

Hunger persists in chronic conflict zones despite strong global harvests – UN

2 March 2017 – Despite robust food supply conditions, droughts are worsening food security across swathes of East Africa, and access to food has been dramatically reduced in areas suffering civil conflicts, a new United Nations report has found.

“This is an unprecedented situation. Never before have we been faced with four threats of famine in multiple countries simultaneously,” Kostas Stamoulis, the Assistant Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), said in a news release issued today, noting that famine has been formally declared in South Sudan, and the food security situation is of grave concern in northern Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen.

According to the new edition of FAO’s Crop Prospects and Food Situation report, some 37 countries require external assistance for food, 28 of them in Africa as a result of lingering effects of last year’s El Niño-triggered droughts on harvests in 2016.

In South Sudan, 100,000 people were facing famine in Leer and Mayendit Counties, part of former Unity state. Overall, about 4.9 million people across the country were classified as facing crisis, emergency or famine.

In Yemen, 17 million people, or two-thirds of the population, are estimated to be food insecure. The report notes that “the risk of famine declaration in the country is very high.”

In northern Nigeria, 8.1 million people are facing acute food insecurity conditions, and in Somalia, an estimated 2.9 million people have been severely food insecure from six months ago.

Conflicts and civil unrest in Afghanistan, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Myanmar and Syria are also exacerbating food insecurity conditions for millions of people as well as affecting nearby countries hosting refugees.

Global food supply conditions robust

The report says, however, global food supply conditions are robust.



Various types of rice at a market in Hissar, Tajikistan. Photo: FAO/Nozim Kalandarov

Cereal production made quite strong gains in the world overall in 2016, with

a record recovery in Central America, and larger cereal crops in Asia, Europe and North America.

Prospects are favourable for the 2017 maize crop in Brazil and Argentina and the outlook is generally positive for coarse grains throughout the Southern Hemisphere. Prospects for rice are mixed, but it is still too early to make firm predictions for many of the world's major crops.

Maize harvests in Southern Africa, slashed by El Niño, are forecast to recover this year, with South Africa's output expected to increase by more than 50 per cent from 2016.

Although FAO's first global wheat production forecast for 2017 points to a 1.8 per cent decline from last year's record level, that is due mostly to a projected 20 per cent output drop in the United States.

[UN-backed narcotics control body calls for more policies to address drug dependence among women](#)

2 March 2017 – Citing a significant rise over the past year in the number of women dying from drug overdoses globally, the independent expert body which monitors Governments' compliance with the United Nations international drug control treaties is today calling for the implementation of gender-sensitive drug policies and programmes.

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) said that women and girls comprise one-third of global drug users yet are only one-fifth of those receiving treatment, as significant systemic, structural, social, cultural and personal barriers affect women's ability to access substance abuse treatment..

Further, they are also more likely to be prescribed narcotics and anti-anxiety medication than men, and are thus more likely to abuse these medications.

For example, Germany and Serbia have reported that fatal overdoses from prescription drugs are more frequent among women. Additionally, countries such as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have seen larger increases in overdoses, of all substances, among women than among men.

These are among the key findings in the 2016 Annual Report launched today by the INCB. It stresses that Governments should prioritize providing health care for drug-dependent women, in addition to more funding and coordination to prevent and treat drug abuse among women.

“We want to change perceptions and remind people, particularly policymakers, of the importance of protecting the rights of women who use drugs or who have committed drug-related offences and the rights of their families,” said the organization’s President, Werner Sipp, in a news release.

The report also highlights the importance of targeting prevention programmes to specific populations, such as prisoners, pregnant women, people living with HIV/AIDS, and sex workers.

It notes that women prisoners and sex workers are at “particular risk” of drug use.

Countries are also encouraged to seek alternatives to imprisonment for drug-related offences, such as treatment, rehabilitation and social integration.

The INCB also repeated its longstanding call for countries to abolish the death penalty for drug-related offences.

