

Drought drives food price spike in East Africa, UN warns

14 February 2017 – East Africa's ongoing drought has sharply curbed harvests and drive up the prices of cereals and other staple foods to unusually high levels, posing a heavy burden to households and special risks for pastoralists in the region, the United Nations agricultural agency said today.

"Sharply increasing prices are severely constraining food access for large numbers of households with alarming consequences in terms of food insecurity," said Mario Zappacosta, a senior economist for the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in a news release.

Local prices of maize, sorghum and other cereals are near or at record levels in swathes of Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda and Tanzania, according to the latest Food Price Monitoring and Analysis Bulletin (FPMA).

Poor livestock body conditions due to pasture and water shortages and forcible culls mean animals command lower prices, leaving pastoralists with even less income to purchase basic foodstuffs.

Somalia's maize and sorghum harvests are estimated to be 75 per cent down from their usual level. In Tanzania, maize prices in Arusha, Tanzania, have almost doubled since early 2016.

In South Sudan, food prices are now two to four times above their levels of a year earlier, while in Kenya, maize prices are up by around 30 per cent.

Beans now cost 40 per cent more in Kenya than a year earlier, while in Uganda, the prices of beans and cassava flour are both about 25 per cent higher than a year ago in the capital city, Kampala.

Drought-affected pastoral areas in the region face even harsher conditions. In Somalia, goat prices are up to 60 per cent lower than a year ago, while in pastoralist areas of Kenya the prices of goats declined by up to 30 per cent over the last 12 months.

Shortages of pasture and water caused livestock deaths and reduced body mass, prompting herders to sell animals while they can, as is also occurring in drought-wracked southern Ethiopia. This also pushes up the prices of milk, which is, for instance, up 40 per cent on the year in Somalia's Gedo region.

Reported killing of more than 100 people by soldiers in DR Congo could constitute excessive use of force – UN rights arm

14 February 2017 – At least 101 people are reported to have been killed by soldiers in clashes between military forces and members of the Kamuina Nsapu militia in central Democratic Republic of the Congo over the last five days, the United Nations human rights wing has said.

Some 39 individuals among those killed in the violence between 9-13 February were women, caught in the shooting, when Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) soldiers opened fire indiscriminately with machine guns when they saw militia fighters, Liz Throssell, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), told the media at the bi-weekly news briefing at the UN Office at Geneva (UNOG), citing information received from several sources.

The militia members were reportedly armed mainly with machetes and spears.

“We are deeply concerned at the reported high number of deaths, which if confirmed would suggest excessive and disproportionate use of force by the soldiers,” said Ms. Throssell, noting that the UN Joint Human Rights Office is seeking to verify the exact number of victims.

Calling on the FARDC soldiers to abide by standards under national law and international human rights law in their responses and urged the military commanders to reinforce this message with their troops, she added:

“In particular to exercise restraint and to use force only when necessary and proportionate to the threat, to minimize damage and injury and to respect and preserve human lives.”

According to OHCHR, this latest violence “said to have occurred in and around the town of Tshimbulu in DR Congo’s Kasai Central Province” follows “atrocities” committed by both sides it has documented since August last year, when a customary chief (after whom the Kamuina Nsapu militia is named) was killed by the armed forces.

Calling on the authorities for a full and independent investigation into the latest violence, the UN human rights office offered its support to investigations into other allegations of serious human rights violations and abuses committed in the context of the ongoing conflict in Kasai Central Province by the FARDC and the militia.

“Given the ongoing violence, we also reiterate our call for increased efforts to find durable solutions to conflicts with customary chiefs in Kasai

Central Province,” said Ms. Throssell.

[Nine countries join UN-supported network to halve maternal, newborn deaths in clinics](#)

14 February 2017 – A health network is being created, with support of United Nations agencies, in nine countries – Bangladesh, Cote d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda – whose Governments have pledged to halve maternal and newborn deaths in health facilities by 2022.

The new Network for Improving Quality of Care for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, will help countries to improve the quality of care mothers and babies receive in their health facilities and respect the patients’ rights, according to a press release.

“Every mother and infant deserves to receive the highest quality of care when they access health facilities in their communities,” said Dr. Anthony Costello, director of the Department of Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health at the UN World Health Organization (WHO).

With support from the WHO, UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and partners, the Quality of Care Network will use a web-based system to build a community of health practitioners, which will develop a strategy to improve quality of care, brainstorm ideas and collect information and experiences.

The Network will also use the UN agency’s eight new *Standards for improving quality of maternal and newborn care in health facilities* to improve the provision and quality of health care. These include, for example, having competent and motivated health professionals, maintaining access to clean water and equipment, and ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of patients.

“Births in health facilities have increased in the past decade,” said Dr. Costello. “Attention is now shifting from access to care to improving the quality of care so that countries can achieve the Sustainable Development Goals targets to end preventable maternal, newborn and child deaths by 2030.”

Each year, some 303,000 women around the world die during pregnancy and childbirth, and some 2.7 million babies die during the first month.

