Rhéal LeBlanc, Chief of the Press and External Relations Section at the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), chaired the briefing, which was attended by the spokespersons for the Human Rights Council (HRC), the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

The topics addressed were: the upcoming forty-third session of the Human Rights Council; violence in the Sahel; the Inland Transport Meeting; COVID-19; and the Ebola response.

**Human Rights Council**

Rolando Gomez, for the Human Rights Council (HRC), said that the forty-third regular session would start on Monday, 24 February, under the Presidency of Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger, Permanent Representative of Austria. Her opening remarks would be followed by Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, the President of the UN
General Assembly, António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General, and Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. There were 103 speakers in total for the high-level segment, which would last until 26 February. There would be three Heads of State speaking – Montenegro, San Marino, and Libya. The 43rd session would end on 20 March. All sessions would be webcast, and press releases in English and French would be issued. Mr. Gomez informed that media updates would be sent out every day; updates would also be shared on the social media.

Detailed information on the Council can be found here.

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), reminded that, ahead of the Secretary-General’s speech, a virtual background briefing with Volker Türk, Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Coordination, would take place today at 4 p.m. Geneva time; all information would be under embargo until the speech was delivered on Monday morning.

Violence in the Sahel

Andrej Mahecic, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), said that in Burkina Faso, the latest attacks by militants on civilians and local authorities had been forcing a daily average of more than 4,000 people to flee their homes and search for safety since 1 January. Over 150,000 people had fled in the last three weeks alone; so far, 765,000 people had already been displaced, including more than 700,000 in the last 12 months. People fleeing the violence reported attacks on their villages by militant groups, who were killing, raping and pillaging.

Over 4,400 refugees from Niger had arrived in Mali, fleeing a recent string of attacks in Tilaberi and Tahoua regions. In Mali, following the latest attack against the village of Ogossagou on 14 February, which had killed 30 villagers, the population was scared and eager to flee to a safer place. Alarmed by the dramatic rise of forced displacement in the Sahel, UNHCR reiterated its calls for protection of the civilian population and those fleeing violence.

Full UNHCR statement can be read here.

Responding to a question, Mr. Mahecic said the displacement situation was extremely complex. The actual appeal for financial support was currently in the making. The immediate needs currently included safety, food, water, and shelter. Mr. Mahecic said that the intensity and the frequency of the attacks had increased, which explained the rise in the displacement. Local people were already having difficulties making ends meet, but with the violence and the displacement, the situation had become significantly worse. Mr. Mahecic explained that there were some areas in which access was problematic and limited.

Humanitarian crisis in northwest Syria

Jens Laerke, for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), informed that on 24 February at 12.45 p.m. in Room III, Mark Cutts, Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis, would brief the media on the ongoing humanitarian crisis in northwest Syria.

Mr. Laerke stated that more than 900,000 people, mostly children, had been displaced in northwest Syria since the beginning of the current government offensive. Many of them lived in open areas or makeshift camps with little or no basic services. Some had referred to burning their spare clothes or tires to warm themselves up. OCHA called for an immediate ceasefire to prevent the humanitarian catastrophe and a further bloodbath. OCHA was currently planning to address the needs of 1.2 million people.

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), referred to the statement by the UN Secretary-General, who had expressed deep concern over the deterioration of the humanitarian situation and called for an immediate ceasefire.
Inland Transport Committee

Jean Rodriguez, for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), informed that Ministers of Transport and high-level officials from across the globe would gather in Geneva from 25 to 28 February for the eighty-second session of the Inland Transport Committee (ITC). The ITC was the highest UN policy-making body in the field of inland transport, the equivalent of ICAO for air and IMO for maritime transport.

The meeting would particularly focus on climate change and road safety. A first study on adaptation of areas at particular risk of climate change would be published the following week. The first day of the high-level segment (25 February) would discuss adaptation to climate change, emissions mitigation and the role of the Committee to harness international cooperation to fight climate change. Speaking of road safety, Mr. Rodriguez reminded that the Third Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety had taken place in Stockholm this week.

He also shed light on the fact that in many regions in the world, in particular in Africa, there were no standards and no control on the safety and emissions levels of used cars, contributing to thousands of deaths and alarming pollution. UNECE and partners would launch a project financed by the UN RSF to improve the situation in six countries in Africa. Another highlight the following week would be a demonstration of emission-testing devices, on 25 February at 1:10 p.m. outside of Door 36.

Detailed information on the Inland Transport Committee can be found here.

Responding to a question, Mr. Rodriguez specified that around two-thirds of the 1.35 million annual road deaths were in the lower and middle-income countries, so the bulk of the effort to make an improvement ought to be there. Nonetheless, road safety affected all countries, both rich and poor, and the challenge needed to be addressed globally.

COVID-19

Tarik Jašarević, for the World Health Organization (WHO), informed that a press conference on the coronavirus would be held at 4 p.m. today. No press conferences were planned for the weekend. The email system through which updates were being sent had been modified so all journalists should now be receiving them.

Responding to a question, Mr. Jašarević said that if there were any public activities planned by the Director-General, the media would be accordingly informed. He reminded correspondents that a call had been made for over USD 600 million for the global COVID-19 response.

Ebola response

Tarik Jašarević, for the World Health Organization (WHO), stated that the WHO needed close to USD 40 million to fund the Ebola response in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, even if the number of new cases had been rather low in recent weeks. Investing in Ebola preparedness made a big difference, said Mr. Jašarević, giving the example of Uganda. As long as there was a single case remaining, there was a risk of a spread; therefore, the goal was to reach zero cases.

Geneva announcements

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), informed that the Libyan military talks, which had resumed the previous day, were continuing at UN Geneva today.
Mr. LeBlanc stated that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women was reviewing today the report of Kiribati in Room XVI at the Palais des Nations.

Mr. LeBlanc also said that the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was concluding this morning its review of the report of Ukraine.

Mr. LeBlanc further informed that the Conference on Disarmament would hold this afternoon at 3 p.m. a public plenary meeting, which would be the first one under the presidency of Argentina. The Conference on Disarmament would hold a high level segment during the three first days of next week, with a current list of 31 high dignitaries.

On 24 February at 2 p.m. in Press Room 1, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) would present its new study *Brexit Beyond Tariffs: The role of Non-Tariff Measures and the impact on Developing Countries*.

On 25 February at 1 p.m. in Room III, Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, the President of the 74th session of the General Assembly would hold a press conference. Live webcast and video-on-demand will be available at [http://webtv.un.org](http://webtv.un.org)

On 25 February at 2.30 p.m. in Press Room 1, the Permanent Mission of the Philippines to the UN would hold a press conference on press freedom in the Philippines. The speaker would be Jose Ruperto Martin M. Andanar, Secretary at the Presidential Communications Office.

* * *