UNOG Bi-weekly press briefing: 22 November 2019

22-11-2019 | Press Conferences

Story

Venezuelan migrants in Colombia and Ecuador need more support

Hervé Verhoosel, for the World Food Programme (WFP), read the following statement:

“The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) launched an urgent appeal to the international community for US$196 million to assist the growing number of migrants leaving Venezuela, as well as Colombian returnees, enabling ongoing emergency operations in Colombia and Ecuador.

The funding is part of the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP), the largest of its kind ever implemented in the region. With a total budget of US$1.35 billion, the plan will act as a coordination and fundraising tool implemented by 137 organizations in 17 countries of the region to support 4 million migrants in 2020.
The scale of the challenges in Colombia and Ecuador is such that the governments need the support of the international community to assist with the influx of migrants and their needs.

Food assistance plays a critical role in addressing vulnerabilities that migrants face. Usually, women are the heads of the most vulnerable families. They have limited access to basics like food, and face risks such as being recruited into sex work or by armed groups in Colombia, in order to feed their families.

WFP’s partnership with local authorities, civil society groups and national institutions is helping to provide vulnerable groups such as women and children with the food they need while they live in temporary shelters or on the streets. Since 2018, WFP has provided hot meals in community kitchens, food kits for people in transit, and vouchers to cover basic food needs for more than 1.85 million migrants and host communities primarily at border areas in Colombia and 14 provinces in Ecuador.

WFP staff in the region report that six out of ten migrants do not know where their next meal will come from, and with the number of people on the move continuing to increase, WFP needs additional support.

Some 4.6 million Venezuelans have left their country as of November 2019, with nearly 80 per cent settling in Latin America and the Caribbean, according to the Regional Interagency Coordination Platform. Nearly 1.5 million live in Colombia and 385,000 in Ecuador.

WFP food security surveys conducted this year show that 54 per cent of migrants and refugees in Colombia, and 23 per cent in Ecuador are moderately or severely food insecure. In Colombia, 29 per cent spent a day without food in the week prior to the survey, while 60 per cent were forced to eat fewer meals a day in Ecuador.

The regional plan will intervene in nine key sectors: health; education; food security; integration; protection; nutrition; shelter, basic relief items and humanitarian transport; and water, sanitation and hygiene. WFP co-leads food security and cash-based interventions.

It is urgent to have additional support in Colombia and Ecuador, as the number of migrants from Venezuela keeps increasing.”

Asked about the role of food assistance in keeping women off the street, Mr. Verhoosel said the first need for the displaced families was food. Many families were headed by women and many did not have the money to purchase it. Women, therefore, did whatever was possible to have either food or money to buy food, including selling their bodies. The priority for WFP and other agencies was to ensure women did not have to engage in such actions.

A journalist asked about the correct terms to use to describe the people who left Venezuela - refugees or migrants. The United Nations Refugee Agency said displaced Venezuelans were refugees.

Babar Baloch, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), said there were currently 4.5 million refugees and migrants from Venezuela in the neighbouring countries. Some 660,000 had applied for asylum and several neighbouring countries had put in place the arrangements for stay permits for Venezuelans.

Mr. Baloch recalled that on 13 November, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration had launched a joint appeal for 1.35 billion to help Venezuelan refugees and migrants. UNHCR was very concerned by the lack of resources to assist those vulnerable groups and their host communities which had so generously welcomed them.

The Sahel Crisis: UNHCR extremely concerned about the safety and wellbeing of persons displaced in Burkina Faso
Babar Baloch, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), read the following statement:

“UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and our partners are facing severe challenges in accessing the internally displaced people and refugee populations in Burkina Faso as insecurity grips north-eastern parts of the country.

With almost 500,000 currently displaced, a recent upsurge of violent attacks by militants on military personnel and civilians is forcing thousands more to flee their homes in search of safety. About 300,000 people have been displaced in just the last four months in the country. The number of those displaced could reach 650,000 by the end of the year.

People fleeing the violence report attacks on their villages by extremists who often forcibly recruit male residents at gunpoint, killing those who resist. Militants also stole cattle and other possessions. Terrified of these attacks, residents have left everything behind, many seeking safety in Dori – a town of about 20,000 inhabitants close to the border of Mali and Niger.

