



Bi-Weekly Press Briefing 29 April 2022

29-04-2022 | Press Conferences

Story

Bombing in Kyiv

Alessandra Vellucci, Director of the United Nations Information Service, responding to questions on a bombing that occurred in Kyiv while the Secretary-General was in the city, said that the Secretary-General was shocked but not totally surprised by the incident, as Kyiv is the capital city of a war-torn country. Ms. Vellucci confirmed that the Secretary-General was safe. The United Nations had condemned such attacks on the civilian population in the past and would continue to do so. It was too early to say which group was responsible for the attack, but the culprits of attacks of this kind needed to be held accountable and brought to international justice. Ms. Vellucci further confirmed that the Secretary-General had left Kyiv this morning.

Increase in Refugee Deaths at Sea

Shabia Mantoo for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said that more than 3,000 people died or went missing while attempting to cross the Central and Western Mediterranean and Atlantic last year to Europe, according to a new [report](#) released today by UNHCR. UNHCR called for urgent support to prevent deaths and protect refugees and asylum seekers who were embarking on dangerous journeys by land and sea.

The number of deaths on these sea routes in 2021 had doubled from the number reported in 2020, with 1,924

people reported dead or missing on the Central and Western Mediterranean routes, and an additional 1,153 perished or missing on the Northwest African maritime route to the Canary Islands. Alarming, since the beginning of the year, an additional 478 people had also died or gone missing at sea.

Land routes also continued to be highly dangerous. Even greater numbers may have died on journeys through the Sahara Desert and remote border areas, in detention centres, or while in the captivity of smugglers or traffickers. People traveling these routes were reportedly subject to extrajudicial killings, unlawful and arbitrary detention, sexual and gender-based violence, forced labour, slavery, forced marriage and other gross human rights violations.

Many desperate refugees and migrants turned to smugglers to facilitate these perilous journeys. UNHCR warned that continued political instability and conflicts, deteriorating socioeconomic conditions as well as the impact of climate change could increase displacement and dangerous onward movements.

UNHCR had launched an updated protection and solutions strategy for refugees on dangerous journeys along routes towards Europe across the Central and Western Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic. It was calling for US\$163.5 million to assist and protect thousands of refugees and others. The organization aimed to provide meaningful alternatives to these dangerous journeys and prevent people from becoming victims of traffickers

UNHCR was also urging States to commit to strengthened humanitarian, development and peace action to address protection and solutions challenges. It called on states in the regions – in both Africa and Europe – to enhance legal frameworks and operational capacities at land and sea borders and in urban centres, and to ensure credible alternatives to dangerous journeys through inclusion, and strengthened youth programming and local community-based development.

States needed to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access for the delivery of essential services to people on the move or stranded en route, intercepted at sea, or held in detention centres, and to determine whether they have international protection needs.

Ms. Mantoo's full statement is available [here](#).

In response to questions, Ms. Mantoo said that UNHCR was working to protect refugees through sea routes, and it called for States' cooperation. When there were no sufficient alternatives, people were forced to take these dangerous Central and Western Mediterranean Sea routes to flee to other countries. Humanitarian assistance for these people needed to be strengthened. Refugees from North Africa, Tunisia, Bangladesh, Guinea, and Somalia were among those taking these dangerous routes. Traffickers, smugglers, criminal gangs, and law enforcement officers were among those found to have committed human rights abuses.

On the issue of turnback by the United States of refugees from Haiti, Ms. Mantoo said that, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 27,000 people had been returned to Haiti in 2022. UNHCR called for fair and efficient asylum protection for refugees travelling from Haiti.

Funds Needed Urgently to Support Refugees Fleeing to Uganda

Boris Cheshirkov for the [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#) said that UNHCR and 44 humanitarian partners were urgently appealing for US\$47.8 million to respond to the critical needs of thousands of refugees who had arrived in Uganda this year, fleeing violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and sporadic clashes in South Sudan.

Since January, Uganda had generously welcomed over 35,000 refugees. A third of those had arrived in just the past three weeks from the DRC, fleeing intense fighting in North Kivu and Ituri provinces.

UNHCR was coordinating with the Government of Uganda and humanitarian partners to provide emergency assistance and protection to refugees in border areas, and making efforts to relocate them to refugee

settlements as soon as possible.

Needs were surging for protection, food, shelter and essential household items. Funding would also support urgently needed health-care supplies, as well as water, sanitation and hygiene services required to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other diseases.

Uganda already hosted over 1.5 million refugees – the largest refugee population on the African continent – before the latest influx, and was now receiving thousands of new arrivals from South Sudan, in West Nile State to the north, and the DRC, arriving in southwestern Uganda.

