Story

Attacks on humanitarians in South Sudan

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

“UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is calling for increased protection for aid workers in South Sudan after this weekend’s targeting of an international relief agency by armed men.

The devastating attack happened during the early morning of Sunday December 01, when armed men broke into an NGO compound in Bunj town in Upper Nile’s Maban County, severely assaulted staff and took their belongings.

UNHCR strongly condemns this senseless act against aid workers who were there to improve the lives of refugees and vulnerable South Sudanese nationals.
The past few months have seen an increase in attacks on aid workers in the country. Sunday’s violence happened only a month after three United Nations staff working in South Sudan’s Central Equatoria Region were killed.

The world’s youngest country has remained among the world’s most violent places to deliver aid. Ensuring the safety and security of aid workers in South Sudan has now become a major challenge. This continuously hampers humanitarian action for some of the world’s most desperate people.

UNHCR calls for enhanced respect for international humanitarian and human rights law to protect civilians and humanitarian workers from violence and to ensure the perpetrators are brought to justice immediately.”

In answer to questions from journalists, Mr. Baloch said that 151,000 refugees from Sudan and many vulnerable South Sudanese nationals were reliant on humanitarian assistance in Maban county. The identity of the attackers had not yet been established, and UNHCR was calling on the authorities in the region to investigate the attack and bring the perpetrators to justice as soon as possible. In 2018, for the third consecutive year, the Norwegian Refugee Council, which compiled an index of attacks on humanitarian workers, had said that South Sudan was one of the worst countries in which to deliver aid.

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

Tarik Jašareviæ, for the World Health Organization (WHO), read the following statement:

“WHO Director General Dr. Tedros Adhanom visited Goma this weekend to meet with Ebola responders who are in hospital recovering from injuries suffered in the 27 November attacks.

On the night of 27 November, unidentified armed attackers launched two separate attacks on a camp housing Ebola outbreak response staff in Biakato Mines and on the Ebola coordination office in Mangina. 4 responders were killed and 7 injured.

These were the latest in a series of similar incidents this year, during which WHO has documented approximately 390 attacks on health facilities that have killed 11 and injured 83 health care workers and patients in DRC. But despite the disruptions, WHO and humanitarian partners in eastern DRC have committed to continue their Ebola response operations.

Since the start of the outbreak in August 2018, 3,313 people have contracted Ebola, 2,203 of whom have died. In recent weeks, there has been an encouraging decline in the number of people confirmed with the virus. While it is too soon for us to tell what the impact will be on Ebola cases, we know that when we have no access to affected communities there could be new infections going undetected.

Over the past weekend WHO continued relocations of staff due to security threats. Of the 800 staff WHO has in country for the Ebola response, about a third have been now been relocated to safer locations in the response area. We are continuing to work on how to adapt our strategy to keep responders safe while still getting the job of ending Ebola done.

In Biakato, the MSF-run Ebola transit centre is still functional. WHO is supporting remotely (e.g. over the phone step-by-step instructions when they administer the therapeutics). Other response activities are currently on hold.

In Mangina, the IMC treatment centre is still working as normal, as is the lab. Local teams are performing surveillance, investigation, contact tracing and follow-up, infection prevention and control, burials, and risk communication and community engagement.

In Oicha work is continuing, but mainly being done by trained members of local communities, often with remote support from WHO. For example, 25 people were vaccinated in Oicha over the weekend.
In Beni, there are reduced activities but surveillance, lab, etc. are ongoing.

In all above-mentioned places, the vaccination activities have been limited

In Komanda, Mamabasa, Bunia, and Goma, response activities continue at usual levels.

Dr. Tedros said during his visit that ending the outbreak cannot be done without a much stronger effort to improve your security. We call on those responsible for security to recognize your extraordinary efforts by making a greater commitment to your security.”

Alessandra Vellucci, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, said that Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations had on Monday 2 December concluded a visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in the wake of the previous week’s violence. He had visited several peacekeeping sites and met with representatives of the authorities, as well as going to the Ebola centre in Biakato, where he had emphasized the imperative need to ensure that the Ebola response remained fully operational.

