Concerns for trapped civilians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Charlie Yaxley, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), read the following statement.

“UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and its humanitarian partners remain extremely concerned for the safety and security of hundreds of thousands of civilians in the Democratic Republic of Congo’s eastern Beni Territory, after deadly violence and mass protests have cut off humanitarian access to the troubled region.

Tensions in this part of DRC’s North Kivu province have been rising since the launch of a government-led security operation against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) on October 30. Armed groups have been targeting civilians and displaced populations in the region, killing scores of people.

Growing estimates indicate that at least 100 people were reported to have been killed in violent attacks in the
Beni region since 2 November, with thousands displaced, the vast majority of them women and children. Additional mass displacements have been reported from Mbau and Oicha localities, north of Beni. People are taking refuge in the Beni town, in an attempt to flee attacks, and the ongoing fighting between the army of the DRC and ADF.

Information is difficult to verify, as the movement of humanitarian workers is restricted due to insecurity around the city and in the territory of Beni, as a result of violence. Alarming reports from the region suggest people being trapped and under threat from the armed groups, with daily reports of loss of life. Abductions and attacks on schools, health centres and indigenous communities are also on the rise.

UNHCR and its partners are calling for an urgent restoration of security to allow humanitarian agencies immediate access to support the affected population. Hundreds of households are currently sleeping in churches and schools.

Children are in need of immediate support, many of whom have lost their parents or have arrived unaccompanied. Forced recruitment by armed groups is a real threat to the safety of children. Women also face widespread sexual violence, abuse and risk of exploitation. We fear that many more lives could be lost if humanitarian access as well as law and order is not immediately restored in the areas.

According to official estimates, the city of Beni is home to almost half-a-million people. There are some 275,000 displaced people in the territory. With ongoing insecurity, many have been left stranded at the mercy of the armed groups.

The current insecurity adds to an already-complex displacement situation in North Kivu, with an existing 1.5 million internally displaced persons affected by the conflict and ongoing efforts to fight the deadly Ebola virus.”

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

“With civil unrest and violence continuing in the city of Beni, one of the Ebola epidemic hotspots in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, the World Food Programme-run United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) is airlifting non-essential UN staff to Goma, capital of North Kivu province, 360 km to the South.

The widespread violence, which erupted in Beni in November, destroyed and damaged UN property and precipitated the decision to temporarily re-deploy non-essential staff. Nearly 200 UN colleagues made their way in convoys to Beni airport, and most were flown to Goma by WFP-UNHAS aircraft: two passenger planes and a transport helicopter.

While those relocated include some 18 non-essential WFP staff, a core team that includes security, logistics, warehousing and administration personnel remains in Beni. WFP staff who have been flown to Goma will return to Beni as soon as the security situation permits.

Due to the insecurity, WFP’s Ebola response activities have been suspended, including food distribution.”

Answering a question about the role of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, said that the situation on the ground was extremely complex and difficult. MONUSCO compounds had also come under attack. He wished to draw attention to a recent press briefing given by the Special Representative and Head of MONUSCO, Leila Zerrougui, who had explained that, although MONUSCO did have a mandate to protect, it was not always able to achieve the desired results. According to Ms. Zerrougui, protests against MONUSCO came from only a small group of individuals who were manipulating people’s suffering and use it against the Government and MONUSCO. The capacity of
MONUSCO was limited but it was doing what it could to defend the civilian population and mitigate the current situation, in coordination with government authorities. MONUSCO was there to protect people, not to wage a war, and it had to exercise great care to ensure that its own use of force did not cause harm to civilians. Ms. Zerrougui had explained that MONUSCO had 13,000 troops deployed across 6 provinces whereas the armed groups responsible for the violence numbered more than 100 and sometimes members of those groups were difficult to identify from the population at large.

Responding to a journalist’s question, Mr. Yaxley said the situation was dire and deteriorating with ongoing attacks against schools, health centres and sites where people had taken shelter. Without humanitarian access it was difficult to be precise but, according to information at his disposal, there were currently 275,000 displaced persons in the area around Beni while Beni itself had a population of around 500,000. In some areas, pockets of civilians were surrounded by armed groups which effectively meant that they could not escape, and assistance could not reach them.