We remain extremely worried about the safety and security of residents and the 26,000 Malian refugees who have been affected by the recent violent militant attacks in Burkina’s Sahel region.

The fate of people living in the north-eastern border town of Djibo – including some 7,000 refugees in the Mentao camp, is of special concern to us. Access to the town was cut in early November after a series of militants attacks. Attackers have murdered the mayor, destroyed houses and disrupted daily life.

Inside the Mentao camp, refugees are living in fear. All schools have been closed and humanitarian access to the camp has become increasingly challenging, with the distribution of aid, including food, severely hindered. UNHCR was forced to temporarily relocate its staff from Djibo, to work remotely.

We are working through partners to provide aid to those who are still living in Djibo and also assisting locals and refugees who have arrived in Dori, Bobo Dioulasso and Ouagadougou.

Displaced families are in desperate need of shelter, water and food. Many are sleeping in the open, as renting small brick houses from the local population is expensive. UNHCR is distributing specialized tents - known as refugee housing units (RHU) - which have more ventilation, a lockable door and a small solar panel on the rooftop to provide light or to charge phones.

It is estimated that only 10 per cent of the shelter needs of the displaced people in Burkina Faso is covered at the moment. UNHCR is scaling up its relief efforts with urgently acquiring more shelter to complement the 3,335 already distributed and 1,880 currently being constructed in both Sahel and Centre Nord regions.

For communities and those forced to flee, access to documentation is essential to ensure freedom of movement. UNHCR has facilitated and financed the issuing of identity cards to internally displaced people, as well as birth certificates and other documentation that are essential to prove their identity, move freely or seek assistance.

We are calling for increased efforts to ensure the safety of the civilian population and humanitarian access to all affected in the region. Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger in September this year, adopted the “Bamako Conclusions,” reaffirming their commitments to protect civilians.

Currently, all of Burkina Faso’s 13 regions host people fleeing violence. The Centre-Nord region hosts the largest number of displaced people - more than 196,000 in Sanmatenga province alone - followed by the Sahel region – with almost 133,000 in Soum province.”

The situation was worsening daily, Mr. Baloch said in response to questions. A few weeks ago, more than
480,000 people had been forcibly displaced. Today, the number had crossed the 500,000 mark and could increase to 680,000 by the end of this year.

The armed groups and armed elements were coming after the civilian population and forcing them to join. They were extremists and any resistance by civilians carried severe consequences. UNHCR did not have other information about those groups, who they were and whether they were labelled “terrorists” internationally.

A journalist wondered how UNHCR, which had a presence on the ground in Burkina Faso, could not identify the militant groups attacking the people, either through their staff or through the Government. Mr. Baloch said it was important to understand the nature of those armed elements and that they operated with fear, trying to disrupt and destroy civilian life.


### Thousands of Central African refugees to return home from DRC

Babar Baloch, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), read the following statement:

“UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, on Thursday (November 21) helped hundreds of refugees currently living in the Democratic Republic of Congo to return home to the Central African Republic - launching the first-ever voluntary repatriation programme from DRC for around 172,000 people forcibly displaced from CAR since 2013. Some 400 refugees and their belongings left in a convoy of four trucks and light vehicles from Mole refugee camp to Zongo in Sud Ubangi Province, northern DRC. They continued their journey by boat to Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic.

The majority of the refugees had been living in DRC for several years, after violence in CAR forced them to flee and seek refuge in the neighbouring country.

The start of the voluntary repatriation programme follows a tripartite agreement signed by UNHCR and the governments of DRC and CAR in June 2019.

Since the agreement, some 4,000 people have signed up for the programme, indicating their wish to be helped to go home by the end of 2019. Although some refugees have been organizing their own returns, UNHCR plans to assist some 25,000 people by the end of 2020 through this gradual programme.

Returnees said better security in their areas of origin and the peace agreement between the CAR government and armed groups were the main reasons for their decision to end their exile.

