

## Desperate Rohingya refugees use home-made rafts to get to Bangladesh – UN

17 November 2017 – Over the past 10 days, dozens of makeshift rafts carrying more than a thousand people have floated into Bangladesh, proof that Rohingya refugees are resorting to increasingly desperate means to flee Myanmar, the United Nations refugee agency said Friday.

Unable to pay for the crossing, [refugees are building rafts](#) from whatever material they can get their hands on – mostly bamboo poles and empty jerry cans tied together with rope and covered with plastic sheets, William Spindler, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), told reporters at the regular press briefing in Geneva.

Using paddles made of bamboo and plastic debris some of these rafts made it to Shahporir Dwip in Bangladesh, a journey of about four hours, he added, pointing out that the Naf river estuary between the two countries is about three kilometres wide at this point.

According to Mr. Spindler, more than 100 Rohingya refugees are known to have drowned in shipwrecks and boat incidents since the start of the [crisis](#) on 25 August, and recent arrivals said they had been waiting for more than a month in desperate conditions on Myanmar's shores with food and water running low.

An estimated 620,000 Rohingya refugees have fled to Bangladesh since 25 August, the UNHCR spokesperson explained. The Kutupalong Extension site alone, which was set up soon after the influx began, is now highly congested sheltering some 335,000 new arrivals – more than half of the influx so far.

Citing UN Habitat data that Dhaka's population density is 44,500 people per square kilometre, UNHCR said 13 out of 20 blocks in the Kutupalong Extension area are more densely populated than parts of the Bangladesh capital city, with an area known as Block CC sheltering more than 95,000 people per square kilometre.

Despite concerted efforts to deliver more aid and services, the overcrowding and difficult living conditions in the camps and makeshift sites increase health, sanitation and fire risks as well as violence and trafficking, stressed Mr. Spindler.

Additional land and more space for shelters and infrastructure are needed urgently to provide life-saving services and aid, including water points, latrines and spaces for women and girls.

As high population density also escalates risks, particularly for sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), UNHCR is engaging all segments of the refugee communities to raise awareness.

Together with our partners, we are working to put in place referral pathways for women, survivors of SGBV, as well as safe spaces for women and girls," said Mr. Spindler.

### ***Solar-powered healthcare***

Meanwhile, the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM) is using solar energy to power its health posts in Kutupalong and Balukali makeshift settlements now home to an estimated 440,000 Rohingya refugees.

"As the demand for our healthcare services increases, solar-powered lighting means we can provide round the clock emergency consultations and medicine distributions," said Mariam Abdelkerim-Spijkerman, the IOM Emergency Health Officer in Cox's Bazar.

Prior to the latest refugee influx, in close collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Bangladeshi Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, IOM had been coordinating aid work in the health sector.

As people continue to flood into the settlements, pressure on the health sector has steadily risen.

"The health needs of the refugees are immense – providing 24-hour lighting helps save lives," explained Ms. Abdelkerim-Spijkerman.

---

## **With UN support, more countries confronting threat of drug-resistant 'superbugs'**

17 November 2017 – Efforts to stem the spread of antimicrobial resistant pathogens on farms and in food systems are gaining strength, thanks to strong backing by governments and technical support from the United Nations to boost national capacities, the Organization's food security and health agencies reported Friday.

According to the first annual survey conducted by FAO (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN), WHO (World Health Organization) and a global intergovernmental body on animal health (World Organization for Animal Health), more than 6.5 billion people – over 90 per cent of the world's population – now live in country that has in place, or is developing a national action plan on antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

"Nearly all of these plans cover both human and animal health in line with the recommended 'one health' multisectoral approach," said the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in a news release announcing the

findings.

The report's release comes at the end of [World Antibiotic Awareness Week](#) , which kicked off this on Monday 13 November.

Antimicrobial medicines – antibiotics, antifungals, antivirals or antiparasitics – are widely used in livestock, poultry and aquaculture operations to treat or prevent diseases.

