

UN fund allocates \$6 million to help thousands in violence-hit parts of Central African Republic

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The top United Nations relief official today approved an allocation from the organization’s Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to support response to assist the response to new emergencies triggered by a surge of violence in the Central African Republic (CAR)’s Kaga Bandoro, Bambari and Bria areas.

The allocation, amounting to \$6 million and allocated by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien today, will enable the UN World Food Programme (WFP) to reach some 36,800 people facing food insecurity due to the crises in the last few months of 2016 that not only led to new displacements but also caused a significant decline in commercial activities in the areas.

“The humanitarian community is deeply concerned that a crisis linked to the scarcity and soaring prices of essential foodstuffs will aggravate a situation that is already extremely worrying,” warned Joseph Inganji, the head of the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in CAR.

The CERF allocation, with approximately 3,600 tons of food, will meet urgent food needs for four months. In Bria and surrounding areas, located about 600 kilometres north-east of the national capital, Bangui, 12,800 affected people will receive assistance.

Similarly, about 10,000 people in Bambari, Grimari and the region (about 300 kilometres from Bangui), and 14,000 people in the Kaga Bandoro (some 330 kilometres from Bangui), will also benefit from the allocation.

According to OCHA, the CERF support will partially cover the urgent humanitarian needs of newly displaced people with regards to food security.

In addition to these funds, the Humanitarian Fund in CAR also triggered its emergency reserve mechanism on two occasions: first in December 2016 with \$1 million to support the response to the food crisis in Bria; and then, in January 2017, it complementary addressed needs including shelter and non-food items, camp management, water, sanitation and hygiene, logistics, protection and health.

OCHA further noted that the humanitarian community in country continues to advocate for additional funds to cover the remaining needs.

CERF is one of the fastest and effective ways in which the UN supports rapid humanitarian response for people affected by natural disasters and conflict.

The Fund receives voluntary contributions throughout the year to provide immediate funding for lifesaving humanitarian action anywhere in the world.

It is managed by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator on behalf of the UN Secretary-General.

Yesterday, the Fund had allocated some \$100 million to sustain operations in nine “neglected crises” around the globe, enabling life-saving assistance for more than six million people in Cameroon, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Libya, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia and Uganda.

Syria: UN-supported talks delayed until 20 February to give opposition time to unite

31 January 2017 – The United Nations envoy for Syria today said that he asked the Security Council to postpone the UN facilitated talks that had been scheduled for 8 February in Geneva until 20 February, in order to give the war-torn country’s opposition time to unite and participate as one group.

“We want to give a chance to this Astana initiative to actually implement itself,” Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura told reporters at the UN Headquarters in New York, referring to the talks held last week in the Kazakh capital on solidifying a ceasefire in Syria, which had been brokered by Russia, Iran and Turkey.

He said that in Astana, the Syrian Government, the opposition and the three guarantors of the ceasefire agreed on a mechanism – a group of experts – to monitor the truce, adding that a technical follow-up meeting on the creation of the mechanism is scheduled to take place in the Kazakh capital on 6 February with the participation of the UN.

He explained that the delay of UN-supported intra-Syrian talks would give time for the ceasefire to solidify, give the Government a chance to consider concessions, and give a chance for the armed groups to come as “one unified opposition.”

Mr, de Mistura said he will issue invitations for the Geneva talks around 8 February.

He reiterated that his work is guided by UN Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), which endorsed a roadmap for a peace process in Syria, including issues of governance, constitution and elections.

Founders of ‘Lonely Planet’ awarded UN agency’s lifetime achievement award

31 January 2017 – Hailing the impact of the popular ‘Lonely Planet’ travel guidebook series on global tourism, the United Nations tourism agency today awarded its founders with its 13th Lifetime Achievement Award.

“The inspirational role that Lonely Planet inferred worldwide to travellers, writers and the tourism sector in general has been the major reason to concede the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Lifetime Achievement Award to [Tony Wheeler and Maureen Wheeler],” noted the UN agency in a news release.