In CAR, the refugees are returning to areas in Bangui and in the prefectures of Lobaye, Ombella M’poko, la Kemo, Nana Mambere, Mambere Kadei and Sangha-Mbaere, where the situation has improved over past two years.

Prior to their return, refugee representatives had visited their areas of origin, witnessing the presence of administrative and security authorities, and of humanitarian and development organizations.

Returning refugees are provided with transport and a return package consisted of cash and basic household items to help them initially once they are back in CAR.

UNHCR is also facilitating their reintegration by supporting the acquisition of civil documents and school certificates. We have built classrooms in some of the identified return areas.
As about half of the returning refugees are farmers, the CAR Government has provided arable land for them to grow their own food and provide for their families. UNHCR is also working with judicial authorities to facilitate the recovery of refugee properties.

However, the CAR needs more support in its efforts to improve access to basic healthcare, education and other social services.

Nearly 600,000 refugees from CAR are living in DRC and other neighbouring countries, while an equal number remains displaced inside its borders. Voluntary returns are based on individual refugee decisions and continued protection in hosting countries will be needed for those who do not feel safe to return home."

Was it safe for them to return to the Central African Republic, considering that the country was “a mess”, a journalist asked? Was it perhaps safer to return than to stay in the Democratic Republic of the Congo?

Mr. Baloch stressed that the return process was gradual and voluntary and only those who thought it was safe for them to return went back to the Central African Republic. Refugees who did not feel safe going back could remain in host countries. A total of 4,000 refugees had registered for voluntary return and the first convoy of 400 refugees had left the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 21 November.

He also recalled that there were still 600,000 internally displaced persons in the Central African Republic.

**Winter preparations for Syrian refugees and displaced in full swing**

Babar Baloch, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), read the following statement:

“UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, estimates that some 3.8 million Syrian and Iraqi refugees, as well as internally displaced people and refugees of other nationalities, are in need of additional assistance this winter in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt. For many of the Syrians, this is the ninth consecutive winter they will spend in displacement. Ongoing preparations for assistance began in September and support will continue throughout winter until March next year.

Preparations include deliveries of core winter relief items such as high-thermal blankets, plastic sheets and warm clothing. Refugee shelters are being repaired and improved to make them weather-proof. Other activities include improvements to drainage systems and other infrastructure, both in camps and informal settlements. Vulnerable refugee families are being provided with seasonal cash assistance to meet their additional needs during the cold winter months.

Given the drop in temperature and rains across the region, UNHCR teams and our partners are already distributing winter assistance in Syria and Iraq. As of the end of October, more than 364,000 refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) have been reached with winterization assistance in these two countries. In Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt, identification of beneficiaries for winterization assistance is ongoing.

Across Syria, UNHCR aims to reach 1.6 million Syrian IDPs (320,000 families). Assistance is prioritized for vulnerable IDPs and returnees, newly displaced families, people living in hard-to-reach areas and in sub-standard shelters, spontaneous returnees, as well as people in newly accessible locations who have not been assisted in the past. Distributions so far include north-east Syria, where UNHCR, as part of the inter-agency efforts, has provided basic aid and winter items to more than 177,500 newly displaced people in host communities, collective shelters and camps, including to over 86,500 people in Al-Hol, Areesha, Roj and Mahmoudli camps.

UNHCR in Iraq aims to deliver winter assistance to over 660,000 IDPs (110,000 families) - 157,700 Syrian refugees (38,300 families), and 16,800 refugees of other nationalities (4,200 families). During October alone, more than 89,000 IDPs and returnees (nearly 15,000 families) received winter cash assistance. Nearly
one in three of these families was headed by a woman.

In Lebanon, UNHCR is providing winter aid to more than 860,000 Syrian refugees (some 172,000 families) and 9,000 Iraqi refugees (3,000 families) living below the poverty line. 73% of the Syrian refugee families in Lebanon live below the poverty line which is USD 3.84 per capita a day. They are unable to cover their basic survival needs such as food, health and shelter. As a consequence, there are increased protection risks and exposure to negative coping mechanisms such as child labour, early marriages or survival sex. Almost nine out of ten households are indebted, clearly indicating that Syrian refugee families lack the resources to cover their essential needs.

