UNOG Bi-weekly press briefing 26 November 2019

26-11-2019 | Press Conferences

Story

Secretary-General of the United Nations in Berlin

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, said the Secretary-General was currently in Berlin, Germany, where he was attending the opening ceremony of the fourteenth Annual Meeting of the Internet Governance Forum. The Forum – an annual gathering of civil society, governments and technology specialists – had as its theme in 2019: “One World. One Net. One Vision.” The Secretary-General was expected to call for universal and affordable Internet access by 2030 and for a world in which access to technology did not give rise to social and political divisions. Also during his visit to Berlin, the Secretary-General was due to visit a school that provided technology training for refugees. In addition, he would hold bilateral meetings with the German Chancellor and with government officials. The previous evening, he had had an informal dinner with leaders of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities.

World AIDS Day on 1 December

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, said he wished to draw attention to the Secretary-General’s Message for World AIDS Day, which began: “Ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030, as we committed to in the Sustainable Development Goals, will require a continuous collaborative effort. The United Nations, Governments, civil society and other partners have been working together to scale up access to health services and to halt new HIV infections. More than 23 million people living with HIV were
receiving treatment in 2018.” The Secretary-General concluded his message with the words: “Where communities are engaged, we see change happen. We see investment lead to results. And we see equality, respect and dignity. With communities, we can end AIDS.”

Charlotte Sector, for the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), said the new report by UNAIDS for World AIDS Day – entitled “Power to the people” – was being released under embargo ahead of the Day itself, which fell on 1 December. The report was being launched in Nairobi by the new Executive Director of UNAIDS, Winnie Byanyima.

Peter Ghys, Director of Strategic Information and Evaluation for the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), explained that the theme of the report was that empowering communities and individuals could have a significant impact on the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The “power to choose” meant that people could select from a range of different prevention modalities such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), voluntary medical male circumcision and the integration of contraceptive services with HIV services.

Knowledge about HIV/AIDS needed to be communicated through appropriate sexual education. In fact, the report also contemplated the “power to know”. That meant that people had a range of options whereby they could learn their HIV status and persons living with HIV could learn about viral loads. For example, the report made it clear that an undetectable virus was untransmissible; in other words, a suppressed virus could not be transmitted to another person. In addition, the report highlighted the fact that the period between infection and diagnosis needed to be as short as possible. That period differed from country to country but typically it was longer for men than for women. The power to know also extended to other aspects: once people knew that they were on effective treatment for their condition they felt liberated and could lead almost entirely normal lives.

The report also envisaged the “power to thrive”, meaning that persons who were on antiretroviral treatment were able to live full lives. According to the latest data, 24.5 million persons were receiving antiretroviral treatment as of mid-2019 and, although that was some way short of the target of 30 million that had been set for 2020, it showed a marked increase with respect to the December 2018 figure of 23.3 million. The data also identified a gap in the number of children, particularly older children, on antiretroviral treatment with respect to adults. It was estimated that more than 250,000 children between the ages of 10 and 14 were not benefiting from antiretroviral treatment.

A study conducted recently in Eswatini had shown that cash transfers to girls and young women had had the effect of enabling them to stay in school longer and, as a consequence, had led to an important reduction in the incidence of HIV.

Lastly, the report highlighted the importance of empowering what it described as “key populations” – i.e., sex workers, gay men, men who had sex with men, transgender persons, intravenous drug users and prisoners – where almost 50 per cent of new HIV infections occurred.

In reply to a question raised by a journalist, Mr. Ghys said that, whereas 62 per cent of the HIV population as a whole were receiving antiretroviral treatment, that figure fell to 54 per cent in the case of children between the ages of 0 and 14.

In response to a query about the situation in Venezuela, Mr. Ghys said the report recognized the crisis there. In fact, many Venezuelans had left the country to access HIV/AIDS testing and treatment services elsewhere. UNAIDS was working to import antiretroviral drugs into Venezuela.

Christian Lindmeier, for the World Health Organization (WHO), said the theme for the forthcoming World AIDS Day was “Communities make the difference”. WHO was drawing attention to the difference communities were making to end the HIV epidemic while drawing global attention to the need for their broader engagement in strengthening primary health care. On 27 November, WHO would be releasing new recommendations concerning HIV testing services including innovative approaches to deliver more accurate and timely testing services to the 8.1 million people who were still to be diagnosed with HIV.

The twentieth International Conference on AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections in Africa
ICASA2019 would begin in Kigali, Rwanda, on 2 December with a keynote address by WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. At ICASA2019, WHO would be hosting over 20 key sessions, engaging policymakers and implementers from across Africa and beyond. On 1 December, WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus would be present at a public health event to promote healthy lifestyles and HIV services during the “Kigali Car-Free Day”.

**Update from the Office of the Special Envoy for Syria**

Jennifer Fenton, for the Office of the Special Envoy for Syria, read the following statement:

“On Monday, the Special Envoy for Syria Mr. Geir O Pedersen met with the two Co-Chairs to discuss the agenda for the second session of the Syrian Constitutional Committee. The two Co-Chairs each submitted a proposal for the agenda and these were exchanged. There is not yet an agreement on the agenda and discussions are continuing. The Special Envoy also met with members of the Middle Third to inform them about the discussions with the Co-Chairs. Mr. Pedersen is continuing his consultations with the Co-Chairs, with the expectation of continuing the work with the Syrian Constitutional Small Body of 45 members. Information about any further meetings would be released as it became available.”

