

Yemen truce reduces hostilities despite violations: UN Yemen envoy

Wed, 2022-04-06 17:32

RIYADH: Hans Grundberg, the UN envoy to Yemen, said on Wednesday the current truce between warring factions has led to a rare significant reduction of hostilities, despite reports about the mobilization of forces and violations in mainly around Marib.

“We have seen a significant reduction of violence. However, there are reports of some hostile military activities, particularly around Marib, which are of concern,” Grundberg said during a virtual press conference.

“We are currently setting up (a) coordination mechanism with the parties to maintain open channels of communication and help them prevent, de-escalate and manage incidents in support of their commitment to halt all offensive military operations and freeze their positions.”

The official said the UN is not monitoring the truce on the ground and has left the implementation to parties concerned, expressing hope that the truce would pave the way for achieving a comprehensive settlement to end the war in Yemen.

“We need to make the best possible use of the window this truce gives us to work toward ending the conflict. These two months will be a test of the parties’ commitment to reaching a peaceful resolution of the conflict that prioritizes the needs of the Yemeni people.”

The two-month-long ceasefire that took effect on April 2 was meant to stop hostilities across the country, opening Sanaa International Airport, allowing fuel ships into the port at Hodeidah and opening roads in Taiz and many other provinces.

Meanwhile, Yemen’s human rights groups and officials have demanded that international mediators order the Iran-backed Houthis to hand over maps that show the locations of hundreds of landmines across the country.

“The Houthis should be forced into submitting those maps, and the government and other organizations should help the country get rid of this plague,” Saleem Allawo, a lawyer and activist from Yemen’s National Organization for Defending Rights and Freedoms told Arab News on Wednesday.

Even before capturing Sanaa in late 2014, the Houthis planted hundreds of thousands of landmines across the country to block military advances by their opponents.

The landmines have killed and wounded thousands of people, ruined villages and farms, destroyed hundreds of vehicles and barred many displaced people from returning to their houses.

Military officials say the Houthis have randomly and intensively laid the landmines across former battlefields, and locating and defusing them might take years.

Allawo said that if the Houthis do not have maps, their fighters should be ordered to locate the landmines, demanding that demining teams quickly clean land affected to save the lives of displaced people who return to their homes during the truce.

Abdul Baset Al-Qaedi, undersecretary at Yemen's Ministry of Information, told Arab News on Wednesday that the Houthis had planted landmines that look like rocks or other shapes to inflict maximum casualties.

"The biggest problem is that the Houthi militia plants mines indiscriminately and without maps, which doubles the losses," Al-Qaedi said.

A report prepared by several Yemeni organizations released on Tuesday showed that landmines planted by the Houthis have killed 2,818 people, including 534 children and 177 women, and wounded 3,655 more, including 854 children and 255 women since 2014.

The biggest number of civilian deaths from landmines was recorded in Taiz where 549 died, followed by Hodeidah, 479, and Marib, 274.

The Yemeni Landmine Monitor said on Wednesday that at least 363 civilians have been killed by Houthi landmines and unexploded ordnances since January last year.



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[UN envoy to Yemen Hans Grundberg](#)

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Saudi Cabinet welcomes UN efforts in Yemeni truceGCC ambassador to Yemen says decisions at peace talks in hands of Yemenis

[Germany arrests Syrian accused of torturing captives with Daesh](#)

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Wed, 2022-04-06 16:41

BERLIN: German investigators on Wednesday arrested a Syrian man accused of war crimes for allegedly torturing captives while he was with Daesh group in Syria in 2014.

Federal prosecutors said the man, identified only as Raed E. in line with German privacy rules, was arrested in Berlin. He is suspected of membership in a foreign terrorist organization, crimes against humanity, war crimes and bodily harm.

The suspect joined Daesh in summer 2014 and participated in an attack that August on the Shueitat tribe in the Deir Ezzor region of eastern Syria, prosecutors said.

Activists reported death tolls ranging up to 700.

Raed E. is accused of abusing and torturing three captives after that attack. Prosecutors say that he had a man who was looking for a 13-year old brother kidnapped by Daesh arrested and then tortured him at various prisons run by the terrorist group.

The suspect allegedly also ordered the 13-year-old suspended from a ceiling with his hands tied behind his back. And he is accused of twice physically abusing a third captive during months in captivity.