**Zimbabwe: worst hunger crisis in more than a decade**

Bettina Luescher, for the World Food Programme (WFP), said that Zimbabwe was facing the worst hunger crisis in over a decade, with 7.7 million people – half the population – in food insecurity. WFP planned to nearly double the number of people it was helping to 4.1 million by January 2020. Extreme weather conditions and the dire economic situation had pushed those people into severe hunger. They formed part of the climate-driven disaster that was gripping southern Africa. The country had seen a normal rains in only one of the previous five growing seasons, with below-average rainfall forecast once again for the period between January and March 2020, the main growing season. The country’s subsistence farmers, who produced maize - a very water-intensive crop - had still not recovered from the drought in 2016. The crisis was being exacerbated by a dire shortage of foreign currency, runaway inflation, mounting unemployment, lack of fuel, prolonged power outages and large-scale livestock losses, afflicting urban residents and rural villagers alike.

Eddie Rowe, WFP Zimbabwe Country Director, for the World Food Programme (WFP), speaking by telephone from Harare, said that the food security situation in the country was unprecedented. About 80 per cent of rural areas had seen only one normal harvest in the previous four years. The crisis was a result not just of climate-induced drought, but also of the economic challenges the country was facing. More and more families went to bed hungry, without even one meal a day, and prices of basic commodities were rising by 25 or even 30 per cent week on week. The purchasing power of the average household was negligible, and the markets were not functioning.

The lack of availability of basic commodities had led WFP to conclude that, rather than continue to provide 60 per cent of its assistance in cash transfers, it would, as of the peak of the hunger season in January 2020, provide all in-kind assistance to 4.1 million people in rural areas. Urban areas had also seen an increase in food insecurity and urban poverty, and WFP was trying to assist about 200,000 individuals in eight urban domains, providing much-needed electronic cash transfers to allow them to access basic food.

While WFP greatly appreciated the generosity of donors over the years, the task before it now was daunting: it currently had a funding gap of US$ 293 million if it was to meet projected needs in January 2020. The greatest challenge was procuring the food: it would usually have been sourced within the region, but neighbouring countries such as Zambia and Malawi were also hit by drought. Hence the basic commodities would need to be procured internationally: it would take between two and three months for the 200,000 tonnes needed to arrive in Zimbabwe. Action had to be taken now to avoid the situation turning into a major crisis.

Responding to questions from journalists, Mr. Rowe said that the 200,000 tonnes planned would cover the
needs of 4.1 million people between January and June 2020. He added that the supplies available from the WFP global facility in Durban, South Africa, were not enough to cover all the needs, and so maize grain would be sourced, for instance, from Tanzania and Mexico, and pulses from Kenya and possibly the Black Sea area.

Ms. Luescher added that only 30 per cent of the US$ 293 million needed had so far been received, and WFP was calling on the international community to provide the remaining US$ 211 million. The crisis that was unfolding in Zimbabwe was huge and the international community needed to take action now.

**COP25 and World Meteorological Organization Statement on the State of the Global Climate**

Alessandra Vellucci, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, said that the Secretary-General had spoken extensively on climate change on the occasion of COP25, and had emphasized the need for strong action to put an end to what he called “our war against nature”.

Jonathan Fowler, for the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), said that the WMO Statement on the State of the Global Climate had been launched in Madrid on Tuesday morning during the twenty-fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP25). He read the following statement:

“The year 2019 concludes a decade of exceptional global heat, retreating ice and record sea levels driven by greenhouse gases from human activities. Average temperatures for the five-year (2015-2019) and ten-year (2010-2019) periods are almost certain to be the highest on record. 2019 is on course to be the second or third warmest year on record, according to the World Meteorological Organization.

The global average temperature in 2019 (January to October) was about 1.15 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial period. Concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere hit a record level of 407.8 parts per million in 2018 and continued to rise in 2019. CO2 lasts in the atmosphere for centuries and the ocean for even longer, thus locking in climate change.

Sea level rise has accelerated since the start of satellite measurements in 1993 because of the melting of ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica, according to the report. The ocean, which acts as a buffer by absorbing heat and carbon dioxide, is paying a heavy price. Ocean heat is at record levels and there have been widespread marine heatwaves. Sea water is 26 percent more acidic than at the start of the industrial era. Vital marine ecosystems are being degraded.”

Mr. Fowler added that the study *United in Science*, produced by WMO and a range of UN and other partners in September 2019, had noted that the current level of ambition pledged by the parties to the 2015 Paris Agreement now needed to be tripled if a rise of up to 3°C in average global temperatures was to be avoided, and multiplied by five to avoid a rise of 1.5°C. As Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary of the the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, had said, the report would help to focus negotiators’ minds at COP25.

