

Cholera cases in Yemen may reach 130,000 in two weeks, UNICEF warns

2 June 2017 – With about 70,000 cholera cases reported with nearly 600 fatalities in Yemen, the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) today warned that an already dire situation for children is turning into a disaster.

Cholera doesn’t need a permit to cross a checkpoint or a border, nor does it differentiate between areas of political control, [said](#) UNICEF Regional Director, Geert Cappelaere, following his visit to the war-torn country.

Cholera is spreading incredibly fast in Yemen [...] The number of suspected cases is expected to reach 130,000 within the next two weeks, [he warned](#).

He said he witnessed harrowing scenes of children who were barely alive – tiny babies weighing less than two kilos [and](#) fighting for their lives at one of the few functioning hospitals he visited.

But they are the lucky ones. Countless children around Yemen die every day in silence from causes that can easily be prevented or treated like cholera, diarrhoea or malnutrition, [he said](#).

He said health workers are racing against time to prevent cholera from killing more children. They are dedicated and committed, despite not receiving their salaries in almost nine months.

For its part, UNICEF has been working with partners to respond since the start of this outbreak four weeks ago, providing safe water to over 1 million people across Yemen and delivered over 40 tonnes of lifesaving medical equipment [including](#) medicine, oral rehydration salts, intravenous fluids and diarrhoea disease kits.

He called for stepping up global support, as UNICEF urgently requires \$16 million to prevent the outbreak from spreading further.

But most importantly, it is time for parties to the conflict to prioritise the boys and girls of Yemen and put an end to the fighting through a peaceful political agreement. This is the ultimate way to save the lives of children in Yemen, and to help them thrive, [he said](#).

Local solutions, people-centred health systems key to ending AIDS epidemic – UN deputy chief

1 June 2017 – While global optimism has fuelled a major push to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030 – the highest ambition within the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development – the United Nations today warned that the pandemic is far from over, and with more than 36 million people living with HIV, tackling it will require a life-cycle approach based on community-level solutions.

“Achieving our aims on AIDS is interlinked and embedded within the broader 2030 Agenda. Both are grounded in equity, human rights and a promise to leave no one behind,” Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed [told](#) delegations gathered for the General Assembly’s [annual review](#) of the Secretary-General’s [report](#), this year calling for a reinvigorated global response to HIV/AIDS.

In 2016, The UN political declaration on ending AIDS set the world on a fast-track to stamp out the epidemic by 2030. In the first phase, countries agreed to reduce new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths to fewer than 500,000 by 2020. They also agreed to eliminate HIV-related stigma and discrimination by then.

However, according to the report, with less than four years to go, progress on reducing new HIV infections among adults has stalled, financing for the global response has dried up and more importantly, women and girls continue to bear the brunt of the AIDS epidemic.



Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed (left), addresses the Assembly’s annual review on progress in the global response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

Briefing Member States alongside Assembly President Peter Thomson and UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé, Ms. Mohammed warned that the pandemic is far from over. UNAIDS estimates that more than 36.7 million people are living with HIV globally.

“While more than 18 million are now on life-saving treatment, this is just half of those who need it, and there is no decline in the number of new infections each year. People living with HIV who are on treatment can now expect the same life expectancy as someone who is not infected,” she said.

UN deputy chief spotlights ‘life-cycle’ approach to HIV

That is why a life-cycle approach to HIV is so important, she continued, to ensure that people have access to the services they need at every stage of

life. Echoing the report's concern, she cited other challenges, noting that key populations, including sex workers, people who inject drugs, transgender people, and men who have sex with men, remain at much higher risk of HIV infection. More than 10 million additional people living with HIV must access treatment by 2020; most of them are unaware of their HIV status.

"Now we need to do a better job of reaching young women and adolescent girls. This is true of Sub-Saharan Africa where adolescent girls account for three out of four new HIV infections among the 15 to 19 year olds. Women and girls' heightened vulnerability of women and girls to HIV is intimately linked to "entrenched gender-based inequalities and harmful social attitudes," she said, adding: "We also need to ensure a more integrated approach to HIV delivery. In particular, we need to integrate HIV, sexual and reproductive health programmes, including family planning."

