Rolando Gomez, for the Human Rights Council, recalled the statement read by the President of the Human Rights Council on the measures taken with regard to COVID-19. All Council-related side events were cancelled from today until the end of the session on 20 March. While unfortunate, the Council Bureau believed that it was the responsible action to take. Typically, the Human Rights Council attracted several thousand participants, both at the main session and at numerous side events. The maximum capacity of Room XX was 700, informed Mr. Gomez, and there were rarely more than 500 people in the room at any given time, far lower than the 1,000 limit imposed by Switzerland. The independent experts and rapporteurs invited to present at the ongoing session were encouraged to present and engage in interactive discussions via video link.

Topics on today’s agenda included the rights of persons with disabilities, freedom of religion or belief, the
sale and sexual exploitation of children, the rights of persons with albinism, the right to food, and the following day there would be presentations on cultural rights, human rights defenders, and human rights and counter-terrorism measures.

On 4 March at 2.00 p.m. in Press Room I, Hilal Elver, Special Rapporteur on the right to food, would offer her insight into the global state of the right to food and show that despite the Sustainable Development Goal of “zero hunger” and malnutrition by 2030, the realization of the right to food remains a distant reality for far too many.

On 5 March at 10.00 a.m. in Press Room III, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, would hold a press conference on human rights impact of policies and practices aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism.

**Situation in Syria**

Jenifer Fenton, for the Office of the Special Envoy for Syria (OSE), said that the Special Envoy had briefed the Secretary-General and joined him to see the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov in Geneva the previous week. On 2 March, he had met Turkish Foreign Minister and other senior Turkish officials in Ankara. Mr. Pedersen was now en route to Cairo to brief Foreign Ministers of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Pedersen continued to strongly underline the desperate need for an immediate ceasefire and the protection of civilians. Beyond that, what was needed were arrangements for Idlib that could ensure some stability and help create more conducive conditions for a political process. The Special Envoy urged and encouraged the Russian and Turkish Governments to spare no effort for a diplomatic solution. Ms. Fenton also informed that Marianne Gasser of Switzerland, who had more than three decades of experience in humanitarian work, had been appointed as the Head of the OSE office in Damascus.

**Refugees and migrants at the Turkish-Greek border**

In response to a question, Andrej Mahecic, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), appealed for the easing of tensions along the Greek-Turkish border. There was a need for calm and restraint. UNHCR deplored the incidents that were happening, which were inflicting further suffering to people who had already been through a lot. States did have the right to control their borders and limit irregular movements, but should, at the same time, refrain from using excessive force. It was estimated that on 1 and 2 March some 1,400 people had crossed from Turkey into Greece, the majority of them by sea, and only smaller groups by land. Those seeking asylum should not be punished, stressed Mr. Mahecic, who also referred to the UNHCR’s press release from the previous day.

Leonard Doyle, for the International Organization for Migration (IOM), said that this was an extremely serious humanitarian situation for already very vulnerable refugees and migrants.

Marixie Mercado, for the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) added that, according to UNICEF’s information, some 40 percent of people in that area were children.

**Partnership for statistics on children, adolescents and youth**

Jean Rodriguez, for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), informed that the UNECE Conference of European Statisticians had announced the start of partnership for statistics on children, adolescents and youth, which had been decided the previous week.

The 2030 Agenda set the ambitious objective of eliminating inequalities among people on the planet. Many factors were linked with inequalities, such as people’s income level, where they lived, their gender, their ethnicity, and their age. To know where those inequalities existed, as well as to decide how to focus efforts to reduce and eliminate them, and to monitor whether policies were working, decision-makers needed
disaggregated data. Some groups of young people were often missed out of national statistics altogether, such as children and adolescents living in institutions, while child migrants might be under-represented.

