



Bi-Weekly Press Briefing 24 January 2023

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Shotlist

PRESS BRIEFING BY THE UNITED NATIONS INFORMATION SERVICE

24 January 2023

Violence and threats by armed groups displace refugees and civilians in Mali

Mohamed Touré, United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) Representative in Mali, speaking from Mopti, spoke of the vacuum left by the departure by the European armed forces. As there were no government forces in the region at the moment, there had been an increase in violence and displacement, caused by various armed groups. Some already displaced people were now being displaced again.

UNHCR was coordinating the humanitarian response for refugees and internally displaced Malians across the country through emergency shelter, education, food and water supply, cash assistance and programmes aimed at economic empowerment. Despite those efforts, the needs of the displaced remained enormous as violence by armed groups continued to force people to flee. UNHCR is appealing to the international community to show greater solidarity for the displaced in Mali, which appeared to be a forgotten crisis.

More details are available [here](#).

Responding to questions, Mr. Toure stressed that there was currently a vacuum in the northern part of Mali. Since the departure of the European troops, there was nobody left to protect local people. People were fleeing daily, trying to find safety in cities. Responding to a question on the possible presence of the Wagner group, he said that some of the displaced people had spoken about the presence of foreign soldiers, but one could not be sure to which armed group they belonged.

Escalating violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo

Eujin Byun, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), stated that UNHCR was deeply concerned by the escalation of brutal attacks on civilians by non-state armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

The latest deadly attack had happened on 19 January at the Plaine Savo site for internally displaced persons in Ituri province. Armed men had stormed the site with firearms and killed two adults and five children. Many shelters had been looted and burned to the ground. As many as 17,000 people had fled to the greater security of the nearby town of Bule. They were now staying in schools, churches, and poorly covered outdoor markets without sufficient food and water.

The violence and instability in the region also meant that UNHCR and partners were delivering life-saving shelter, site management and protection services despite risks to the safety of humanitarian personnel. UNHCR reiterated that humanitarian actors and civilians should not be targeted in armed conflict and calls on all parties to respect the civilian and humanitarian character of sites for displaced people. Over 5.6 million people were internally displaced in the DRC, making it the largest displaced population on the African continent and one of the largest worldwide. The country also hosted 524,700 refugees. Informed Ms. Byun.

Full statement is available [here](#).

Answering questions from the media, Ms. Byun explained that the largest population of Congolese refugees was hosted by Uganda. She said that there were some 130 non-state armed groups in the eastern part of the country. UNHCR's focus was on humanitarian support. Rwandan officials had recently stated that they would not be closing their borders to Congolese refugees, but that they would need additional support from the international community.

High-level visits to Afghanistan

Alessandra Vellucci, for the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), reminded of the [press release](#) following the visit to Afghanistan by a delegation led by the UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed. "My message was very clear", stated Ms. Mohammed at the end of the visit, speaking about the restrictions imposed by the *de facto* authorities to women and girls. "While we recognize the important exemptions made, these restrictions present Afghan women and girls with a future that confines them in their own homes, violating their rights and depriving the communities of their services. Our collective ambition is for a prosperous Afghanistan that is at peace with itself and its neighbours, and on a path to sustainable development. We must do everything we can to bridge this gap." Following this mission, an Inter-Agency Standing Committee mission under the leadership of the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths was taking place at the moment.

Jens Laerke, for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), informed that the Inter-Agency Standing Committee mission led by the Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths included heads of several humanitarian NGOs. There were fears that the already dire humanitarian situation in Afghanistan would get even more dire, said Mr. Laerke. Some two-thirds of the population in the country needed humanitarian aid. Members of the mission would brief the press on 30 January, upon their return to

New York.

Replying to questions, Mr. Laerke said that the mission would meet with the *de facto* authorities, along with various humanitarian organizations. The reason for the mission was the ban on women's activities in the country. Before heading to Afghanistan, Mr. Griffiths had said he was hoping for detailed, substantive, and practical discussions with the *de facto* authorities. Some 70 percent of the aid distributed in Afghanistan was done by the NGOs, both local and international, and such efforts could not properly continue without women's involvement. It appeared that there were some exceptions in the health and education sectors, where certain NGOs had been able to carry on their work. Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Afghanistan, Roza Otunbayeva, led the UN activities in the country, reminded Ms. Vellucci answering a question.

Contaminated cough syrup

Responding to questions, Margaret Harris, for the World Health Organization (WHO), said that the WHO urged governments and regulators to detect substandard medical products and remove them from circulation. National medical regulators needed to assign appropriate resources to improve and increase risk-based inspections of manufacturing sites to meet international standards. So far, some 300 children's deaths had been reported, an unacceptable situation that should not have happened in the first place. The problem was contamination, and it had to be established now how the contaminants had entered the production chain, and to investigate all possible explanations.

Announcements

Jens Laerke, for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), provided an update on the [Third High-Level Conference on the Lake Chad Region](#), which was taking place in Niger. The two-day event would wrap up later today. In her opening remarks, Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Joyce Msuya, had stressed that international commitment had to be measured in decades rather than years. "Untangling the region's knot of complex problems will require us to cut to the very roots of the crisis. If we can tackle the social, economic and political marginalization at its heart, then we can untie the loop of endless suffering and return to a past of collaboration and prosperity." Mr. Laerke said that over 11 million people across the four countries in the region needed aid; 400,000 of them were malnourished children. A press release on the conference would be shared later today.

Alessandra Vellucci, for the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), informed that today at 12 noon, Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), would present UNRWA's annual appeal for 2023.

Today at 2 p.m., there would be a hybrid briefing to present the World Economic Situation and Prospects 2023, produced by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, under embargo until 6 p.m. on 25 January. Speakers would be: Ingo Pitterle, Senior Economist, Economic Analysis and Policy Division at UN DESA; José Palacín, Senior Economist, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe; and Jeronim Capaldo, Senior Economist, Division on Globalization and development Strategies, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

The Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review's 42nd session had started on 23 January, and 13 countries would be under review, informed Ms. Vellucci. More information is available [here](#).

On 27 January at 3 p.m., there would be an in-person only briefing by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, on the occasion of Switzerland's review at the UPR. Speaker would be Livia Leu, Secretary of State.

On 30 January at 10 a.m., there would be a hybrid press conference by Jagan Chapagain, Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, to launch its World Disasters Report and the Everyone Counts Report, which offered insights into the COVID-19 pandemic and make concrete

recommendations for how leaders can mitigate tragedies of this magnitude in the future.

Ms. Vellucci informed that the [Committee on the Rights of the Child](#) would conclude this morning the review of the report of Azerbaijan. This afternoon, it would begin consideration of the report of Ireland.

The Conference on Disarmament was holding this morning the first plenary meeting of its 2023 annual session, under the presidency of Egypt.

Ms. Vellucci stated that today was the International Day of Education, on which occasion the Secretary-General had issued a [message](#), asking the global community to deliver education systems that can support equal societies, dynamic economies and the limitless dreams of every learner in the world.

On 16-17 February in Geneva, Education Cannot Wait and Switzerland would host a high-level funding conference to call on world leaders, businesses, foundations, and high net-worth individuals to provide at least USD 1.5 billion so it can deliver its [2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#). More information is available [here](#).

Story

Alessandra Vellucci, Director of the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, chaired the [hybrid briefing](#), which was attended by representatives and spokespersons of the United Nations Refugee Agency, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the World Health Organization.