Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, said that the Secretary-General would be returning to the COP 25 Climate Change Conference in Madrid on 10 December to attend several events, including the Caring for Climate high-level meeting organized by the United Nations Global Compact and the high-level event on global climate action. The Secretary-General had called on leaders to increase their ambition when setting nationally determined contributions and had urged them to agree on the guidelines for the implementation of article 6 of the Paris Agreement. While in Madrid, he would also meet with ministers, members of the business community and civil society leaders to reinforce the message.
Dr. Rosamund Lewis, Head of the Smallpox Secretariat at the World Health Organization (WHO), said that 9 December had marked the fortieth anniversary of the signing of the certificate of the eradication of smallpox. The certificate had been signed by the Global Commission for the Certification of Smallpox Eradication, which had been made up of 19 members led by Australia.

Smallpox was a terrible disease that had killed 30 per cent of the people who contracted it and had caused 300 million deaths between 1900 and 1978. The first efforts to combat it had begun in 1721, when small doses of the variola virus had been placed on the arms of children who had then passed it to other children during long sea voyages. In 1796, the physician Edward Jenner had discovered that young milkmaids who caught cowpox never developed smallpox. He had then produced the first vaccine for smallpox and predicted that the disease would be eradicated.

In 1958, at the eleventh World Health Assembly, the Soviet delegation had presented a resolution proposing to eliminate smallpox. In 1967, WHO had intensified its efforts through the global eradication programme. The last naturally occurring case of the disease had been detected in Somalia in 1977. Five months after the signing of the certificate of eradication in December 1979, at the thirty-third World Health Assembly the WHO member States had declared the disease eradicated.

The variola virus was nowadays kept in two repositories in the Russian Federation and the United States of America. At those facilities, research was ongoing to develop countermeasures and vaccines should the world ever experience a resurgence of the disease.

Some of the lessons learned from the eradication of smallpox continued to be applied today. For example, house-to-house active case search surveillance underpinned the polio eradication programme, while the use of ring vaccination of contacts was used to combat the spread of Ebola.

In 1980, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and WHO had launched the concept of universal childhood immunization. The eradication of smallpox remained an incredible achievement that showed what the world could do when all nations worked together.

Responding to questions from journalists, Dr. Lewis said that smallpox was not known to have been successfully weaponized. Those countries that had attempted to weaponize it continued to be monitored under the Biological Weapons Convention. The role of WHO was to monitor the two repositories where the virus was stored and inspect them every two years. The facility in the Russian Federation had last been inspected in January 2019 and the one in the United States in May 2019.

Asked which other diseases were close to being eradicated, Dr. Lewis said that polio and guinea worm were
on the brink of being eradicated. So far, no human disease other than smallpox had been eradicated. However, rinderpest, which affected cattle and had decimated livestock in many communities around the world, had recently been eradicated.

**Measles outbreak in Samoa**

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

“The United Nations emergency response fund, the CERF, has released US$2.6 million to help responders scale up and fight back against the devastating measles outbreak in Samoa.

The funds will provide emergency vaccinations, obstetric and neonatal care for mothers and newborns infected with measles, help with mental health and psychosocial support and provide clean water and sanitation and public health information.

On 15 November, the Government of Samoa declared a state of emergency in response to the growing measles outbreak. The country has since been in a race against the disease to vaccinate its population and treat those who have already been affected. Its youngest citizens are most at risk, along with pregnant women and new mothers.

As of this morning, 4,819 measles cases have been reported to the Disease Surveillance Team since the outbreak started, according to the Ministry of Health in Samoa. There were 87 cases recorded over the past 24 hours.

In a country with a population of about 200,000, these numbers have been overwhelming for the health system. To date, 70 people have died as a result of the outbreak.

Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock, who released the emergency money, said that the people of Samoa will not fight this outbreak alone and that we can and must move swiftly to stop this deadly outbreak in its tracks.

The Government of Samoa, with support from the United Nations and the international community, launched a mass vaccination campaign on 20 November. This campaign has so far reached about 90 per cent of the 143,000 people it targeted.

