

Yemen's health system another victim of the conflict – UN health agency

23 February 2017 – Acute shortage of critical medicines, limited fuel for electricity and specialized medical staff such as intensive care doctors and nurses having left Yemen have put innocent lives in danger, the United Nations health agency has warned.

According to the UN World Health Organization (WHO), only 45 per cent of the country's health facilities remain fully functional and accessible and at least 274 have been damaged or destroyed during the conflict.

On top of this, drastic budget cuts have left health facilities without funds for operational costs and health care workers without regular salaries since September 2016.

One such example is the 320-bed Al-Thawra Hospital, the main functioning health facility in Al-Hudaydah (Yemen's third largest city) and neighbouring governorates. Many health facilities in the area have already closed.

Staffed by more than 1,200 employees – many of whom have not received their salaries for the past five months – the hospital provides care to some 1,500 people every day. This is a five-fold increase over the numbers in 2012 due to the influx of people displaced by ongoing conflict.

Most of the patients who arrive are unable to pay the minimal fees for hospital services.

RELATED: Cut off by fighting, thousands of Yemenis urgently need aid and protection – UN official

Despite this, no one is turned away from Al-Thawra Hospital and medical staff provide care to everyone, regardless of whether they can afford to pay, noted the WHO news release. Recently, however, the hospital had to stop providing food for inpatients due to lack of funds.

But there are fears that recent arrivals of thousands of displaced women, men and children in the governorate could overburden the already weakened health facilities and vulnerable host communities.



A severely damaged health facility in Taiz, Yemen. Photo: WHO Yemen

“The World Health Organization (WHO) assists us by providing fuel and medicines for emergency interventions, and supporting the hospital's therapeutic feeding centre,” said Khaled Suhail, Director of Al-Tharwa Hospital.

“However, with no funds for operational costs, we never know if we will still be open one month from now,” he added.

A collapsing health system

With more than 14.8 million people lacking access to basic health care, the current lack of funds means the situation will get much worse, WHO Acting Representative in Yemen

According to WHO, since the escalation of the conflict in March 2015, health facilities across Yemen have reported more than 7,600 deaths and close to 42,000 people injured.

Malnutrition rates are also rising: almost 4.5 million people in Yemen, including 2 million children, require services to treat or prevent malnutrition, a 150 per cent increase since late 2014.

Of special concern are almost 462,000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition and at risk of life-threatening complications such as respiratory infections or organ failure, said WHO.

RELATED: Yemen: As food crisis worsens, UN agencies call for urgent assistance to avert catastrophe

And with severely limited budgets, things might get worse.

“With more than 14.8 million people lacking access to basic health care, the current lack of funds means the situation will get much worse,” said Nevio Zagaria, WHO Acting Representative in Yemen.

Responding to the crisis, the UN agency has established 15 therapeutic feeding centres in seven governorates, and plans to open 25 more as the numbers of malnourished children increases across the country, but its efforts are challenged by lack of funds.

“We are asked to fill gaps created by the collapsing health institutions,” noted Dr. Zagaria, adding: “[however] last year, [we] received less than half of the \$124 million required.”

In 2017, UN agencies in the country and non-governmental organizations have appealed for \$322 million to support health care in Yemen, of this amount WHO has requested \$126 million.

“We urgently need resources to help support the health system as a whole, and are calling on donors to scale-up their support before more innocent lives are lost unnecessarily,” underscored Dr. Zagaria.

Syria negotiations may not yield breakthrough, but momentum needs to be maintained – UN envoy

22 February 2017 – A day before negotiations on the crisis in Syria kick off in Geneva, the United Nations Special Envoy for the war-torn country acknowledged that while he is “not expecting a breakthrough,” the proactive momentum needs to be sustained, and the top United Nations relief official told the Security Council that the country’s humanitarian needs would remain critical for a long time.

“As has been stated so many times already, there is no humanitarian or military solution to this conflict,” the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Stephen O’Brien, told the Security Council today.

“A genuine political commitment to peace will be needed if 2017 is to offer any different prospect than the death and destruction of the past six years,” he added, emphasizing the need for fighting to stop.

The conflict, now into its sixth year, has left hundreds of thousands of women, men and children dead and millions more dependent on aid both within the country and beyond Syria’s borders.

However, humanitarian actors continue face myriad challenges in reaching those most in need.

In particular, Mr. O’Brien voiced serious concerns over continued attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, which have further limited humanitarian access to those areas, as well as leading to further displacements that in turn add to the humanitarian needs.

