

Afghanistan: UN-backed \$550 million aid plan aims to reach 5.7 million people

23 January 2017 – A newly-launched United Nations-backed humanitarian response plan for Afghanistan is seeking \$550 million in 2017 to support the most vulnerable and marginalized population of the conflict-torn country.

Strategic, life-saving interventions – related to shelter, food, health care, nutrition, safe water and sanitation – are expected to reach an estimated 5.7 million people under the Afghanistan 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan, released by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

According to the Plan, the continued deepening and geographic spread of the conflict has prompted a 13 per cent increase in the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance to 9.3 million in 2017.

OCHA notes that Afghanistan remains one of the most dangerous, and most violent, crisis-ridden countries in the world. The 8,397 civilian casualties in the first nine months of 2016 marked the highest record since 2009, and included a 15 per cent increase in child casualties from 2015.

The Plan dedicates \$240 million to interventions to assist refugees and returnees.

In 2016, the conflict has led to unprecedented levels of displacement, reaching half a million in November – the highest number recorded to date. On average, every day sees another 1,500 people forced to leave their homes, escaping violence.

Last year also saw the unprecedented return of some 600,000 registered refugees and undocumented Afghans from Pakistan. With no obvious prospects for an improved state of affairs, 2017 is likely to see at least 450,000 new internally displaced persons and potentially as many as a million more Afghan returns from Pakistan and Iran.

Seven million people in Lake Chad basin 'living on the edge' – UN relief

official

23 January 2017 – Spotlighting the desperate plight of millions in Africa's Lake Chad basin, the top United Nations humanitarian official for the Sahel region called today for international solidarity with the people in urgent need.

"I wish I had good news, but I don't," Toby Lanzer, the Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahel, told a news conference at the UN Headquarters, in New York that was largely focused on the crisis affecting Lake Chad basin countries, which include Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria.

"11 million people are in desperate need of humanitarian aid, 7.1 million of them are severely food insecure. [They are] living on the edge – surviving on, if they can, one meal a day," he noted.

Mr. Lanzer added that among them, the situation of children is particularly worrying. Some 515,000 children are severely and acutely malnourished and their lives are at risk if aid does not reach them urgently.

"No government on Earth can do what it takes to confront [these numbers] of severe food insecurity," he stressed. "This is a clear case where international solidarity with the governments of the region is needed."

He also noted the peaceful resolution of the political standoff in the Gambia prevented "yet another crisis" in the region, which already has at least 2.5 million internally displaced persons (IDP). Fearing violence this past weekend, some 52,000 Gambians fled to Senegal and Guinea Bissau, but are now starting to return.



Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahel, Toby Lanzer, briefs journalists on the latest developments in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin region. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

Response to bombing of IDP camp in Rann, Nigeria

Turning to the tragic bombing of a camp for IDPs in Nigeria's Rann, Mr. Lanzer hailed the efforts of the first responders – relatives of those in the camp, as well as nearby villagers – who rushed in to help the victims.

We sprang into action, in exactly the way we are meant to do

The UN and humanitarian family too stepped in from the onset of the disaster, helping the first responders as well as helping transfer those severely injured to medical facilities.

The UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) also flew in medical supplies and

teams on the day of the incident and in subsequent days.

“We sprang into action, in exactly the way we are meant to do,” said the UN relief official. “It was a tremendous effort from the local and community aid workers, as well as by international humanitarians.”

Improving security reveals depth of humanitarian suffering

Responding a question, Mr. Lanzer explained the scale of humanitarian suffering in the region has become increasingly evident with improving security situation as a result of the military campaign against Boko Haram. This has allowed humanitarian actors to reach many places which were impossible to get to earlier due to insecurity.

Speaking on the situation on the ground at that time, he said: “[We saw] towns and villages that were totally destroyed. [Places] that were completely cut off for over three years [and places] devoid of two-, three- and four-year olds because they have died.”