Prosecutors said in a statement that, in addition to working in Daesh prisons, he handled transactions in which the freedom of Shueitat captives was bought and manned two checkpoints for the extremist group.

They didn't say how or when he came to Germany.



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Germany arrests woman accused of joining Daesh in Syria
German prosecutors charge Syrian doctor with murder, torture

[Lebanese elections to see 103 lists compete](#)

Tue, 2022-04-05 20:44

BEIRUT: A total of 103 electoral lists will compete in around 40 days for 128 seats in the Lebanese Parliament.

No one had expected the surprisingly high number, with only 77 lists in the previous elections in 2018.

There are 11 electoral lists in the Tripoli constituency alone, followed by

the capital, Beirut, with 10 competing lists.

While all constituencies had an unprecedented increase in the number of lists, South Lebanon's third constituency has the lowest number, with only three lists.

These parliamentary elections are particularly important since they are the first to be held after the October 2019 protests and the subsequent financial and economic crises.

In addition, this parliament will in turn elect the next Lebanese president for a six-year term to succeed Michel Aoun.

The electoral lists registration deadline ended at midnight on Monday, with an increase of 26 lists from the 2018 elections.

The number of candidates reached 1043, 42 of whom withdrew, and 284 others did not join the electoral lists.

The number of candidates who joined the lists decreased to 718, including 118 women, with a noticeable increase in the percentage of women over the previous elections.

Civil society groups, known as the "new forces," were divided between several lists in all constituencies.

In 2018, there were 77 lists with 597 candidates, 86 of whom were women.

The total number of candidates reached 976, including 113 women, but 379 candidates withdrew or did not join the lists.

Since the Future Movement refrained from participating in the elections, candidates loyal to the movement were distributed among several lists from Akkar to Sidon.

Some submitted their resignations from the movement before submitting their candidacies, while others are new faces running for the first time.

Some MPs of the bloc re-nominated themselves independently in the North and West Bekaa constituencies.

The lists of the Shiite duo Hezbollah and the Amal Movement remained the same as in the previous elections, with minor changes in Nabatiyeh, Bint Jbeil, Zahle and Baalbek-Hermel.

The lists of the Free Patriotic Movement, Aoun's supporters, were slightly altered as some former MPs were excluded from the lists.

Meanwhile, major changes were made in the Lebanese Forces lists in various constituencies from the North to Beirut.

The "new forces" are contesting the elections with unified lists in various constituencies, although the rivalries that prevailed between these forces

had given the impression that they will be unable to reach an understanding on unified lists.

Some of these lists have good chances of winning over the ruling parties' lists in several constituencies, with some serious battles ahead in 10 of the 16.

However, political observers believe that the existence of a large number of opposition lists is not necessarily a good thing, and may reflect the existing differences between these forces that would split votes in favor of the ruling parties, especially since voters loyal to traditional parties all vote for the same parties they have always supported, especially Hezbollah, the Amal Movement.

They also feel that the traditional parties will now focus on securing votes for their strongest candidates in each constituency or finding ways to bring down other candidates.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Interior has to train over 14,000 permanent employees and about 2,000 others in electoral law and on the logistical matters required of them on election day, in addition to securing electricity and the internet at polling and sorting stations, as well as transportation for staff and logistics; all of which have become very expensive.

On Tuesday, the Election Supervisory Authority began monitoring electoral campaigns, electoral advertising and electoral spending.



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Pope Francis to visit crisis-hit Lebanon in June
Cash-strapped Lebanon struggles to turn lights on for polling day

A US-backed initiative tackles the Middle East's food-security challenge

Tue, 2022-04-05 20:12

DUBAI: Millions of people in the Middle East and North Africa were suffering from severe effects of hunger and malnutrition long before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted supply chains and put a squeeze on public spending. Now the war in Ukraine threatens to exacerbate the problem and global food prices are expected to keep rising.