According to the agency, the Wheelers founded Lonely Planet Publications in 1972, after a trip across Asia.

In the last 40 years, their guidebooks have sold over 100 million copies in English and other languages. The books also ventured into many other travel areas including a television series and an award-winning travel website.

In addition, through their Planet Wheeler Foundation, Tony and Maureen Wheeler, have been involved in more than 50 projects in the developing world, principally in south-east Asia and east Africa, with a focus on poverty alleviation.

They are also involved in a number of ventures, including promoting literature and the arts, as well as entrepreneurship and protection and development of archaeological sites in developing countries.

The UNWTO Lifetime Achievement Award is conferred every year to individuals with visionary leadership and significant contributions to the global tourism sector.

Managing national borders ‘cannot be based on any form of discrimination’ – UN chief Guterres

31 January 2017 – Refugees fleeing conflict and persecution are entitled to protection, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said today, expressing concern at decisions around the world that have undermined the

integrity of the international refugee protection regime.

“Refugees fleeing conflict and persecution are finding more and more borders closed and increasingly restricted access to the protection they need and are entitled to receive, according to international refugee law,” Mr. Guterres said in a statement.

The UN chief made a particular mention of Ethiopia, the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa, that, he noted “for decades has been keeping its borders open to hundreds of thousands of refugees from its neighbours, many times in dramatic security situations.”

Further stating that countries have the right and the obligation, to responsibly manage their borders to avoid infiltration by members of terrorist organizations, Mr. Guterres cautioned that this cannot be based on any form of discrimination related to religion, ethnicity or nationality, noting that doing so “is against the fundamental principles and values on which our societies are based.”

He also warned that it could “trigger widespread anxiety and anger that may facilitate the propaganda of the very terrorist organizations we all want to fight against” and that “blind measures, not based on solid intelligence, tend to be ineffective as they risk being bypassed by what are today sophisticated global terrorist movements.”

At the start of the regular noon-briefing at UN Headquarters, Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said Mr. Guterres is currently on his way back to New York from the African Union Summit in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, and he had had the opportunity to express his disagreement with the United States Executive Order on refugees.

The statement follows President Donald Trump’s signing last Friday of an Executive Order that, among things, suspends the US refugee programme for 120 days and, according to the media, bars entry of refugees from several mostly Muslim countries, including Syria, until further notice.

Cut off by fighting, thousands of Yemenis urgently need aid and protection – UN official says

31 January 2017 – The senior United Nations humanitarian official in Yemen voiced extreme concern today about the safety and well-being of citizens in the south-eastern part of the country, where military operations are cutting off services and causing harm to civilians.

"A halt to the fighting is required to facilitate the delivery of assistance to Al Mokha and enable the free movement of civilians," said Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen, Jamie McGoldrick, in reference to the port city on the Red Sea coast of the country.

Up to 30,000 people are estimated to be trapped in Mokha, roughly one-third of the population, and in need of immediate protection and relief assistance, Mr. McGoldrick said.

He noted also that scores of civilians have been injured by repeated airstrikes, shelling and sniper attacks in and around Mokha, which has also ground most services, including the main market and the water supply system.

Meanwhile, in Dhubab, also a district of Taiz Governorate, tens of thousands of civilians are being forced to flee their homes to escape the fighting.

Mr. McGoldrick warned that some are using mined roads, and many have already been previously displaced or lost livelihoods in the fighting.

"I call on all parties to the conflict to meet their obligations under the international humanitarian law," he said, urging all parties to ensure the humanitarian organizations have "rapid, safe and unimpeded access to reach the people in need in the town of Al Mokha and the wider affected region."

In addition to concerns for civilians, the UN aid official expressed concern about recent damage to roads and bridges connecting the port city of Al Hudaydah with other governorates.

Noting that infrastructure is vital for moving humanitarian and commercial supplies, Mr. McGoldrick said he deplored such actions "as they risk further isolating Yemeni communities and aggravate the already alarming food security situation."

UN agencies and partners are mobilizing food, water, shelter and medicines for those in need, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).