During winter, their situation is exacerbated by economic shocks associated with harsh weather conditions and the reduction of already limited income opportunities. In addition, many families will face additional health risks as they cannot keep warm. There are floods and access to health care is already limited. In light of the major economic crisis currently affecting Lebanon, UNHCR’s winter campaign this year will reach more vulnerable Lebanese families than in previous years to ensure that they can stay warm during the winter season despite their rapidly deteriorating situation.

Starting this month, in Jordan UNHCR is reaching more than 310,000 Syrian refugees (69,000 families) in camps and urban areas this winter season. In two large camps - Azraq and Zaatari - families will be supported with a one-time winter cash assistance through the common humanitarian cash distribution facilities and will receive cash to obtain gas for heating. In urban areas, UNHCR will also provide a one-time package that covers the cost of a heater, a gas canister, gas refills for four months and blankets for each family member.

In Egypt, UNHCR plans to provide seasonal cash assistance to more than 87,000 Syrian refugees (29,000 families) and 3,934 Iraqi refugees (1,659 families), starting in November.

UNHCR is grateful for the support our government and private sector donors have shown so far for our efforts to aid and protect Syrian refugee and IDPs. However, the overall funding of UNHCR operations for IDPs in Syria and Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries in 2019 stands at 43 per cent of required USD2.180 billion.

Syrians remain the largest refugee population in the world. More than 5.6 million live in neighbouring countries and across North Africa. Another 6.2 million are estimated to be displaced within Syria.”

**Upsurge in violence complicates Ebola response in the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

Christian Lindmeier, for the World Health Organization (WHO), said the ongoing violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was complicating the Ebola response.

Dr. Michael Ryan, Executive Director of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, said WHO and its partners had been making progress on the Ebola response in North Kivu and Ituri over the last few weeks. The weekly number of cases had fallen progressively, with only seven cases reported in the last week. This was a great testament to the work of frontline workers, a very active alert system and an efficient surveillance system. The public health operation moved from strength to strength and over the last 21 days, cases had been reported in only five health zones.

The bad news was that the footprint of violence and insecurity had once again aligned itself with the footprint of Ebola. There was currently a smaller number of chains of transmission in places like Mabalako, Beni, Oicha and Wamba. In those areas, there was a limited number of transmission chains and a real opportunity to break the chain of transmission and the outbreak.

Unfortunately, over the last two weeks, the number of security incidents in those areas had doubled,
especially in Oicha and Beni. The increased scale of engagement between the FARDC, the national army, and the ADF had led to the death of over 40 civilians in the last two weeks. Eleven deaths had been reported most recently over the weekend with significant engagements in Oicha and in Volcane, which is an area of Beni town.

In parallel, there was a large number of high-risk contacts and a very serious chain of transmission in Oicha. Some of those individuals moved away, raising the need for forensic tracking and tracing of contacts, for accelerated vaccination. So, while the number of cases was low, there was a significant number of high-risk contacts to which health agencies did not have the appropriate access. WHO was very alarmed that the lack of access and the lack of security was now preventing the agency and its partners from ending this outbreak, Dr. Ryan stressed.

There was still a lot of work to do on the public health side. The tracking of alerts and of more than 4,500 contacts across the still affected five health zones continued. Also, more than 100 safe burial teams were still operating.

Dr. Ryan clarified that the response was led by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and supported by the WHO and other UN agencies, including UNICEF and IOM, as well as non-governmental organizations such as MSF (Médecins sans frontières) and others.

“From a public health operation point of view, we have the resources on the ground to end the Ebola outbreak. The difficulty we collectively face at the moment is that we have lost the unlimited and unfettered access to communities in key areas. This is a very dangerous and alarming development in this response. We have seen previously in Beni, Butembo and Katwa just what a significant breach in operations could do to the transmission of the virus,” said Dr. Ryan.

Today, there were ongoing demonstrations in Beni and in Butembo. The communities affected by severe violence were protesting, not against the Ebola response but against the violence, which was disrupting the operations in addition to the insecurity on the ground, Dr. Ryan concluded.