Upcoming conference in Oslo

Mr. Lanzer also informed the media about an upcoming conference for the region, to be held in the Norwegian capital, Oslo, on 24 February, to draw attention to the tragic situation there.

He further noted that the humanitarian appeal for the region for 2016 was only 52 per cent funded.

“When you are funded to this extent, a lot of lives are lost,” he said, “We hope that with the leadership of Norway, Germany, Nigeria and the support of the UN, we can convince many Member States to go to Oslo and make statements of political support and also, we hope, material support, that will allow the agencies to do their work to save lives, as well as give people a hand up.”

[News story: Views sought ahead of review into residential special education](#)

A [call for evidence](#) has today (23 January 2017) been launched to seek views on the educational experiences and outcomes for some of the country’s most vulnerable children.

Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families Edward Timpson has asked Dame Christine Lenahan to conduct an independent review looking at the outcomes and experiences of children and young people attending residential special

schools and colleges.

The review is designed to find practical outcomes for the government and other agencies who work with this group of young people, who often have the most complex needs and require more intensive support.

It will look at the characteristics of this group, how and why they are placed in residential special schools and colleges, the support that's available to them during and after their placement and the ways in which families say their experience of these settings could be improved.

To ensure that the review is informed by a wide range of views and evidence from the sector, Dame Christine has launched a call for evidence and is asking for contributions from people working in residential settings, students attending these residential schools and colleges, their parents or carers, and children, young people and adults who have now left these settings. Councils, academics and other sector groups are also encouraged to take part.

Director of the Council for Disabled Children since 2003, Dame Christine will be supported in the review by Mark Geraghty, chief executive of the Seashell Trust, which runs an outstanding residential special school and college for children and young people with complex needs.

A Department for Education spokesperson said:

Every child, no matter the obstacles they face, should have the same opportunities for success as any other. This independent review will look at how the experiences of children and young people attending residential special schools and college can be improved, to ensure the right support is in place.

We are grateful to Dame Christine Lenehan and to Mark Geraghty for conducting this review. Together they bring a wealth of experience from across the education and social care spectrum.

The [call for evidence](#) runs until March 17. The review will report back to the government later this year.

[Single market exit heralds disaster for family farms, warns Green MEP](#)



23 January 2017

The Green MEP for the South West, Molly Scott Cato, has warned that family farms could disappear from our countryside if the UK leaves the Single Market. Dr Scott Cato, who sits on the Agricultural Committee in the European Parliament, believes that in the absence of a new trade deal with Europe outside the Single Market, the UK would revert to WTO trade rules which could prove disastrous for farmers.

Under WTO trading rules, tariffs would be imposed on around 90% by value of the UK's exports to the EU [1]; the EU accounts for around 65% of total agricultural exports from the UK, while around 70% of the UK's imports originate from other EU countries [2]. Tariffs on both exports and imports would make UK farmers less competitive and increase both food prices for consumers and supply chain costs for food producers. Molly Scott Cato said:

"The decision by Theresa May to opt for a hard Brexit will strike our family farmers and small scale food producers particularly hard. They are the cornerstone of agriculture across many parts of the UK, so any tariff or non-tariff barriers could seriously weaken regional economies and devastate rural communities.

"The government has no plan on replacing the agricultural support and direct payments farmers receive through the Common Agriculture Policy; it wants to end free movement making it impossible to take on seasonal migrant labour from EU countries and exit the single market risking tariffs on exports and imports. This is a triple whammy few family farms could withstand."

Dr Scott Cato argues that Brexit does throw up opportunities for a new approach to farming, but doesn't believe the government have shown any willingness to support such an approach:

"Brexit could be used as an opportunity to move towards a diverse and ecologically sustainable farming system; one which focuses on relocating food production and boosting rural economies [3]. But so far all we have heard from the Defra secretary, Andrea Leadsom, are plans to shred EU legislation, dismissing it as red tape [4]. But many of these measures are aimed at safeguarding our soils, protecting habitats, guaranteeing animal welfare and utilizing farmland for capturing and storing carbon to help in the fight against climate change.

