



Bi-Weekly Press Briefing 25 March 2022

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Story

War in Ukraine

Alessandra Vellucci, for the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), reminded that 24 March marked one full month since the start of the Ukraine war. United Nations, along with its humanitarian partners, was providing aid wherever security conditions on the ground were allowing.

Rob Holden, WHO Incident Manager for Ukraine, connecting from Dnipro in Ukraine, said that the WHO team had arrived to Dnipro two days before in order to further strengthen its operational response in the center-east of the country and be closer to the people who needed assistance the most. The eight oblasts most affected by the war should now hopefully be better covered.

Matilda Bogner, Head of the OHCHR Human Rights' Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, connecting from Uzhgorod in Ukraine, said that day by day suffering was increasing in cities, towns and villages. As of today, the OHCHR Mission had recorded at least 1,035 civilian deaths and 1,650 civilian injures, but that represented far from the full picture, as it did not include Mariupol. Private houses, multistory building, and medical facilities had all been destroyed on a massive scale. The extent of civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian objects showed that the principles of distinction and proportionality were not respected. OHCHR was also looking into reports of indiscriminate shelling by the Ukrainian forces in Donetsk and other non-government-controlled areas. OHCHR was investigating allegations that the Russian forces had killed civilians during peaceful protests in the areas occupied by Russia. Arbitrary detentions

were also recorded, including of journalists and activists. Ms. Bogner said that prisoners of war had to be treated humanely and protected from insults and public curiosity.

The past month had demonstrated the absolutely crucial role of journalists, she said, but they were facing increasing dangers in their work, with a number of them killed and injured. OHCHR was deeply concerned about the plight of people who had already been in difficult situations prior to the war, such as persons with disabilities and elderly persons. OHCHR called on all parties to ensure safe corridors for evacuation of civilians from hard affected areas. It was time to stop the fighting now, as the UN Secretary-General had stressed several days earlier.

Karolina Lindholm Billing, Representative of the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Ukraine, speaking from Lviv in Ukraine, said that one month had passed in which everything had changed. So many private homes and infrastructure objects repaired by the humanitarian agencies were now rubble. Today, there was a reality of a massive humanitarian crisis growing by the second. Over ten million people had been forced to run for their lives; 6.5 million of them were currently displaced inside Ukraine. Some 13 million people were estimated to be stranded in affected areas and unable to leave safely; many of them were living in constant fear of bombardment. Many UNHCR national staff were internally displaced persons now, for the second or even third time since 2014. There were 154 UNHCR staff currently deployed in Ukraine; everyone was doing their best, in cooperation with humanitarian partners and local authorities.

UNHCR aimed to complement and support local capacity, stressed Ms. Lindholm Billing. Just this week, UNHCR had delivered over 20,000 non-food items to affected individuals, which was far from meeting all the existing needs. Millions of IDPs would need housing support in medium to long term, she stressed, and UNHCR was working hard to make sure IDPs could access accommodation and essential services across the country. UNHCR was rolling out cash transfer programs in several oblasts, aiming to reach at least 360,000 people. The humanitarian agencies needed to do all they could to protect, empower and support those in need, concluded Ms. Lindholm Billing.

Full UNHCR briefing note is available [here](#).

Tomson Phiri, for the World Food Programme (WFP), estimated that 45 percent of the people in Ukraine were worried about finding enough food to eat. WFP had mobilized food supplies to support three million people over one month: WFP had already provided assistance to 716,000 people and would scale up its response to reach more than 2.4 million people within one month. One out of five people in Ukraine were currently using a food copying strategy, he said. The country's food supply chain was broken, with trucks and trains destroyed, airports damaged, and supermarkets empty. The encircled city of Mariupol could be reached only through humanitarian convoys which had so far not made it through. The first interagency convoy had made it to Sumy with 130 metric tons of supplies, informed Mr. Phiri. Over 2,000 tons of mixed food commodities were in transit inside Ukraine at the moment.

Ms. Vellucci stated that the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) had just released an information note on the importance of Ukraine and the Russian Federation for global agricultural markets and the risks associated with the current conflict, which is available [here](#). Ms. Vellucci added that some USD 469 million had been provided by donors thus far in response to the [Ukraine Flash Appeal](#).

Responding to multiple questions from the media, Ms. Lindholm Billing, for the UNHCR, said that the number of people in need of immediate humanitarian assistance was high, and was likely to remain so for a long time. Ms. Bogner, for the OHCHR, said that the OHCHR's civilian casualty reports were updated daily; people were dying in areas controlled by both Ukrainian and pro-Russian forces in eastern Ukraine. There was a very delicate and vulnerable water infrastructure in danger by the ongoing hostilities. OHCHR was looking into the allegations of civilians being deported to Russia; it was not possible to verify, as of now, whether those had been forced movements. Ms. Bogner said that the extent of civilian casualties and damage to civilian objects suggested very strongly that there had been violations of the international humanitarian law, but each individual case had to be looked into thoroughly. OHCHR was still trying to collect

information and verify details regarding the bombing of the theater building in Mariupol. OHCHR could confirm the killing of the journalist Oksana Baulina in the Kyiv area but could not state whether she had been specifically targeted.

In further replies to questions, Ms. Bogner said that there were reports of the use of both incendiary weapons and cluster munitions; the use of the latter by the Russian Federation had been confirmed. The overwhelming damage was being done by explosive weapons with a wide impact area, she said. OHCHR's civilian casualty figures were considered to be relatively accurate for most of the country, but figures for cities such as Mariupol and Volnovakha could not be verified. OHCHR's methodology required that every single civilian casualty be verified and not rely on broader estimates. It would take time to get reliable figures on the numbers of casualties in Mariupol. OHCHR figures did not cover civilians who died of causes other than fighting, such as those who died because of the lack of access to their usual medical care. If people were being forcibly deported to Russia, that could indeed amount to war crimes, Ms. Bogner said. More than 40 reports by the OHCHR Monitoring Mission had been issued over the previous eight years, said Ms. Bogner, and none of them had documented the "genocide" in the Donbas region alleged by the Russian Federation.

