UNOG Bi-weekly press briefing: COVID-19 WFP - OCHA

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Shotlist

2. Wide shot: Press Room III, podium speakers to rear of shot, spaced apart. A conference hearing aid is lying on a table in the foreground.
3. SOUNDBITE (EN) - Spokesperson for the World Food Programme (WFP), Elisabeth Byers: “Because of the COVID pandemic, some 300 million primary schoolchildren are now missing out (of) school meals on which they depend. Nearly 30 countries where WFP implements school feeding programmes have so far reported partial or countrywide closure of school. This means that nearly nine million children are no longer receiving WFP school meals, and that number is set to rise in coming days and weeks.”
5. SOUNDBITE (EN) - Spokesperson for the World Food Programme (WFP), Elisabeth Byers: «Nous sommes en effet très, très concernés par cette situation. Beaucoup d’enfants dans le monde ne peuvent manger finalement à leur faim et avoir une nourriture équilibrée que s’ils vont en classe. Donc il faut maintenant se substituer à l’école et aux distributions à l’école et prévoir des rations à emporter par chaque famille et non seulement les enfants pourront en bénéficier, mais la famille qui est pauvre dans lesquelles ces enfants vivent, pourront également bénéficier de ces rations. »
7. SOUNDBITE (EN) - Spokesperson for the World Food Programme (WFP), Elisabeth Byers: «Le
Programme Alimentaire Mondial à travers ses programmes de repas scolaire, couvre normalement 18 millions d’enfants. Actuellement, près de neuf millions sont touchés par des mesures de fermeture des écoles dans certains pays. Le PAM s’inquiète en fait du bien-être de tous les enfants, non seulement, pas seulement ceux auxquels le PAM apporte une assistance, mais tous les enfants actuellement dans le monde. »

8. Wide shot: podium speakers to rear of shot, spaced apart in an otherwise empty room.
9. SOUNDBITE (EN) - Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the Office for the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): “As the coronavirus spreads around the world, our key concern is for the 100 million people living in war zones and other emergency settings who depend on the UN’s humanitarian assistance. Many live in cramped conditions and with limited or no access to proper sanitation or basic health services.”

10. Close-up: alcohol gel hand washing dispenser, podium to rear.
11. SOUNDBITE (EN) - Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the Office for the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): “Disrupted supply chains could mean that nutrition products to fight malnutrition produced in one country may not get to the country where it is needed. School meal programmes may be suspended. Water and sanitation may be in short supply or simply unavailable.”

12. Medium shot: row of empty chairs
13. SOUNDBITE (EN) - Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the Office for the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): “Relief distribution points where many people gather for food or other assistance will likely be banned and alternative solutions must be found. Overcrowding of camps for internally displaced persons in some of the world's humanitarian hotspots are also high-risk areas for this pandemic.”

15. SOUNDBITE (EN) - Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the Office for the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): “My Office will, our humanitarian partners, the wider UN system, are right now working around the clock to asses where and how flows of aid may be disrupted, either have been already or are at risk of being in the future, and seeking to find solutions so that all operations can continue.”

17. SOUNDBITE (EN) - Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the Office for the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): “The cross-border operation from Turkey and into Syria was at least of last night continuing, so the trucks are continuing to go in. Of course, all preventive measures are being put in place to ensure there is no accidental transmission going on when they cross the border.”

18. Medium shot: UNTV cameras - one showing a podium speaker on monitor - in front and rear of shot in an otherwise empty room.
19. SOUNDBITE (EN) - Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the Office for the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): “We generally see at least Security Council sanctions have provisions allow for humanitarian items and aid to pass through. So, with that in mind, let’s see how much of an impact that has; of course, our general position is that lifesaving humanitarian aid should to the extent possible flow freely to where it is needed most.”

20. Close-up: conference table mics and listening device, blurred; podium speakers to rear, UN logo.
21. SOUNDBITE (EN) - Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the Office for the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): “The world needs to continue support for the most vulnerable, including through UN-coordinated humanitarian and refugee response plans. To stop COVID-19 anywhere, it must be stopped everywhere. If we do not break transmissions worldwide, the virus could cycle back to countries who thought they were safe.”

22. Medium shot: podium speakers, profile.
23. Medium shot: UNTV camera with monitor showing podium, which is also to rear of shot.
UN aid teams work round the clock to ensure humanitarian support to millions

Humanitarian actors are gearing up to find solutions for vulnerable communities hardest-hit by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, including millions of children whose schools have closed, depriving them of essential meals, the World Food Programme (WFP) said on Friday.

“Because of the COVID pandemic, some 300 million primary schoolchildren are now missing out of school meals on which they depend,” WFP spokesperson Elisabeth Byers said to a near-empty conference room in Geneva, in accordance with Swiss measures limiting meetings to no more than five people to combat the epidemic.

Some 18 million youngsters receive school meals provided by the UN food agency, Ms Byrs said, but around half of them no longer do so because of the coronavirus which emerged in December in central China before spreading globally.

“Nearly 30 countries where WFP implements school feeding programmes have so far reported partial or countrywide closure of school. This means that nearly nine million children are no longer receiving WFP school meals, and that number is set to rise in coming days and weeks.”

The development comes as other UN agencies and Offices race to assess needs for around 100 million people who rely on emergency assistance.

“As the coronavirus spreads around the world, our key concern is for the 100 million people living in war zones and other emergency settings who depend on the UN’s humanitarian assistance. Many live in cramped conditions and with limited or no access to proper sanitation or basic health services,” said Jens Laerke from the Office for the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Highlighting the dire conditions for many people displaced by conflict, food insecurity and climate change, the OCHA spokesperson expressed concern that the virus risked overwhelming the capacity to get aid to where it is needed.

“Disrupted supply chains could mean that nutrition products to fight malnutrition produced in one country may not get to the country where it is needed. School meal programmes may be suspended. Water and sanitation may be in short supply or simply unavailable,” he explained.

In terms of the practical distribution of humanitarian aid, that may have to change too, the veteran aid
"Relief distribution points where many people gather for food or other assistance will likely be banned and alternative solutions must be found," he said. "Overcrowding of camps for internally displaced persons in some of the world's humanitarian hotspots are also high-risk areas for this pandemic."

In a bid to ensure unbroken aid deliveries globally, Mr Laerke insisted that OCHA, along with humanitarian partners and the wider UN system, "are right now working around the clock to assess where and how flows of aid may be disrupted, either have been already or are at risk of being in the future, and seeking to find solutions so that all operations can continue."

Responding to a question about the impact on the aid convoys crossing from Turkey into north-west Syria, where around a million people have fled a Government offensive since December, Mr Laerke confirmed that its work had not stopped.

"The cross-border operation from Turkey and into Syria was at least of last night continuing, so the trucks are continuing to go in. Of course, all preventive measures are being put in place to ensure there is no accidental transmission going on when they cross the border."

On the issue of how sanctions placed on countries might affect the delivery of life-saving supplies, the OCHA spokesperson noted that those passed by the Security Council sanctions generally had "provisions (to) allow for humanitarian items and aid to pass through. So, with that in mind, let’s see how much of an impact that has; of course, our general position is that lifesaving humanitarian aid should to the extent possible flow freely to where it is needed most."

Ahead of the likely launch of a COVID-19 global humanitarian response plan next week, Mr Laerke insisted on the need to show solidarity for ongoing aid work.

"The world needs to continue support for the most vulnerable, including through UN-coordinated humanitarian and refugee response plans," he said. "To stop COVID-19 anywhere, it must be stopped everywhere. If we do not break transmissions worldwide, the virus could cycle back to countries who thought they were safe."