of people remain trapped in Douma and nearly a quarter of a million people need aid urgently in the wider Eastern Ghouta area.

More than 133,000 people have fled Eastern Ghouta in the past month and one-third of that number have been given shelter in eight centres in Rural Damascus.

But these are “overcrowded and pose a serious health risk,” Andrej Mahecic from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) said, adding that there and elsewhere in the war-torn country the situation is “desperate.”

UNHCR’s response involves providing essential aid, shelter support and protection services, including to 137,000 Syrians displaced from the Afrin region in the north.

[Security Council urged to prevent ‘uncontrollable escalation’ in Syria](#)

The recent escalating violence across Syria, including allegations of chemical weapons use in a Damascus suburb, could have consequences so devastating they are “difficult to even imagine,” a United Nations envoy warned Monday, calling for unity among global powers to prevent a chain of events that could draw in actors far beyond the region.

“Recent developments carry more than ever before the dangers that the Secretary-General has warned about,” Staffan de Mistura, the UN Special Envoy

for Syria, told an emergency meeting of the Security Council.

“[Dangers] of different Middle East fault lines completely crossing each other and interconnected, of conflicting interests – of both global and regional powers, and forms of escalation that can have absolutely devastating consequences that is difficult for us to even imagine.”

In sounding the alarm, Mr. de Mistura reiterated that is it the first time since his appointment (in July 2014), that he has issued such a warning.

“The Council cannot allow a situation of uncontrollable escalation to develop in Syria, on any front,” he said.

Amid deadly attacks and heightened human suffering across the war-torn country, the first priority must be to protect civilians, underlined Mr. de Mistura, calling on all sides to respect international law and ensure humanitarian access to all people in need.

He also called for complete respect for Security Council [resolution 2401](#), in which the body demanded an immediate cease in hostilities and conditions that to enable humanitarian aid deliveries and medical evacuations of those in need.

The Security Council’s emergency meeting was convened amid sharp deterioration in the situation in the war-torn country with reports of dozens killed in an alleged chemical weapons attack as well as heightened conflict across Syria.

Also briefing the Council today, Thomas Markram, the Deputy High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, said that the Organisation for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons ([OPCW](#)) – which monitors implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention ([CWC](#)) and works to rid the world of such weapons – is gathering information on the alleged incidents over the weekend and will report its findings on this alleged attack.

“There is, sadly, little to be said today that has not already been said. The use of chemical weapons is unjustifiable. Those responsible must be held to account,” he underscored.

“The use of chemical weapons cannot become the status quo, nor can we continue to fail the victims of such weapons,” he added.

[With fair play, tolerance and team spirit, sport can score for peace and](#)

development, say UN officials

The United Nations can make its voice heard on the power of sport in promoting both peace and development, a senior UN official said Monday, urging participants at a special Headquarters event to “bring out our inner sports fans,” and harness sport as a force for positive change.

“Fair play, tolerance and team spirit – sports have a [unique potential](#) to help develop and reinforce positive life skills and values, and expand prospects, Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)),” told a Headquarters event on ‘Crime Prevention and Sustainable Development through Sport.’

He underscored that sports offer a practical, cost-effective means to help prevent violence and crime, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), adopted by world leaders in 2015 as a blueprint to achieve a healthy planet where people can live free of poverty and hunger by 2030.

“This event is a wonderful opportunity to further advance awareness of the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace, and its vital message,” he continued. “Let us take this chance to engage with sports champions and young men and women around the world. Working together, we can harness sport as a force for positive change.”

The Executive Director highlighted the importance of major sporting events, such as the Olympic Games and the World Cup, saying they “have the power to inspire and build bridges.”

“We must take these events as golden opportunities to raise awareness, to promote tolerance and respect, and advance efforts towards peace and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals,” he asserted.



Miroslav Lajčák, President of the General Assembly, taking part in the Olympic torch relay in Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea.

Opening the event, Miroslav Lajčák, President of the General Assembly, stressed that tackling crime is essential to changing the world for the better by 2030.

“That is why the [2030 Agenda](#) draws a link between combatting crime and sustaining development,” he stated. “And, that is why I am so glad we are here to examine a driver of both: sport.”

