

In Chad and Cameroon, Security Council hears of Boko Haram terror and survivors' needs

4 March 2017 – The United Nations Security Council is today in Chad, as part of a four-country visit to shine a spotlight on the ongoing humanitarian challenges in the Lake Chad Basin region and draw international attention to the plight of about 11 million people.

In the Chadian capital of N'Djamena, the Council met with Prime Minister Albert Pahimi Padacké and visited the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which includes troops from the four affected regional countries – Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, plus Benin in the fight against Boko Haram.

The Security Council welcomed the efforts to fight Boko Haram and encouraged more regional cooperation, according to a Tweet by the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom to the UN which has the Security Council's rotating presidency for the month of March and is leading the visit.

Discussions with the Prime Minister also focused on the economic situation in Chad and the importance of women participating in the economy and politics.

Also today, the Council members met with representatives of the UN agencies, funds and programmes and non-governmental organizations working in the country.

They are working to aid the millions of people who, in addition to the security threat from Boko Haram and the fight against the terror group, also face a major food and nutrition crises. Some 2.4 million people are currently displaced in the area, according to UN figures, and more than 7.1 million are severely hungry.

In his conversations with the Council, Stephen Tool, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Coordinator in Chad, detailed the severe challenges in the countries, which include malnutrition, disease and health, sanitation. He noted, however, that you cannot deal with humanitarian issues without looking at the root causes which include insecurity, development gaps, lack of education, poor agriculture, and so on.

'That's who we're fighting for'

The Security Council delegation, led by Ambassador Matthew Rycroft of the United Kingdom, had yesterday visited Cameroon, where members met with President Paul Biya and other senior Government officials.

The Council also met with refugees and people displaced by Boko Haram and the

forces tracking them.

In a blog post, Mr. Rycroft detailed meeting two young survivors of Boko Haram's violence. The first, a boy who was 13 years old when the terrorist group stormed his village and killed his friends and family. The other boy was about 10 years when he was kidnapped, escaped, and has since 2014 lived in a camp for internally displaced persons.

"They are heroic beyond measures," Mr. Rycroft said. "That's who we're fighting for."

Speaking earlier in the day, Mr. Rycroft outlined his vision for the visit.

"First of all, we came here in order to shine a spotlight on the situation in the Lake Chad Basin.

"We came to hear the individual stories of people involved, whether they are refugees or displaced people or other victims of Boko Haram.

"We stand with the government and the people of Cameroon, and the wider region, in tackling the scourge of terrorism, and in encouraging them to look broadly and deeply at the root causes of the set of crises going on here."

The delegation heads to Niger later today, and is scheduled to continue on to Nigeria tomorrow.

[UN aid chief calls for access, funds to prevent spread of South Sudan's famine](#)

4 March 2017 – Hundreds of thousands of people in South Sudan will starve unless relief workers gain access to needy populations and more funding is raised, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator today warned after meeting malnourished children who fled the raging conflict in the country.

Stephen O'Brien, who is also the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, travelled to Ganyiel, Southern Unity state, considered one of the most violent areas in the fight for political control of the country.

Among the people he met was a starving boy whose grandmother carried him through waist-high swamp to get away from the fighting. His parents are apparently missing.

"1000s similar. Horrendous," Mr. O'Brien wrote on social media, posting a number of photos of people who had fled the fighting and sexual violence.

Humanitarian partners, such as the International Red Cross, are setting up clinics directly in the swamps to reach more people, he noted. Some people with nothing to eat survived by chewing on water lilies.

“Millions of people prevented from receiving aid by parties to conflict. Immoral, unlawful and unacceptable. We need access now,” Mr. O’Brien has said.

He is in South Sudan to see first-hand the critical humanitarian situation and the response which his agency, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), is assisting.

RELATED: Famine declared in region of South Sudan – UN

The UN declared a famine in parts of South Sudan on 20 February, increasingly blaming the lack of food and the collapsing economy on the rival forces of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) loyal to President Salva Kiir and the SPLA in Opposition backing Riek Machar.

A formal declaration of famine means that people have already started dying of hunger.

About 100,000 people are facing starvation, and an additional one million are on the brink of a famine, according to the UN. The total number of food insecure people is expected to rise to 5.5 million at the height of the lean season in July if nothing is done to curb the severity and spread of the food crisis.

The situation is worsened for the 3.4 million Sudanese, some of whom Mr. O’Brien met today, who have been displaced and separated from their families.

Humanitarian organizations have appealed for \$1.6 billion to provide life-saving assistance and protection to some 5.8 million people across South Sudan in 2017.

Mr. O’Brien came to South Sudan from Kenya and previously, from Yemen. He is next scheduled to visit Somalia.

Quality support key for people with disabilities to fully participate in their communities – UN rights expert

3 March 2017 – Access to good and safe support is of great importance for people with disabilities, as it helps them become independent and gain human rights, a United Nations independent expert said today, urging Member States

to take legal, policy and financial actions to ensure their adequate support.

“Guaranteeing their access to support is not only a human rights obligation, but also a prerequisite to ensure that no one is left behind in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda,” Catalina Devandas Aguilar, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, said today while presenting her report to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council.

However, she stressed, in practice, people with disabilities have limited or no access to the support they need.

“Many have been segregated and disempowered in traditional care services, explained Ms. Devandas, adding that “for them, the very notion of ‘care’ bears a heavy historical connotation associated with oppression and invalidation.”

