Rolando Gomez, for the Human Rights Council, informed that today the Council was continuing the general debate on Item 3, to be followed, at 4 p.m, by a panel discussion on the rights of persons with disabilities, with the focus on awareness-raising. The High Commissioner for Human Rights would deliver opening remarks. On 9 March, the day would either start with the continuation of the general debate or the presentation by the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. It would be followed by a discussion on the report on the UN’s involvement in Myanmar; the report was posted at the HRC extranet. The Commission on South Sudan and the Special Rapporteur on Iran were also scheduled to speak on 9 March. The Special Rapporteur on Myanmar would present her report on 10 March at 9 a.m. via video link.

Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental
freedoms while countering terrorism, would hold a press conference in Press Room III, today at 2 p.m.

On 9 March at 2 p.m, Tomas Quintana, Special Rapporteur on the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, would brief the media in Press Room III.

On 10 March at 2 p.m, Javaid Rehman, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, would hold a press conference in Press Room III.

**Women in parliament**

Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), said that 2020 was marking the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. On that occasion, the IPU was launching the report “Women in Parliament 1995-2020”, which showed a significant increase over the past 25 years: today 24.9 percent of members of parliaments worldwide were women. Yet, there was a slowdown in the growth of women’s political representation, and there needed to be a “pushback against the pushback”, said Mr. Chungong. In 2020, there were only four countries where women constituted 50 percent or more of parliamentarians, which was now a stated global objective: Rwanda, Cuba, Bolivia, and the United Arab Emirates. The Americas was the first region to go above the 30-percent threshold, with currently 31.3 percent of female MPs. Regrettably, there were still three countries in the world where there were no women parliamentarians: Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, and Vanuatu. Mr. Chungong stressed that political will and commitment ought to come from the top, but it was also encouraging to see the progressive youth moment on board.

More information can be found [here](#).

Responding to questions, Mr. Chungong said that the pushback, which had always been there, was now particularly pronounced. He confirmed that there was an improvement in some Arab countries, such as the United Arab Emirates, which had a 50-50 balance in the parliament, Bahrein with the first-ever female speaker, and Saudi Arabia, with some 22 percent of female parliamentarians, close to the global average.

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), reminded about the major [speech](#) delivered by the UN Secretary-General at the New School in New York the previous week.

**World Food Programme Gender Index**

Elisabeth Byrs, for the World Food Programme (WFP), informed that an instrument was being developed to highlight the interconnectedness of dis/empowerment and food in/security: the ‘Gender Equality for Food Security’ (GE4FS) measure. The GE4FS measure would be a means of gathering experiences of gender in/equality and of food in/security at the individual level. The WFP and Gallup Inc, with statistical contributions from the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), had collaborated to construct a measure of women’s and men’s experiences of dis/empowerment, which would help guide policy and programme to better address the gender barriers that come in the way of food security. Closing the gender data gap was vital for Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 5, and 10, stressed Ms. Byrs.

**Situation in Syria**

Elisabeth Byrs, for the World Food Programme (WFP), said that the WFP welcomed the ceasefire in Idlib, which had just come into effect. Up to one million people had been displaced in recent months, more than ever in the nine-year long conflict. The lull in fighting should allow those caught in fighting to access humanitarian access. The situation was dramatic with too many families having to sleep in open air in freezing temperatures.

Food prices in Idlib had risen by 120 percent, making families there fully reliant on the WFP and humanitarian partners. WFP had scaled up its operations to reach as many people as possible. WFP depended on reliable and predictable funding to maintain the lifeline of humanitarian assistance. Ms. Byrs
stressed that USD 188.9 million was needed for the activities to continue until August 2020.

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), informed that the Secretary-General hoped that the agreement between Russia and Turkey would lead to an immediate and lasting cessation of hostilities that ensured the protection of civilians in northwest Syria, who had already endured enormous suffering. He called for a return to the UN-facilitated political process mandated by resolution 2254.

Responding to a question, Ms. Byrs emphasized that the WFP was working with recognized humanitarian partners on the ground. WFP was not discriminating against people based on their political or other affiliations, but was basing its activities purely on humanitarian needs.

COVID-19 and human rights

Elizabeth Throssell, for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), stressed that it was essential that governments introducing measures to impede the spread of COVID-19 undertake a range of additional actions to reduce the potentially negative impact such measures might have on people’s lives. Lockdowns, quarantines and other measures to contain and combat the spread of the virus should always be carried out in strict accordance with human rights standards, and in a necessary and proportionate way. OHCHR welcomed the fact that some governments and international organizations were starting to put in place measures to mitigate the impact on people’s economic and social rights. Human rights needed to be front and centre in response to the COVID-19 epidemics.