Asked about the causes of the latest eruption in violence, Mr. Ryan said violence was, unfortunately, a part of the daily lives of the people in North Kivu and Ituri. There were two issues, he said: the violence itself and the capacity to provide security to frontline workers. There had been an increase in engagements between the national army (FARDC) and the insurgent movement ADF. In the case of Beni and Oicha, that had been the primary reason for the increase of violence.

In the past, the WHO and the partners had been able to operate in deeply insecure environments, with the appropriate protection and security. We could not stand back and wait for the violence to disappear because Ebola would operate faster than that.

“What we need is access, we need security and an enabling operation that can provide access for our staff to the frontline in a secure manner. At the same time, we need all parties involved in the conflict to understand that, at this present time, it is the precious access we need in Oicha, in Beni, in Kanguta and in other areas.” Dr. Ryan also emphasized the need for proper planning of military operations in those areas and comprehensive access and protection for the response teams, a creation of safe spaces in which they could operate.

In response to a question on high-risk contacts, Dr. Ryan said there were more than 4,000 at the moment. Referring to a case in Oicha (a community death of an individual), he said that, of the 62 extremely high-risk contacts (in terms of their exposure), access had been possible to only 19 over the last two days. This was a major issue. On the other hand, over 90 per cent of the 159 contacts of the same case who had moved to Kalenguta had been seen. In the insecure area without access we saw a very small proportion of cases, while when there was some access, a high proportion of cases were seen.
“That one case generated over 300 contacts and at this stage of an outbreak, one case matters. One case can re-ignite this whole outbreak, and right now, one case where we do not have access to that community means the virus will get ahead of us again. We have been here before and we do not want to be here again; we need to deal with the security issues on the ground so we have proper access to communities to do our job.”

Asked who had to provide security and protection and why the teams were not getting adequate protection from the Government and United Nations, Mr. Ryan said that, given the ADF presence, Oicha was a very difficult environment in which to operate. Given the number of attacks, the road between Beni and Oicha was probably one of the most dangerous ones on the entire African continent. Previously, WHO had been able to place a national and international team in Oicha, with the appropriate protection and security.

The protection would be a mixture of both: MONUSCO with the local police and others working together to create a platform from which the public health operation could occur. The improvement in security situations and enduring access to the affected community was the task for everybody, including the Government, MONUSCO, and FARDC. The situation on the ground was one that no one could have predicted: an active transmission of Ebola in an area where there was an active military engagement.

The health teams were travelling under the protection of the police, in a point-to-point escort. Under this arrangement, the police remained outside of the villages and it was the civilian teams that interacted and engaged with the communities. This was a way to avoid the securitization or the militarization of the Ebola response and ensure that it remained a civilian affair.

In every insecure situation, there were two choices related to the use of police escorts: not to go and do nothing, or go under security arrangements. With Ebola, however, the choice not to go was not an option, because every day you decide not to go is the day that the disease spreads in the community. “That is the conundrum, that is the dilemma that the teams on the ground face every day, and have faced for the last year and a half.”

There was no zero-risk, or perfect situation and perfect security. But sustained access to Oicha over the next three weeks must be assured to follow up and manage the situation. The same applied to Beni, where cases had been reported. WHO was also concerned about the Loemba health area in the north. Here, the community had been deeply resistant to the intervention for several weeks and there were indications of ongoing transmission. Loemba, Oicha, Kalanguta, Mabalako were areas of major concern, while Beni and Oicha represented the biggest security threat to the effectiveness of the operations.

Do you fear that this will reignite the epidemic and create a situation that could go on for a very long time? Dr. Ryan said there was good containment of the virus in general and key monitoring and that it was unlikely to see an explosive transmission of Ebola just because of its incident. However, “we are so close to finishing and if we lose this opportunity, we are going to be dealing with that reality for months to come. It is time to finish with Ebola because we have more work we need to do to support the vulnerable people of Congo.”

Dr. Ryan noted the excellent work done by UNICEF to increase community acceptance and stressed that this was not a major barrier to the public health operation.

