



Bi-weekly Press Briefing 01 October 2021

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Story

Human Rights Council update

Rolando Gomez, for the Human Rights Council, said that on 1 October, the Council would continue its consideration of the reports of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review. At approximately 4.30 p.m., the Council would hear from the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation and allocation of water resources in the occupied Palestinian territories. The general debate on item 7, “Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories”, would begin in the evening. The Council’s programme for 4 October included an interactive discussion with the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent regarding environmental justice, followed by the presentation of the report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance on the use of emerging digital technology at borders. The Council had received 28 draft resolutions to be adopted on 7 and 8 October.

Kenya Drought Flash Appeal

Dr. Stephen Jackson, Resident Coordinator in Kenya, said that 2.5 million people across Kenya were already experiencing deep food insecurity as a result of drought and the failure of two successive rainy seasons. Food insecurity would worsen substantially by November, as the October rains were expected to fail as well. The Government of Kenya had already allocated some US\$ 17 million, with a pledge of a further \$20 million, and United Nations and international partners had been providing assistance to 500,000 people.

However, those efforts were insufficient.

The Flash Appeal for the 2021 Kenya Drought brought together 45 humanitarian partners and called for nearly \$139.5 million to respond to the most urgent humanitarian needs of 1.3 million people in the areas of food security and livelihoods, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, health and education. In addition, various parts of the United Nations system were responding with cash transfers, support to impacted refugees and migrants and efforts to boost resilience and disaster risk reduction, among other forms of assistance.

Replying to journalists, Dr. Jackson said that 368,000 people were in an emergency state and 2 million others were in a crisis state in terms of nutrition. There were 465,000 acutely malnourished children and 96,000 malnourished pregnant or lactating women. People were selling off cattle to survive, which exposed them to risk in the long-term given the centrality of livestock to Kenyan livelihoods.

Killing of a Rohingya leader in Cox's Bazar

Rupert Colville, for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said that the High Commissioner was shocked and saddened over the killing of Rohingya human rights defender Mohib Ullah. For years, Mr. Ullah had methodically collected information about human rights violations suffered by the Rohingya in their home state of Rakhine and had sought to galvanize international action, even addressing the Human Rights Council in person. Insecurity had been increasing alarmingly in the camp, and anti-Rohingya sentiment had also been rising in Bangladeshi communities. The High Commissioner called for a prompt, thorough and independent investigation, not only to identify and apprehend his killers but also to define what measures were needed to better protect vulnerable civil society leaders. Meanwhile in Myanmar itself, the situation of approximately 600,000 Rohingya in Rakhine State remained dire and violations, such as unlawful killings, arbitrary arrest and detention, and extortion, were allegedly being committed.

The full text of the statement and tribute can be found [here](#).

Shabia Mantoo, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), said that UNHCR was also deeply shocked and saddened by the tragic killing of Mr. Ullah and condemned the attack in the strongest possible terms. It urged the Bangladeshi authorities to undertake an immediate investigation and hold those responsible to account.

In response to questions, Ms. Mantoo said that, while UNHCR was familiar with Mr. Ullah, he had not been working for the Agency. UNHCR was in contact with law enforcement authorities responsible for the camps and would be increasing its staff presence to receive complaints from refugees, of which there were some 895,000 in the camps in Bangladesh, and provide them with psychosocial support, including through helplines.

Mr. Colville added that the Bangladeshi authorities had been working to address rising criminality, but it was a tricky task because over-securitization of the camps could have a drastic impact on the lives of those living there. Therefore, OHCHR called for further support for Bangladesh in hosting the refugees. The situation remained very serious in Myanmar, where at least 1,120 individuals had been killed since 1 February 2021. OHCHR had collected considerable information pointing to widespread and systematic attacks on civilians, some of which could amount to war crimes, and to violations against ethnic minorities now being committed against a broader cross-section of the population. It was regrettable that international attention had turned away from Myanmar.

Replying to a separate question, Mr. Colville said that OHCHR had no access of any kind to Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. It was finalizing an assessment of the information on allegations of serious human rights violations in the Autonomous Region with a view to making a public statement.

Allegations of sexual abuse by United Nations staff

Asked about the cases of sexual abuse by WHO staff in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mr. Colville, for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said that OHCHR condemned all acts of sexual exploitation and abuse, which were a breach of the United Nations code of conduct and, in certain circumstances, could constitute violations of international law. It was vital to seek accountability for all perpetrators, regardless of their status. The Office had been working for many years with colleagues across the United Nations to integrate a human rights and victim-centred approach. It welcomed the investigation into events during the Ebola epidemic in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and paid tribute to the women who had come forward with their allegations.

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), recalled that the Secretary-General had been unequivocal about the importance of a zero-tolerance policy for sexual exploitation and abuse at the United Nations. His deputy spokesperson had apologized unreservedly to the women and girls who were abused, including rape, in the DRC and had thanked them for their courage in coming forward. It was also important that all United Nations operations thoroughly investigated such allegations, and the Organization encouraged people to come forward if they had been mistreated by anyone in the UN system.