Responding to journalists’ questions, Ms. Fenton said the Special Envoy, in addition to his meetings with the Co-Chairs, routinely engaged with all other regional stakeholders. The Small Body of 45 members was scheduled to continue to meet in Geneva throughout the week.

**Embargoed briefing by OCHA and UNICEF**

Jens Laerke, for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said that OCHA and UNICEF would be holding a briefing in Room III at 3 p.m. on Tuesday 3 December for the launch of the Global Humanitarian Overview 2020. The Global Humanitarian Overview, formerly known as the Global Humanitarian Appeal would be officially launched on 4 December and the contents of the briefing would remain under embargo until 6 a.m. Geneva time on that day. The main launch would be in Geneva but other events would also be held in Berlin, Brussels, London and Washington.

The briefing would be attended by Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator – who would be presenting the Global Humanitarian Overview – and Henrietta Fore, Director-General of the United Nations Children’s Fund – who would be launching the UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children 2020 financial appeal. The two appeals were aligned and complementary.

Responding to a question raised by a journalist, Mr. Laerke confirmed that 2018 had seen a record appeal for USD 22 million. However, the methodology for calculating the amount of the 2019 appeal had been changed meaning that a direct confrontation between the 2018 figure and the 2019 figure was not possible. Nevertheless, the text of the Global Humanitarian Overview had catered for that change by recalculating the 2018 amount so that it could directly compared with the appeal for 2019.

**Update on Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

Christian Lindmeier, for the World Health Organization (WHO), said the security situation in Beni had worsened in recent days. Although the violence was not directed against Ebola-response teams, WHO had deemed it prudent to relocate 49 of its 120 staff from Beni to Goma. It was important to note that the staff members who had been relocated were non-critical and that 71 members remained on the ground in Beni where they continued to provide some level of response to the Ebola outbreak, tracing contacts, assisting in dignified burials and providing vaccinations. Nonetheless, the uncertain situation was having an impact on WHO efforts; for example, it had previously been possible to trace more than 90 per cent of contacts whereas currently that figure stood at 17 per cent. Seven new cases had been reported in the previous week.
Overall, as of 24 November, there had been 3,303 cases of which 2,199 had resulted in the death of the patient, 1,077 had survived while the others were still receiving treatment.

Responding to questions from journalists, Mr. Lindmeier said WHO staff – both those who had relocated to Goma and those who remained in Beni – continued to do what they could, despite the situation. He understood that the current violence was inspired by people’s frustration about the security situation, but it needed to stop in order for WHO to be able to resume its operations fully.

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, pointed out that the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) was also calling for calm as violent protests continued in Beni. The United Nations Special Representative in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Leila Zerrougui, had stated that she understood the anger and frustration people were feeling following further deadly attacks by the Allied Democratic Forces, and she had met to discuss the situation with the President, ministers and military chiefs. MONUSCO would continue to work with the authorities in order to find joint solutions and had called on all political, religious and media figures to support a return to calm.

**WHO press conferences**

Christian Lindmeier, for the World Health Organization (WHO), said a press conference would be held in Press Room 1 at 2 p.m. on Wednesday 27 November to present new global mortality figures for measles for 2018 and an update on 2019. The figures would be officially released on 5 December and the contents of the press conference would remain under embargo until then.

Mr. Lindmeier added that the first report tracking global progress on health and climate change would be launched in Press Room 1 at 2 p.m. on Friday 29 November. The launch was being timed to precede the forthcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference COP 25, due to be held in the Spanish capital Madrid from 2 to 13 December.

Lastly, Mr. Lindmeier said he wished to draw attention to a virtual press briefing at 3 p.m. on Monday 2 December on the key findings of the World Malaria Report 2019. The Report offered an in-depth analysis of trends in malaria control and elimination at the global, regional and country levels.

**Geneva announcements**

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, said that, in Press Room 1 at 11 a.m. on Monday 2 December, UNHCR would hold a press briefing on the key findings of four years of UNHCR cash-based assistance programmes for refugees and internally displaced persons. The information would remain under embargo until 10 a.m. on 3 December.

Also in Press Room 1 at 12.30 p.m. on Monday 2 December, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) would be holding a question and answer session about the Federation’s humanitarian priorities. The session would be led by IFRC President Francesco Rocca.

That morning and on the afternoon of 27 November, the Committee against Torture would be reviewing the initial report of Niger. The Committee would then continue to meet in private until the end of its current session on Friday 6 December when it would issue its concluding observations on the six countries it had reviewed: Burkina Faso, Cyprus, Latvia, Niger, Portugal and Uzbekistan.

Mr. LeBlanc further said that the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination had begun its 100th session on Monday 25 November, which would continue until Friday 13 December. During the session, the Committee would be considering reports submitted by Cambodia, Colombia, Ireland, Israel and Uzbekistan.
Mr. LeBlanc concluded by drawing attention to the fact that Friday 29 November marked the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. To mark the event, a meeting would be held in the Council Chamber of the Palais des Nations at 10 a.m. The Secretary-General had released a statement for the Day, which was already available but remained under embargo until Friday morning.