IOM alarmed by a spike in departures from Libya, calls for an urgent shift in approach to the situation in Libya

Safa Msehli, for International Organization for Migration (IOM), read out the following statement:

“The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is alarmed by the latest developments in Libya where, in the span of 48 hours, at least nine boats carrying more than 600 migrants have been discovered on the
central Mediterranean route. A tenth boat arrived yesterday (21/11) in Lampedusa, Italy.

This apparent spike in departures from Libya comes at a time when the capital, Tripoli, and surrounding areas are witnessing some of the heaviest shelling since the conflict erupted in April.

“IOM is deeply concerned about the safety of migrants who are vulnerable to clashes, human trafficking and abuse as the security situation further deteriorates,” said Federico Soda, IOM Libya Chief of Mission.

“Libya is not a safe port; there is a need for a predictable and safe disembarkation mechanism for migrants fleeing violence and abuse.”

IOM renews its call to the European Union and the African Union, for an urgent shift in approach to the situation in Libya. Immediate action must be taken to dismantle the detention system and find alternative solutions to safeguard lives.

Between Tuesday (19/11) and Thursday (21/11), operators of the Ocean Viking and Open Arms NGO vessels reported rescuing 287 migrants. IOM Libya confirms that the Libyan Coast Guard returned 289 others to shore including 14 children and 33 women; they were transferred to a detention centre. IOM staff who provided emergency assistance at the disembarkation point described the migrants as “vulnerable and scared”.

Forty-three others were picked up by the Tunisian authorities off the coast of Djerba on Thursday morning. A further 74 migrants also arrived at Lampedusa yesterday. According to IOM Staff in both locations, the boats departed from Zwara, Libya.

IOM Libya is unable to verify reports Wednesday night that another vessel sank with a significant loss of life.

Since the beginning of the year, more than 8,600 migrants have been returned to often overcrowded Libyan detention centres where the United Nations has documented unacceptable conditions, violations of human rights and often disappearances.”

Asked whether IOM had access to detention centres, at least those run by the Government of Libya, Ms. Msehli said her agency had access to official detention centres, which were under the Department for Combatting Illegal Migration. No information was available about other detention facilities run by non-official authorities. IOM provided support and assistance to people in detention, for example, health assistance, core relief items and voluntary humanitarian return to countries of origin.

Ms. Msehli clarified that nine boats had been discovered on the central Mediterranean route. Five had been rescued by ships run by non-governmental organizations, including Ocean Viking and Open Arms, and four had been returned to Libya. An additional boat had arrived in Lampedusa on its own.

Migrants picked up by the Libyan Coast Guard had been returned to Libya, which IOM did not believe to be a safe port. Vessels operated by non-governmental organizations requested a port of safety from authorities. Those ports of safety were assigned by States, explained Ms. Msehli.

As for the boat that had arrived in Lampedusa, it was not known what the passengers’ claims were and whether they would be provided with protection.

**In Sudan, humanitarian needs driven by erratic weather, disease outbreaks and the economic crisis**

Jens Laerke, for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), read the following statement:
United Nations humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock will visit Sudan from today to Sunday to see the humanitarian situation in the country and advocate for sustained international support to address the current needs. This is his first mission to Sudan since the transitional Government was formed in August of this year.

During his visit, the Emergency Relief Coordinator will meet with senior officials from the transitional Government, the diplomatic community, and humanitarian organizations. He will also travel to Kassala in eastern Sudan to visit health facilities and meet local communities who have been affected by recent economic shocks and recurrent disease outbreaks, and he will meet youth volunteers involved in the response.

Humanitarian needs in Sudan are driven by a combination of erratic weather, multiple disease outbreaks and the economic crisis. More than 8.5 million people, including 1.9 million who remain internally displaced, need humanitarian assistance - and needs are expected to increase further.

The ongoing disease outbreaks are of immediate concern. They have been exacerbated by the recent flooding - the worst since 2013 - as stagnant water has become a breeding ground for water-borne and vector-borne disease.