He also underlined that the conflict has taken its worst toll on children: thousands have been killed and maimed or have lost their parents to the violence. Many more have suffered physical and psychological trauma, forced into early marriages and lag years behind in school.

The formal education system has lost about 150,000 education personnel and one in three schools in the country have been damaged, destroyed or rendered inaccessible, and 5.82 million children and youth from pre-school to secondary school-age are in need of education assistance inside Syria.

Concluding his briefing, the UN relief chief urged: “The eyes of all of Syria, and the eyes of the world, are looking to Geneva [where intra-Syrian negotiations will be held].”

“Millions of battered and beleaguered women, men and children depend on meaningful action and the constructive engagement by the Syrian parties and their allies [...] to assure Syrians that an end to the conflict may finally be

within reach.”

I am not expecting a breakthrough, but I am determined to keep the momentum – UN envoy

Also today, speaking to the press in Geneva, the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, said is critical that the momentum provided by the negotiations “outpace” those that wished to see the negotiations come to nothing.

“There are spoilers, we have seen it all the time during the last talks and perhaps they may even be attempting or tempted to [do] something before or during the talks to provoke one side or the other to walk out,” he warned.

“I am not expecting a breakthrough, but I am expecting and determined for keeping a very proactive momentum,” said Mr. de Mistura, highlighted the need to “outpace” those wished to “spoil” the negotiations and see that it come to nothing.

“There is a rush between us and the spoilers [...] we have to outpace those few but clear spoilers with momentum on the political track,” he added.

On the eve of the UN-facilitated negotiations between the parties to the conflict in Syria, Mr. de Mistura said he would be continuing to push for a resolution to the conflict based on Security Council Resolution 2254 that endorsed a road map for peace process in war-battered Middle East nation, including non-sectarian governance, a new constitution and free and fair elections.

Also, the UN envoy said that while the ceasefire remained fragile, it was largely holding and noted that “we would not have been able to have these talks if there was a breakdown of the cease-fire.”

Mr. de Mistura added that the bottom line remains that it is “delicate moment” and that there are fragile incidents but these need to be controlled and need to be taken care of.

In conclusion, he noted that one should not focus too much on the rhetoric and even dismissive statements but instead to “look for the substance, for what would happen during the talks and at the end of the talks,” he said.

Central African Republic: Four UN peacekeepers wounded in ambush by armed group

22 February 2017 – The United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Central

African Republic has reported that its troops on patrol were ambushed yesterday outside of Ippy in Ouaka prefecture.

During the exchange of fire with the FPRC's (*Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de Centrafrique*) coalition, four peacekeepers were wounded, including one severely, according to the Office of Spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, which added that the attackers fled the scene after the incident.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, plunged the country of 4.5 million people into civil conflict in 2013.

In a news release issued earlier this month, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSCA) had stressed that two factions of the ex-Séléka armed group, namely the FPRC coalition and UPC *Mouvement pour l'Unité et la Paix en Centrafrique*, represent a threat for civilian populations and that UN peacekeepers will respond in case of violence.

The spokesperson's office said that peacekeepers prevented a hostile crowd – including members of the FPRC – from entering a camp for internally displaced persons in Ippy, which is some 70 miles from the city of Bambari, earlier yesterday. Some people in the crowd fired at peacekeepers, who returned fire, killing two FPRC members.

MINUSCA reiterated its resolve to use force to protect civilians in accordance with its mandate and calls on all armed groups to immediately cease hostilities and to resolve any dispute through dialogue within the framework of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation, the office added.

Meanwhile, the UPC leader, Ali Darassa, left Bambari yesterday following the Mission's calls for him to leave the town, the office said. The Mission has reinforced its police presence in Bambari.

OSCE seeks to defuse conflicts, combat radicalization and build trust, UN Security Council told

22 February 2017 – Multilateral cooperation is the only way to achieve peace, security and stability, and there is no alternative to it, Austria's Foreign Minister told the United Nations Security Council today, underscoring the work of his country in its role as the Chair of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

“As you can imagine, chairing OSCE is not an easy task,” said Sebastian Kurz, Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria, citing the difficulty in finding consensus among the regional body’s 57 States.

“Austria has taken over the OSCE chairmanship at a critical moment. Everywhere we look, there are grave threats to peace and security,” he added.

He said that the Austrian chairmanship will seek to contribute to defusing existing conflicts, create a platform to assist States in their efforts to combat radicalization and violent extremism, and help rebuild trust between the OSCE States.

On the crisis in and around Ukraine, he said the OSCE has demonstrated its crucial role in brokering a ceasefire and its special monitoring mission has helped prevent a worsening of the situation. However, support is needed to increase the number of monitors on the ground, improve the technical equipment for monitoring and extend the operating hours along the contact line between Government and non-Government armed forces, he said.