Also answering journalists’ questions, Mr. Verhoosel said the security situation and the difficulties in accessing affected areas were the reasons that had forced WFP and its partners temporarily to suspend their response activities. That meant that thousands of people would not be receiving vital food assistance in coming days. The inability to keep up food supplies might also have an impact on efforts to respond to the current Ebola outbreak in the region. In fact, alongside its general food assistance, WFP also distributed food to contacts of Ebola victims so that they would not have to travel to markets and potentially propagate the disease still further. He hoped that food distribution could recommence as soon as possible and called on all parties to give priority to humanitarian access and security.

Mr. Verhoosel said he had just received information from the WFP bureau in the Democratic Republic of Congo indicating that essential staff remained on the ground in Beni and continued to respond to urgent requests.

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

Christian Lindmeier, for the World Health Organization (WHO), said that 15 confirmed cases had been reported between 30 October and 5 November in the ongoing Ebola virus disease outbreak in North Kivu and Ituri provinces. While the number of new cases was consistent with the weekly average of 19 confirmed cases in the past 21 days, there was a notable daily fluctuation of cases.

Following the insecurity, the volume of reported daily alerts from health-care facilities and the community had dropped in Beni in the four-day period from 23 to 26 November from approximately 400 per day to 120-150 per day. Proportionally similar reductions in the number of alerts had also been observed in Butembo, following two days of protests.

Recent security events had had an impact on contact tracing activities, which involved monitoring registered contacts of Ebola cases for signs of infection, particularly in Oicha where only 15 per cent of contacts were under surveillance as of 26 November. The overall average percentage of contacts under surveillance in the previous 7 days was 86 per cent, but it had dropped as low as 59 per cent on 25 November.

Contact tracing activities were essential functions of the response and were well known to reduce the risk of spread of the virus. Fluctuations in performance following insecurity would almost certainly enable new chains of transmission.

It was heart-breaking that people had died in the line of duty as they worked to save others. It was important also to recognize that the population at large was facing a situation of extreme insecurity due to attacks by armed groups.

Ebola had been retreating, and now it is likely to resurge. It would be tragic to see more unnecessary
suffering in communities that had already suffered so much. WHO was constantly looking at options for continuing the Ebola response as the virus continued to spread when health workers leave.

In reply to a question from a journalist, Mr. Lindmeier said that, under normal circumstances, contact tracing percentages would be in the high nineties. Currently, they were fluctuating considerably with the average for the previous week standing at 86 per cent. However, on individual days it could be as low as 15 per cent. Inability to trace contacts effectively had a significant impact on the Ebola response and would almost certainly lead to new chains of transmission. In any case, the current situation was such that Ebola – as well as other diseases such as cholera, measles and malaria – were being underreported.

Mr. Lindmeier said it was important to distinguish between two kinds of attacks. On the one hand, armed insurgent groups were attacking camps and United Nations installations including, on one occasion, a WHO residential compound. At the same time, fear and frustration was giving rise to violent unrest among the general population. The latter was not directed against humanitarians as – thanks also to outreach by UNICEF and others – the community was largely supportive of efforts to tackle Ebola. In fact, the typical contact tracing figures of over 90 per cent, as well as upwards of 400 alerts per day, were a testament to how engaged, sensitized and cooperative the population was.

Mr. Lindmeier said that, despite the current violence and its serious impact on the capacity to respond, Ebola responders continued to do what they could to continue with some part of the operations: following up on alerts, tracing contacts and assisting in safe burials. He was not aware that any Ebola treatment centres had been attacked although some had reduced capacity due to fewer staff.

Answering a further question about relocations, Mr. Lindmeier said that, 33 staff had been relocated from the Biakato Mines and 140 Mangina to Goma. The security situation in other locations was being carefully monitored to see if any further relocations were required. Marixie Mercado, for the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), said all 11 UNICEF staff in Biakato had been relocated. Of the 13 UNICEF staff in Mangina of whom 9 had been relocated while 4 remained.

Responding to a question from a journalist, Marta Hurtado, for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said the High Commissioner for Human Rights was due to visit the Democratic Republic of the Congo early in 2020. The precise dates for such visits were normally announced only two or three days before they took place.