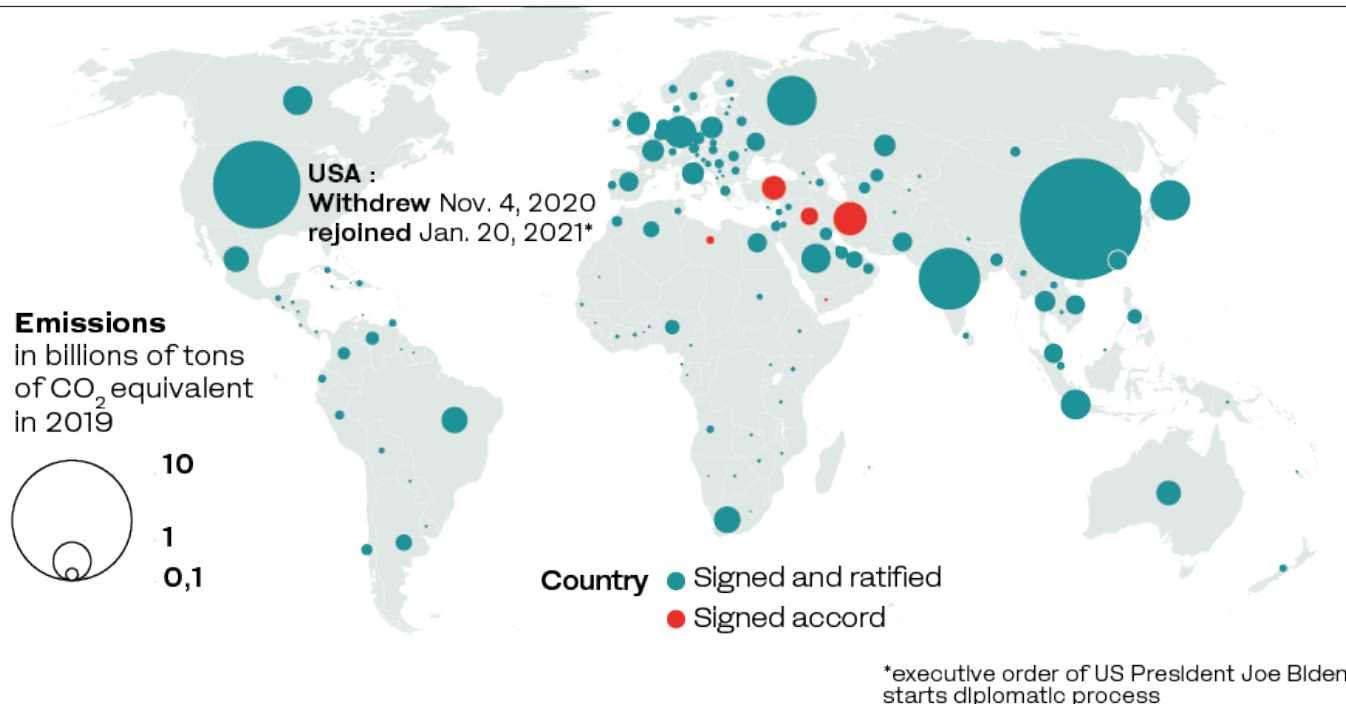
This is happening against the backdrop of an ever-worsening climate emergency, as rising temperatures around the world compound problems such as water shortages, soil degradation, forest fires and rural displacement. This is placing additional strain on agriculture and the food security of some of the world's most vulnerable people.

In an effort to get ahead of this escalating food crisis, and in recognition of the fact it is intrinsically connected to the climate emergency, an ambitious new initiative led by the UAE and the US aims to double investment in climate-smart agriculture over a period of five years – from the \$4 billion announced by US President Joe Biden at the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland, in November to \$8 billion by the time COP27 takes place in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, this year.

The initiative – the Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate, or AIM for Climate – brings together more than 140 global partners from the public, private and non-profit sectors with a view to doubling investment in science-based and data-driven decision and policy making relating to two of the most pressing issues facing the MENA region: food security and climate change.

PARIS CLIMATE ACCORD

Carbon emissions from fossil fuels



Source: UNFCC, Global Carbon Project. Carbon emitted by each nation's territory

ARAB NEWS

Speaking in late February after the inaugural ministerial meeting of AIM for Climate at Expo 2020 Dubai, Mariam Almheiri, the UAE's minister for climate change and environment, said that although food systems are responsible for as much as a third of greenhouse gas emissions, they can also help to solve the problem.

"Food systems can be a challenge but also a solution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions," she said. "Over two billion people are directly connected to the food-system sector, so we need to make food systems more efficient, decarbonize and ensure the livelihoods of the people dependent on the sector."

Noting the dependence of the UAE on imported food – about 90 percent of the country's food needs are met by other countries – Almheiri said partnerships such as AIM for Climate are critical to help arid countries such as those in the MENA region to learn from the experiences of others. Furthermore, the adaptation of food systems will play a central role in the global drive toward sustainable development.