Recognizing the existing lack of adequate data and definitions, a decision had been made to establish a Task Force for Statistics on Children, Adolescents and Youth. Several CES member States, working jointly with UNICEF, UNFPA, Eurostat and UNECE would explore how countries currently collect and publish data about children and young people and the issues affecting them, and would identify critical gaps that need to be filled.

**World Hearing Day**

Dr Shelly Chadha, Technical Officer, Prevention of Deafness and Hearing Loss at the World Health Organization (WHO), presented a conservative estimate that out of 400 million people who would need hearing aids, a mere 17 percent were using that technology. The first reason for such a huge gap was that people did not have access to medical services or appropriate technology, or did not have financial means to afford them. For example, a young boy with hearing problems born in a country where screening was not available would remain deprived of language, communications and socializing. That was also a problem in high-income countries. Even in developed countries, hearing services were often not well integrated in health systems. Another main reason was a very common “I-can-manage” attitude; people often waited up to ten years to do a hearing test and benefit from the hearing technology.

Dr. Chadha stressed that solutions existed, but people needed to be willing to use those solutions. The level of available services had to be increased and better integrated in the health systems, but so did the level of awareness among those who needed help. A free app to check one’s hearing could be downloaded. Today at 12:30 pm at the WHO, there would be a briefing on the topic of hearing loss and available remedies.

Responding to questions, Dr. Chadha said that people were sometimes not even aware of what sounds they were missing. In many countries there were newborn hearing screenings, but it was important to know that some children were not born deaf, but lost hearing later on. For that reason, pediatricians and schools had a role to play to make sure the issue was detected in a timely manner. The first World Report on Hearing would be published this May, informed Dr. Chadha.

**COVID-19**

Responding to questions, Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), said that steps were taken to inform participants in meetings, delegates and UN staff of the measures in place and steps everyone could take to protect themselves and others. UN Office at Geneva would continue with the measures as long as needed.

Several journalists asked that UNOG provide more sanitizing gels at entrances to the Palais and meeting rooms. Questions were asked on the preparedness and contingency measures taken by UNOG should the COVID-19 situation worsen. Mr. LeBlanc said senior management was monitoring the situation very closely and following the advice of the Swiss authorities and the World Health Organization. It had already taken several precautionary steps at the Palais. Journalists who might find themselves working from home would be able to obtain audio files of press conferences and briefings or watch live or recorded webcasts when available. The situation was very fluid and additional measures would be taken as required. All Human Rights Council sessions were live webcast, it was pointed out.

0 not touching their faces with hands, and sneezing/coughing into a tissue. Those feeling sick, primarily having fever and coughing, should refrain from attending meetings.

**Geneva announcements**

Catherine Huissoud, for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), informed about a launch of a study on the economic impact of COVID-19 on 4 March at 10.30 a.m. in Press Room
III. The analysis, which would rank the most impacted countries and sectors, would be embargoed until 6 p.m. that day. The speakers would be Pamela Coke-Hamilton, Director of UNTAD Division on International Trade, and Alessandro Nicita, economist.

Rosalind Yarde, for the International Labour Organization (ILO), spoke about the launch of ILO Global Employment Trends for Youth report, which would focus on technology and the future of jobs. A media advisory would be sent out shortly. The report would be presented on 9 March at 10 a.m. in Press Room I.

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, informed that the Human Rights Committee was concluding this morning the review of the report of Uzbekistan and would begin this afternoon the review of the report of Tunisia.

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was meeting in private until the end of its 67th session, on 6 March when it would issue its concluding observations on the reports of the five countries reviewed during the session: Guinea, Belgium, Ukraine, Benin and Norway.

Mr. LeBlanc further said that the Conference on Disarmament was holding this morning a public plenary at 11 a.m., still under the presidency of Argentina.

Today at 12.30 p.m. behind Room XX, UNHCR and IOM would launch the 2020 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis. The speakers would be Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Shahriar Alam, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh; António Vitorino, Director General, International Organization for Migration.

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The webcast for this briefing is available here: http://bit.ly/unog030320