In another example, he added that the members of the peacekeeping contingent recently involved in cases of sexual abuse in the Central African Republic had been repatriated to their country of origin [Gabon], and the Office of Internal Oversight Services was working with national investigators on the case.

Sudan and South Sudan

Jens Laerke, for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said that South Sudan and Sudan were experiencing severe seasonal flooding and, in both countries, humanitarian organizations warned that their relief pipelines were at risk of breaking. In South Sudan, OCHA had received reports of almost half a million people affected by flooding in areas that also had a high proportion of people facing crisis and emergency food insecurity. The United Nations and non-governmental organizations were responding with, inter alia, food, water purification tablets, plastic sheeting for temporary shelter, mosquito nets and medical supplies. However, access was a major challenge due to roads being cut-off and to ongoing violence. If dykes overflowed, the impact on people already deemed vulnerable would be devastating. The \$1.7 billion response plan for South Sudan was currently 61 per cent funded.

Fourteen out of 18 states in Sudan had been hit by the floods, which had destroyed or damaged more than 62,000 houses and displaced over 100,000 people, collapsed bridges and cut off roads. Some 183,000 people had been reached with food, shelter, health and other assistance; however, relief stocks urgently needed to be replenished to maintain the response. Without additional resources, 330,000 people would not receive adequate water, sanitation and hygiene support; 290,000 would be left without a shelter response; and over 250,000 would be deprived of essential health services. The \$1.9 billion Humanitarian Response Plan for Sudan was only 29 per cent funded.

Expulsion of United Nations officials from Ethiopia

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), drew attention to the Secretary-General's statement on 30 September in which he expressed shock at the information that the Government of Ethiopia had declared seven United Nations officials, including senior humanitarian officials, as *persona non grata*. All United Nations humanitarian operations were guided by the core principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. In Ethiopia, the United Nations was delivering life-saving aid – including food, medicine, water and sanitation supplies – to people in desperate need. He had every confidence in the United Nations staff who were in Ethiopia doing that work. The United Nations was now engaging with the Government of Ethiopia in the expectation that the staff concerned would be allowed to continue their important work.

In response to journalists' questions, Jens Laerke, for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said that OCHA was equally shocked by the announcement and expected the decision to be reversed. It was critical that the humanitarian operation continued – and it was – though naturally the abrupt departure of such senior officials could have repercussions on activities. Some 5.2 million people in Tigray were in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and the conflict's spillover into neighbouring regions meant that needs were increasing, as was the number of internally displaced persons. The food security situation was particularly concerning, with insufficient food consumption climbing from 5 to 21 per cent between June and September 2021. Screening indicated unprecedented levels of moderate malnutrition among pregnant and lactating women, and moderate acute malnutrition among children under five exceeded the global emergency threshold of 15 per cent. Access and response were not at all at the level they should be. For instance, only 11 per cent of the necessary aid trucks had arrived in Tigray since July.

Rupert Colville, for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said that the High Commissioner deplored the decision of the Government of Ethiopia to declare the seven officials, including an OHCHR staff member, *persona non grata*. The decision, which had not been explained and had caught the Office completely off guard, meant that the individuals concerned had to leave the country within 72 hours. The Office emphatically rejected the allegation that its staff member was “meddling in the internal affairs of Ethiopia”. There were still 23 staff members in the regional office in Addis Ababa and 9 others working on the joint investigation with the Ethiopian National Human Rights Commission.

Review of recommendations on masks for health workers in the context of coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

Dr. April Baller, Medical Officer, Infection Prevention and Control, World Health Emergencies, World Health Organization (WHO), said that an international panel of multidisciplinary experts had reviewed the latest evidence and, on that basis, WHO had updated its guidance on mask wearing for health-care workers. Fortunately, masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE) remained effective against the virus, provided that they were used correctly and consistently. According to the guidance, health-care workers providing care to suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients should wear a medical mask (also known as a surgical mask) in conjunction with other PPE. However, workers performing aerosol-generating procedures, such as resuscitation, bronchoscopies and intubation, should wear what was known as a respirator at all times. Furthermore, the panel emphasized the importance of proper fit. Health-care practitioners should wear the model of respirator that best fit their facial features to avoid air leaks. Surgical masks could be made to fit more tightly by pulling the ear loops closer using a head clip. Lastly, health authorities should consider workers' preferences for wearing a respirator rather than a mask in settings where aerosol-generating procedures were not performed.

Replying to questions from journalists, Dr. Baller said that it had been necessary to review the guidance in the light of the Delta variant, but the WHO recommendation had not changed in substance though it was now stronger. The global supply of respirators was sufficient; however, that did not necessarily translate into local availability. Standards had now been adopted at the international level regarding cloth masks. The challenge lay in enforcing those standards.