**Second intersessional meeting on human rights and the 2030 Agenda**

Alessandra Vellucci, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, speaking on behalf of Rolando Gomez, for the Human Rights Council, said that the second intersessional meeting on human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, mandated by the Human Rights Council, was taking place in room 20 on Tuesday 3 December. The full-day event, which had started at 10 am, was open to the media, and would be webcast live. Participants would be discussing how implementing human rights commitments could help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. More information was available in the press release sent to journalists on 28 November.
New Human Development Report

Sarah Bel, for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), read the following statement:

“At 3.30 p.m. today, UNDP is organizing an online briefing under embargo with Achim Steiner to present the findings of our latest Human Development Report, which is focusing on inequality. The report will be launched on 9 December in Bogotá. The report also includes the latest human development indexes for 189 countries.

In the context of growing civil unrest and protests linked to perceptions of entrenched inequality among ordinary citizens, Achim Steiner decided to focus our flagship research product on the topic of human development inequalities.

The report assesses which inequalities are becoming important today. It reflects on how these inequalities differ around the world and among population groups, and how they are changing.

Despite substantial gains in health, education and living standards, the basic needs of many remain unmet, while a next generation of inequalities is emerging, growing under the shadow of the climate crisis and technological change.

But corrective action is possible and the report provides a series of recommendations for policies to redress inequalities in human development.”

Ms. Bel added that journalists should contact her if they wished to join the briefing and receive the related materials, under embargo until the launch date, or to interview Mr. Steiner or and Pedro Conceição, author of the Report.

UNCTAD – E-commerce

Catherine Huissoud, for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), said that the first meeting of the Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy was taking place in Geneva on 3 and 4 December. UNCTAD was working in partnership with the International Telecommunication Union, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Trade Organization, the Universal Postal Union and Eurostat on the meeting, which would bring together over 100 participants from 40 countries.

At the meeting, UNCTAD was launching the Business-to-Consumer (B2C) E-commerce Index 2019, with a new ranking of countries. Europe remained by far the most prepared region for e-commerce, with eight countries ranking in the top 10 of the global index. For the second consecutive year, the Netherlands led the Index, followed by Switzerland.

The Index scored 152 nations on their readiness for online shopping, worth an estimated US$ 3.9 trillion globally in 2017. Data were not available for 2018; it was problematic to collect relevant data on the digital economy and e-commerce.

The 10 developing countries with the highest scores were all from Asia and classified as high-income or upper middle-income economies. At the other end of the spectrum, least developed countries occupied 18 of the 20 bottom positions.

UNCTAD - Investment Policy Monitor

Catherine Huissoud, for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), said that the most recent Investment Policy Monitor had been published on Tuesday 3 December, looking at the ways
in which investment policies restricted foreign investment in many countries. The number of cases where governments have rejected foreign investment, sometimes for national security reasons, have increased in recent years.

UNCTAD had identified at least 20 cases (value exceeding US$ 50 million) where foreign investment had been stopped for national security reasons. From 2016 to September 2019, such cases represented an aggregate value of US$ 162.5 billion. The figures reflected only those cases and transactions for which information is publicly available.

Generally speaking, numerous countries have introduced new or reinforced procedures dedicated to national security-related investment screening. The tightening of investment screening for national security reasons might create new investment barriers.

**UNCTAD - Handbook of Statistics 2019**

Catherine Huissoud, for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), said that the Handbook of Statistics 2019, to be published on 10 December, would present statistics related to all the areas of UNCTAD’s work in a new way. The forthcoming press release would provide additional information on the global economy and global trends.

**Other Geneva announcements**

Ms. Vellucci said that the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination was concluding this morning its review of the report of Ireland and would begin its review of the report of Uzbekistan in the afternoon.

Ms. Vellucci said also that, on the occasion of Human Rights Day on 10 December 2019, Nobel Peace Prize winner Nadia Murad would be the guest of honour, along with other young female activists, at the Young Activists Summit – Women and Girls Driving Progress, at the Palais des Nations and the Graduate Institute. Organized by the United Nations Office at Geneva, the Swiss Radio and TV (RTS) and Dev.tv, the event would comprise a Youth Summit in the morning with some 750 young participants from the Geneva region, followed in the afternoon by an award ceremony, where the six young female activists would share their views and talk about their causes.

Interested accredited media representatives who had not yet registered for the event were invited to contact the organizers through UNIS.