The Sudanese Federal Ministry of Health has announced an outbreak of Rift Valley Fever in the country with 319 suspected cases reported, including 11 deaths. Special task force committees have been activated in the most affected states of Red Sea and River Nile. And active vector control with household inspections and fogging to eliminate mosquitoes are ongoing in affected areas. There is also a cholera outbreak with 337 cases reported, dengue fever with nearly 2,600 cases, and 128 cases of chikungunya - a viral disease transmitted to humans by infected mosquitoes (reported across the country as of 19 November).

One aspect of the economic crisis that directly affects vulnerable people is food prices which are still at record or near record levels despite a good harvest last year and good prospects for the current season. For instance, the October 2019 prices of sorghum on markets in Khartoum were about five times higher than in October 2017.

In support of the national response, aid groups across the country are responding to the humanitarian situation under the umbrella of the UN-coordinated humanitarian response plan. That plan seeks US$1.1 billion in funding and is currently 51 per cent covered.

**World AIDS Day Report to highlight the role of community organizations**

Sophie Barton-Knott, for the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), read the following statement:

“Ahead of World AIDS Day on 1 December, UNAIDS is launching a new report highlighting the need to engage and support community organizations.

Community organizations play a critical role in health and development in general and particularly in the response to HIV, expanding access to treatment, supporting adherence and reaching the most vulnerable and the most affected by HIV.

However, harmful laws and policies in many countries, and a lack of funding, are depriving dozens of national HIV responses and the knowledge, dynamism and determination of organized communities. The report highlights that crackdowns or restrictions on many community groups are putting their life saving work in jeopardy.

The report is called Power to the People and will be launched on Tuesday 26 November in Nairobi with the new Executive Director of UNAIDS, Winnie Byanyima.”
Announcements

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

Catherine Huissoud, for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) said the first Competition Policy Forum would be held on 25 and 26 November in Istanbul. Digitalization and competition law and policy, effective enforcement against cartels, and international cooperation in competition law enforcement would be discussed.

Next week in Geneva, the Trade and Development Commission was to focus on vulnerabilities, in particular in Small Island Developing States.


On 10 December, UNCTAD would publish the 2019 Handbook of Statistics.

Human Rights Council

Alessandra Vellucci, Director of the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, speaking on behalf of the Human Rights Council, said that the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights, set up by the Human Rights Council in 2011, would hold its next session from 25 to 27 November in Room XX at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. The meeting was open to the media.

The session theme was "Time to act: Governments as catalysts for business respect for human rights". Some 2,500 participants from governments, business, civil society, affected groups and international organizations were expected to attend the three-day meeting. They would explore trends, challenges and good practices in preventing and addressing business-related human rights impacts, with the aim of translating the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights from paper to practice.

Office of the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria

Alessandra Vellucci, Director of the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, reminded journalists that the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Geir O. Pedersen, would brief the United Nations Security Council today at 3 p.m. (New York time).

The 45 members of the small body of the Syrian Constitutional Committee was expected to meet in Geneva next week. No press conference was planned.

International Organization for Migration

Joel Millman, for International Organization for Migration (IOM), said the Global Migration Film Festival, now in its fourth year, was about to be officially launched. On Monday, IOM Niger had embarked on a “caravan” festival, with films screened in the capital and other big cities, as well as in migrant transit camps. The caravan would cover 3,000 kilometres.

He also announced that the 10th World Migration Report for 2020 would be launched on 27 November.

United Nations

Rhéal LeBlanc, Chief of the Press and External Relations Section, United Nations Information Service in Geneva, said the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination would open its 100th session on Monday 25 November, during which it would review reports from Colombia, Cambodia, Ireland,
Uzbekistan and Israel.

He reminded journalists that the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women would be marked on 25 November. In his annual message, the United Nations Secretary-General said such abuses were among the world’s most horrific, persistent and widespread human rights violations, affecting one in every three women in the world. The Secretary-General called on Governments, the private sector, civil society and people everywhere to take a firm stand against sexual violence and misogyny. “We must show greater solidarity with survivors, advocates and women’s rights defenders. And we must promote women’s rights and equal opportunities,” he says.

Mr. LeBlanc also reminded the media about this evening’s “Fearless” concert by Maya Azucena at 5 p.m. The concert was organized by the Permanent Mission of the United States to the United Nations Office at Geneva, on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.