"The transformation to sustainable food systems is an urgent task and we don't have a lot of time," Almheiri said. "The UAE seeks to become a leading exporter of sustainable agricultural solutions for hot and arid climates."



Emirates Bio Farm is making sure people still have access to healthy produce during the coronavirus crisis and supplies the UAE's largest supermarket chains and retailers daily with fresh organic produce. (AFP/File Photo)

Part of this transformation will involve the adoption of emerging technologies, which are already enabling the UAE to produce food that would be impossible under normal climatic conditions, such as salmon, quinoa and berries, all of which can now be sustainably farmed in the UAE.

"We are keen to share our experience with our partners and work with other countries to address critical challenges of our food systems," Almheiri told guests at the Expo 2020 Dubai meeting. "We see ourselves as an open lab to innovate, discover and put forward solutions."

Although it is exciting to hear about such commitments and learn about the applications of new technologies, Almheiri said, food security and climate pressures cannot be addressed without concrete global targets.

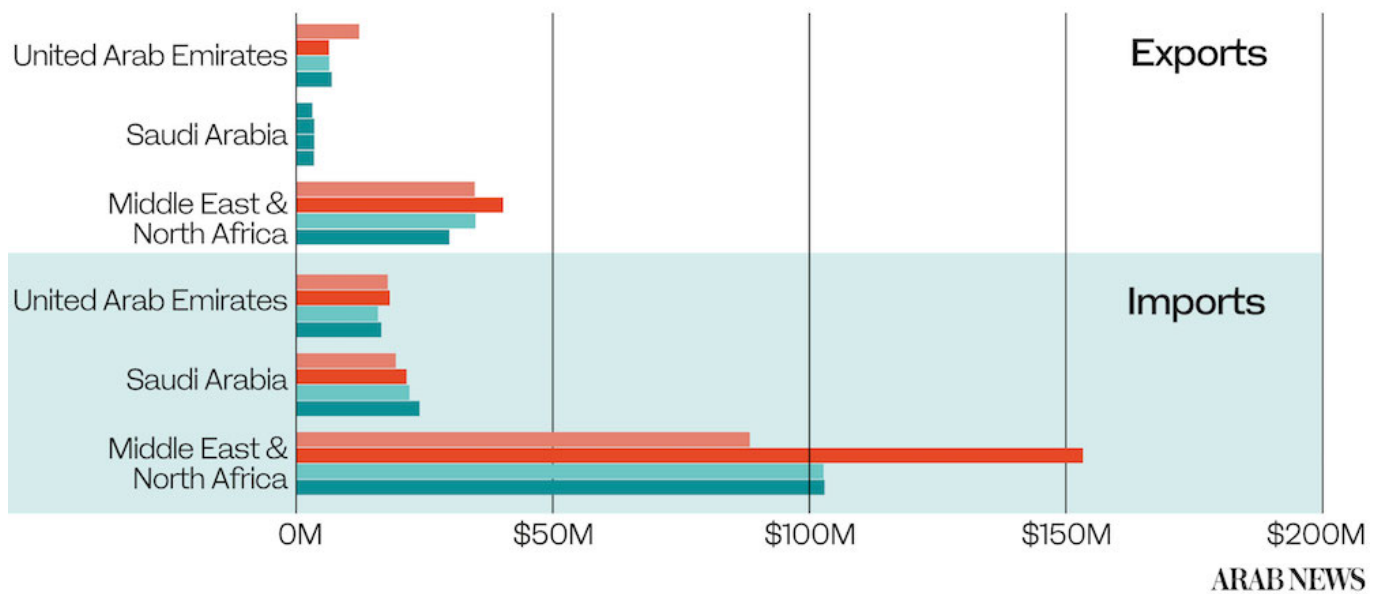
"To move it to the next level, we've put tangible outcomes we want to achieve by COP27, which will move to the UAE as we are hosting COP28. We have to look at the deliverables," she added.

Thomas J. Vilsack, the US agriculture secretary, also spoke at the Expo 2020 Dubai event and lauded the efforts of the UAE to rally nations to a common cause.

MENA FOOD AND AGRICULTURE EXPORTS AND IMPORTS

KSA and UAE are minor players in total exports and imports

■ 2015 ■ 2016 ■ 2017 ■ 2018



“There is an innovative spirit in Dubai that all of us around the world should emulate: A belief in a better and brighter future,” he said.

