



Bi-Weekly Press Briefing 8 October 2021

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Story

Outcome of the Ministerial Meeting “Affordable, adequate, and resilient housing in liveable cities”

Paola Deda, Director of the Forests, Land and Housing Division at the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), said that the [Ministerial Meeting](#) on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management had concluded on 7 October. The pandemic meant that people were advised to stay at home, but that was not possible for those people who had no proper homes. The housing crisis overlapped with the pandemic. Globally, some 1.2 billion people lived in substandard housing, informed Ms. Deda. In the UNECE region, some 50 people million still lived in such housing; over 100 million people spent at least 40 percent of their disposable income on housing. Housing had not been high on political agendas, but the pandemic had brought the issue to the forefront, as so many people had to stay at home.

The Ministerial Meeting had discussed the document “#Housing2030: Effective policies for affordable housing in the UNECE region”, a study drawing on the experience of over 100 researchers, policymakers, housing providers and advocates from across the ECE region and beyond, to define useful approaches, outline their advantages and disadvantages, and illustrate their practical application. It included success stories from across the region that could be replicated elsewhere. Several ministers and deputy ministers had presented situations in their countries; the issues of climate neutrality and social housing had been predominant, said Ms. Deda. The Meeting resulted in a detailed ministerial action plan, the [*Place and Life in the UNECE: Regional Action Plan 2030*](#), which identified specific actions to tackle challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic, climate and housing emergencies in the region, city, neighbourhood and home.

A clinical case definition of post COVID-19 condition

Dr. Janet Diaz, [Head of Clinical Management at the World Health Organization](#) (WHO), provided a definition of [post COVID-19 condition](#), also known as “long COVID”. It occurred in individuals with a history of probable or confirmed SARS CoV-2 infection, usually three months from the onset of COVID-19 with symptoms, lasted for at least two months, and could not be explained by an alternative diagnosis. Common symptoms included fatigue, shortness of breath, cognitive dysfunction but also others and generally had an impact on everyday functioning. Symptoms might be new onset following initial recovery from an acute COVID-19 episode or persist from the initial illness. Symptoms might also fluctuate or relapse over time.

Dr. Diaz thanked all external collaborators and partners, including patients and advocates who had been working with the WHO on this research.

Responding to questions, Dr. Diaz explained that there was no one particular drug that served as a cure for long COVID-19; research was ongoing. Treatments were currently symptom-based and multidisciplinary. There were examples of people experiencing relapse, but more research was needed on this as well. WHO expected governments to recognize that this was a true condition affecting people’s every day functions. Patients’ needs ought to be acknowledged and adequate care provided within respective countries’ health systems. There was still no full understanding of what was causing long COVID; hypotheses included viral persistence and autoimmunity, among others; it was most likely to include a combination of factors.

Military build-up in central Sagaing, Magway and Chin states in Myanmar

Ravina Shamdasani, for the [Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR), spoke of alarming reports that there had been substantial deployment of heavy weapons and troops by the Myanmar military, the Tatmadaw, over the previous few weeks in Kanpetlet and Hakha townships in Chin State; Kani and Monywa townships in the central Sagaing region; and Gangaw township in Magway. Two high-level commanders had also been deployed to the area and the Internet had been shut down.

OHCHR was gravely concerned by those developments, particularly given the intensifying attacks by the military documented over the past month in those areas, including killings, raiding of villages and burning of houses, apparently to seek out armed resistance elements and as reprisals against villages perceived to be sympathetic to people’s defence forces or ethnic armed groups. There had also been reports of mass arrests, as well as torture and summary executions.

OHCHR urged the international community to speak with one voice, to prevent the commission of further serious human rights violations against the people of Myanmar. Influential states had to prevail on the Tatmadaw to de-escalate the situation, protect civilian lives and property, and ensure access to humanitarian aid for those who need it.

There was an imminent risk of serious civilian casualties, stressed Ms. Shamdasani in a response to questions. Ms. Shamdasani further explained that the OHCHR had been working with organizations on the ground to monitor and report killings. An estimate, based on the inputs from partners on the ground, was that

some 1,120 had been killed since the 1 February coup.

Full OHCHR statement is available [here](#).