The UNHCR's [Uganda Emergency Appeal](#) intended to support its initial emergency response to the influx of up to 60,000 refugees in Uganda in the first half of 2022, with an estimated 45,000 new arrivals from April to June 2022.

Read the full briefing note [here](#).

Responding to questions, Mr. Chershirkov said that the UNHCR had only five per cent of the funds it needed to support new refugees. A very large proportion of the new refugees were women and children. Funds were needed to provide shelter, as well as health and psychological support for these women and children.

Outbreak of Acute Hepatitis of Unknown Origin in Children

Dr. Philippa Easterbrook, Scientist, Global HIV, Hepatitis and STI (sexually transmitted infections) programme, [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), said that acute and severe hepatitis of unknown aetiology had been detected in children in 16 countries, with 170 cases and so far, one death having been recorded. WHO was actively investigating infectious and non-infectious causes of the outbreak.

WHO would continue to investigate both existing cases and new cases as reported. Investigations thus far had found none of the common viruses that caused acute hepatitis (hepatitis A, B, C or E) or the common bacteria or bugs that caused stomach infections or gastroenteritis within the infected children. There was also no clear link to a particular food or common exposure, such as to a drug or to travel. There was also nothing to suggest a link to the Covid vaccine, as the vast majority of children had not received the vaccine.

Adenovirus, a common infection in children, was one of the possible hypotheses of an underlying cause of the outbreak. Adenoviruses are a group of common viruses spread from person to person that may cause colds or flu-like symptoms and sometimes stomach upsets with vomiting and diarrhoea. It has been detected in about 74 of the cases that were tested, but it was very unusual for adenovirus to cause these types of severe symptoms.

WHO was also investigating any possible link to COVID-19 infection, but studies so far had found that infection rates of COVID-19 amongst the infected children were in line with those of the general population.

Responding to questions, Dr. Easterbrook said that this was a severe form of hepatitis that previously healthy children were contracting, and several of the infected children were developing liver failure, an unusual symptom for hepatitis. Some but not all the children were infected with adenovirus. Unexplained hepatitis did occur in children each year, but the infection rate currently appeared to be higher than typical levels of unexplained hepatitis in children. The majority of cases had been found in the United Kingdom. Toxicology, immunology and other studies would continue to be conducted in hospitals.

Heatwaves in India and Pakistan

Clare Nullis for the [World Meteorological Organization \(WMO\)](#) said that extreme heat was gripping large parts of India and Pakistan, impacting hundreds of millions of people in one of the most densely populated parts of the world. National meteorological and hydrological departments in both countries were working

closely with health and disaster management agencies to roll out heat health action plans which had been successful in saving lives in the past few years.

The heatwave had sent temperatures soaring into the mid-to high 40°Cs, placing severe stress on agriculture, ecosystems and water and energy supplies and disrupting key socio-economic sectors. Air quality had deteriorated, and huge swathes of land were at risk of extreme fire danger.

The India Meteorological Department said that maximum temperatures as of 27 April were 43-45°C over many parts of Northwest and Central India. It said that temperatures were expected to rise by about 2°C on 29 April and last until early May.

Similar temperatures had been seen in Pakistan. The Pakistan Meteorological Department said that daytime temperatures were likely to be between 5°C and 8°C above normal in large swathes of the country.

It warned that in the mountainous regions of Gilgit-Baltistan and Khyber Pakhtunkwa, the unusual heat would enhance the melting of snow and ice and could trigger glacial lake outburst floods or flash floods in vulnerable areas.

It was premature to attribute the extreme heat in India and Pakistan solely to climate change. However, conditions were consistent with those of a changing climate. Heatwaves were more frequent and more intense and starting earlier than in the past. This trend would continue in the future because of the accumulated greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

India's Ministry of Earth Sciences reported that the frequency of warm extremes over India had increased during 1951–2015, with accelerated warming trends during the 30-year period 1986–2015. The pre-monsoon season heatwave frequency, duration, intensity and areal coverage over India was projected to substantially increase during the twenty-first century.

India recorded its warmest March on record, as did Pakistan. Turbat, in Pakistan, recorded the world's fourth highest temperature of 53.7°C on 28 May 2017; it was hoped that similar temperatures would not be seen this year.

India and Pakistan, the WMO and its partners were implementing heat action plans to limit the impact of these heat waves and protect the most vulnerable in urban areas. Ms. Nullis expressed hope that mortality from the heat waves would be limited.

Ms. Nullis said that the WMO would release the *State of the Global Climate in 2021* report on the morning of May 18. A separate report on global temperature predictions for the next five years would be released in the preceding week on a date to be confirmed.