**Floods in north-western Democratic Republic of the Congo and Kinshasa**

Jens Laerke, for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), read the following statement.

“Torrential rains since October in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have caused extensive flooding and initial assessments indicate that over 400,000 people are affected, most of them along the Ubangi river in the north-west of the country. Authorities are saying these are the worst floods in 25 years.

The worst affected provinces are North and South Ubangi, bordering Central African Republic, but there is also flooding in Maniema, Tshopo and Haut-Uélé.

OCHA has deployed staff to the flooded areas along the Ubangi river to support local authorities in coordinating the response. Initial assessments indicate that people primarily need emergency shelter and clean water.

Earlier this week, heavy rains and landslides in the capital Kinshasa reportedly killed more than 40 people and flooded several neighbourhoods.
Assessments across the country are ongoing to assess the scale of the floods and the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance. A response plan is being developed by the Government with the support from UN and humanitarian partners. This plan will prioritize shelter, water and sanitation and non-food items to help the most vulnerable among the affected.”

Marixie Mercado, for the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), read the following statement.

“In North and South Ubangi, over 32,000 houses, 632 water sources and 142 schools and health centres have been damaged.

Water points and latrines have been damaged in the flooded areas and access to safe water, hygiene, and sanitation is extremely limited. The risk of water-borne disease, especially cholera, is increasing due to overflowing latrines and poor hygiene conditions.

Using contingency stock, UNICEF sent a first wave of emergency supplies – water, sanitation and health – by air to partners in Zongo / Libenge, the epicentre of the humanitarian crisis in South Ubangi. UNICEF is currently in the process of sending a second round of supplies to both provinces and it has deployed experts in water, sanitation and coordination.

As of 10 November, there had been 17,000 cases of cholera in 2019, as well as a nationwide measles epidemic that is described as the world’s largest and faster moving, that has already killed more than 5,000 people, over 90 per cent of them children below the age of 5.”

Hervé Verhoosel, for the World Food Programme (WFP), said WFP had provided support to people in Bangui, Central African Republic, who had also been affected by the floods. However, most of the impact had been felt in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

WFP and its partners had provided food to 10,000 people and new food distributions were currently underway. WFP food rations were composed of rice, peas, oil and salt. Many roads had been washed away and the best way to reach the stricken communities was by boat.

Upriver from Impfondo, the district capital, the impacts were obvious. Dozens of villages were under water and had been deserted. The straw roofs were torn off of buildings. Cassava root – a staple of people’s diet in the region - was mouldy but many still ate it and it was making them ill. Likouala was known for its plantain but the plantain was now yellow or brown, submerged in stagnant water. In the Betou market, women selling cassava flour were nowhere to be seen. Fish was hard to catch with such a high-water level.

A river barge with more than 700 tons of food, enough to feed the population affected by the floods for a month, had left Brazzaville last Friday.

Responding to a journalist’s question, Mr. Verhoosel explained that the focus of WFP efforts was on Ubangi. Although Kinshasa had also been affected by flooding, food was still readily available in markets.

FLOODS IN KENYA

Jens Laerke, for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), read the following statement.

“In Kenya, floods and landslides since October have killed at least 120 people and caused widespread devastation – and more heavy rains are expected across the country over the next weeks.

More than 160,000 have been affected and in one single incident, on 22 November, 72 people lost their lives after a landslide buried their houses in West Pokot County in the north-west of the country.
Flood alerts have been issued for the coastal, northern and western regions of the country, with the risk of landslides and mudslides in parts of the Central Highlands and parts of the Rift Valley.

In support of the humanitarian efforts by the Government, Kenya Red Cross and others, OCHA is convening UN humanitarian agencies to help coordinate the response which in places is hampered by damaged roads and bridges, particularly in the worst affected parts of north and north-western Kenya.

Agencies have delivered food and non-food items, emergency medical teams and supplies of potable water to marooned communities and carried out aerial reconnaissance to locate cut-off communities.

It is estimated that the overall funding needed for this response is USD15 million to allow humanitarian organizations to provide critical food and livelihood support, water, sanitation and hygiene, shelter and health services for the most vulnerable people in the hardest-hit areas. An allocation from the Central Emergency Response Fund was on its way.