World Food Programme assistance in Afghanistan

Tomson Phiri, for the World Food Programme (WFP), stated that the WFP had assisted 3.8 million people in Afghanistan in September, three times the number of beneficiaries in August. Over 33,000 metric tons of food had been provided in September. WFP was planning to assist as many as five million people in need in October, but the cash shortage was affecting its operations, warned Mr. Phiri. WFP had provided cash assistance to a number of families in Kabul, where markets were somewhat functioning.

Ethiopia

Responding to a question, Ravina Shamdasani, for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), confirmed that the OHCHR staff member who had been declared a *persona non grata* had left the country. There was a full-fledged OHCHR office in Ethiopia, and other staff remained there, though. OHCHR rejected accusations of bias in its work in Ethiopia.

Alessandra Vellucci, for the UN Information Service (UNIS), stressed that the UN work in Ethiopia was continuing, with the focus on delivering humanitarian aid to civilian populations in Tigray and other regions in Ethiopia who needed help.

Nobel Peace Prize

Alessandra Vellucci, for the UN Information Service (UNIS), informed that the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize had just been awarded to Maria Ressa and Dmitry Muratov for their efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which was a precondition for democracy and lasting peace. Ms Vellucci said that this award was fully in line with the UN Secretary-General's repeated calls for press freedom as a key instrument for democracy. A statement from the Secretary-General was expected later today. Ms. Ressa had participated in a June 2021 Ciné-ONU event, reminded Ms. Vellucci.

Ravina Shamdasani, for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said that this was recognition of the work of journalists in most difficult circumstances. Last years had seen an increase of attacks against journalists. Maria Ressa had been on a number of panels with the High Commissioner and had been under attack in the Philippines for years. Ms. Shamdasani stressed the importance of the critical work of journalists.

Health topics

Alessandra Vellucci, for the UN Information Service (UNIS), informed that 10 October would be the World Mental Health Day. The Secretary-General's message had been shared with the media. In his message, the SG stressed that around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic was taking a terrible toll on people's mental health.

Fadéla Chaib, for the World Health Organization (WHO), announced two press conferences for the coming week. On 11 October at 3 pm, outcomes would be presented of the annual meeting of the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on vaccination (SAGE). Speakers would be Dr. Alejandro Cravioto, SAGE Chair; Dr. Katherine O'Brien, Director Immunization Vaccines, Biologicals, WHO; and Dr. Joachim Hombach, Secretary, SAGE. SAGE had discussed a number of vaccines, including malaria, influenza, polio, Indian-produced COVID-19 vaccines, and the issue of COVID-19 boosters, explained Ms. Chaib.

Also on 11 October at 5 pm, there would be a press conference on COP26 Special Report: "The Health Argument for Climate Action". More details would be shared later today.

Other announcements

Speaking on behalf of the Human Rights Council (HRC), Alessandra Vellucci informed that the Council would be taking action on remaining draft resolutions today.

The sixth session of the Constitutional Committee Small Body for Syria would convene in Geneva from 18 October. A detailed note had been shared with the media.

Ms. Vellucci, on behalf of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) informed that the world food commodity crisis had increased in September, according to the FAO Food Price Index released on 7 October. World wheat prices were up almost four percent, and over 40 percent more compared to the year before.

Today at 1:30 pm, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi would speak to the media concluding UNHCR's 72nd Annual Executive Meeting.

Today at 8 October at 3 pm, OCHA would update on the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Speakers would be David McLachlan-Karr, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator; and Clémence Caraux-Pelletan, Director, INGOs Forum Secretariat in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

On 11 October at 1 pm, OCHA would brief on the humanitarian situation in Yemen. Speaker would be David Gressly, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen.

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights would close this afternoon at 5:30 pm its 70th session and adopt its concluding observations on the five countries reviewed during this session: Kuwait, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bolivia and Nicaragua.

The Committee on Migrant Workers would close this afternoon at 5:30 pm its 33rd session and adopt its concluding observations on the two countries reviewed during this session - Rwanda and Azerbaijan.

The Human Rights Committee would open on 11 October its 133rd session, and it would meeting in person, 11 October to 5 November, during which it would review the reports of Germany, Botswana, Armenia, and Ukraine.

Building Bridges - an action-oriented, multi-stakeholder movement launched in Switzerland in 2019 to shape the global agenda and the future of sustainable finance – had unveiled a full program of 77 events. The week would be held in Geneva from 29 November to 2 December. Full programme and registration link are available [here](#).