



UNOG Bi-weekly press briefing: Somalia COVID-19 - UNHCR

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Shotlist

EDITED STORY SHOTLIST

1. Wide shot: exterior, United Nations Geneva, main entrance with UN flag and building in background.
2. **SOUNDBITE (EN) Charlie Yaxley, Spokesperson for the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR):**
“Heavy flooding, conflict, a crippled economy, impending desert locust swarms and the exponential spread of COVID-19 are threatening the safety and welfare of Somalia’s 2.6 million internally displaced people (IDPs)”.
3. Medium shot: UN Geneva and UN flag alley behind gates at UN Geneva, filmed from the Place des Nations. A motorcyclist passes from left to right.
4. **SOUNDBITE (EN) Charlie Yaxley, Spokesperson for the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR):** ”
Since the start of this year, more than 220,000 Somalis have become internally displaced, including 137,000 due to conflict. Natural and climate-related disasters including drought and the resulting lack of livelihoods as well as floods are additional complex and interlinked drivers of displacement”.
5. Medium shot: flag alley, UN Geneva.
6. **SOUNDBITE (EN) Charlie Yaxley, Spokesperson for the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR):** ”
UNHCR believes the humanitarian situation will worsen as COVID-19 further spreads. Most of the 2.6 million IDPs in Somalia live in overcrowded settlements and many, especially those newly displaced, live in makeshift shelters made of plastic bags, cardboards and sticks. Physical and social distancing is close to impossible, and there is scarcely enough clean water for

drinking, let alone hand-washing. Conditions are ripe for widespread viral transmission”.

7. Medium shot: UN Geneva flag alley, with UN flag in background.
8. **SOUNDBITE (EN) Charlie Yaxley, Spokesperson for the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR): “If current trends continue, this year’s rains give every indication that they could pose the same catastrophic threat as the Deyr rains of last year, which led to more than 400,000 people being forced to flee their homes. Swarms of desert locusts also threaten to decimate crop yields and cause widespread food shortages post the Gu rains”.**
9. Close up: UN Geneva building
10. **SOUNDBITE (EN) Charlie Yaxley, Spokesperson for the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR): “In March and April, armed operations against Al Shabab resumed in Lower Shabelle, resulting in more than 50,000 people being forced to flee their homes. Communities were directly exposed to crossfire and mortar attacks in their villages, and roadside explosions during that flight. Recruitment of children, gender-based violence including rape, and arbitrary arrest were also reported”.**
11. Medium shot, UN palais building with UN flag

Story

Conflicts and heavy floods force tens of thousands of people to flee their homes in Somalia amidst COVID-19

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) calls for a strong and coordinated response from the international community, national and local Somali authorities and humanitarian actors to meet the massive humanitarian needs arisen in Somalia due to conflicts and heavy floods which force people to leave their homes amidst Covid-19.

During a virtual press conference at the UN in Geneva, Charlie Yaxley, Spokesperson for the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) said that **“heavy flooding, conflict, a crippled economy, impending desert locust swarms and the exponential spread of COVID-19 are threatening the safety and welfare of Somalia’s 2.6 million internally displaced people (IDPs)”**.

UNHCR’s Yaxley added that **“since the start of this year, more than 220,000 Somalis have become internally displaced, including 137,000 due to conflict. Natural and climate-related disasters including drought and the resulting lack of livelihoods as well as floods are additional complex and interlinked drivers of displacement”**.

The Government of Somalia has initiated COVID-19 testing across the country. However, decades of conflict, together with a global shortage of testing kits, has left the country’s health infrastructure in a precarious position to respond should the virus spread rapidly. Despite Somalia having 928 confirmed cases of COVID-19 among the general population, there has been only one confirmed case amongst the IDP population so far.

“UNHCR believes the humanitarian situation will worsen as COVID-19 further spreads”, UNHCR’s spokesperson Yaxley said. “Most of the 2.6 million IDPs in Somalia live in overcrowded settlements and many, especially those newly displaced, live in makeshift shelters made of plastic bags, cardboards and sticks. Physical and social distancing is close to impossible, and there is scarcely enough clean water for drinking, let alone hand-washing. Conditions are ripe for widespread viral transmission”.

Also, the annual rainfall season in Somalia – the so called Gu season started in March and April. It is critical both for crop-dependent and livestock-dependent livelihoods across Somalia. Average to above average rains is expected in most parts of Somalia during the 2020 Gu season.

In South and Central Somalia, flash floods and the beginnings of riverine flooding caused by the seasonal Gu rains have already displaced an estimated 90,000 with additional displacement expected.

“If current trends continue, this year’s rains give every indication that they could pose the same catastrophic threat as the Deyr rains of last year, which led to more than 400,000 people being forced to flee their homes”, Yaxley said. “Swarms of desert locusts also threaten to decimate crop yields and cause widespread food shortages post the Gu rains”.

UNHCR and the Government of Somalia airlifted emergency assistance, including jerry cans, soap, blankets, sleeping mats, kitchen sets and plastic sheets, to help over 8,000 people in Baidoa, Bardheere and Qardho. A second airlift delivering aid in Qardho, Bardheere, Beletweyn, and Berdale is planned for today.

But also fighting between various parties to the conflict forced people to flee their homes, says UNHCR’s Yaxley. **“In March and April, armed operations against Al Shabab resumed in Lower Shabelle, resulting in more than 50,000 people being forced to flee their homes. Communities were directly exposed to crossfire and mortar attacks in their villages, and roadside explosions during that flight. Recruitment of children, gender-based violence including rape, and arbitrary arrest were also reported”**.