

## Alarmed by plight of Central African refugees in Chad, UN urges funding to scale up humanitarian response

Thousands of refugees who have fled violence in the Central African Republic (CAR) to Chad are facing food and shelter shortages the United Nations refugee agency said Friday, warning that this is the largest influx in for years into the small landlocked country.

“The worry and real risk is that food shortages for the entire population over the next month may have [devastating consequences](#),” Babar Baloch, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), told the regular press briefing in Geneva, where he said that some \$149 million is required to meet the urgent needs.

Late last year, clashes between armed groups *Mouvement national pour la libération de la Centrafrique* (MNLIC) and *Révolution et Justice* (RJ) in north-west CAR forced more than 70,000 people from their homes.

“Since last December, more than 15 Central Africans refugees have been killed on both sides of the border and at least 67 have suffered sexual and gender based violence while trying to go back to CAR to gather food and their scarce resources in exile,” he said.

UNHCR and partners have been providing life-saving relief such as healthcare, water and sanitation, shelter, food and nutrition assistance to newly arrived refugees since the start of the crisis.

However, without increased food aid, refugees could face prolonged period of food shortage while overwhelm humanitarian agencies’ response ability.

Severe floods have not only affected harvest, but they also posed an urgent need for accommodation.

Therefore, UNHCR is building emergency shelter in the camps and villages that host them, while also working with the authorities, partners and donors on a relocation plan.

“The situation with refugees’ health is also critical,” said Mr. Baloch, stressing that “malnutrition levels are already high, especially with children.”

More mobile clinics are also urgently needed and local health centres must be strengthened to ease the heavy toll taken by respiratory infections, malaria and other diseases.

Southern Chad, including Goré, one of poorest and most underdeveloped parts of the country, is already hosting some 43,000 Central African refugees and

45,000 Chadian returnees from CAR, is struggling to cope with an additional influx of 22,180.

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## **Syria: UN envoy says 'only piece of good news' is brief ceasefire in Douma**

The United Nations mediator for the Syrian conflict said Friday that a brief ceasefire in Douma in Eastern Ghouta is the only piece of good news for the Middle Eastern country, noting increased violence there.

Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy for Syria, joining the Security Council via videoconference from Brussels, briefed on the implementation of its recent resolution demanding a ceasefire in that country, noting that, while progress has been made in Douma, more remained to be done to ease the humanitarian crisis and find a political solution to the conflict.

More to come...

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## **Gaza requires changed political reality, renewed commitment to avoid total collapse**

The lack of a political process to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to be the single largest impediment to Palestinian development, and an escalation in hostilities could completely break down service delivery in Gaza, a United Nations report said Friday.

"The UN and partners will continue to [highlight the key concerns](#) and areas for intervention, but the parties need to make the difficult choices and compromises to achieve a long overdue resolution to this conflict," said the report compiled by the office of the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process ([UNSCO](#)).

Some 25 years after the beginning of the Oslo process, this prolonged period of conflict management and of transition without end will not lead to a solution that meets the needs and aspirations of Palestinians and Israelis.

The report notes that Gaza – an occupied Palestinian enclave – continues to present the greatest risk of escalation alongside an acute humanitarian crisis with the potential for a complete breakdown in service delivery.

To properly address the issues facing Gaza, the report suggests:

First, the humanitarian crisis must be addressed to ensure hospitals and health clinics function, essential drugs are available, sewage and water treatment is provided, and the electricity situation is immediately improved.

Second, increased efforts are needed to finalize the reconstruction of physical damages from the 2014 conflict, and simultaneously to revive Gaza's moribund economy, and revitalize its productive sectors.

Third, investment in longer-term infrastructure projects is needed to ensure Gaza remains livable.

The report also stresses the need for a changed political reality on the ground, including the resumption by the Palestinian Authority of its full responsibilities for the people, governance and infrastructure of Gaza.

Hamas, a Palestinian faction, must cease its military build-up, including the construction of tunnels and the firing of rockets towards Israel, while Israel's closure regime must fundamentally change to allow for the recovery and development of the Strip through movement and access of people and goods.

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## [UN appeals for nearly \\$1 billion to address 'critical needs' of Rohingya refugees, Bangladesh host communities](#)

To meet the urgent needs of nearly 900,000 Rohingya refugees and more than 330,000 vulnerable Bangladeshis in the communities hosting them, United Nations agencies and their humanitarian partners appealed jointly on Friday for \$951 million.

"We are talking about truly [critical needs](#) here both on the part of the Bangladeshi communities who have so generously opened their doors, and of a Stateless and refugee population that even prior to this crisis was among the world's most marginalised and at risk," UN [High Commissioner for Refugees](#) Filippo Grandi said in Geneva, launching the 2018 Joint Response Plan (JRP) for the rohingya humanitarian crisis.

Over the months since the most recent Rohingya influx began, it has become the world's fastest growing refugee crisis – with tens of thousands fleeing

by land and sea daily from Myanmar's northern Rakhine state at the peak of the emergency.