A blunt assessment would say that to date, our achievements have been mixed

For his part, Mr. Thomson said that while major advancements have been made, the scale of shortcomings remained deeply concerning. HIV prevention rates among adults around the world had largely stalled, with the number of new infections actually increasing in some regions. Some 1,800 young people a day were being newly infected with the virus, with young women at particular risk.



Peter Thomson (centre), President of the 71st session of the General Assembly, addresses the Assembly's annual review on progress in the global response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

"A blunt assessment would say that to date our achievements have been mixed," said the Assembly President, stressing that [ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030](#) requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach that also targets education, information and services to people living with HIV and to those at risk.

"We must build on the tremendous advances we have already seen in science, technology and innovation to better support people living with HIV, and to find a path towards a vaccine or cure," he said, adding that it is important to leverage the integrated nature of the [SDGs](#) by building on the synergies between the global AIDS response and efforts to achieve universal health coverage.

Adequate funding remains critical to meet the objectives, he added, emphasizing the need to close the \$7 billion funding gap for the global AIDS response.

UN urges aid for civilians swept up in Central African Republic's 'new spiral of escalating violence'

1 June 2017 – Warning that violence in the Central African Republic (CAR) is quickly escalating, the top United Nations aid official in the country today urged the international community to assist the tens of thousands of newly displaced civilians.

Speaking to representatives of UN Member States in Geneva, Najat Rochdi, the Humanitarian Coordinator and UN Resident Coordinator in the country, said the frequency and brutality of attacks in Bangassou, Bria, Alindao and other localities have reached levels not seen since August 2014.

“In the past two weeks the signs are very clear, violence in the Central Africa Republic has entered a new spiral of escalating conflict and the situation is quickly deteriorating,” Ms. Rochdi said.

“Over 100,000 people have been newly displaced, family running for their lives, leaving everything behind,” she added.

Humanitarian actors are facing logistical and security challenges to reach the people in need, as well as funding shortages. The UN requested nearly \$400 million on behalf of the humanitarian community to meet CAR's needs. So far, only about 25 per cent have been received, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)).

Without sufficient resources, the most vulnerable people will be cut off from aid “many of them will be killed, and entire areas of the country abandoned,” warned Ms. Rochdi.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, plunged the country of 4.5 million people into civil conflict in 2013. According to the UN, more than half the population is in dire need of assistance. Despite significant progress and successful elections, CAR has remained in the grip of instability and sporadic unrest.

In her briefing today, she urged Governments to remain engaged in CAR: “This is not the time to let the people of the Central African Republic down. This is not the time to give up on peace.”

With innovative strategy, UN health agency launches new offensive against vector-borne diseases

1 June 2017 – Spread of the Zika virus disease and emerging threat of dengue and chikungunya were the result of weak mosquito control policies adopted nearly half a century ago, the United Nations health agency has said, vowing a renewed attack on global spread of such vector-borne diseases.

“What we are seeing now looks more and more like a dramatic resurgence of the threat from emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases,” Margaret Chan, the Director-General of the UN World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) told the sixty-ninth World Health Assembly, in May last year.

Starting in June 2016, the UN health agency began developing a comprehensive response to strategically guide countries and partners to urgently strengthen vector control as a fundamental approach to preventing disease and responding to outbreaks.

The unique fast-track process culminated this week with the adoption of the *Global Vector Control Response 2017–2030* by the World Health Assembly (at its seventieth session).

The Response is also expected to go a long way in supporting implementation of approaches to vector control and achieve disease-specific national and global goals as well as for the implementation of the [2030 Agenda](#) and the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

Of most direct relevance are Goals 3, 6 and 11 on ensuring health and well-being and clean water and sanitation, and on sustainable cities and communities.

Riding on wave of economic development

In particular, the Global Response calls for aggressive pursuit of promising new interventions such as new insecticides, spatial repellents and odour-baited traps, improved house screening, and developing common bacterium which can stop viruses from replicating inside mosquitoes.

At the same time, economic development can help bring solutions.

“If people lived in houses that had solid floors and windows with screens or air conditioning, they wouldn’t need a bednet,” said Professor Thomas Scott from the Department of Entomology and Nematology at the University of California, who co-led a group of eminent scientists and public health experts in the development of the Response.

