

## [Donors make initial pledges of \\$857 million to fund UN refugee agency's work in 2018](#)

5 December 2017 – Donor governments on Tuesday pledged an initial \$857 million to fund the United Nations refugee agency's work to help some 67 million displaced or stateless people worldwide in 2018.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) said that while [the pledges](#) made at an annual meeting in Geneva represent only 11 per cent of its total 2018 funding needs of over \$7.5 billion, they indicate the anticipated funding levels next year.

However, the gap between the funds received and the needs of refugees and other displaced people will likely continue growing, with new crises and worsening displacement running at record levels.

"Refugee crises grow. Refugee needs grow as well," said UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi.

This means that UNHCR has to prioritize, sometimes mercilessly, he explained.

"This can mean some (refugees) will be left to fend for themselves during the harsh winter months and others won't get the assistance they need to reintegrate upon return," he warned.

UNHCR's work globally is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions from governments, intergovernmental institutions and, increasingly, from individuals, corporations and foundations.

The agency's work includes operations in some of the biggest emergencies around the world such as those in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

Mr. Grandi thanked the countries and communities hosting refugees because they are some of the largest donors in terms of space, resources, and the socio-economic and political cost of hosting refugees.

For 2018, UNHCR appeals to donors to sustain and increase support, through flexible and early contributions, to avoid uncertainty and enable it to channel funds where the needs are greatest without interruption.

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# Amid alarming spike in violence, looming famine, Yemen gripped by uncertainty – UN officials

5 December 2017 – Yemen remains gripped by uncertainty after the assassination of the former president and a spike in brutal violence in and around its war-ravaged capital, Sana'a, the United Nations envoy for the war-torn country said Tuesday.

"The [situation is reaching a new adverse development](#) with the killing of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and a number of GPC [General People's Congress] leaders," Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, told a closed session of the UN Security Council Tuesday.

"These events will constitute a considerable change to the political dynamics in Yemen," he added.

[Briefing](#) alongside Mr. Cheikh Ahmed was the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, who underscored that the humanitarian situation in the country remains severe, with millions on the cusp of the largest famine in modern times.

Intense fighting – including airstrikes and rocket attacks – have devastated the country and brought incredible hardships on its people. Over 17 million Yemenis (close to two-thirds of the population) is food insecure while a staggering 8.5 million people are on the brink of starvation.

In all, close to 21 million people across Yemen are in need of humanitarian or protection support.

The violence has also devastated basic services in the country, all but destroyed its water and sanitation system, and sparked a deadly cholera outbreak that has claimed thousands of innocent lives – including children.

Making matters much worse is that aid workers are not able to carry out their vital mission to save lives due to the scale of fighting and insecurity.

Overnight, 25 air strikes had targeted the Republican Palace, bridges and civilian infrastructure in Sana'a, the capital of Yemen, forcing humanitarian agencies, including the UN, the Red Cross and non-governmental organizations into a lockdown.

Against this backdrop, the top UN relief official in the country, Jamie McGoldrick, had appealed Monday for a "humanitarian pause" today from 10:00 AM to 16:00 PM (Yemen time) to allow desperate civilians reach assistance and safety as well as for aid workers to reach them.

[Speaking](#) via telephone, from Sana'a, to journalists at a press briefing in

Geneva today on his request for a pause in fighting, Mr. McGoldrick expressed that while he does not expect full compliance by all the parties, he hoped for some respite in the fighting to allow civilians to access supplies and medical care.

The “hallmark of the crisis,” he noted has been the general disregard for international humanitarian law.

The UN and reiterated, time and again, reiterated the obligation of the parties to the conflict to ensure civilians are protected, and health and aid workers, and civilian infrastructure not be subjected to attacks.

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## Careless disposal of antibiotics could produce ‘ferocious superbugs,’ UN environment experts warn

5 December 2017 – Growing antimicrobial resistance linked to the discharge of drugs and some chemicals into the environment is one of the most worrying health threats today, according to new research from the United Nations that highlights emerging challenges and solutions in environment.

“The warning here is truly frightening: we could be spurring the development of [ferocious superbugs](#) through ignorance and carelessness,” said Erik Solheim, chief of the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)), on Tuesday.

He added that studies have already linked the misuse of antibiotics in humans and agriculture over the last several decades to increasing resistance, but the role of the environment and pollution has received little attention.

As such, the [Frontiers Report](#), launched on the second day of the UN Environment Assembly ([UNEA](#)), which is running through 6 December at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, looks at the environmental dimension of antimicrobial resistance in nanomaterials; marine protected areas; sand and dust storms; off-grid solar solutions; and environmental displacement – finding the role of the environment in the emergence and spread of resistance to antimicrobials particularly concerning.

“This needs priority action right now, or else we run the risk of allowing resistance to occur through the back door, with potentially terrifying consequences,” stressed Mr. Solheim.

[Antimicrobial resistance](#) occurs when a microorganism evolves to resist the effects of an antimicrobial agent. Globally about 700,000 people die of resistant infections every year because available antimicrobial drugs have become less effective at killing the resistant pathogens.

Clear evidence shows that antimicrobial compounds from households, hospitals, pharmaceutical facilities and agricultural run-off released into the environment, combined with direct contact between natural bacterial communities and discharged resistant bacteria, is driving bacterial evolution and the emergence of more resistant strains.

Once consumed, most antibiotic drugs are excreted un-metabolized along with resistant bacteria – up to 80 per cent of consumed antibiotics, according to the report. This is a growing problem, as human antibiotic use this century has increased 36 per cent and livestock antibiotic use predicted to increase 67 per cent by 2030.

Evidence shows that multi-drug resistant bacteria are prevalent in marine waters and sediments close to aquaculture, industrial and municipal discharges.