Austria will also support all efforts to achieve progress on other conflict situations, including those in Transnistria, Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Turning to radicalization and terrorism, he said more than 10,000 people from the OSCE area have joined the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh). The most vulnerable group to be radicalized is youth, Mr. Kurz said, adding that he has appointed Peter Neumann, an expert on terrorism, as his special representative on radicalisation.

The Austrian chairmanship will also try to resume discussions on conventional arms control in Europe, and seek to launch a structured dialogue on current and future challenges and risks to security in the OSCE area.

Cyber security and social and economic cooperation – two issues discussed in Vienna recently – are areas where everybody stands to gain from more cooperation, and success in these areas will lead to more trust, he stressed.

“The same is true for human rights, the rule of law and democracy. Together we can strengthen the cohesiveness and resilience of our societies to better counter threats to our security,” he said.

In closing, he welcomed the establishment of a UN liaison office in Vienna that would enable even stronger cooperation between the OSCE and the UN.

[Tackling hunger crises in South Sudan,](#)

Somalia, Nigeria and Yemen requires \$4.4 billion – UN

22 February 2017 – Sounding the alarm on behalf of more than 20 million people in South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, and north-east Nigeria facing devastating levels of food insecurity, Secretary-General António Guterres joined other top United Nations officials today calling for “strong and urgent” action from the international community to help the already-fragile countries avert catastrophe.

“Famine is already a reality in parts of South Sudan. Unless we act now, it is only a matter of time until it affects other areas and other countries. We are already facing a tragedy; we must avoid it becoming a catastrophe,” said the Secretary-General, stressing: “This is preventable if the international community takes decisive action.”

Briefing the press at UN Headquarters in New York alongside the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O’Brien, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator, Helen Clark, and by video conference, the Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), Ertharin Cousin, Mr. Guterres said the UN needs at least \$4.4 billion by the end of March to avert a catastrophe.

“Despite some generous pledges, just \$90 million has actually been received so far – around two cents for every dollar needed. We are at the beginning of the year, but these numbers are very worrying,” he said: “The lives of millions of people depend on our collective ability to act. In our world of plenty, there is no excuse for inaction or indifference.”

In South Sudan, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners aim to assist 5.8 million people this year; in Somalia, 5.5 million people and in Yemen 8.3 million. In north-east Nigeria, humanitarians are reaching more than two million people with food assistance.

These four crises are very different, but are all preventable. “They all stem from conflict, which we must do much more to prevent and resolve,” he said, urging all members of the international community to step up and do whatever is in their power, whether that is mobilizing support, exerting political pressure on parties to conflict, or funding humanitarian operations.

“Saving lives is the first priority, but we are also looking to build longer-term resilience to shocks,” Mr. Guterres said, noting that UNDP Administrator and the Emergency Relief Coordinator will set up a steering committee to link the UN Development Group and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee for humanitarian assistance to ensure a coordinated long-term approach.

VIDEO: Speaking at a joint press conference on humanitarian crises in Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, United Nations Secretary-General

chief António Guterres today urged the international community to 'step up' and take 'decisive action' to prevent devastating food insecurity levels from becoming a catastrophe.

Speaking next, Mr. O'Brien, who is also the UN Under-Secretary-General for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, reemphasized the ongoing effort to ensure that development and humanitarian partners will work together to tackle these crises. "We want to help people survive," he said, "but we also want to help them build more durable solutions so they will not be left in vulnerable situations."

He went on to stress that almost 1.4 million children are at imminent risk of death from severe acute malnutrition this year, as famine looms in the four countries, an issue spotlighted yesterday by UNICEF. He said that catastrophe can be averted if action is taken now. The funding noted by the Secretary-General must be made available by the end of March to make a difference. "We are ready to scale up [...] with brave and committed aid workers already in place."

Miss Clark noted that the way forward on the four crises would very much reflect the "new way of working" among relief and development agencies agreed by the 2016 UN World Humanitarian Summit, which stressed that "the priority is saving lives and part of saving lives is building resilience for the future."

For her part, Ms. Cousin said that in each of these four countries, "the plans are in place and the people are prepared to perform the work that is necessary. What we need is the resources and the access."

"Acting now, before we reach the height of the lean season in these countries will ensure our ability to provide the support that is necessary to avoid what we all see on the horizon, which is a famine in each one of these countries if we fail to act," she stated.

Carla Mucavi, the Director of UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Liaison Office in New York, and Justin Forsyth, the Deputy Executive Director of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), also attended the briefing.