

UN agency creates tool box of new technologies, good practices to help keep food safe

1 February 2017 – From avian flu to locusts and E. coli bacteria, food is contaminated every day by diseases and pests, leading the United Nations agricultural agency to create a set of emergency prevention tools to save lives and improve food safety and security.

“We believe it’s important for sectors involved in food production, processing and marketing to watch out for current and potential threats and respond to them in a concerted manner,” said the Assistant Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Ren Wang.

The UN agency, in the recently published *Averting risks to the food chain: It’s important for sectors involved in food production, processing and marketing to watch out for current and potential threats and respond to them*, show that preventing, early warning, preparedness, good food chain crisis management and good practices can help to stop the diseases and pests that ravage food chains.

One of the key messages from the report is that an integrated approach which covers all the stages from prevention to timely response is needed to curb food chain crises caused by transboundary animal diseases to plant pests and diseases.

Among the biggest pests that the FAO is focusing on is the desert locust, which affects more than 65 per cent of the world’s poorest countries and is considered the most dangerous of all migratory pest species in the world.

Able to consume its own weight in fresh food per day, a typical 1 km size swarm of locusts or roughly 40 million locusts can eat the same amount as 35,000 people, 20 camels or six elephants.

The FAO is using the eLocust3 system, which records and transmits data from crop pest monitoring in good time, to improve monitoring and prevention of locusts in 19 of the most vulnerable countries.

Meanwhile, in Mali, Uganda and Tanzania, livestock farmers are using the EMA – i app to collect animal disease information from the field on their smartphones. The data is sent in real-time to the Global Animal Disease Information System (EMPRES-i) at FAO, where it is shared at national, regional and global levels, facilitating analysis in a timely manner in order to provide a very rapid response to attack the disease at the very early stage of birth.

Another tool in the FAO report is sharing information through regional veterinary lab networks in Africa and Asia. There are 32 labs in African

countries and 17 in Asian countries. By working more closely together, scientists can trace the outbreak and prevent it from infecting animals in other countries in the region.

Given that a third of global crop production is lost annually due to insects and plant diseases that can spread to multiple countries and through continents, by sharing information, experts can develop standardized protocols and train response workers regionally, as well as have international standards for any tests.

With fewer people active, UN health agency urges people to get moving

1 February 2017 – Not enough exercise contributes to cancer, diabetes, depression and other non-communicable diseases, according to the United Nations health agency, which is urging people to get up and get active.

According to a new document the World Health Organization (WHO), less and less people are active in many countries with nearly a quarter of all adults and more than 80 per cent of adolescents being too sedentary.

WHO's *Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2013-2020* recommends that inactive people start with "small amounts of physical activity" and then gradually increase duration, frequency and intensity over time.

Physical activity can be any activity, not just sport, that uses energy "from playing and doing household chores to gardening and dancing.

"Any activity, be it for work, to walk or cycle to and from places, or as part of leisure time, has a health benefit," according to the UN agency.

Ukraine: UN 'gravely concerned' by deteriorating situation amid flare-up of violence in Donetsk

31 January 2017 – Amid outburst of violence in Ukraine, the United Nations Security Council and the top humanitarian official there expressed grave

concern today about the “dangerous deterioration” of the situation in the country’s eastern region and its severe impact on the local civilian population.

In a press statement, Council members condemned the use of weapons prohibited by the Minsk agreements along the contact line in Donetsk region that lead to deaths and injuries, including among civilians.

The members of the Security Council expressed their full support of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and underlined the need for strict compliance with resolution 2202 (2015), which endorsed the “Package of measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements,” aimed at ending the violence in eastern regions of Ukraine.

“The members of the Security Council called for an immediate return to a ceasefire regime,” the statement concluded.

Earlier in the day, the humanitarian community and the Humanitarian Coordinator in the country also expressed grave concern by the “drastic deterioration” of the security situation in eastern Ukraine and its humanitarian consequences.

In a statement issued by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the UN and its aid partners in the county expressed particular concern about the impact on the civilian population on both sides of the ‘contact line.’”

Casualties continue to be recorded. Sustained targeting of and damages to civilian infrastructure adds to the already difficult conditions. This situation, they said, is exacerbated by the harsh winter, and may have irrevocable consequences. “The Government of Ukraine is doing its utmost to provide support and to coordinate humanitarian efforts.”

The humanitarian community stressed that due to the shelling, the Donetsk Filter Station (DFS) stopped working on yesterday, leaving some 15,000 to 17,000 people in Avdiivka without water, and potentially affecting up to 400,000 people served by the facility.