"This government seems hell-bent on pushing large scale industrialised farming post-Brexit, and letting our family farms and small scale producers flounder. Such an approach will leave the 71% of our land currently used as farmland less protected and further damaged; less beneficial to protecting soils, biodiversity and animal welfare and less able to tackle climate change."

Molly Scott Cato will launch a new report in the Spring on farming policy after Brexit which will identify opportunities on how farming can create environmental, social and economic benefits.

Notes

[1] http://www.cbi.org.uk/global-future/case_study06_wto.html

[2] <http://www.nfuonline.com/assets/61142>

[3]

<http://mollymep.org.uk/2016/09/14/green-meps-agricultural-support-post-brexite/>

[4]

<http://mollymep.org.uk/2017/01/04/defra-secretary-is-environmentally-irresponsible/>

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[News story: Liam Fox welcomes industrial strategy commitment to UK trade](#)

Following the launch of the industrial strategy green paper today – International Trade Secretary, Dr Liam Fox, visited a leading advanced technology business in Oxfordshire to reiterate the government's commitment to supporting UK business to grow at home and abroad.

On the visit to Prodrive in Banbury – a successful independent British engineering innovation business – the International Trade Secretary outlined the steps government is taking to support trade and investment across the country which can have a crucial impact on the growth of local economies.

The industrial strategy green paper sets out a plan to improve living standards and economic growth by increasing productivity and driving growth across the whole country. To achieve that goal, the green paper sets out ten strategic pillars to underpin a new government approach.

Encouraging trade and inward investment policy is one pillar and is key to opening up markets for UK firms, boosting productivity and growth across our economy, including by increasing competition and helping to bring new ways of doing things to the UK.

The Secretary of State for International Trade, Dr Liam Fox, said:

Trade and investment is a vital part of building an economy that

works for all, creating jobs and transforming local communities and industry.

Across the UK we're pioneering a whole host of new technologies, working with industry and universities to ensure Britain remains the location of choice for many sectors, such as the next-generation automotive industry. Prodrive is a fantastic example of innovative British automotive engineering at its best and a great illustration of our how we can and should be exporting our world-class expertise to benefit our economy.

The UK is open and ready for business and the launch of the Industrial Strategy today shows our commitment to improving growth and productivity across the whole country.

The Department for International Trade is leading government work to continue to champion free trade and ensure it helps deliver an economy that works for everyone.

The strategy lists how the department will:

- build future trade relationships – The UK remains committed to pursuing free trade. That includes seeking to achieve continuity in our trade and investment relationships with third countries thereby minimising disruption for business as we leave the EU
- build global prosperity
- improve market access for exporters
- create a more active approach to winning overseas contracts
- increase defence exports
- double export finance capacity
- make government trade services easier to use for firms – the department has recently launched a [ground breaking new digital platform](#) to provide digital services to help exporters and investors;
- join up trade and inward investment promotion with local areas
- strengthen the value from trade shows and
- develop a new, more strategic approach to inward investment

Following the decision to leave the European Union, the UK has the opportunity to develop its new trading arrangements and take forward its ambition to become a global trading nation and champion of free trade.

On the visit to Prodrive the Secretary of State had a tour of the factory and saw first-hand how the company makes bespoke parts for race and rally cars using traditional metalworking techniques and the advanced technology workshop where the company develops innovative projects for some of the company's biggest clients such as Jaguar Land Rover, Volvo and McLaren.

Further information

The [Automotive Investment Organisation](#) which now sits within DIT, has since it was set up by the Automotive Council in 2013, helped create or safeguard

over 20,000 jobs in the UK automotive supply chain, and by attracting inward investment helped increase local content in UK-built cars from 36% to 41%.

Car-making in the UK is thriving – with more cars built last year than any year since 1999.