The Bangladesh Government and people have responded with extraordinary generosity and hospitality to the 671,000 Rohingya refugees who have arrived since 25 August.

Almost seven months in, refugees continue to arrive and the situation in Cox's Bazar remains fluid.

The Kutupalong-Balukhali site, where some 600,000 refugees are living, is now the largest and most densely populated refugee settlement in the world.

Precarious conditions and the ongoing emergency response there are about to be further challenged by the approaching monsoon season, placing more than 150,000 Rohingya refugees at risk of landslides and floods, threatening disaster on top of the current emergency.

"The solutions to this crisis lie inside Myanmar, and conditions must be established that will allow refugees to return home," said Mr. Grandi. "But today we are appealing for help with the immediate needs, and these needs are vast."

Complementing Bangladesh's continuing efforts, the 2018 appeal aims to bring together more than 100 UN agencies and national and international non-governmental organizations to ensure that refugees and host communities receive the life-saving assistance, protection and the support they desperately need. It also includes contingency planning for 80,000 more refugees in the coming months.

"The needs and vulnerabilities of the Rohingya refugee population in Bangladesh are immense," said William Swing, Director General of the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM).

"Many Governments generously supported the last Rohingya crisis appeal. Given the large scale of the emergency and the amount of humanitarian services needed to ensure lives can be protected with dignity, continued and enhanced support is necessary," he added.

Fifty-four per cent of the appeal is to ensure food, water and sanitation, shelter and other basic aid, with food alone accounting for 25 per cent of the total.

While acknowledging great appreciation for the generosity with which the response has been funded, Mia Seppo, UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh, lauded the Government's efforts.

"In terms of being the first responders, in terms of providing land, in terms of keeping its borders open, in terms of providing asylum, in terms of building roads, extending electricity networks, providing food, seconding civil servants, providing police and army to keep order in the camp. The biggest donor to this crisis continues to be the people and the Government of Bangladesh."

The humanitarian response faces immense challenges, including congested conditions, gender-based violence and critical public health concerns, namely measles, diphtheria and diarrhoea.

So far, the emergency response from September 2017 to February 2018 has received \$321 million of the \$434 million required.

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## [UN refugee agency scaling up support as 'horrific' violence in DR Congo drives thousands into Uganda](#)

In the span of just three days – between 10 and 13 March – more than 4,000 people, mostly terrified women and children, have crossed into Uganda from crisis-gripped eastern provinces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the United Nations refugee agency said Friday.

Babar Baloch spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) told reporters at the regular news briefing in Geneva that the agency is working with partner organizations in western Uganda [to support the influx](#), many who are exhausted, hunger and deeply traumatized by “horrific inter-ethnic violence and sexual abuse” they have reportedly endured.

Since the year began, an overwhelming 77.5 per cent of more than 57,000 refugees displaced by the violence in eastern DRC are women and children, according to the agency.

“These numbers are on a larger scale still than in 2017, when some 44,000 fled over the course of the entire year,” he continued. “UNHCR fears thousands more could arrive in Uganda if the security situation inside the DRC does not immediately improve.”

Mr. Baloch said that the majority continue to cross into Uganda via Lake Albert in rickety and unsafe boats from Ituri (province), “a journey that has already cost the lives of several refugees.”

“The situation has been even more dangerous in recent days because of bad weather,” he noted.

Although the lack of access means it is difficult to offer a detailed picture of the situation, UNHCR has received chilling accounts of violence – rape, murder and separation from family members.

“These are linked to the deteriorating security situation, internal conflicts

and inter-communal tensions,” the spokesperson maintained, saying that armed men are reported to be attacking villages, looting and burning houses, indiscriminately killing civilians and kidnapping young men and boys.

A growing number of reports indicate that the violence is taking on ethnic dimensions as tribal groups engage in retaliatory attacks.

Dozens of refugees have recounted to UNHCR staff in Uganda, stories of the sexual violence and assaults they have endured – the vast majority of whom are women and girls, as well as some men and boys.

“These alarming reports have led the UN refugee agency and partners to strengthen the systems in place to identify and support survivors of sexual and gender based violence,” stressed Mr. Baloch.

UNHCR has deployed significant additional staff and resources to identify victims and strengthen support, including medical screening at Lake Albert landing sites, sexual and gender-based violence screening at the reception centres and making gender segregation spaces available.

“Working with partners, we have deployed additional staff specifically trained in psychosocial care to increase support to [sexual and gender based violence] refugee survivors and have conducted further outreach with community leaders and networks to ensure refugees are aware of what services are available to them,” he stated.

“We are also working with our humanitarian partners to save lives after a Cholera outbreak killed at least 32 refugees,” Mr. Baloch said, informing that the number of reported cases have significantly dropped from 668 to 160 since the February outbreak.

He pointed out that the nearly \$180 million refugee response funding appeal for Uganda remains poorly funded, “severely restricting capacities of humanitarian organizations to deliver vital aid and assistance.”

Within that appeal, only three per cent of UNHCR’s \$118.3 million requirement is funded.