Moreover, on 30 January the fourth power line to the Avdiivka coke plant was damaged by shelling, leaving it without power, and further impacting on the supply of hot water. Urgent repairs are needed to restart the heating system. With temperatures falling well below -10 degrees Celsius, should the heating system stop working it will freeze and will require weeks to restart.

In Donetsk, city water is being redistributed from Verkhniokalmiuska Filter station, and other cities are surviving by using local water reservoirs designed to provide 24 hours of storage. In villages such as Vasylivka, Spartak, Verkhnotoretske and Kruta Balka water delivery has stopped altogether, and in part of Yasynuvata water is now cut.

“An immediate cessation of hostilities is urgently needed to prevent further loss of lives and to enable repair teams to urgently restore critical basic services to hundreds of thousands of affected civilians living in -10 below

zero temperature,” said Humanitarian Coordinator Neal Walker.

[UN fund allocates \\$6 million to help thousands in violence-hit parts of Central African Republic](#)

31 January 2017 – The top United Nations relief official today approved an allocation from the Organization’s humanitarian emergency response fund to assist the response to new emergencies triggered by a surge of violence in the Central African Republic’s Kaga Bandoro, Bambari and Bria areas.

The top United Nations relief official today approved an allocation from the organization’s Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to support response to assist the response to new emergencies triggered by a surge of violence in the Central African Republic (CAR)’s Kaga Bandoro, Bambari and Bria areas.

The allocation, amounting to \$6 million and allocated by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien today, will enable the UN World Food Programme (WFP) to reach some 36,800 people facing food insecurity due to the crises in the last few months of 2016 that not only led to new displacements but also caused a significant decline in commercial activities in the areas.

“The humanitarian community is deeply concerned that a crisis linked to the scarcity and soaring prices of essential foodstuffs will aggravate a situation that is already extremely worrying,” warned Joseph Inganji, the head of the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in CAR.

The CERF allocation, with approximately 3,600 tons of food, will meet urgent food needs for four months. In Bria and surrounding areas, located about 600 kilometres north-east of the national capital, Bangui, 12,800 affected people will receive assistance.

Similarly, about 10,000 people in Bambari, Grimari and the region (about 300 kilometres from Bangui), and 14,000 people in the Kaga Bandoro (some 330 kilometres from Bangui), will also benefit from the allocation.

According to OCHA, the CERF support will partially cover the urgent humanitarian needs of newly displaced people with regards to food security.

In addition to these funds, the Humanitarian Fund in CAR also triggered its emergency reserve mechanism on two occasions: first in December 2016 with \$1 million to support the response to the food crisis in Bria; and then, in January 2017, it complementary addressed needs including shelter and non-food items, camp management, water, sanitation and hygiene, logistics, protection and health.

OCHA further noted that the humanitarian community in country continues to advocate for additional funds to cover the remaining needs.

CERF is one of the fastest and effective ways in which the UN supports rapid humanitarian response for people affected by natural disasters and conflict. The Fund receives voluntary contributions throughout the year to provide immediate funding for lifesaving humanitarian action anywhere in the world.

It is managed by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator on behalf of the UN Secretary-General.

Yesterday, the Fund had allocated some \$100 million to sustain operations in nine “neglected crises” around the globe, enabling life-saving assistance for more than six million people in Cameroon, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Libya, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia and Uganda.

Syria: UN-supported talks delayed until 20 February to give opposition time to unite

31 January 2017 – The United Nations envoy for Syria today said that he asked the Security Council to postpone the UN facilitated talks that had been scheduled for 8 February in Geneva until 20 February, in order to give the war-torn country’s opposition time to unite and participate as one group.

“We want to give a chance to this Astana initiative to actually implement itself,” Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura told reporters at the UN Headquarters in New York, referring to the talks held last week in the Kazakh capital on solidifying a ceasefire in Syria, which had been brokered by Russia, Iran and Turkey.

He said that in Astana, the Syrian Government, the opposition and the three guarantors of the ceasefire agreed on a mechanism – a group of experts – to monitor the truce, adding that a technical follow-up meeting on the creation of the mechanism is scheduled to take place in the Kazakh capital on 6 February with the participation of the UN.

He explained that the delay of UN-supported intra-Syrian talks would give time for the ceasefire to solidify, give the Government a chance to consider concessions, and give a chance for the armed groups to come as “one unified opposition.”

Mr, de Mistura said he will issue invitations for the Geneva talks around 8 February.

He reiterated that his work is guided by UN Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), which endorsed a roadmap for a peace process in Syria, including issues of governance, constitution and elections.