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Story

Migrants and asylum seekers in Libya

Marta Hurtado, for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said the UN entity was extremely worried about the continued suffering of migrants and asylum seekers in Libya who are experiencing daily violations and abuses at the hands of both State and non-State actors. There had been a perceptible increase recently in heavy-handed security operations and raids targeting migrants and asylum seekers. These had resulted in killings and serious injuries, a rise in detentions in appalling conditions, as well as expulsions of individuals to countries in sub-Saharan Africa without due process and in violation of the principle of non-refoulement and the prohibition of collective expulsion.

Ms Hurtado recalled a series of incidents since early October. Security forces had raided an informal settlement in Gergaresh. Women, children and men had been arrested and handcuffed, and security forces had used unnecessary and disproportionate force to detain them. At least one person had died, five had been injured, and more than 4,000 had been detained. More incidents had been documented at the Gheriyan and the al-Mabani centres, where hundreds of migrants who managed to escape were chased by guards who opened fire on them.

Ms Hurtado said this series of horrific events was just the latest example of the precarious, sometimes lethal, situation facing migrants and asylum seekers in Libya. She added that OHCHR was calling on authorities to establish prompt, thorough, impartial and independent investigations into the claims of disproportionate use

of force, including allegations of killings, with a view to holding those responsible accountable. OHCHR was also calling for the release of all arbitrarily detained migrants and asylum seekers, cease the raids on settlements and halt evicting them, as well as stop criminalizing them. It asks for legislation to be reformed to decriminalize irregular entry, stay and exit of people. She concluded by saying these attacks on people could amount to crimes against humanity. OHCHR was reminding the authorities that they had a responsibility to protect everyone. The full statement is available [here](#).

In answer to questions, Ms Hurtado said there were many nationalities involved, mainly from sub-Saharan Africa. Some people in detention centres had been detained while crossing the southern border of Libya, while in other cases police officers had gone looking for them. The Government had said these raids were being conducted to tackle crime. OHCHR's position was that the authorities should target the criminals and not migrants.

Ms Hurtado added that Libya was not considered a safe point of return, and the High Commissioner's Office had impressed upon the European Union that migrants should not be returned to that country.

Also on Libya, Alessandra Vellucci, for the [UN Information Service](#), recalled the statement by the UN Secretary-General where he welcomed the agreement reached in Geneva, on 8 October, by the 5+5 Libyan Joint Military Commission (JMC) on a comprehensive Action Plan for the gradual, balanced, and sequenced process of the withdrawal of mercenaries, foreign fighters and foreign forces from Libyan territory. The full statement is [here](#).

World Food Day 2021 Commemorations

Patrick Jacqueson, for the [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO), said that each year, over 150 countries held events to mark [World Food Day](#), the birthday of FAO, making it one of the most celebrated international days of the year. He said the theme of this year's World Food Day was "Our actions are our future. Better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life", calling for the transformation of agri-food systems to ensure that everyone, everywhere had access to enough, affordable, safe and nutritious food to lead active and healthy lives, leaving no one behind.

With an ever-growing population, expected to reach 10 billion by 2050, he said it was important to build long-term resilience and change how we produced and consumed food. We needed to strengthen the resilience of the world's most vulnerable to economic adversity – for example, through in-kind or cash support programmes to lessen the impact of pandemic-style shocks or food price volatility. The more diverse an agricultural system, the greater its ability to adapt to climate change and other shocks, he added. Farmers - men and women in agriculture, fisheries and forestry - are our primary sources for nutritious foods. As guardians of the planet's natural resources, their decisions lie at the roots of transforming agri-food systems. Innovative technologies and training, finance, incentives and social protection can help farmers to provide sustainable healthy diets locally and globally.

Mr Jacqueson said the World Food Day Global Ceremony would take place on Friday 15 October with global leaders, FAO special ambassadors, heads of the Rome-based UN agencies joining FAO Director-General QU Dongyu.

In Geneva, the FAO was organizing a series of activities on 15 and 16 October, including the World Food Day Cornavin Exhibition, organized in partnership with the Federal Office for Agriculture of Switzerland (FOAG), Partage Foundation (Geneva's food bank) and Ville de Genève/ MA-Terre, at Geneva's mail train station.

Thomson Phiri, for the [World Food Programme](#) (WFP), said the WFD2021 event, co-organized by WFP, UNHCR and FAO on Friday, 15 October, from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. CET, would focus on the benefits on integrating forcibly displaced people into the local food systems, by providing great stability and resilience. This event will be followed by a distribution of lunch boxes to vulnerable people in Geneva, including

refugees.

Alessandra Vellucci, for the [UN information Service](#), recalled the message of the Secretary-General for World Food Day, in which he says that the COVID-19 pandemic had made a precarious global food situation worse. This World Food Day should highlight the need to change how we consume food and make healthier choices for ourselves and our planet. Now is the time to make transformation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) on the alleviation of hunger worldwide.