The Government of Samoa has also launched a National Measles Response and Recovery Appeal, asking for nearly $11 million to support national efforts to contain the outbreak.
By the end of November 2019, Samoa, Tonga, Fiji and American Samoa have all reported measles outbreaks. Prior to the ongoing outbreaks, measles vaccine coverage varied in Pacific island countries and areas, ranging from 31 per cent in Samoa to 99 per cent in the Cook Islands and Nauru.”

Tarik Jašarević, for the World Health Organization (WHO), said that measles outbreaks had also been reported in Australia, Cambodia, China, including Hong Kong and Macao, Japan, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea and Viet Nam.

In Samoa, the Ministry of Health had declared the outbreak on 16 October and the national state of emergency on 15 November. Under the declaration, the Government had activated all sectors to support a coordinated government response and instituted a series of public orders, including mandatory vaccination as a legal requirement for the entire population.

A mass vaccination campaign had been launched on 20 November, focusing in the first instance on the main islands and aiming to provide vaccinations to those most at risk, namely children aged between 6 months and 19 years and non-pregnant women aged between 20 and 39 years. The campaign had been expanded on 2 December to target everyone aged between 6 months and 60 years.

There were currently nine medical emergency teams from different countries in Samoa. The response was being coordinated by the emergency medical teams coordination cell led by the Ministry of Health and WHO. WHO had deployed five public health experts, including an epidemiologist, an infectious disease specialist, a psychosocial support expert and a vaccine expert. In cooperation with UNICEF, WHO had supported the procurement of vaccines and vitamin A, as well as the delivery of human immunoglobin donated by French Polynesia.

The global increase in measles was a sign of collective failure — all parties needed to work together to reach 95 per cent vaccination coverage which protected everyone.

In response to questions from journalists, Mr. Jašarević said that 61 of the 70 people who had died of measles in Samoa had been children. The onset of the disease brought various complications, including encephalitis and pneumonia, which were more serious in children. It was a tragedy that people were dying from a disease that could be prevented by vaccination. According to the latest information, 91 per cent of the population of Samoa had now been vaccinated. The Government and its partners were working hard to increase that level to 95 per cent.

Ebola vaccination campaign
Asked to comment on the Ebola vaccination campaign in Rwanda, Tarik Jašarević, for the World Health Organization (WHO), said that people in areas close to the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo were being given the new J&J vaccine. In April this year Rwanda has already been vaccinating health workers near the border with DRC with the vaccine that had been developed by Merck. Although that vaccine was slightly more complicated to administer, since it required two doses, the advantage was that it covered a number of strains of Ebola, rather than just the Zaire strain.

Asked about the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with regard to Ebola, Mr. Jašarević said that the Ministry of Health was working towards restarting activities in Biakato following the attack that had occurred on 27 November. WHO was providing support to the Ministry and partners in that respect. For some time, WHO had been working to get the local population more involved in its Ebola-related activities.

**Publication of 2019 Handbook of Statistics**

Catherine Huissoud, for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), said that the Handbook of Statistics 2019 contained new estimates on the state of international trade and the world economy. The estimates, known as nowcasts, were predictions for 2019 that would be updated as soon as newer information became available.

The Handbook revealed a general global slowdown, with trade in goods expected to fall by 2.4 per cent to US$19 trillion, following more significant growth rates of 9.7 per cent in 2018 and 10.7 per cent in 2017. Trade in services was expected to increase by only 2.7 per cent to US$6 trillion, a significant slowdown from the previous two years.

Global real economic output (gross domestic product) was expected to grow by only 2.3 per cent in 2019, 0.7 percentage points lower than in 2018.

The 2019 Handbook, which was available only in English, contained maps, graphics and infographs to make the information more accessible to a wider audience. The online version of the Handbook was interactive.

**Geneva announcements**

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, said that the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination would meet in private until 13 December when its 100th session would end. On that date, the Committee would issue its concluding observations on the reports of Colombia, Cambodia, Ireland, Israel and Uzbekistan.

On 12 December, the final Mix & Mash event of 2019 would be held. Based on the theme of mountains, to mark International Mountain Day on 11 December, it would take place at the Brasserie des Halles de l’Ile in
Geneva from 6.30 p.m. and was being organized with the participation of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other local partners.