However, their over-use and misuse, such as for promoting growth is leading to the emergence of microbes resistant to these drugs, making the diseases they cause difficult or in cases, impossible, to treat. Humans exposed to these [antimicrobial resistant](#) pathogens are also affected in the same way.

### [ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE – What you need to know](#)

*There is progress, but there are also gaps*

Since the survey was completed last year (2016), more countries have unveiled plans to tackle AMR.

Yet despite the progress, the global push to address this problem which is taking epic proportions is still in its early stages.

There are weak points that still need to be shored up particularly in the food and agriculture sectors of low- and middle-income countries, key battlegrounds against 'superbugs' resistant to conventional medicines, FAO cautioned.

In particular, there are major gaps in data regarding where, how and to what extent antimicrobials are being used in agriculture; also systems and facilities for tracking the occurrence of AMR in food systems and the surrounding environment need to be strengthened.

According to Ren Wang, FAO Assistant Director-General for Agriculture and Consumer Protection, the UN food security agency, along with its partners, is using its expertise and experience to assist developing countries.

The goal is to help them develop the tools and capacity to implement best practices in animal and crop production, reduce the need for antimicrobials in food systems, develop surveillance capacity to assess the scale of AMR and efforts to control it, and strengthen regulatory frameworks to minimise the misuse of antibiotics while simultaneously ensuring access to drugs for treating sick animals, he added.

---

## UN agencies rush in medical supplies for thousands wounded in Iran-Iraq earthquake

17 November 2017 – United Nations agencies have delivered medical supplies to the areas of Iran and Iraq struck by a devastating earthquake, and are urging vigilance against the possible outbreaks of infectious and waterborne diseases.

The World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) has airlifted trauma kits and medical supplies to Iran to support treatment for thousands of people injured as a result of the 12 November quake.

Additional trauma kits are available in WHO's emergency logistical centre in Dubai and will be delivered as needed to health facilities reporting [shortages](#), said Michel Thieren, WHO Regional Emergency Director.

While there is no direct link between earthquakes and disease outbreaks, close monitoring for cases of infectious diseases, especially waterborne diseases, is also required, he added.

The supplies, enough to provide surgical care for up to 4,000 trauma patients, were transported from WHO's emergency logistical centre in Dubai to Kermanshah province in western Iran on Thursday. They were immediately delivered to hospitals and other health facilities receiving the injured.

Almost 9,400 people in Iran were injured as a result of the earthquake, including more than 1,000 people hospitalized in Kermanshah province with serious injuries, and 340 more who were transferred to hospitals in neighbouring provinces, including Tehran.

The two cities of Sar Pol Zahab and Ghasr Shirin in Kermanshah province, with a total population of almost 115,000 people, are reported to have suffered considerable damage, with almost 80 per cent of infrastructure destroyed. One main hospital in the province was forced to close, and 49 more health facilities were damaged, but remain open.

In Iraq, WHO's country office deployed a medical team and three ambulances, and delivered four tents and emergency lifesaving supplies sufficient for 200 surgical operations, to hospitals in Sulaimaniyah governorate receiving critical cases.

The earthquake was felt in the major cities of Sulaimaniyah, Halabja, Erbil and Duhok, with a total of eight fatalities and 525 people injured. Darbandikhan in northern Sulaimaniyah was most affected, with damages to Darbandikhan hospital and Sharazoor maternity hospital.

WHO continues to work closely with national health authorities in Iran and

Iraq to monitor the health impact of the earthquake and respond to urgent needs.

Earlier in the week, a Mobile Medical Team from the UN International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) in Iraq [arrived](#) in Kani Bardina village, Warmawa district, to provide medical assistance to families, following the earthquake.

Approximately half of the 40 homes in Kani Bardina village were damaged or destroyed in the earthquake, according to IOM.

The IOM Mobile Medical Team is providing assistance in response to a request from the Joint Crisis Coordination Centre of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq, for medical support in the area to assist those who were injured in the earthquake. The team is receiving guidance from local health authorities.

The IOM Mobile Medical Team visited Halabja Hospital, which during the earthquake sustained damage to the ceiling, floor, and walls, with blocks falling onto empty hospital beds.