Citing sport as a tool for crime prevention, he noted that research supports the assertion that sport participants have a better chance to reject crime and contribute to achieving the SDGs, saying that teams and associations can build strong social networks, and that sport can boost self-esteem and help communities put their differences aside, “to cheer for the same team.”

He elaborated that sports as educational or community-based activities, help “prevent crime or radicalization.”

While the vast majority of youth are not involved in crime, he asserted that too many become trapped in cycles of violence and criminal activity.

“When we are talking about the role of sport in preventing crime – young people should be leading the discussion,” he said.

Recalling the recent Olympic Games in Pyeongdhang, Republic of Korea, Mr. Lajčák noted that despite months of high tensions, athletes from north and south of the Korean Peninsula had participated together – “under the same flag.”

“This is not yet a success story. But it is a sign that we are moving in the right direction,” he explained, saying “it tells us that our work to strengthen sport, as a tool for development and peace, can, indeed, make a difference in the world outside of these walls.”

Mr. Lajčák concluded by saying: “We need to bring out our inner sports fans! And we need to shout even louder in support of this initiative!”

Former National Basketball Association All Star player Dikembe Mutombo, Olympians and other distinguished athletes and sports personalities participated in the event, which featured panel discussions on how sport can promote development and crime prevention strategies, and youth programmes.

The event was organized by UNODC and the Permanent Missions of Colombia, Italy, Monaco, Qatar and Rwanda to the United Nations to mark the [International Day of Sport for Development and Peace](#), which is commemorated annually on 6 April.

UN population forum urged to examine ways to protect people on the move, make cities work better

A great migration of humanity into cities is under way, and with millions drawn to urban areas for the promise of a better life, the main United Nations forum on population opened its annual session on Monday examining ways to protect people on the move and help create cities that can embrace the massive number of new arrivals.

“People are moving at high rates within national borders, and international migration is growing more complex, with more countries serving simultaneously as countries of origin, transit and destination,” said Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed at the opening of the 51st Session of the Commission on Population and Development.

Created to advise the UN and its Member States on population issues and trends, the Commission is meeting this year under the theme ‘sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration.’

Over the next week, delegates will tackle a host of matters related to the [dramatic population shifts](#) under way driven by the movement of people from rural to urban areas, between cities of different sizes and from one country to another. By 2030, six of every 10 people will be an urban inhabitant. By 2050, it may be two out of three, according to the UN.

Ms. Mohammed said that some of the rapid population change is due to growing drivers of displacement, including conflict, poor economic prospects and, in some cases, climate-related hazards. But much of the mobility also stems from people seeking new opportunities – better jobs, education and training, expanded social and family connections, and more.

Questions of migration and urbanization cannot be distinguished from those of sustainable development because as young people seek a better life in cities, the potential loss to communities and countries of origin can be significant, she said.

Some cities have successfully managed migration, said Ms. Mohammed



UN Photo/Loey Felipe

Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed makes remarks during the opening segment of the fifty-first session of the Commission on Population and Development.

For example, since 2013, São Paulo has been successful in this endeavor through an awareness-raising campaign focused on ending xenophobia and better policy coordination. These measures have helped the Brazilian city embrace migrants and their families and provide them with assistance.

In London, the Home Secretary and the Archbishop of Canterbury have launched a new scheme to encourage community groups to sponsor a refugee family. An online service for refugees in the UK now makes it easier for any individual to support refugees, allowing local authorities to focus on the provision of public goods and services.

Data collection is crucial to improve collective understanding of the changing situation.

The Government of Zambia has partnered with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) to generate district-level development indicators. Analysis of data collected have been used to inform the latest national development plan and mobilize investments in health and education for children and youth.

The Dominican Republic highlighted the contributions of Haitian migrants to gross domestic product (GDP), as well as the limited services they received.

“Because gaps in understanding are easily filled by myths and misperceptions, better data can usefully inform global discussions of migration and related issues,” Ms. Mohammed said.

“It is for this reason that the Commission on Population and Development, with its focus on population data and its emphasis on evidence-based policy-making, plays such a vital role,” she added.