Full OHCHR statement can be read here.

Governments needed to take steps to alleviate the measures which were in place to combat and prevent COVID-19 spread, said Ms. Throssell in a response to several questions. It was a delicate balancing act. OHCHR had not yet undertaken a study of best practices. The right to life was supreme and absolute, stressed Ms. Throssell.

Citizenship Amendment Act in India

Responding to a question, Elizabeth Throssell, for the Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), confirmed that the High Commissioner had submitted an amicus brief to the Supreme Court of India. It was a long-standing practice of the Office to prepare and submit such briefs around the world, as provided by the mandate of the OHCHR. OHCHR was not sharing the amicus brief, but journalists could look at the Supreme Court for details.

Unlawful judicial proceedings in Yemen

Elizabeth Throssell, for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), stated that the OHCHR was very concerned that 35 Yemeni parliamentarians had been sentenced to death - in absentia and by a court in Houthi-held Sana’a - on treason charges, and their property confiscated and their families threatened. OHCHR called on the de facto authorities to immediately quash the sentences against the MPs, and to ensure their families were not harassed. OHCHR reminded the de facto authorities that the death penalty was an extreme form of punishment reserved for the most serious crimes, involving intentional killing. If used at all, it should only be imposed after a fair trial that respects the most stringent due process guarantees as stipulated in international human rights law.

OHCHR’s press release can be read here.

Refugee Appeal for the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Babar Baloch, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), said that the UNHCR and partners were urgently appealing for USD 621 million to support refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) who had sought safety in neighbouring countries as well as to assist hosting communities. The DRC
Refugee Response Plan 2020-2021 covered humanitarian activities for 66 organizations. Uganda hosted the majority of Congolese refugee (400,000), followed by Burundi (84,000), Rwanda and Tanzania (75,000 each), and others. DRC had more than five million internally displaced people in the country, with some who had been repeatedly displaced.

Full UNHCR statement is available here.

Jens Laerke, for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), stated that the previous week, a USD 1.82 billion humanitarian response plan had been launched jointly with the Congolese government. The Humanitarian Response Plan for 2020 aimed to provide assistance to eight out of 16 million people in need. DRC was the country most affected by internal displacement in Africa, stressed Mr. Laerke. The funding required this year would cover the whole range of humanitarian support from food and health services to protection and emergency education. Aid workers in the DRC estimated that without sufficient funds, some 8.1 million people would not be able to meet their basic needs and the lives of as many as 1.3 million children under the age of 5 suffering from severe acute malnutrition could be at risk.

State of Climate Report

Clare Nullis, for the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), said that the annual State of the Climate report would be released in New York on 10 March, at a press conference with the UN Secretary-General and the WMO Secretary-General. January 2020 had been the warmest January on record; Europe and Japan had the warmest winter on record, according to the European Union's Earth Observation Programme; and February 2020 was the second warmest February on record. This winter had also featured abnormally low pressure over the North Pole, which had allowed the polar vortex (a band of strong winds high in the atmosphere that circled the northern arctic region) to be extremely strong. This was called the "positive phase" of a large-scale weather pattern known as the Arctic Oscillation.

Responding to a question, Ms. Nullis said that carbon-dioxide concentrations in January and February had been very high. It was still early to say what kind of impact the COVID-19 epidemics would have an effect on emissions globally.

Mediterranean migrant deaths pass 20,000

Paul Dillon, for the International Organization for Migration (IOM), stated that a shipwreck off the coast of Libya the previous month had pushed the death toll in the Mediterranean Sea to over 20,000 since 2014. Two-thirds of the fatalities recorded were people lost at sea without a trace. That grim fact reinforced the IOM’s position that there was an urgent need for increased, comprehensive search-and-rescue capacity in the Mediterranean. Although the annual number of deaths had decreased every year since 2016, the proportion of deaths compared to attempted crossings had risen in both the Central and Western Mediterranean in 2019, compared to previous years.

Full press release can be read here.

The latest data on migrant deaths and disappearances could be found at the Missing Migrants Project website.

Geneva announcements

Catherine Huissoud, for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), informed that a special issue of the Global Investment Trends Monitor would be sent out at 2 p.m. today, and would be under embargo until 15 March at 5 p.m.

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 Portugal and would began this afternoon consultations with States Parties on the draft general comment on article 21 of the Covenant (Right of Peaceful Assembly).

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was closing its 67th session this afternoon and 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 23rd session of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (which was due to begin on 9 March) was postponed.

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The webcast for this briefing is available here: http://bit.ly/unog060320