UNOG Bi-weekly press briefing: Cameroon Attacks on Humanitarians - OCHA

05-06-2020 | Edited NewsCOVID-19

Shotlist


2. SOUNDbite (EN) – Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): “Over the past two months we have seen a significant increase in attacks with 6 aid agencies reporting having had their workers kidnapped or illegally detained in live-threatening incidents”.

3. Medium shot: Flag alley in front of UN Geneva building

4. SOUNDbite (EN) - Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): “There is an increasing widespread practice by non-state armed groups of setting up illegal checkpoints along the main supply routes and abducting aid workers”.

5. Close up: UN flag
6. **SOUNDBITE (EN)** – Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): “The increase of attacks is very troubling as it comes at a time where efforts are actually focused in scaling up in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic. The Humanitarian Coordinator has reiterated the UN Secretary-Generals call for a global ceasefire to also apply in Cameroon”.

7. Medium shot: UN Geneva Palais des Nations

8. **SOUNDBITE (EN)** – Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): “Motives for these kidnappings are mostly predatory - kidnapping for ransom or theft. Armed elements have also enforced so called ‘ghost towns’ which is days where they prohibit people from venturing out, they have used improvised explosive devices in populated areas and closed transport routes between cities for several days”.

9. Wide shot: UN flag alley

10. **SOUNDBITE (EN)** – Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): “There is also an issue with the regular armed forces there, the Cameroonian armed forces, which have withheld and stopped trucks particularly with aid. They are having some reports of them detaining protective equipment that was to be used for humanitarian workers”.

11. Wide shot: UN flag, in background ICRC building
Harassment, attacks, abductions and extortions of aid workers are dramatically on the rise in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, according to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The situation has reached a point where aid delivery has had to be scaled back, putting many lives at unnecessary risk.

“Over the past two months we have seen a significant increase in attacks with six aid agencies reporting having had their workers kidnapped or illegally detained in live-threatening incidents” said Jens Larke, spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) speaking today to a virtual press conference at the United Nations in Geneva.

He added that “there is an increasing widespread practice by non-state armed groups of setting up illegal checkpoints along the main supply routes and abducting aid workers”.

All staff involved in these incidents have been released, but they are traumatised because of the death threats they received during the abduction.

These constraints have strongly impacted the work of humanitarian organisations with consequences for the people they serve.

The situation in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon, which started as a political crisis, has been marked by violent clashes and has led to a complex humanitarian emergency with 1.7 million people in need in the region.

Quoting Cameroon’s humanitarian coordinator Allegra Baiocchi, the OCHA spokesperson said that “the increase of attacks is very troubling as it comes at a time where efforts are actually focused in scaling up in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

He added that “the Humanitarian Coordinator has reiterated the UN Secretary-Generals call for a global ceasefire to also apply in Cameroon”.

Aid workers and the assistance they provide to the most vulnerable populations can make the difference between life and death for entire communities in this part of Cameroon, OCHA says. In this context, the kidnapping of aid workers has a devastating effect on life-saving aid.

“Motives for these kidnappings are mostly predatory - kidnapping for ransom or theft”, Laerke said. “Armed elements have also enforced so called ‘ghost towns’ which is days where they prohibit people from venturing out, they have used improvised explosive devices in populated areas and closed transport routes between cities for several days”.

Cameroon security forces have also reportedly delayed the movement of humanitarian cargo.

“There is also an issue with the regular armed forces there, the Cameroonian armed forces, which have withheld and stopped trucks particularly with aid. They are having some reports of them detaining protective equipment that was to be used for humanitarian workers”.

According to OCHA; 450,000 of the 1.7 million people in need are displaced, 600,000 have already fled the violence to other parts of the country. A total of 2.3 million people in Cameroon need food, shelter, non-food items and protection as a result of the crisis.