[With humanitarian catastrophe looming, civilians in Syria's 'Four Towns' need support now – UN relief official](#)

13 February 2017 – A senior United Nations relief official has today called on all parties to come to an agreement and allow immediate and unfettered humanitarian access to more than 60,000 civilians trapped in four Syrian towns of Al-Zabadani, Al-Fu'ah, Kafraya and Madaya.

These four locations were referred to specifically in the so-called 'Four Towns' Agreement to facilitate humanitarian access to the people in need. However, these places have remained inaccessible for humanitarian workers since November last year.

"The unfair and totally unjustified besiegement is compounded by the tit-for-tat arrangement between the Four Towns, which makes humanitarian access prone to painstaking negotiations that are not based on humanitarian principles," Ali Al-Za'tari, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria, said in a news release.

Mr. Al-Za'tari stressed that the situation is a looming humanitarian catastrophe and called on all those directly involved forces and all parties which have influence on them to convince them to allow urgent humanitarian assistance, including medical evacuations, to take place without delay.

"This has prevented medical cases from receiving proper treatment and evacuation. People are in need, and they cannot wait any longer. We need to act now," he underlined.

Recalling that the principle of free access to people in need must be implemented the news release noted that civilians trapped in the four towns continue to suffer a cycle of daily violence and deprivation, where malnutrition and lack of proper medical care prevail.

The moral and ethical accountability befalls all those who hinder this access, the release read, adding that the UN and humanitarian partners stand ready to provide humanitarian assistance to the Four Towns as soon as negotiations with the parties to the conflict come to conclusion.

UN Security Council urges joint measures to protect 'critical infrastructure' from terrorist attacks

13 February 2017 – Given the importance of critical infrastructure for a country's prosperity and security and against the backdrop of increasingly diverse physical and cyber threats from terrorist groups, the United Nations Security Council today underlined the need for international collaboration – both domestically and across borders – to ensure their protection.

In a resolution adopted unanimously today, the 15-member Council reiterated “the need to strengthen efforts to improve security and protection of particularly vulnerable targets, such as infrastructure and public places.”

Attacks against objects and sectors such as banking and finance, telecommunications, emergency services, air, maritime and rail transportation, and energy and water supply – perceived as ‘attractive targets’ for terrorist groups – can result not only in civilian casualties, but also damage property on a large scale, disrupt proper functioning of public services, and create chaos in societies.

Such attacks may also cause widespread environmental damage, as well as significantly undermine national defence capabilities.

Further in the resolution, the Security Council – the UN body with the responsibility for maintenance of international peace and security – also underscored the importance of partnerships at all levels and with public and private stakeholders.

It called upon UN Member States “to share information [...] to prevent, protect, mitigate, investigate, respond to and recover from damage from terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure facilities, including through joint training, and use or establishment of relevant communication or emergency warning networks.”

The resolution was adopted at an open Security Council debate on vulnerabilities, interdependencies and capabilities and the cascading impacts of terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure, as well as measures to prevent them.

VIDEO: UN flags three key areas to enhance protection of critical infrastructure against terrorist attacks. Credit: UN News

International community needs to unite – UN chief Guterres' Chef de Cabinet

Noting that international counter-terrorism cooperation – especially in the area of critical infrastructure – has been limited, Maria Luiza Viotti, Chef

de Cabinet of the Secretary-General António Guterres, called on all international community to unite in a coordinated response and outlined the importance of a coordinated response comprising all actors and stakeholders.

“Strategically, this means that the international community needs to unite and be more creative, proactive and effective, including through the development of strong public-private partnerships,” she said, delivering the UN chief’s message to the forum.

“As our world becomes increasingly interconnected – through travel, commerce, communications and in cyber space, we become more vulnerable to attacks by technologically savvy terrorists seeking new ways to spread fear,” Ms. Viotti added.



The Security Council unanimously adopts resolution 2341 (2017), calling upon Member States to consider developing or further improving their strategies for reducing risks to critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

One attack can have a ripple effect worldwide – INTERPOL chief

Also cautioning that the consequences of an attack in today’s interconnected world could be far reaching, Jürgen Stock, the Secretary-General of the International Criminal Police Organization (ICPO-INTERPOL) said: “One attack on a single point of failure could lead to the disruption or destruction of multiple vital systems in the country directly affected, and a ripple effect worldwide.”

“This creates an appealing target to those intending to harm us. And as our cities and infrastructure evolve, so do their weapons,” he added.

To mitigate such threats, he called for strengthening critical site security and emergency preparedness standards and procedures; protecting national borders and countering terrorist mobility; enhancing vigilance and efforts to interdict materials and tools before they become the “next weapon”; and boosting inter-agency and international collaboration, as a force multiplier.

“In an interconnected world, we will not succeed in protecting national infrastructure in isolation. This is why initiatives [...] and the steps [...] by the international community are essential,” he underlined.

Other speakers speaking at the debate included Hamid Ali Rao, Deputy Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW); Chris Trelawny, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organizations (IMO) on Maritime Security and Facilitation; Olli Heinonen, Senior Advisor on Science and Non-proliferation at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and former Deputy Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).