Securing funding is now critical for the project to succeed, Vilsack said, as he called on governments, the private sector and non-profit organizations to pool their resources to support small farms in developing countries, commit to reducing methane emissions, and promote emerging industries such as nano-technology, artificial intelligence, robotics, sensors and drones.

THE NUMBER

*** 69 million – People in the Near East and North Africa without access to adequate food in 2020, according to FAO.**

“AIM for Climate government partners today demonstrated their strong commitment to work together to close the investment gap in climate-smart agriculture and food systems innovation, (which is) needed to address the twin challenges of global hunger and the climate crisis,” said Vilsack.

“We are proud of the wide range of AIM for Climate partners working to deliver impactful solutions for all people. AIM for Climate seeks to expand its network even further with new participants from across the globe.”



Food-security concerns have heightened since Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, several MENA nations rely on them for food staples. (AFP)

Food-security concerns have heightened since Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24. Both of these countries are major suppliers of wheat and vegetable oils to global markets and several MENA nations rely on them for food staples, including bread.

Financial sanctions imposed on Russia and disruption to shipping have caused prices to rise and are stoking fears of looming shortages. In Yemen and Afghanistan, where hunger is already a fact of life for many, the prospect is terrifying.

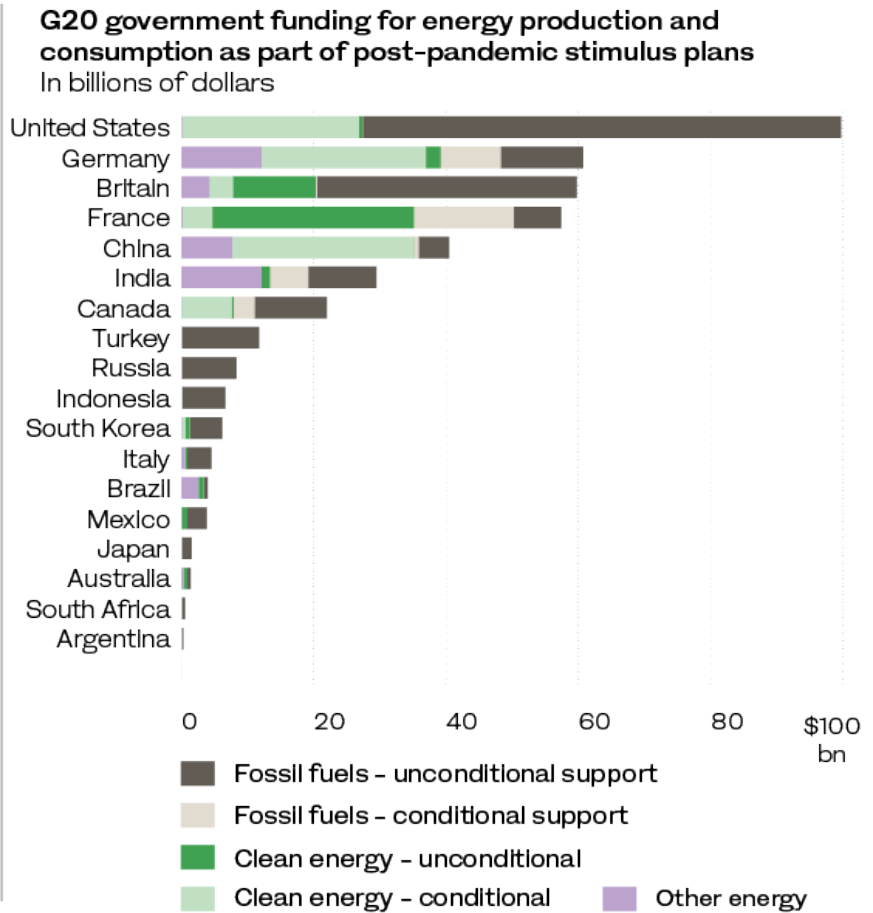
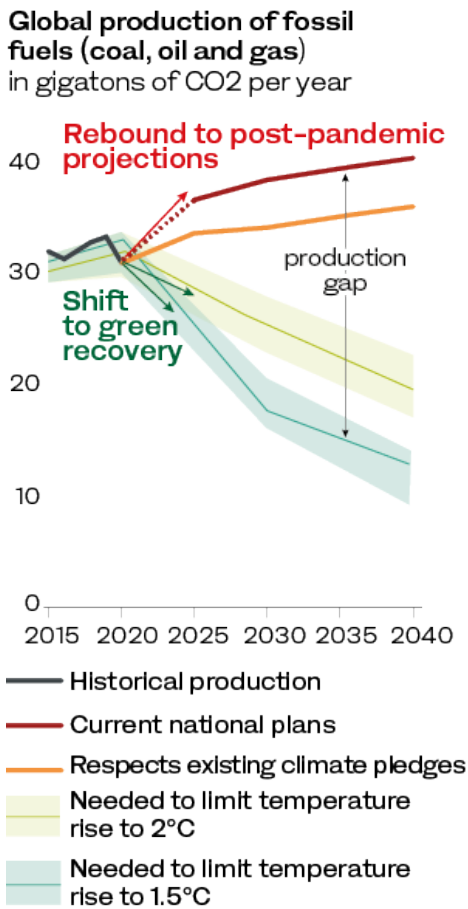
The 2021 Near East and North Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition report, published by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization in December, revealed that 69 million people in the region did not have access to adequate supplies of food in 2020, and 50.2 million people – 11 percent of the population – were undernourished.

