

Millions of children across Somalia vaccinated against measles in UN-backed campaign

8 January 2018 – One million children aged six months to 10 years in Puntland and 4.2 million across Somalia were reached during a five-day measles campaign that wrapped up on Sunday, the United Nations has reported.

It is a priority for WHO [World Health Organization] to continue supporting the Ministry of Health and maintaining the close partnership with the local health authorities and partners to [control disease outbreaks](#) like measles and ensure high vaccination coverage for all Somali children,” said Dr. Ghulam Popal, WHO Representative to Somalia.

It is unfortunate that [measles](#) cases are still being reported while there is effective vaccine available,” he added.

The campaign was conducted in partnership with WHO, the UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) and Somalia’s Ministry of Health.

In 2017, amidst a drought emergency, a total of 23,002 suspected measles cases were reported – alarmingly high compared to previous years. Among those cases, 83 per cent were in children under age 10.

In response to the outbreak, two rounds of vaccination campaigns were conducted in March and April of 2017, reaching 516,934 children aged nine months to five years.

Together with our partners, UNICEF was able to achieve great results for children and families affected by drought in 2017,” says Jesper Moller, UNICEF’s acting Representative.

However, the crisis is far from over,” he continued. “The threat of famine continues to loom large, and so does disease outbreaks such as measles.”

During the campaign, a support dose of Vitamin A will be administered to eligible children alongside the measles vaccine. Social mobilizers and health workers supported by WHO and UNICEF are also encouraging adults who are not fully immunized, or not sure of their immunity status, to get vaccinated as well.

The only way to protect children from this deadly disease is through mass vaccination campaigns. And we will remain vigilant and sustain our emergency efforts in 2018,” Mr. Moller concluded.

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease that is transmitted via droplets from the nose, mouth or throat of infected persons. Routine vaccination for children, combined with mass immunization campaigns in countries with low

routine coverage, are key public health strategies to reduce global measles deaths, says WHO.

Western Sahara: UN chief urges easing of tensions in Guerguerat area

6 January 2018 – Deeply concerned over rising tensions near Guerguerat in the buffer strip in southern Western Sahara between the Moroccan berm and the Mauritanian border, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Saturday called for maximum restraint in the area.

According to a statement from a UN spokesperson, the Secretary-General underlined that the withdrawal of Frente Polisario (Polisario Front) elements from Guerguerat in April 2017, together with the earlier withdrawal of Moroccan elements from the area, was critical to creating an environment conducive to the resumption of dialogue under the auspices of his Personal Envoy Horst Kohler.

“[Mr. Guterres] calls on the parties to exercise maximum restraint and to avoid escalating tensions. Regular civilian and commercial traffic should not be obstructed and no action should be taken, which may constitute a change to the status quo of the buffer strip,” the statement concluded.

Western Sahara is located on the north-west coast of Africa bordered by Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria. The colonial administration of Western Sahara by Spain ended in 1976. Fighting later broke out between Morocco and the Polisario Front. A ceasefire was signed in September 1991.

The UN mission, known by its French acronym, [MINURSO](#), was deployed that year to oversee a ceasefire and a UN settlement plan; however, disagreements between the Government of Morocco and the Polisario Front prevented the holding of the anticipated referendum on the territory’s future.

A revised settlement plan [proposed](#) by the United Nations after seven years of diplomatic consultations was rejected by one of the parties in 2004.

In 2017, the UN Security Council affirmed its full support for the commitment of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy towards a solution to the question of Western Sahara.

In this context, the Council requested Mr. Kohler to relaunch the negotiating process with a new

dynamic and a new spirit leading to the resumption of a political process with the aim of reaching a mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara in the

context of arrangements consistent with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations.

The Council also emphasized the importance of the commitment of Morocco and the Polisario Front to continue the process of preparation for a fifth round of negotiations while also encouraging the neighbouring countries, Algeria and Mauritania, to make important contributions to this process.

[UN announces special probe into attacks on peacekeepers in eastern DR Congo](#)

6 January 2018 – The United Nations is launching a special investigation into attacks on peacekeepers in restive eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), one month after 15 ‘blue helmets’ were killed and dozens wounded in the deadliest single assault on a UN mission in nearly a quarter century.

According to a UN spokesperson, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Friday announced the appointment of veteran UN peacekeeping official Dmitry Titov of Russia to lead a Special Investigation into recent attacks on peacekeepers and bases in the Beni territory of North Kivu Province, in the DRC.

The probe will include a focus on the 7 December attack on a base of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSC) in Semuliki that killed 15 Tanzanian peacekeepers and wounded 43 others. One blue helmet remains missing.

The UN said the special probe will examine the circumstances surrounding these attacks, evaluate MONUSC’s overall preparedness and response to the events and provide recommendations on how to prevent such attacks from occurring in the future or when they do occur, from having such lethal consequences.