Suspension of RFI/France24 in Mali

Ravina Shamdasani for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said that the OHCHR was deeply dismayed by the Malian media regulator's decision to definitively suspend Radio France International (RFI) and France24. OHCHR called on Mali's transitional military authorities to reverse this ban and allow independent media to work freely in the country.

The suspensions were the latest in a string of actions curtailing press freedom and the freedom of expression in Mali, and came at a time when more, not less, scrutiny was needed. OHCHR continued to document serious allegations of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in many parts of the country, and remained seriously concerned by steps to further shrink the already limited civic space.

An open and pluralistic civic space that guaranteed freedom of expression and opinion, as well as freedom of assembly and association, was a prerequisite for development and sustainable peace.

The suspensions were first imposed by the Government on 16 March. The Government accused the two broadcasters of airing “false allegations” about reports of human rights violations by the Malian army. On 27 April, the High Authority for Communication announced that those provisional suspensions would be “definitive”. The current climate was one with a pervasive chilling effect on journalists and bloggers.

In response to questions, Ms. Shamdasani said that journalists’ licences had been revoked by the Mali Government. There was a climate of self-censorship amongst journalists in Mali, and there had been very serious allegations of human rights abuses against journalists. The issue was particularly noticeable in the lead-up to World Press Freedom Day on 3 May.

There were also worrying trends in West Africa, where there was a seemingly growing intolerance for dissent. Governments around the world were increasing using surveillance to monitor the work of journalists, and there had also been increasing allegations of conspiracy against journalists.

Launch of FAO *State of the World’s Forests* Report

Ewald Rametsteiner, Deputy Director, Forestry Division, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) announced that the 2022 edition of FAO’s *State of the World’s Forests* report would be launched by the Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on Monday, 2 May at the occasion of the World Forestry Congress held in South Korea.

The report reviewed solutions that could potentially help humanity out of environmental problems such as climate change and biodiversity loss and at the same time address economic recovery needs and the need to build more carbon-neutral and resilient economies.

The report called for the following solutions, or “forest pathways”: an end to deforestation, the restoration of trees, and the sustainable use of forests and trees.

The report reviewed data and evidence on benefits and costs of each solution, their up-scaling potential, and the most important areas that policy makers should focus on. The three forest pathways combined could contribute around 20 per cent of the additional mitigation needed by 2030 to stay within 1.5 degree Celsius. Millions of new jobs and income opportunities could also be created, especially by scaling up local value chains in rural areas.

The report also reviewed ways to finance implementation of the forest pathways, finding that there was a particular need to use of agricultural subsidies better, and finance and investment support modalities that suit small-scale producers better.

The report argued that smallholders, local communities and indigenous peoples were crucial for scaling up implementation of the forest pathways. They owned or managed at least 4.3 billion hectares of forest and farmlands world wide. These people needed to lead local development and gain benefit from changing unsustainable practices to sustainable ones.

The report called for focus on the solutions that forests, and trees could offer toward building a better environment and a healthier economy.

Adriano Timossi for the Food and Agriculture Organization said that the *Global Food Crisis Report* would be released next Wednesday at 2 p.m. Rome time. The *State of the World’s Forests* report would be released next Monday at 5 a.m.

Responding to questions, Mr. Rametsteiner said that the main issue dealt with in the report regarding

deforestation was agriculture. Illegal logging and corruption were both important topics, but the major feature of the report was working with agriculture to provide increased support for forests.

The report looked into financing the pathways, especially climate and environmentally-oriented financing. There was often disconnect between the objective of such financing and its usage.

Announcements

Isabel Piquer Hubert for the International Labour Organization (ILO) said that ILO would launch a new report on the role of collective agreements in the world of work, the first of a series of flagship reports on Social Dialogue, on Thursday 5 May.

The report focused on the importance of collective bargaining in achieving a human-centred recovery and fighting the inequalities that have worsened during the COVID-19 crisis.

Next week, ILO would publish a media advisory about the International Labour Conference, which would take place, for the first time face to face, from 27 May until 11 June.

Alessandra Vellucci, Director of the United Nations Information Service, announced that on Tuesday, May 3 at 12pm, there would be an update on the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo from the Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The speakers at this press conference would be Bruno Lemarquis, United Nations Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Modeste Mutinga Mutuishayi, Minister of Humanitarian Action and National Solidarity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Today was the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons had launched a social media campaign to reaffirm that chemical weapons had no place in the world today. It called on the world to spread the message that chemistry should only be used for peaceful purposes on social media using the hashtag #OPCW25.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child would open next Tuesday at 10am its 90th session (3 May to 3 June), during which it would review the reports of Greece, Iceland, Cambodia, Somalia, Zambia, Cuba, Djibouti, Cyprus, Canada, Kiribati, Croatia and Chile.