Solving the problem will mean tackling the use and disposal of antibiotic pharmaceuticals as well as the release of antimicrobial drugs, relevant contaminants and resistant bacteria into the environment, the report says.

#### ***Other evolving issues***

The report also considers other emerging issues, such as nanomaterials in which little is understood about their long-term effects. According to UNEP, past lessons reveal that “no evidence of harm” does not equal “evidence of no harm,” meaning that research into nanomaterials is essential.

Another area it highlighted was in securing Marine Protected Areas as one excellent option for maintaining or restoring the ocean’s and coastal ecosystems health, and a potential driver for economic benefits derived from them.

The Frontiers Report also noted that sand and dust storms, which impoverish arid landscapes soils, and can cause economic losses, indicted that strategies promoting sustainable land and water management must be integrated with measures addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Pointing out that nearly one billion people live without electricity, the report emphasized the importance of bridging the off-grid energy gap as a possible key to achieving the [2030 Agenda](#) and its Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) for universal access to affordable, reliable energy services.

Finally, in an era of unprecedented mobility, the report points out that migration produces environmental changes that include pollution, deforestation and biodiversity loss, saying that unless we deal with long-term environmental vulnerability and build resilience, environmental displacement will become a new normal.

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# Caring for the planet starts with ‘the ground we walk on;’ UN says on World Soil Day

5 December 2017 – Soil is a major carbon storage system, essential for sustainable agriculture and climate change mitigation, the United Nations agriculture agency said Tuesday, launching on [World Soil Day](#) a comprehensive global map showing the amount of carbon stocks contained in soil.

“[Soil is the foundation of agriculture](#) , it is where food begins,” said Maria Helena Semedo, Deputy Director-General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)).

“Maintaining the soil’s important functions and ecosystem services to support food production and increase resilience to a changing climate calls for sustainable soil management practices,” she added.

Soil organic matter, with carbon as its main component, is crucial to soil health and fertility, water infiltration and retention as well as food production.

The world’s soils act as the largest terrestrial carbon sink, reducing greenhouse gases. Intensifying its role could significantly offset the rapid rise of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

In an historic decision on agriculture, the 2017 UN Climate Change Conference in Bonn ([COP23](#) ) recognized the need for improved soil carbon, soil health and soil fertility. The [Global Soil Organic Carbon Map](#), the most comprehensive to date, illustrates the amount of organic carbon stock in the first 30 cm of soil – revealing natural areas with high carbon storage that require conservation along with regions where further sequestration would be possible.

This information can prove a powerful tool to guide decision-making on practices aimed to preserve and increase the current soil carbon stocks – helping win the fight against climate change.

The map shows that globally the first 30 cm of soil contains around 680 billion tons of carbon – almost double the amount present in our atmosphere.

The degradation of one third of the world’s soils has already prompted an enormous release of carbon into the atmosphere. Restoring these soils can remove up to 63 billion tons of carbon, significantly reducing the effects of climate change.

FAO’s [Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils](#) supported the map’s development, including by putting together the national carbon maps of more than 100 countries, making a concrete contribution towards Sustainable Development Goal ([SDG](#)) 15, Life on Earth.

The next step is for countries to monitor their national soil information systems for organic carbon levels to make evidence-based decisions on how to manage and monitor their soils.

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## [UN rights chief calls for probe into crimes against Rohingya, says genocide 'cannot be ruled out'](#)

5 December 2017 – The United Nations human rights chief on Tuesday called for an international criminal probe into the perpetrators of the widespread and brutal attacks that have driven more than 600,000 Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar since August, noting that “elements of genocide” against the minority could not be ruled out.

Rohingyas have faced decades of statelessness, policies of dehumanizing discrimination and segregation, and the horrific violence and abuse, along with the forced displacement and systematic destruction of villages, homes, property and livelihoods, said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein.

“Given all of this, can anyone rule out that [elements of genocide](#) may be present?” he told the Human Rights Council in Geneva in a special session convened in response to the ongoing exodus of Rohingyas from Myanmar to Bangladesh.

“Ultimately, this is a legal determination only a competent court can make. But the concerns are extremely serious, and clearly call for access to be immediately granted for further verification,” he added.

The High Commissioner urged the Council to consider making a recommendation to the UN General Assembly that it establish a new impartial and independent mechanism, complementary to the work of the fact-finding mission into the latest wave of violence and abuses, to assist individual criminal investigations of those responsible.

By 2 December, an estimated 626,000 refugees – or more than half the estimated number of Rohingya living in Rakhine state – had fled to Bangladesh since October 2016, and particularly since August 2017. The Myanmar Government has said its latest campaign in northern Rakhine was in response to attacks by insurgents.

The High Commissioner reported that his Office ([OHCHR](#)) had sent three teams to Bangladesh this year to monitor the situation and interview refugees. He said witnesses reported acts of appalling barbarity committed against the Rohingya, including deliberately burning people to death inside their homes;

murders of children and adults; indiscriminate shooting of fleeing civilians; widespread rapes of women and girls; and the burning and destruction of houses, schools, markets and mosques.

Mr. Zeid said he had reported to both the Human Rights Council and the UN Security Council about the persistent allegations of serious human rights violations by security forces. Yet, he added, prosecutions for alleged acts of violence against them, including sexual violence – whether committed by security forces or civilians – appeared to be extremely rare. Refusal by international as well as local actors to even name the Rohingyas as Rohingyas – to recognize them as a community and respect their right to self-identification – is yet another humiliation, and it creates a shameful paradox: they are denied a name, while being targeted for being who they are,” he added.

“The world cannot countenance a hasty window-dressing of these shocking atrocities, bundling people back to conditions of severe discrimination and latent violence which seem certain to lead in the future to further suffering, and more movements of people,” Mr. Zeid said.