UNOG Bi-weekly press briefing 09 June 2020

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Story

Rhéal LeBlanc, Chief of the Press and External Relations Section at the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), chaired the virtual briefing, attended by the spokespersons for the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the Human Rights Council (HRC).

COVID-19: impact on the displaced in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Babar Baloch, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), stated that massive funding gaps were threatening hundreds of thousands of lives in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where surging violence and COVID-19 were exacerbating already dire conditions for millions of forcibly displaced people. As of 7 June, DRC had recorded 4,105 confirmed cases of COVID-19, the second largest number in the southern African region. At the same time, surging violence was uprooting hundreds of thousands more people in the east of the country.

UNHCR warned that without an urgent injection of cash, underfunding would have a devastating impact on critical lifesaving humanitarian programmes. Over the past few months, hundreds of thousands more people had been displaced in eastern and northern DRC following brutal attacks by various armed groups, intercommunal violence and natural disasters. DRC also hosted over half a million refugees – mainly from Rwanda, Burundi, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan. While the overall humanitarian situation remained alarming, UNHCR was forced to make difficult choices that result in many of those in dire need
not getting the assistance they required. The lack of funding also hampered efforts towards finding lasting solutions for Rwandan and other refugees, for whom the Congolese Government had indicated an openness to facilitating long stay permits and local integration.

Full press release can be read here.

Responding to questions, Mr. Baloch said that the UNHCR was working with the authorities to decongest the sites and help build sustainable shelters. The underfunding affected the efforts to move people to accommodation in which they could be safe. Insecurity, COVID-19 and underfunding represented a truly deadly mix.

COVID-19: food security in Nigeria

Elisabeth Byrs, for the World Food Programme (WFP), said there had been a steep drop in international oil prices, Nigeria’s major export commodity, since the outbreak of the virus, which had sparked fears of a recession. Over 3.8 million people, mainly in the informal sector, could lose their jobs temporarily. This figure could rise to 13 million if movement restrictions continued for a longer period. That would add to the almost 20 million already out of work. In a country where about 90 million people (46 percent of the population) lived on less than two dollars per day, the urban poor who depended on a daily wage to feed themselves and their families had been hard-hit by movement restrictions to contain the spread of the virus.

WFP planned to scale up its assistance to reach three million people in Nigeria, including an expansion to support Government social protection systems in the cities of Abuja, Kano and Lagos. WFP was working to assist up to 1.2 million people through a combination of cash-based transfers and in-kind food distributions in Kano, Abuja and Lagos – areas where WFP was not delivering assistance until now, and where it could meaningfully boost Government social protection efforts. WFP was also gearing up to serve an additional 600,000 people - bringing the total to 1.8 million - in the three north eastern states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe, where WFP was providing food and nutrition support to women, men and children affected by a decade-long insurgency. WFP urgently required USD 182 million over the next six months to provide crucial assistance in Nigeria, including to people whose livelihoods and incomes had been adversely affected by COVID-19.

COVID-19: other topics

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the UN Information Service, reminded that the UN Secretary-General was issuing today a new policy brief on COVID-19 and food security, which had already been shared with the media.

Discussing COVID-19 in Latin America, several journalists expressed concern that not enough attention was being paid to Latin America in either the biweekly briefings or the briefings organized by the World Health Organization (WHO). Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service, stressed that the global pandemic was being taken seriously in all areas of the world and information would be shared as it became available.

Responding to questions, Elisabeth Byrs, for the World Food Programme (WFP), said that 340,000 people in El Salvador were prone to hunger as a consequence of COVID-19 and the tropical storm Cristobal.

Geneva announcements
Catherine Huissoud, for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), informed that the World Investment Report would be presented at a press conference on Friday, 12 June at 2.30 p.m. The report would be embargoed until 16 June at 7 a.m. CET. The speakers at the press conference would be Mukhisa Kituyi, UNCTAD Secretary-General, and James Zhan, Director, Division on Investment and Enterprise. The press kit, to be distributed on 10 June, would contain eight press releases: one on global trends, one on the theme chapter of the report on international production beyond the pandemic and six press releases on regional trends.

Rosalind Yarde, for the International Labour Organization (ILO), said that Friday, 12 June would be the World Day Against Child Labour. On that occasion, the ILO and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) would be issuing a report on the effect of the pandemic on the world’s children. The previous figures indicated that 152 million children had been subjected to child labour around the world. The new report would include a series of recommendations on the measures governments could take to alleviate the consequences of the pandemic on children. The report under embargo would be sent on 11 June; the embargo would be lifted at 2 a.m. CET on 12 June.

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the UN Information Service (UNIS), informed that today, at 3 p.m., there would be a virtual event “Inequalities during & after COVID-19: Moving from crisis to long-term resilience”, organized by the SDG Lab at UN Geneva in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO). Participating, among others, would be the UN Geneva Director-General, the ILO Director-General, and the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. More information is available here.

Mr. LeBlanc also stated that on 12 June, at 11:30 a.m., Winnie Byanyima, UNAIDS Executive Director, would address the media for the first time since taking over.

On questions related to the Human Rights Council (HRC), Rolando Gomez said various proposals had been put forth to resume the forty-third session of the HRC on 15 June. While no definite decision had been yet made, it seemed likely that the session would resume in a so-called hybrid format, with some physical presence and some virtual participation. No formal decision had yet been taken either on the forty-fourth session, which was also supposed to start this month. More information was expected this afternoon.