On another question, Mr. Holden, for the WHO, said that there were six WHO staff on the ground in Dnipro, which was currently relatively calm. The challenge was going into more difficult, active fighting areas, which were in higher demand and included higher risks and higher complexity.

Displaced Nicaraguans in Costa Rica

Boris Cheshirkov, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), stated that the number of Nicaraguan refugees and asylum seekers in Costa Rica had doubled in the last eight months, reaching more than 150,000, according to the latest figures available to the UNHCR. That represented a full 3 per cent of Costa Rica's total population of five million. Those figures, as of February 2022, confirmed that more Nicaraguans were currently seeking protection in Costa Rica than all the refugees and asylum seekers combined during Central America's civil wars in the 1980s, when Costa Rica had been a sanctuary for those fleeing violence.

Responding to questions, Mr. Cheshirkov said many arrived Nicaraguans were working in coffee harvest, but that harvest was coming to an end shortly.

Full briefing note is available [here](#).

Responding to a question, Elizabeth Throssell, for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), added that there had been trials against arbitrarily detained persons, some of whom had received long sentences. The High Commissioner had called on the authorities to unconditionally release those people and repeal the laws restricting public freedoms.

Crackdown on civil society in Libya

Elizabeth Throssell, for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said that the OHCHR was concerned by the deepening crackdown on civil society in Libya, where arbitrary arrests and a campaign of social media vilification were having a seriously chilling effect on human rights defenders, humanitarian workers, and other civil society actors. Members of the Internal Security Agency and state-affiliated armed groups had arbitrarily detained human rights defenders and civil society actors, under the pretense of protecting "Libyan and Islamic values", and had subjected them to torture verbal harassment and intimidation.

OHCHR called on the Libyan authorities to immediately stop such aggressive campaign against Libyans exercising and defending their human rights, and to immediately and unconditionally release all those arbitrarily detained, while also ensuring the protection of those named in coerced "confessions".

The OHCHR note is [here](#).

The trend of a shrinking civic space in Libya had been long noted, said Ms. Throssell in a reply to a question.

Launch of the UNECE 2022 SDG progress report

Jean Rodriguez, for the United Nations Economic Commission in Europe (UNECE), informed that the UNECE today was releasing [UNECE 2022 SDG progress report](#). The UNECE region was on track to achieve only 26 of 169 SDG targets, according to the report, while for all other measurable targets, the region had to accelerate progress or reverse current trends to achieve its 2030 ambitions. UNECE Executive Secretary Olga Algayerova commented that “with the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic not yet fully reflected in available data, and the impact of the war in Ukraine still to be assessed, the risk that the region will fail on the 2030 Agenda has never been so high.”

Mr. Rodriguez further said that, with the exception of extreme poverty, which was rare in the UNECE region, targets to reduce poverty and income inequality were not on track to be achieved by 2030. One in five individuals experienced multidimensional poverty across the region, and income inequality was worsening in many countries. In addition, the region had made good progress towards access to basic services such as drinking water and energy, and most countries had increased reliance on renewable energy.

Announcements

Margaret Harris, for the World Health Organization (WHO), spoke about the [Go.Data application](#) had been developed for contact tracing and data management to respond to outbreaks in real time. The tool included functionality for case investigation, contact follow-up, visualization of chains of transmission including secure data exchange and is designed for flexibility in the field, to adapt to the wide range of outbreak scenarios. By 2022, WHO and partners had supported Go.Data projects in 65 countries and territories.

Ms. Harris said that in the course of the pandemic, the WHO had hosted three critical forums of world experts on research and innovation that had helped shape the global research agenda for COVID-19 – including a coordinated R&D Roadmap at the very start of this emergency. The most recent of those forums (24-25 February 2022) reviewed core thematic areas of research, highlighting knowledge gaps and research priorities in the next research phase. Its [outcome report](#) had just been released, informed Ms. Harris.

Alessandra Vellucci, for the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), said that the Human Rights Council was considering the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

On 28 March, the [Committee on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families](#) would open its 34th session.

Also on 28 March, the [Committee on Enforced Disappearances](#) would open its 22nd session.

Ms. Vellucci also informed that today at 4:30 pm there would be a hybrid press conference in Tempus 2 by the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Syria, following the conclusion of the seventh session of the Small Body of the Syrian Constitutional Committee. Geir O. Pedersen, UN Special Envoy for Syria, would address the media. [Later the Special Envoy for Syria cancelled the presser]

On 28 March at 1 pm, there would be a hybrid press conference by the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya, which would launch the report of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya. Speakers would be: Mohamed Auajjar, Chair of the Fact-Finding Mission on Libya; and Tracy Robinson, Member of the Fact-Finding Mission on Libya, and Chaloka Beyani, Member of the Fact-Finding Mission on Libya.

On 30 March at 9 am, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) would release its State of World Population 2022 Report - “Seeing the Unseen: The case for action in the neglected crisis of unintended

pregnancy”. Monica Ferro, Director, UNFPA Geneva Office, would address the media.

Finally, on 1 April at 12 noon, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) would provide an update on the humanitarian situation in South Sudan. Speaker would be Sara Beysolow Nyanti, Humanitarian Coordinator for South Sudan.

At the end, Ms. Vellucci informed that today was the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade as well as the International Day of Solidarity with Detained and Missing Staff Members.