“By improving people’s standard of living, we would significantly reduce these diseases,” he added.

At the same time, programmes targeting specific diseases have also yielded remarkable results.

One such example is Malaria: massive use of insecticide-treated bednets and use of residual insecticides inside houses has helped reduce the disease's incidence in sub-Saharan Africa by 45 per cent over the past 15 years.



A scientist collecting live mosquitos for study at a infectious diseases research facility in Cali, Colombia. Photo: PAHO/WHO

'Disappearing' public health entomologists

But that success has had a down side.

"We've been so successful, in some ways, with our control that we reduced the number of public health entomologists – the people who can do this stuff well," said Professor Steve Lindsay, a public health entomologist at Durham University in Britain. "We're a disappearing breed."

def.: entomologist

en·to·mol·o·gist (noun)

A scientist who focuses on the study of classification, life cycle, distribution, physiology, behaviour, ecology and population dynamics of insects and pests.

To counter this phenomenon, the Global Vector Control Response urges countries to invest in a vector-control workforce trained in public health entomology and empowered in health care responses.

"We now need more nuanced control – not one-size-fits-all, but to tailor control to local conditions," added Professor Lindsay, noting that under the new strategic approach, individual diseases such as Zika, dengue and chikungunya will no longer be considered as separate threats.

"What this represents is not three different diseases, but one mosquito – *Aedes aegypti*," said Professor Lindsay.

A change in mentality needed

Experts have also highlighted that while the task ahead will not be easy, the Global Response offers room for optimism.

"Most of all, this document is a call for action," said Dr. Ana Carolina Silva Santelli, who co-led the eminent group with Professor Scott, presently the deputy director for epidemiology in the Brasilia office of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, noting that integrating

vector-control efforts across different diseases will require more equipment, people and resources.

But above all, a change in mentality is needed, she noted. “The risk of inaction is greater [...] given the growing number of emerging disease threats.”

[‘Beginning of end for rogue fishing,’ says UN agency as more States back landmark treaty](#)

1 June 2017 – A new agreement aimed at stopping rogue fishing practices represents the capstone of years of diplomatic effort to combat the scourge of illegal fishing, according to the United Nations food agency.

The Agreement on Port State Measures ([PSMA](#)) to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing, gives the world “all the instruments necessary to achieve our goal,” said José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation ([FAO](#)) in a [press statement](#).

Mr. Graziano da Silva spoke at the first Meeting of the Parties, hosted by the Government of Norway to hammer out details regarding the treaty’s implementation, such as defining the responsibilities of States, regional fisheries management organizations and other international bodies, including FAO.

Soon to have 48 parties – counting all 28 European Union members, with Japan and Montenegro about to join depositing their instruments of adherence – Mr. Graziano da Silva expressed confidence that more countries would join in the near future, saying “this gives the one-year-old treaty added heft.”

The FAO-brokered treaty restricts port access to fishing vessels that fail to comply with a set of rules, including proof that they have proper operating licenses and transparent disclosure of the species and quantity of fish caught.

Years of IUU fishing, which has yielded up to 26 million tons, worth some \$23 billion a year, represents a huge threat to all efforts to bolster sustainable fishing in the world’s oceans.

Parties to the PSMA currently account for more than two-thirds of the global fish trade, according to FAO.

Mr. Graziano da Silva also noted a number of its additional benefits, such as

promoting marine fisheries' sustainability, improving livelihoods and food security of coastal communities and reducing illegal activities often linked to IUU fishing, namely trafficking, labour abuses and slavery.

The PSMA also represents a large contribution toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal 14, which expressly calls for an end to IUU fishing by 2020.

Focus on implementation

Protocols under discussion include how to assure proper real-time exchange and information publication, as port States must signal eventual violations to a ship's flag State in addition to regional authorities.

Further technical requirements of developing States will also be addressed. An ad hoc working group will meet later this week to make recommendations on establishing suitable funding mechanisms to make sure all members, including Small Island Developing States located amid some of the world's most attractive fishing areas, can carry out their tasks. The PSMA treaty itself demands that members contribute to the capacity-building effort required to make the agreement work.

"This is a crucial moment," Mr. Graziano da Silva said, noting that FAO itself has already committed \$1.5 million of its own funds toward the effort.