The hospital's director Dr. Ranj Zangana explained that they continued to provide services for visiting patients, but those who needed longer-term care were transferred or referred to Sulaymaniyah hospital.

---

## [UN rights chief voices concern about Cambodia election after opposition ban](#)

17 November 2017 – The United Nations human rights chief voiced grave concerns Friday about the conduct of credible, free and fair elections in Cambodia next year following the decision by the Supreme Court to dissolve the main opposition party.

“An [effective multi-party democracy](#) requires an opposition that can operate freely without intimidation and threats and the same goes for a credible, free and fair election,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein in a news release.

The court dissolved the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), the main opposition party, on Thursday after the Ministry of Interior complained that the opposition was plotting a so-called colour revolution against the Government. A total of 118 CNRP members were banned from political activity for five years.

“People need to be able to debate and discuss freely the political affairs of their country, and the decision to dissolve the CNRP has deprived

over three million voters of their representation,&#8221 Mr. Zeid said.

The party's dissolution follows the arrest on 3 September of CNRP president Kem Sokha on charges of 'treason' related to comments made in 2013 about his grassroots political strategy to challenge the current Government.

&#8220The use of law against the CNRP and its members is a smokescreen &#8211 it is the rule by law, and not the rule of law. The accusations against the CNRP and its members were vague, as were the legal provisions supporting the complaint to dissolve it,&#8221 Mr. Zeid said, adding the dissolution of the CNRP was based on alleged criminal acts by Kem Sokha which had not been proved in a court of law.

Mr. Zeid said the party's dissolution and the ban on its members was all the more worrying, given other measures by the Government in recent months, including closure and suspension of civil society groups as well several media companies. It has also been targeting individual journalists and members of non-governmental organizations.

&#8220An essential component of all democracies is a vibrant civil society, including NGOs and press that may sometimes be critical of the Government,&#8221 said Mr. Zeid. &#8220Imposing limits on civil society and shrinking their space serves only to stymie the creativity, innovation and ingenuity necessary for Cambodia to continue to develop, and to maintain peace.&#8221

Similarly, he stressed, &#8220a free press is essential to ensure that the public is properly informed of political and other issues so that people can be responsible and engaged actors.&#8221

---

## [Security Council again fails to extend panel investigating use of chemical weapons in Syria](#)

16 November 2017 – Two draft resolutions &#8211 one sponsored by the United States and another led by Russia &#8211 were defeated in the United Nations Security Council Thursday, blocking renewal of the international inquiry into chemical weapons attacks in Syria.

With a 'no' vote from Russia, as well as a negative vote from Bolivia, and abstentions by China and Egypt, the Council failed to adopt the US text that would have renewed the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the UN, which is set to expire on 17 November.

A negative vote or veto from one of the Council's five permanent members (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and the United States) means a resolution cannot be adopted. This marks the 10th time Russia has moved to block Council action on Syria since the conflict broke out six years ago.

Ahead of today's action on the US-led text, a procedural vote was called by Russia on the sequence of voting on its own draft. The Russian text was also defeated.

In late October, ahead of the release of the Joint Mechanism's final report, the Security Council [failed to adopt](#) a similar measure due to a negative vote from Russia.

The JIM was [established unanimously](#) in 2015 to identify to the greatest extent feasible individuals, entities, groups or Governments perpetrating, organizing, sponsoring or otherwise involved in the use of chemicals as weapons in Syria.

In a [briefing just last week](#), Edmond Mulet, Head of the Mechanism told the Council that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) was responsible for using sulfur mustard in a September 2016 attack in Umm Hawsh and that the Syrian Government was accountable for the release of sarin in an April 2017 attack in Khan Shaykhun.

There has been sufficient evidence of a credible and reliable nature to make [these] findings, he said of the Mechanism's [report](#), which was released on 26 October.

Mr. Mulet stressed that despite the challenges of investigating complex cases during an armed conflict, the Mechanism has taken great care to ensure that its methodology and findings were technically and scientifically sound.

*Find out more about Syria and the OPCW [here](#)*