Announcements

Arlette Verploegh, for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), said that UNCTAD15 would take place from 4 to 7 October 2021. Secretary-General António Guterres would open the Conference from Barbados together with Prime Minister Mia Mottley, President Kenyatta of Kenya and UNCTAD Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan. A press conference was scheduled at 6 p.m. on 4 October.

UNCTAD15 was the first high-level conference on trade and development to discuss inequality and vulnerability and how to tackle them in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. UNCTAD had issued an amber warning that, through 2025, developing countries would be \$12 trillion poorer because of the pandemic. Moreover, vaccine inequality would cost the south an additional loss of income of \$1.5 trillion. UNCTAD15 presented an opportunity for all countries to jointly agree on bold actions to reduce inequality and vulnerability and to align the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with the global “new normal” created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

There would be daily press conferences or briefings at approximately 5.30 p.m., for which accredited journalists were encouraged to register. For further information, visit <https://unctad15.org/>

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), on behalf of the International Trade Centre (ITC), said that new edition of *The Coffee Guide* would be launched at a virtual event on 1 October, at 4 p.m. *The Coffee Guide* was the world’s most extensive, hands-on and neutral source of information on the international coffee trade and covered trade issues relevant to coffee growers, traders, exporters, transportation companies, certifiers, associations and authorities. Speakers included: Pamela Coke-Hamilton, Executive Director, International Trade Centre; Vanusia Nogueira, Executive Director, Brazil Specialty Coffee Association; Kubasu Agapeters, Operations Manager, Fairtrade Africa; Ric Rhinehart, Executive Director Emeritus, Specialty Coffee Association; and José Dauster Sette, Executive Director, International Coffee Organization.

Mr. LeBlanc, on behalf of the World Trade Organization (WTO), said that WTO was releasing its revised trade forecast on Monday, 4 October. Journalists were invited to the hybrid press conference at noon. The speakers would be Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Chief Economist Robert Koopman, Senior Economist Coleman Nee, and Spokesperson Keith Rockwell.

Mr. LeBlanc also said that [International Day of Older Persons](#) and [International Day of Non-Violence](#) were being celebrated on 1 and 2 October respectively, and recalled the Secretary-General’s messages on these occasions. He added that World Habitat Day would be celebrated on 4 October. This year’s theme – “Accelerating Urban Action for a Carbon-Free World” – would highlight how cities and towns are at the core of climate action to keep the 1.5 degrees goal within reach.

Mr. LeBlanc recalled that the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, whose seventieth session would run from 27 September to 8 October 2021 at the Palais des Nations, would be concluding its review of the periodic reports of Azerbaijan and Bosnia and Herzegovina on 1 October. The Committee would also be reviewing the reports of Bolivia, on the afternoons of 5 and 6 October, and Nicaragua, on the afternoons of 7 and 8 October.

Similarly, the Committee on Migrant Workers, which was completing the first week of its thirty-third session, would be reviewing the periodic report of Azerbaijan on 4 and 5 October, at the Palais des Nations.

Press conferences

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs was holding a virtual press conference on Friday, 1 October, at 2.30 p.m., regarding the United Nations World Data Forum. The speakers would be Stefan Schweinfest, Director of the United Nations Statistics Division, and Gabriella Vukovich, Chair of the United Nations World Data Forum Programme Committee and President of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office.

WHO was holding a virtual briefing on Monday, 4 October, at 9.30 a.m. ahead of the convening of global advisory bodies for immunization and malaria to review evidence on the RTS,S malaria vaccine to inform potential WHO recommendation for wider use of the vaccine in Africa (embargoed until 6 October, at 5 p.m.). Speakers were: Dr. Kate O'Brien, WHO Director of the Immunization, Vaccines and Biologicals Department; Dr. Pedro Alonso, Director of the WHO Global Malaria Programme; and Dr. Mary Hamel, Senior Technical Officer, Malaria Vaccines and the Malaria Vaccine Implementation Programmes.

OHCHR was holding a hybrid press conference on Monday, 4 October, at 1.30 p.m., for the launch of the first report of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya. The speakers, who would be attending in person, were: Mohamed Auajjar, Chair of the Mission; Tracy Robinson, member of the Mission; and Chaloka Beyani, member of the Mission.

At noon on Tuesday, 5 October, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) would release the multi-agency report 2021 State of Climate Services: Water, which showed why more needed to be done to meet water-related challenges. Petteri Taalas, WMO Secretary-General and Maxx Dilley, Director, Climate Services Department would be speaking.

On Wednesday, 6 October, at 11.30 a.m., the team of international experts on the situation in Kasai would present its final report. The speakers were: Bacre Waly Ndiaye, Chair of the team of international experts, and Marie-Thérèse Keita-Bocoum, member of the team of international experts.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi would address a hybrid press conference concluding the 72nd annual session of the UNHCR Executive Committee on Friday, 8 October, at 1.30 p.m.