Humanitarian situation in Afghanistan

In answer to questions, Babar Baloch, for the [UN Refugee Agency](#), said some 40,000 Afghans had arrived in neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and Tajikistan since the beginning of the year. Borders remained regulated. People were gathering on roads, and there were reports of disruptions at various borders. That said, the number remained relatively small. The focus of the displacement was inside Afghanistan, and Refugee Agency was worried about the coming winter, where temperatures would drop to freezing temperatures. Mr Baloch added that the window was closing daily in terms of reaching people. Winters are harsh and can kill if people do not have the resources.

People needed humanitarian support. In Kabul alone, there were 50,000 displaced people, so it was a race against time to reach individuals. Afghanistan was among the worst humanitarian emergencies in the world, with millions needing relief, including more than 3.5 million forced to leave their home because of insecurity. Last week, the UN Refugee Agency had provided 40,000 displaced Afghans in the country with shelter, blankets, solar panels, cash, etc. This week, 60,000 people were being targeted for assistance, with a goal of reaching more than one million displaced this year. The number of displaced people was huge. Mr Baloch said the humanitarian community needed to scale up their efforts to reach people more quickly or else the latter would face dire consequences. He said there were efforts to establish a dedicated logistic hub; the first of three flights was scheduled to arrive at the end of this week to bring supplies from Uzbekistan.

Mr Baloch recalled that before the mid-August takeover by the Taliban, some 20 million Afghans were already relying on humanitarian assistance, and needs were rising day by day. He said the Refugee Agency was relying on the authorities for access and security and working closely with the Taliban in this regard. The situation, he stressed, was dire and desperate as winter approached.

In answer to more questions, Mr Baloch said the Agency didn't have access to hotspots like the Panjshir Valley and mountainous areas. He added that the number of people internally displaced was 700,000 this year; 80 per cent of them were women and children.

In terms of access, he said it was very uncertain. The Refugee Agency continued to appeal for unhindered access to people in need. He said the Agency worked with local authorities to move around. At the provincial and district levels, even in the capital, there were encouraging signs by the authorities to provide access to humanitarians.

From location to location, the Agency was also engaging with the authorities to enable the Refugee Agency's female employees to resume their work. He reminded that half of the population in Afghanistan was made up of women, so it was important that female staff should have access to these women, too.

Mr Baloch addressed the liquidity crisis and the urgency for funding to arrive in the country. Services and the economy were at a breaking point, and this collapse had to be avoided at all costs.

Alessandra Vellucci, for the [UN Information Service](#), recalled the [Secretary-General's statement](#) issued yesterday, in which he urged the world to take action and inject liquidity into the Afghan economy to avoid collapse as assets were being frozen, banks were closing and essential services such as healthcare were being suspended in many places.

Election of the ILO Director-General

Rosalind Yarde, for the International Labour Organization, said nominations for the position of Director-General of the Organization had closed on 1 October. She said all candidates and their biographies were listed on the [ILO website](#).

World Health Organization

In answer to a question about a new Merck COVID pill waiting for approval in the United States, Christian Lindmeier, for the World Health Organization, said this was an interesting development, but more data was needed about it. He said if the pill's virtues held true it would be another weapon in the fight against the pandemic. Drugs and vaccines were important to fight the Covid-19 pandemic and protecting those who couldn't be vaccinated. It was also important to continue using masks and distancing as protection measures.

Announcements

Catherine Huissoud, for UNCTAD, announced that the UN entity would organize, virtually, the [7th World Investment Forum](#) from 18 to 22 October. The Forum was a biennial multi-stakeholder gathering at the level of Heads of States and Governments, CEOs, ministers and heads of international organizations, designed to facilitate dialogue and action on the world's current and emerging investment-development challenges. The Forum would focus on "Investing in sustainable recovery", addressing today's key challenge facing the global investment-development community. Building forward better would not be possible without reigniting investment, both domestic and international, as an engine of growth. The Forum would specifically tackle the challenges and opportunities arising from the new industrial revolution, the sustainability imperative, the realignment of economic governance, and the efforts for greater economic resilience. The deliberations would be informed by the World Investment Report 2020: International Production beyond the Pandemic and the World Investment Report 2021: Investing in Sustainable Recovery. The 2018 Forum had gathered over 6 600 investment-development stakeholders from some 160 countries.

Ms Vellucci, for the UN Information Service in Geneva, said the Human Rights Committee was concluding this morning its review of the report of Germany. Reports by Armenia, Botswana, and Ukraine would also be considered during this session.

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

Ms Vellucci also reminded correspondents about the media workshop being organized for Building Bridges Week on 14 October from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Carouge.

In the context of the Sustainable Transport Conference taking place in China, the key finding of the UN Inter-Agency Report on "Sustainable Transport, Sustainable Development" would be presented today during a technical press briefing in New York at 12:30 p.m. Eastern Time, with representatives from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the World Bank and UNCTAD. The event would be livestreamed on [webtv.un.org](#)

Ms Vellucci also reminded correspondents that the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction was observed on 13 October.