Among its other observations, the Board noted with “great concern” recent reports in some countries of the targeting of individuals suspected of involvement in drug-related activity, including drug use, who have been subjected to violent acts of reprisal and murder at the hands of law enforcement personnel and members of the civilian population.

In some instances, those acts have been committed with the expressed or tacit approval, or even encouragement, of political forces and, in many cases, have gone unpunished, said the Board, emphasizing that it condemned such practices, including the extrajudicial targeting of persons suspected of drug use, “in the strongest possible terms,” and denounced them as a “serious violation of human rights [...] and an affront to the most basic standards of human dignity.”

Perpetrators of terrorist attacks in Kabul must be brought to justice, stresses UN Security Council

2 March 2017 – Strongly condemning yesterday’s terrorist attacks in the Afghan capital, Kabul, the United Nations Security Council underscored the need to bring the perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of such “reprehensible” acts to justice.

At least 15 people were killed and dozens more injured in attacks in two areas of the capital. The Taliban has claimed responsibility for the incidents.

In a statement issued late yesterday, the 15-member Security Council stressed that terrorism in all its forms is criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of its motivation and wherever, whenever and by whomsoever it is committed.

[It] should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group, the Security Council highlighted.

Also in the statement, Council members voiced serious concern over threats posed by the Taliban, Al-Qaida, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) and other illegal and armed groups to the local population, National Defense and Security Forces and the international presence in the country.

No violent or terrorist acts can reverse the Afghan-led process along the path towards peace, democracy and stability in Afghanistan, which is supported by the people and the Government of Afghanistan, and by the international community, the Council added.

It also stressed the need for all UN Member States to combat by all means, in accordance with the UN Charter and other obligations under international law, threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts.

Further in the statement, the members of the Council expressed their deep sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims, as well as to the people and Government of Afghanistan. They also wished a speedy recovery to those injured.

[Financial speculation led to unsustainable global housing crisis, UN expert says](#)

2 March 2017 – The world's money markets have priced people out of cities, a United Nations independent expert has said, blaming financial markets and speculators for treating housing as a place to park capital.

Housing has lost its social function and is seen instead as a vehicle for wealth and asset growth. It has become a financial commodity, robbed of its connection to community, dignity and the idea of home, said Leilani Farha, the Special Rapporteur on the right to housing.

Her latest report, which Ms. Farha presented today to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, examines how housing has become a repository for global capital, and the impact that commodification has had on affordability of housing and homelessness.

The total value of the global housing market is a staggering \$163 trillion, the UN expert said, the equivalent of more than twice the world's total economy.

“The financial world has essentially operated without any consideration of housing as a human right and States are complicit: they have supported financial markets in a way that has made housing unaffordable for most residents,” Ms. Farha said.

Her report recommends stronger rights-based frameworks both domestically and internationally to address the problem. It suggests that States must regulate private actors not simply to prevent blatant violations of human rights but also to ensure that their actions are consistent with the obligation to realize housing as a human right for all.

In London, for instance, developers have not been scared off by the social housing requirement, Ms. Farha said in her statement, while in Vancouver, vacant homes face a one per cent tax levy which is intended to contribute to low-income accommodation.

“This is an issue of accountability,” she says. “Government accountability to international human rights obligations has been replaced with accountability to markets and investors.”

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

[UN envoy condemns firing of rocket from Gaza towards Israel](#)

2 March 2017 – Condemning a rocket fired from Gaza towards Israel, a senior United Nations envoy has called on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and avoid escalation of the situation.

“Such provocations seek only to undermine peace,” said Nickolay Mladenov, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process in a statement today.

According to the statement, the rocket fired yesterday was third such incident in the past 30 days after a period of almost four months of quiet.

“I call on all responsible parties to exercise maximum restraint, avoid escalation and prevent incidents that jeopardize the lives of Palestinians and Israelis,” urged Mr. Mladenov.