“This is an astonishing figure for our region,” Ahmad Mukhtar, a senior economist at the FAO's Regional Office for Near East and North Africa in Cairo, told Arab News.

“There are factors that we know, such as climate change, inequalities and protracted conflicts in our region, but one aspect that should be highlighted is that our region is particularly heavily dependent on imported food.”

FOSSIL FUEL PRODUCTION ON TRACK TO BREAK CLIMATE PLEDGES

World set to produce 120% more fossil fuels by 2030 than is consistent with the aim of limiting warming to 1.5°C



Source: [productiongap.org/2020 report](https://productiongap.org/2020-report) (SEI, IISD, ODI, E3G, UNEP)

ARAB NEWS

About two-thirds of food in the MENA region is imported, which leaves it extremely vulnerable to supply-chain shocks, as the COVID-19 pandemic made painfully clear. Progress toward the UN’s Sustainable Development Goal of achieving “zero hunger” by 2030 was badly affected by the health crisis, with many of the achievements of the past decade pushed into reverse, according to a FAO report published in November.

At least 132 million people in the MENA region were plunged into chronic hunger during the pandemic, with up to 14 percent of food production lost along the supply chain before it even reached consumers.

Areas in which progress has stalled, or gone into reverse, include agricultural systems and small-scale food production, which have borne the brunt of the economic toll of the COVID-19 crisis.

The region is also poorly equipped to manage strategic food reserves. Mukhtar said structured plans are needed for the management and distribution of food and to prevent waste. Much of this will depend on the deployment of new technologies and innovations.

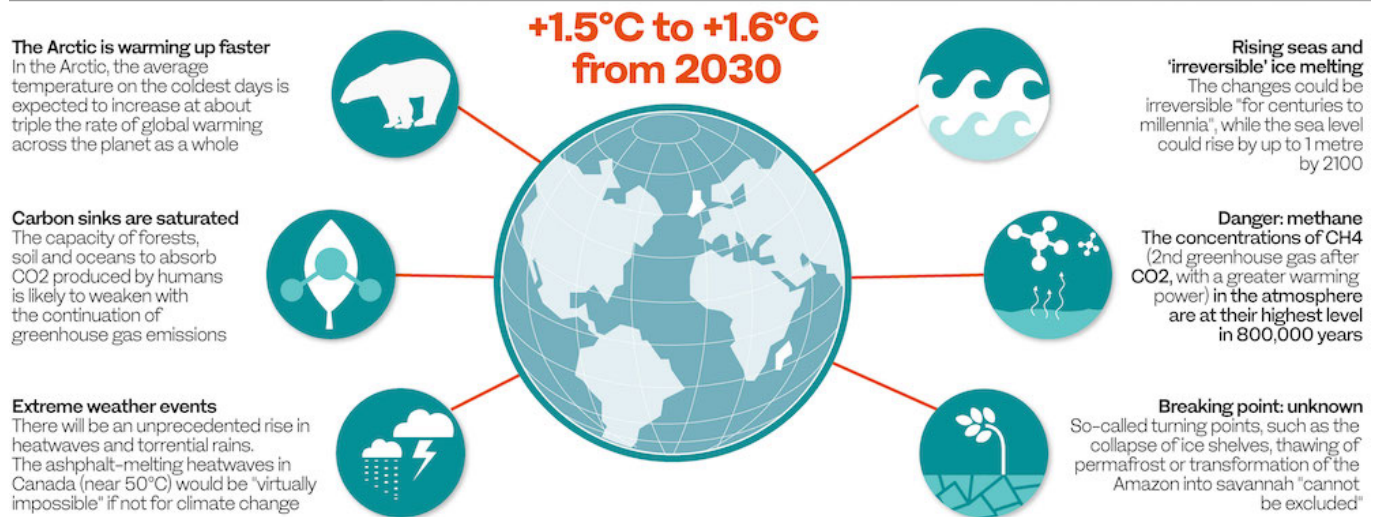
“This is an area that needs focus,” Mukhtar added. “There are certain structural issues, such as inequalities, conflicts and climate change, which