Today, people with disabilities still risk having their decisions overridden by the “caregivers,” the human rights expert underscored.

“This must stop,” said Ms. Devandas, while emphasizing that “States must promote support services that allow for the independence, autonomy and direct participation of all and invest resources in this.”

Voicing concern that not enough is being done to make sure persons with disabilities are getting support, as well as the fact that the demand for support is rising, her report offers guidance to Member States on how to best provide human rights-based support services.

She urged government authorities to develop legislation, implement policies and allocate funds to make support services available, accessible, adequate and affordable.

“States should guarantee the full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities in the provision of support,” Ms. Devandas concluded.

Intra-Syrian talks conclude in Geneva with ‘clear agenda’ and plans to resume later this month

3 March 2017 – The United Nations-facilitated intra-Syrian talks are “moving in the right direction,” the UN Special Envoy for Syria said today, wrapping up the latest round of discussions in Geneva with counter-terrorism added to the agenda and plans to resume in late March.

Staffan de Mistura told journalists that participants had engaged in “serious” discussions and said that the sides would be invited to continue discussions later this month.

“It is now clear to everyone and that is beyond dispute that we are here to implement UN Security Council resolution 2254,” Mr. de Mistura said, referring to the Council text approved in 2015 endorsing a road map for peace process in Syria, including specific language on governance, constitution and elections.

“I believe therefore and expect that the sides should now pursue a framework agreement with an agreed political package so a transition can be implemented in line with 2254 – we’re here to talk about that,” he added.

In addition to the issues previously on the agenda, as outlined in resolution 2254 (2015), counter-terrorism has been added at the request of the Government of Syria, according to the envoy.

The major issue of detainees and abductees was also raised by the delegation from the Syrian Government.

In parallel, the talks in Astana – convened by the Governments of Iran, Russia and Turkey – would continue to address issues related to the maintenance of the ceasefire and confidence-building measures.

“We have a clear agenda in front of us,” Mr. de Mistura told reporters, adding: “The train is ready; it is in the station [...] warming up its engine. It just needs an accelerator and the accelerator is in the hands of those in this round.”

[At first ‘playable’ UN conference, tech experts, gamers drive new thinking on global development](#)

3 March 2017 – Hands-free gardening for a greener future, video gamers using their skills to help achieve the United Nations-led Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – these were just a few of the innovative and forward-looking ideas in the spotlight at the world body’s first ever ‘playable’ policy conference, held in the German city of Bonn.

The Global Festival of Ideas for Sustainable Development, a UN conference that aims to chart a new way of thinking on addressing some of the world’s most complex development challenges, wrapped up today, after three days of intense debates and ‘game-playing.’

Among the technology experts, gamers and activists putting their heads together to figure out how to best to help countries implement the UN vision of a more just and equitable world where no one is left behind, was Ryan Hooks, manager of a software company called Huxley, who showed off his 'hands-free gardening' app.

"It's an AI (Artificial Intelligence) and augmented reality for plants. Greenhouses that use hydroponics to circulate the water are very complex systems and it's hard to scale water efficient food solutions. I've found that augmented reality and AI can be really useful for reducing labour cost," he told *UN News*.

To demonstrate the app's capabilities, Mr. Hook pointed his phone at a plant on the table and his app identified it as "apple mint."

"It's augmented reality, it knows what kind of plant it is, what percentage its health is, when to pick it, pack it, ship it and the environment (around it), so people can have hands-free augmented gardening," he explained.

The hands-free gardening app, Mr. Hooks continued, makes it more efficient to use hydroponics, a method of growing plants without soil, which also uses 95 per cent less water to grow plants.

2030 Hive Mind

Participants at the Festival were also engrossed in the 2030 Hive Mind game, where they played for a hypothetical country, planning policies, and convincing other players to join forces with them.

The Festival organizers stress that the game, which focuses on the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, and reveals the tough choices and trade-offs that might have been made along the road to sustainable development for all over the next 15 years.

Tom Juntunen, of the U Begin company, was playing for Goal 9, which focusses on building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.

When Mr. Juntunen is not at his booth in the exhibit, walked around the conference centre trying to convince other players to support his policies.

"There's a lot of negotiations, it's a very robust simulation of real life dynamics with policy negotiation. Everyone has what's important to them and what's not important. In playing the game, you experience the parallel of that in a virtual environment. It is challenging as it is in real life," he said of Hive Mind 2030.

'Communicating the SDGs' and the 2030 Agenda

"We have to make the world aware of this [...] agenda that is definitely going to transform the planet and that is going to ensure that no one is left behind," Cristina Gallach, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, said yesterday.

“The more we communicate about the SDGs and make people aware of the agenda, the more the governments we will be accountable and will ensure that it is implemented,” she added.

The UN Department of Public Information (DPI), headed by Ms. Gallach, is the Organization’s entity tasked with informing the wider world on the SDGs and ensuring that the 17 goals are known and understood.

To that end, 17 ‘icons’ – each with a designated bright colour, short name phrase and single image – have been created to illustrate each Global Goal.

The icons have also been translated in over 50 languages, from Czech to Bahasa Indonesia, and the number is growing.

The Global Festival of Ideas, the first in a series of annual forums, is hosted by the UN SDG Action Campaign in partnership with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) with the support of the German Government.