RELATED: [In Tanzania, UN peacekeeping chief pays tribute to ‘blue helmets’ killed in DR Congo](#)

The investigation team will head to the DRC early in January and will also visit relevant countries in Africa’s Great Lakes region. Alongside officials of the United Nations, the team will also include two military officers from Tanzania.

Having joined the United Nations in 1991, Mr. Titov served as Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions in the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) from 2007 – 2017. He also served as Africa Director in DPKO’s Office of Operations.

In wake of violent protests in Iran, UN Security Council meets to take stock of situation

5 January 2018 – Even though days of anti-Government protests across Iran appear to have ebbed, a senior United Nations political official said Friday the UN will continue to monitor the situation and engage with Iranian authorities on addressing the legitimate concerns of the population through peaceful means.

“The Secretariat will continue to [...] engage Iranian authorities with a view to addressing, as the Secretary-General underscored in his [statement of 3 January](#), the legitimate concerns of the population through peaceful means and avoid violence or retribution against peaceful protestors,” Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs told a Security Council meeting this afternoon.

He [briefed](#) the Council on the situation since demonstrations broke out on 28 December 2017 when hundreds of Iranians gathered, in a largely peaceful manner, in Mashhad, the country’s second-largest city, chanting slogans against economic hardship.

“According to reports carried by official Iranian media, more than 20 Iranians, including a teenage boy and a policeman, have died during the protests,” said Mr. Zerihoun, adding that Iran’s Ministry of the Interior stated that over 1,000 protesters have been detained, although many may have since been released.

Demonstrations took place in other urban centers, including the capital, Tehran, as well as in many rural areas. Some of the slogans also expressed disappointment at the slow or limited change in social constraints and political freedoms, and criticized what the protesters see as the privileged position of the clergy and elements of the country’s security establishment, reported Mr. Zerihoun.

“As the demonstrations intensified, some became violent,” he said, but noted that the UN has a very limited presence in Iran and could neither confirm nor deny the extent of the violence.

Mr. Zerihoun told the Council that on 31 December 2017, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani told a Cabinet meeting that the Iranian people should be allowed “space” to protest and criticize the government. At the same time, he stressed that violence would not be tolerated.

Two days later, on 2 January, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei accused Iran’s enemies, without naming them, of “stirring” the unrest. On 3 January,

the Permanent Representative of Iran to the United Nations wrote to the Secretary-General, accusing the United States of stepping up “its acts of intervention in a grotesque way in Iran’s internal affairs under the pretext of providing support for sporadic protests” in Iran, he recalled.

He went on to say that also on 3 January, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards announced the end of anti-Government protests. Recent reports indicate smaller and more dispersed protests. Meanwhile, from 3 to 5 January, large pro-Government rallies were reported across the country, with participants expressing their support for the Supreme Leader and condemning the violence.

[UN approves largest-ever emergency funding allocation to scale up response in war-torn Yemen](#)

5 January 2018 – Despite progress over the past month in opening Yemen’s Red Sea ports to commercial and aid shipments, the United Nations relief chief on Friday approved the largest-ever emergency relief allocation – \$50 million – amid concerns that the humanitarian catastrophe in the war-ravaged country is being made worse by the recent increase in fighting and airstrikes.

“These funds will help to save lives,” declared UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock as he [announced](#) that the funding would rapidly bolster the response for some 22 million people in Yemen who need humanitarian assistance, including more than eight million who are “a step away from famine.”

At the same time, he emphasized that to roll back the unfolding catastrophe, three things need to happen.

“First,” he began, “there must be reduction both in fighting on the ground and airstrikes, which have greatly intensified in recent weeks.”

Armed conflict is killing and injuring people and destroying critical infrastructure. Danger and bureaucratic impediments hamper humanitarians’ ability to reach those in need, including those at risk of diphtheria – a growing outbreak now in most of Yemen’s governorates.

Mr. Lowcock maintained that “the parties to the conflict must comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure,” and facilitate humanitarian partners.

“Second,” he continued, “we need all ports to remain open without interruption. Yemen imports about 90 per cent of its staple food and nearly all of its fuel and medicine [...] a lifeline for millions of people.”

Moving forward, sustained and higher levels of food, fuel and medicines must be imported.

“Third,” he said, “we need faster and more generous donor financing.”

While aid saved millions in 2017, recent restrictions and intensified fighting have forced more reliance on aid.

“The CERF allocation today will ensure a comprehensive, integrated response across life-saving humanitarian sectors for the most vulnerable people in 27 high-priority districts at risk of famine, as well as in areas where conflict has recently escalated,” he said.

“The Yemeni people need an end to the conflict so that they can begin to rebuild their lives. For this to happen, the parties to the conflict must cease hostilities and engage meaningfully with the UN to achieve a lasting political settlement,” he concluded.