are all external factors that are beyond the agri-food policy domain, so we have to look at what is in our hands.”



CLIMATE: KEY POINTS OF THE UN ASSESSMENT

In all of the scenarios considered, the global temperature should reach +1.5°C or +1.6°C above pre-industrial levels around 2030. That is a decade earlier than projected



Source: IPCC

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How Ukraine war is making the Arab region's food security crisis worse
Global food security faces serious threats, warns Syngenta

Pope Francis to visit crisis-hit Lebanon in June

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1649171014081834500

Tue, 2022-04-05 14:40

BEIRUT: Pope Francis is set to visit Lebanon in June, the country's presidency said on Tuesday, in a long-awaited trip that comes amid spiralling financial and political crises.

Lebanon, home to one of the largest Christian communities in the Middle East, has been gripped by an unprecedented economic downturn since 2019, with more than 80 percent of the population now living in poverty.

The pontiff, who has received Lebanon's president and prime minister in the Vatican in recent months, had previously promised to visit the country and repeatedly expressed concern over its worsening crises.

"Apostolic Envoy Joseph Spiteri informed President Michel Aoun that Pope Francis will visit Lebanon next June," a presidency statement said.

"The Lebanese people have been waiting for this visit for some time to express gratitude to his holiness for his support," the statement said, adding the exact date and agenda for the visit would be set later.

Lebanese took to social media to celebrate the announcement.

"A welcome to the pope of peace in the holy land," said one user.

Lebanon, a multi-confessional country of some six million people, is home to a Muslim majority but Christians account for around a third of the population.

Pope Francis' planned visit, coming after Lebanese parliamentary elections scheduled for May 15, would be the third by an incumbent pope to the country since the end of its 1975-1990 civil war.

The last trip in 2012 saw Pope Benedict XVI visit to appeal for peace, months after the start of the civil war in neighboring Syria.

Pope John Paul II visited in 1997, drawing one of the largest crowds Lebanon had ever seen.

"Lebanon is more than a country – it is a message," he said at the time. One social media user drew a parallel between the 1997 visit and the one expected in two months.

"Just as Pope John Paul II was a hope for Lebanon, Pope Francis too will definitely be a new hope," he wrote on Twitter.

"During elections, out with the old and in with the new," he said, referring to traditional party leaders who have been at the helm of Lebanese politics since the end of the civil war.

Pope Francis met last month with Lebanon's president, who is a Christian as dictated by the country's constitution which also divides seats in government and parliament along sectarian quotas.

In November, he received Lebanon's Muslim Prime Minister Najib Mikati in the

Vatican.

“May God take Lebanon by the hand and tell it: ‘Get up!’” the Vatican quoted Francis as saying during the meeting.

During a visit to Cyprus in December, Pope Francis met with the head of Lebanon’s Maronite Church and expressed concern over the country’s crises. He also received the heads of Lebanon’s top churches in July.

In August, he called on the international community to offer support to Lebanon, one year after an explosion in Beirut port killed more than 200 people and destroyed swathes of the capital.

Since 2019, the Lebanese currency, the pound, has lost more than 90 percent of its value against the US dollar on the black market.

The bankrupt Lebanese state has struggled to afford basic imports of fuel, food and medicine.

With no exit in sight from the country’s crisis, Lebanon’s population has fled the country en masse in a detrimental brain drain.



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[Lebanese President Michel Aoun](#)

Lebanese president extends invitation to Pope FrancisPope Francis calls for end to ‘armed aggression’ as Ukrainian refugees rise to 2.5 million