The climate crisis is clearly driving the rising humanitarian needs in Kenya and wider East Africa. As climatic shocks pile up, people's livelihoods are being devastated and their access to basic needs such as food and clean water is being compromised. In the Horn of Africa, the past three rainy seasons have seen two droughts and now floods.”

**Update on El Niño and the Indian Ocean Dipole**

Clare Nullis, for the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), said conditions for El Niño/Southern Oscillation (ENSO) were currently neutral – i.e., an absence of either El Niño or La Niña – and that state of affairs seemed likely to continue during the period December 2019 through February 2020. However, that did not mean that there would be no unusual or extreme weather.

The current flooding in East Africa and the drought in Australia were not due to El Niño but to another natural climate condition known as the Indian Ocean Dipole, which had gone through a strong positive phase in recent few months.

WMO had issued its Global Seasonal Climate Update for the forthcoming December-January-February 2919-20 period. The Update was in its pre-operational phase and was intended as guidance rather than a prediction. WMO would be issuing a press release for the UN Climate Change Conference COP 25, which was to be held in Madrid from 2 to 13 December.

Asked by a journalist about the significance of a recent declaration of a “climate emergency” by the European Parliament, Ms. Nullis said the scientific community tended to avoid terms like “climate emergency” and “climate crisis”. Declarations were undoubtedly useful, but what was really required was concrete action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

**OHCHR technical mission to Ecuador**

Marta Hurtado, for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), read the following statement.

“UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet on Friday urged all actors in Ecuador to engage in dialogue to prevent new conflicts and forge an inclusive, peaceful society with full respect for its multicultural nature.

The High Commissioner also called for independent, impartial and transparent investigations into allegations of human rights violations and abuses committed in Ecuador during the protests from 3 to 13 October – including killings, violations of international norms and standards on the use of force, arbitrary detentions, as
well as looting and destruction of public and private property.

According to information received by the team, over 11 days of social unrest, at least nine people died and 1,507 were injured, including 435 members of security forces. Reportedly, 1,382 people were detained. There are allegations that many of these people were arbitrarily detained.

‘Last month’s unrest had a high human cost,’ the High Commissioner said. ‘People should be able to express their grievances without fear of being hurt or arrested. At the same time, it is important that protestors do not resort to violence.’

The team received reports from victims and witnesses of use of force by law enforcement officials that was not in conformity with international norms and standards, including unnecessary and disproportionate use of force. Law enforcement officials included the police and the military, which was deployed following the declaration of a state of exception.

While acknowledging that the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Police have opened 17 and 31 investigations respectively, the UN Human Rights chief stressed the importance of investigating the circumstances of all deaths and serious injuries. She added that it is imperative that the internal protocols regarding the use of force for law enforcement officials are reviewed and that the authorities ensure they comply with international norms and standards.

Some protestors also resorted to violence and unidentified individuals had been accused of inciting and using violence. Riots, roadblocks, looting, attacks on dozens of ambulances, arson and destruction of public and private property, cutting off water supplies, and damage to oil production facilities were all used as means of expressing dissent. According to official reports, more than 400 police and military officers were held against their will and subjected to harassment and ill-treatment.

Bachelet also called on the authorities to refrain from statements and other actions that may lead to stigmatization of indigenous peoples and foreigners, as well as of journalists and political opponents, exposing them to additional risks of physical harm.

A worrying pattern identified by the mission was the very high number of alleged arbitrary detentions. Mass arrests were carried out throughout the crisis, and in several cases without any evidence against specific individuals.

‘The Government should ensure that those released without charges are not left with an adverse record against them as a result. By the same token, those who have been charged should enjoy a fair trial and proper treatment in accordance with international standards,’ the High Commissioner said. ‘A comprehensive package of reparations should also be provided for the victims. People not only have the right to truth, but also to remedy, which include guarantees of non-recurrence. Without these, the feeling of frustration and injustice will prevail.’

