UNOG Bi-weekly press briefing Western Niger Attack - UNHCR

02-06-2020 | Edited NewsPress Conferences

Shotlist

1. Wide shot: UN Geneva main entrance, elevated view of front gates.
2. SOUNDBITE (EN) – Andrej Mahecic, spokesperson, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): “More than 1,000 people – which is a mix of refugees from Mali, displaced Niger nationals and local host communities – are now on the run following the brutal attack by irregular armed elements on a site in western Niger on Sunday afternoon which killed three people and wounded others.”
4. SOUNDBITE (EN) – Andrej Mahecic, spokesperson, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): “Over 50 men on motorbikes had swarmed into Intikane, this is in Tahoua region in Western Niger - some 72 kilometres from the Malian border – they targeted and killed two Malian refugee leaders and a local host community leader. The site is the host to some 20,000 refugees and an additional 15,000 displaced Nigerian nationals.”
5. Wide shot: “broken chair” sculpture at the Place des Nations, Geneva, with UN Geneva across the square.
6. SOUNDBITE (EN) – Andrej Mahecic, spokesperson, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): “In addition to the brutal killings of the three men, the assailants also torched food supplies and other aid items. They also destroyed mobile phone towers and the main water station and pipes.”
8. SOUNDBITE (EN) – Andrej Mahecic, spokesperson, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): “Across the five countries in that region - Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger
and Chad – we are talking about more than three million people in a situation of displacement, of whom many are internally displaced, there is more than 820,000 refugees and also we look after the many people, more than 600,000 people who have tried to return to their homes.”


10. **SOUNDBITE (EN)** – Andrej Mahecic, spokesperson, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): “We condemn the killings and call on all sides to respect civilian lives, bring those responsible to justice and make sure such heinous crimes do not repeat in the future. We are working with partners and local authorities to provide immediate assistance, especially by trucking in water with other relief supplies as people could die of thirst in the desert heat. We are talking about desert conditions.”


12. **SOUNDBITE (EN)** – Andrej Mahecic, spokesperson, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): “Judging by the fact that they have destroyed much of the infrastructure, the mobile phone towers, the water facilities in particular, we believe it shows the intent to force the people from this particular area to move elsewhere.”


Western Niger attack leaves 1,100 people ‘on the run’, warns refugee agency

A vicious attack by an armed gang on vulnerable refugees and host communities in western Niger has left more than 1,000 people “on the run”, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) said on Tuesday, the latest violence in the troubled Liptako Gourma region.

“More than 1,000 people – a mix of refugees from Mali, displaced Niger nationals and local host communities – are now on the run following the brutal attack by irregular armed elements on a site in western Niger on Sunday afternoon which killed three people and wounded others,” said spokesperson Andrej Mahecic.

“Over 50 men on motorbikes had swarmed into Intikane, this is in Tahoua region in Western Niger - some 72 kilometres from the Malian border – they targeted and killed two Malian refugee leaders and a local host community leader. The site is the host to some 20,000 refugees and an additional 15,000 displaced Nigerian nationals.”

Before leaving the scene, the attackers torched food supplies and other aid items, in an apparent move to prevent victims from returning.

“It is clear that this is an area where they seek the possibility of being able to use the border area between the three countries to operate with impunity,” Mr Mahecic explained, in reference to Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

“They also destroyed mobile phone towers and the main water station and pipes,” he added, noting that the development was just the latest example of instability linked to bands of violent extremists.

“Across the five countries in that region - Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad – we are talking about more than three million people in a situation of displacement,” the UNHCR official said.

Many are internally displaced, and there are more than 820,000 refugees, he added, noting that despite access difficulties, the agency helps to look after them and “the many people, more than 600,000 people who have tried to return to their homes”.

According to UNHCR, around 1,100 people have arrived outside the town of Telemces, some 27 kilometres away from the site of the attack. They urgently need water, food and other assistance, the agency said in a statement, noting that national authorities and partners are on hand to register them.

After highlighting the difficulty of identifying the attackers but noting that similar violent incidents have been on the rise in recent months, Mr Mahecic insisted that the UN agency was stepping up its response to help the most vulnerable.

Nonetheless, the fear of further attacks is driving people to look for safety to further inland in Niger, he warned.

“Judging by the fact that they have destroyed much of the infrastructure, the mobile phone towers, the water facilities in particular, we believe it shows the intent to force the people from this particular area to move elsewhere,” Mr Mahecic said.

In an appeal for justice for victims, the UNHCR official also called for a response from the international community that takes into account the huge humanitarian needs of the region, and not just security considerations.

“We condemn the killings and call on all sides to respect civilian lives, bring those responsible to justice and
make sure such heinous crimes do not repeat in the future,” he said. “We are working with partners and local authorities to provide immediate assistance, especially by trucking in water with other relief supplies as people could die of thirst in the desert heat. We are talking about desert conditions.”