

Drought threatens 1.5 million Somalis; UN health agency scales up response

27 February 2017 – Less than half of the people in Somalia have access to basic health services, the United Nations health agency today said, announcing that it is scaling up its response in the country amid a severe drought and worsening food crisis.

“Somalia is now at a critical point as a result of this drought and environmental hazards and lack of basic services,” said UN World Health Organization’s (WHO) Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, Dr. Mahmoud Fikri.

The UN agency said that it is providing “all possible support” to address the ongoing challenges. That includes sending in rapid response teams to areas of greatest threat. That includes sending medicines and medical supplies to health facilities in drought-affected areas.

Some 1.5 million people are believed to be affected by the severe drought and worsening food crisis. More than 400,000 of those people are malnourished children.

In addition, the drought conditions are causing epidemic-prone diseases to spread. These include cholera and measles. According to WHO, since early January, more than 6,000 cases of cholera have been reported, as well as more than 2,500 cases of suspected measles.

The UN has launched an appeal for \$825 million for the first half of 2017 for the pre-famine response. Of this, the health sector requires \$85 million, including \$10 million for the WHO.

In Yemen, UN aid chief rallies support for relief efforts to prevent famine

27 February 2017 – The parties to the conflict in Yemen need to continue providing humanitarian access, and the international community needs to step up its funding for life-saving operations, the United Nations relief aid chief said today during his visit to the port city of Aden.

“I have come to Aden with the first humanitarian UN flight to lend support to the humanitarians who have been working in this city and in Yemen since the conflict escalated in March 2015,” UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien told reporters there.

Today, almost 19 million people in Yemen need humanitarian assistance. Seven million people don't know where their next meal is coming from and we now face a serious risk of famine," he added.

Mr. O'Brien said the purpose of his visit was also to meet with senior Government officials to discuss how to prevent a possible famine and how to better protect the civilians that are caught in this conflict.

In Aden and the surrounding governorates, 3.1 million people need humanitarian assistance, two thirds of whom are in desperate need of food, he warned.

RELATED: As Yemen's food crisis worsens, UN agencies call for urgent assistance to avert catastrophe

Yesterday, in meetings with President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi, Prime Minister Ahmed Obeid bin Daghr and other senior officials, the top UN aid official stressed the need for all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law, protect civilians and civilian infrastructure and to allow for unimpeded and immediate full access by humanitarian partners to all of Yemen.

Given the urgency of the situation, they also discussed the need to facilitate commercial imports of food, fuel and medicine, through all ports of Yemen, and the resumption of commercial flights to all of Yemen, Mr. O'Brien said.

Yesterday, I saw with my own eyes the destruction of the war and the impact on the people living in Aden," he said, noting that he was especially pleased to know that two babies – a boy and a girl – were born while he was at a maternity hospital. "They are Yemen's hope and future," he said.

In the Aden hub, more than 55 humanitarian organizations are working to meet pressing needs.

"We are here to help and provide neutral, impartial life-saving assistance to all people in need, regardless of where they are in Yemen," Mr. O'Brien said, stressing that there are no military solutions to this conflict and only peace can provide a lasting solution to this unfolding humanitarian crisis.

[Western Sahara: UN chief Guterres urges Morocco and Polisario Front to](#)

de-escalate tensions in buffer strip

25 February 2017 – Deeply concerned about increased tensions in the vicinity of Guerguerat in the buffer strip in southern Western Sahara between the Moroccan berm and the Mauritanian border, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today called on Morocco and Frente Polisario to “take all necessary steps” to avoid escalation.

According to a statement issued by UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric, armed elements of both Morocco and Frente Polisario (Polisario Front) remain in close proximity to each other, a position they have been in since August 2016, monitored during daylight hours by the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO).

“The Secretary-General calls on both of the parties to exercise maximum restraint and take all necessary steps to avoid escalating tensions, be that through the actions of military or civilian actors,” the statement said, adding that Mr. Guterres also underlined that regular commercial traffic should not be obstructed and that no action should be taken, which may constitute a change to the status quo of the buffer strip.

Strongly urging the parties to unconditionally withdraw all armed elements from the buffer strip as soon as possible, to create an environment conducive to a resumption of the dialogue in the context of the political process led by the UN, the Spokesman said Mr. Guterres further called on the parties to adhere to their obligations under the ceasefire agreement and to respect both the letter and the spirit of it.

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. MINURSO was deployed that year to monitor the ceasefire between the Government of Morocco and the Polisario Front and organizing, if the parties agree, a referendum on self-determination in Western Sahara.

A revised settlement plan was proposed by the United Nations after seven years of diplomatic consultations was rejected by one of the parties in 2004. In approving the current phase of direct negotiations in 2007, the UN Security Council called for “a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political settlement which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.”

UN Security Council calls for immediate investigation into recent violence in DR Congo's Kasai region

25 February 2017 – The United Nations Security Council has strongly condemned the recent spate of violence in the south-central Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), calling on the Government to immediately dispatch a credible and impartial investigation.

In a press statement issued in New York yesterday evening, the Council expressed grave concern at the recent reports of serious violations of international humanitarian law committed by local militia in that region, including unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers, and of killings of civilians by members of Congolese security forces, known as FARDC, all of which might constitute war crimes under international law.

Recalling that the DRC Government bears the primary responsibility to protect civilians within its territory, the Security Council urged the authorities to constantly exercise maximum restraint and proportionate lawful use of force in its efforts to restore order.

The Council also called on the Government to immediately dispatch an investigation and to bring to justice and hold accountable all those responsible. Welcoming the Government's announcement in this regard, the Council encouraged the UN Stabilization Mission in the country, known by its French acronym MONUSCO, to provide support to the Congolese authorities, if requested, in the conduct of this investigation, developments in which they will follow very closely.

MONUSCO was further urged to monitor and report on violations and abuses of international human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law and to update its contingency plans in this regard. In the longer-term, the Security Council encouraged the DRC Government to continue its efforts for the extension of State authority throughout the vast central African nation, ensuring credible governance with capable institutions, especially in the security sector, to prevent and deter violence.

RELATED: UN mission in DR Congo strongly condemns persistent violence in Kasai Provinces

As for the political situation in the country, the Security Council reaffirmed its strong support for the 31 December 2016 political agreement, and its pursuit of peaceful, credible, free, fair and inclusive elections by December 2017, leading to a democratic transfer of power.

In this context, the 15-nation body said it is increasingly concerned at the continuing lack of progress in the dialogue among the political stakeholders in DRC related to implementation modalities of the

agreement. The Council expressed concern that, two months after the signing of the agreement, the appointment of a Prime Minister presented by the *Rassemblement* coalition, as well as the installation of a new transitional government and of the *Comité National de Suivi de l'Accord* (CNSA) have yet to take place.

As such, the Council stressed the need to maintain the political goodwill that led to the signing of the agreement in order to avoid further insecurity in the DRC. Further, the Council called on all stakeholders in the DRC, including President Joseph Kabila, the presidential majority and the opposition, to redouble, in good faith, their efforts towards a speedy conclusion of the ongoing talks on the *arrangements particuliers* of the agreement, in order to urgently nominate a Prime Minister presented by the *Rassemblement*.

The Security Council reaffirmed the need for all parties to support and participate constructively in the mediation led by the *Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo* (CENCO), and recalled that full and timely implementation of the 31 December agreement, in accordance with the Congolese Constitution and in line with Council resolution 2277 (2016), is critical in upholding the legitimacy of the transitional institutions until elections.

[UNESCO meeting lays groundwork for reviving, protecting Iraq's cultural heritage](#)

24 February 2017 – As details on the destruction of and damage to Iraq's rich and diverse cultural heritage emerge, the United Nations cultural agency has appealed to the international community to help protect and revive the country's archaeological, religious and cultural sites for future generations.

"This is a turning point for the Iraqi people and for the world's understanding of the role of heritage for societies in conflict situations," said the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Irina Bokova.

Speaking at the end of a two-day meeting of the International Coordination Conference on the Safeguarding of Cultural Heritage in Liberated Areas of Iraq, Ms. Bokova added: "UNESCO is already mobilizing on the ground to support Iraq in protecting heritage and objects most at risk, and to fence off and guard sites."

The meeting also prepared the groundwork for emergency, medium and long term action plans to preserve the country's millennial archaeological sites,

museums, religious heritage, and historic cities.

It also agreed to appoint a joint UNESCO-Iraqi Steering Committee to coordinate and advocate the many national and international initiatives to rehabilitate the cultural heritage of Iraq.

However, according to UNESCO the damage already done has been much fear than what was anticipated and the rehabilitation process is likely to require decades of work.

Noting the importance of action to safeguard Iraq's heritage, the country's Minister of Culture Fryad Rawandouzi highlighted: "As we reclaim our country [...] We need help from UNESCO, the UN and others to rehabilitate museums, cities and sites [...] We need a plan with a timeline, as well as technical and financial support."

At the same time, there are fears that antiquities taken away from heritage sites may have been sold on the Internet and the black market and the money used finance activities of the terrorist group Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh).

"We must stop the trade in Iraqi antiquities, adhere to Security Council Resolution 2199, and dry up [ISIL]'s money flow," underscored Mohammad Iqbal Omar, the Iraqi Minister of Education.

Adopted in 2015, UN Security Council resolution 2199, among other provisions, banned all trade in looted antiquities from Iraq and Syria. It also encouraged steps to ensure such items are returned to their homelands, and called on UNESCO, Interpol, and other international organizations to assist in such efforts.

"Da'esh tried, but will never erase our culture, identity, diversity, history and the pillars of civilization. I call on the world to help us," said added the Minister of Education.