Regarding the triggers of the crisis, the UN Human Rights Office strongly recommends that the Government promote a participatory approach to decision-making, ensuring the enjoyment by people of their right to participate in public affairs. Such a strategy of participation should be extended to economic and fiscal measures – including on proposals of austerity measures – and especially with the communities likely to be worst affected.

‘Social and economic inequality remains a structural barrier for development for vast sectors of society, who have felt left behind for generations and do not see positive prospects for the future,’ Bachelet said. ‘It is of paramount importance that society as a whole, with the Government as a guiding force, embark together in search of paths of mutual understanding with the aim of constructing an inclusive, multicultural and peaceful society.’”
Answering a question from a journalist, Ms. Hurtado said the visiting team had been able to visit all the facilities they desired. The Government and all other stakeholders had cooperated fully, for which OHCHR was extremely grateful. The mission had not been mandated by the Human Rights Council or the General Assembly. The decision to send the mission had been taken by OHCHR and it was up to OHCHR to follow-up on the recommendations that had been made.

Answering an additional question about missions to other South American countries, Ms. Hurtado said the mission to Chile had completed its work on Friday 22 November and was currently in the process of drafting its report. OHCHR was continuing to monitor the situation in Venezuela where it had had a presence on the ground since June. The efforts were currently being made to organize a fact-finding mission to the country, as mandated by the Human Rights Council.

**Continuing violence in Iraq**

Marta Hurtado, for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), read the following statement.

“We are deeply disturbed by the continued killing and wounding of protestors in Iraq, including the latest casualties during the extremely violent events over the past two days in Nassariya, during which, according to verification carried out by UNAMI human rights staff, at least 24 people were killed and more than 210 injured. A number of people were also killed and injured in Najaf, but we have not yet been able to verify the extent of casualties there.

The overall number of casualties verified by the UN since protests began at the beginning of October now stands at 354 dead and 8,104 injured. The actual total is likely to be higher.

Once again we urge the Iraqi authorities to take much firmer and more effective action to ensure security forces do not employ excessive use of force, and in particular use of live ammunition, as they have been doing repeatedly since the protests began. There must also be investigations and prosecutions of those responsible for unlawful killings.”

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, said the Secretary-General had also made a statement about the situation in Iraq in which he expressed his deep concern “over reports of the continued use of live ammunition against demonstrators in Iraq.” The Secretary-General “urges all actors to refrain from violence and to engage in peaceful and meaningful dialogue for the benefit of Iraq and the Iraqi people”, and “reiterates his call on the Iraqi authorities to exercise maximum restraint, protect the lives of demonstrators, respect the rights to freedom of expression and assembly, and swiftly to investigate all acts of violence.”

In reply to a query from a journalist, Ms. Hurtado said the numbers of victims she had given were those that had been verified within the strict parameters of the OHCHR methodology. The real number was certain to be much higher. She was unable to say if militias had been involved in the latest events although they had been involved in similar incidents in the past. OHCHR, part of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), was doing what it could to make its voice heard by engaging with the authorities at different levels.

Mr. LeBlanc said the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, had this week held separate meetings with the President, Prime Minister and the Speaker of the Council of Representatives. She had stressed the need to reflect the people’s legitimate call for electoral reforms in legislation currently under review.

**Deportation from Israel of Human Rights Watch Israel Director Omar Shakir**
Marta Hurtado, for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), read the following statement.

“Yesterday, the High Commissioner met with Omar Shakir, the Israel and Palestine director of Human Rights Watch who was compelled to leave Israel on 25 November 2019, after the Israeli Supreme Court upheld the legality of the Government’s decision not to renew his visa. The High Commissioner deeply regrets this decision, which both the UN Human Rights Office and a group of three UN Special Rapporteurs had urged the Government to reverse in the wake of the Supreme Court ruling. The expulsion of Mr. Shakir casts a shadow over Israel’s commitments to freedom of expression and freedom of association, as well as over the ability of human rights defenders and organisations to carry out their important work. The Special Rapporteurs pointed out that the freedoms of expression and association protect the expression of support for, or opposition to, movements such as the BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions), which do not incite discrimination, violence or hostility.”

In answer to a question from a journalist, Ms. Hurtado confirmed that the meeting between the High Commissioner and Mr. Shakir had taken place in Geneva and that Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, Kenneth Roth, had also been present at the encounter.

**Situation in Hong Kong**

Responding to a question about criticisms allegedly levelled against OHCHR by human rights organizations in Hong Kong, Marta Hurtado, for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said the High Commissioner would shortly be making known her views on the situation in Hong Kong. In the meantime, OHCHR called on all sides to show restraint. The Government should respect people’s right of peaceful assembly and protestors should refrain from using violence. It was important also for the Government to remind its security forces of the need to abide by international norms regulating the use of force.

**Reminder about OCHA/UNICEF briefing on Global Humanitarian Overview 2020**

Jens Laerke, for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said he wished to remind journalists about the joint OCHA/UNICEF briefing for the launch of the Global Humanitarian Overview 2020, to be held in Room III at 3 p.m. on Tuesday 3 December. He would be distributing embargoed copies of the Overview in electronic format on Monday morning. Hard copies were also available at Press Room 1 between 10 a.m. and 11 a.m.

**Global workshop on exchange of data and information in transboundary basins**

Jean Rodriguez, for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), said a global workshop would be held on 4 and 5 December to exchange data and information regarding the quality of water in transboundary basins. The workshop would be an opportunity to discuss practical experiences and to make recommendations. There were reporting obligations under river basin agreements and under the Water Convention. The issue was also connected to the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal 6. Although many lessons had been learned in recent years, there was still progress to be made.

Participants were coming from all over the world, including Brazil, Chile, Honduras, South Africa, Cameroon, Chad, Senegal, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, Jordan and Kazakhstan. There would also be representatives from basin authorities such as the Amazon Cooperation Treaty, La Plata River Basin, the Senegal River Basin Development Authority, the Sava River Basin Commission, the Mekong River Commission and the Nile River Basin Initiative.

**Secretary-General’s Message for Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People**
Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, said a special meeting in observance of General Assembly resolution 32/40 B was being held that morning at UNOG to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. In his message for the Day, the Secretary-General of the United Nations stated: “On this International Day of Solidarity, let us reaffirm our commitment to upholding the rights of the Palestinian people. The United Nations will not waver in its commitment to the Palestinian people as we strive to achieve their inalienable rights and build a future of peace, justice, security and dignity for Palestinians and Israelis alike.”

The message added: “Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains one of the most intractable challenges facing the international community. Regrettably, over the past year, there have been no positive developments, and the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate.”

In the message, the Secretary-General called “on Israelis and Palestinians, and all their supporters, to take steps that will restore faith in the two-State solution. There is no viable alternative.”

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

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, said the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Geir O. Pedersen, was continuing his consultations with the Co-Chairs of the Syrian Constitutional Committee.

Responding to a question from a journalist, Mr. LeBlanc said, as scheduled, the meetings had been taking place regularly during the course of the week and, although the delegations had not yet met directly face-to-face, the Special Envoy was continuing to facilitate the negotiating process.

Mr. LeBlanc added that it had been announced within the previous few minutes that the Special Envoy would address the media that day, Friday 29 November, at 1 p.m. by Door 13.

**Geneva announcements**

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, said the United Nations Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, Jayathma Wickramanayake, would be attending the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva from 16 to 18 December and would be available for interviews.

Mr. LeBlanc also said the second intersessional meeting on human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, mandated by the Human Rights Council, would take place in Room XX on Tuesday 3 December, beginning at 10 a.m.

Mr. LeBlanc also said that, except for a short meeting on Wednesday afternoon devoted to follow-up on concluding observations and individual complaints, the Committee against Torture would be meeting in private until the end of its sixty-eighth 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. On the same day at 12.30 p.m. in Press Room 1, the Chair, Vice-Chairs and two members of the Committee would be holding a press conference to present the outcomes of the session.

Mr. LeBlanc added that the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination would be concluding its review of the report of Cambodia that morning. The session 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 said a meeting of the 183 States parties to Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction would be held in Geneva from 3 to 6 December. During the meeting – which would be presided by France –
participants would give detailed consideration to the report of the committee of experts, which had met in August.

Mr. LeBlanc reminded journalists that 1 December was World AIDS Day and 2 December was the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery.