Rolando Gomez, for the Human Rights Council (HRC), said that the Human Rights Council had resumed its forty-third session the previous day. The session had been interrupted on 13 March due to the coronavirus pandemic. The resumed session would last until 19 June. This morning at 10 a.m, the Council would end the general debate on the human rights situation in the Palestinian Occupied Territories. Another discussion, this afternoon and the following morning, would take place on item 9 – racism and racial discrimination. An interactive discussion with the High Commissioner and several experts on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo would also take place on 17 June. In the afternoon on 17 June, the Council would hold an urgent debate on racism and police brutality in the follow-up to the killing of George Floyd in the United States. A resolution on the topic was expected to be adopted.

Responding to questions, Mr. Gomez said that the upcoming urgent debate was not going to discuss the situation in the United States only, as the issue of racism was pervasive around the world. There was no indication that the United States would return to the Council, from which it had withdrawn in 2018.

Alessandra Vellucci, for the UN Information Service (UNIS), mentioned the op-ed written by more than 20 senior UN leaders from Africa or of African descent, in which they expressed their outrage at pervasive and systemic racism, highlighting the need to go beyond and do more than just offering condemnation.
Responding to another question on racism in the United Nations, Ms. Vellucci said that she was not aware of a possible UN-wide inquiry into promotion procedures that might disadvantage UN staff because of their origin. The Secretary-General had addressed the staff on the topic of racism inside the organization and had asked that a plan be prepared to conduct a year-long discussion on the topic of racism.

COVID-19

A number of journalists raised the issue of the repeated absence of the World Health Organization (WHO) from biweekly press briefings at the Palais des Nations. The journalists emphasized that they needed to have direct and regular communication with the WHO, and to be given an opportunity to ask questions about the ongoing health crisis. Alessandra Vellucci, for the United Nations Information Service, said that she would once again pass the message to the WHO colleagues.

COVID-19: impact on Syrian refugees

Andrej Mahecic, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), warned that the economic downturn prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic had pushed hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees in the Middle East into an ever more desperate situation and has increased their humanitarian needs. The number of vulnerable refugees who lacked the basic resources to survive in exile had dramatically surged as a result of the public health emergency. The refugee hosting communities in countries in Syria’s neighbourhood experienced similar hardships. Many refugees had lost what had been already meager incomes, forcing them to cut down on the most basic needs, including food and medication.

Since the start of the pandemic, Mr. Mahecic said, the UNHCR had provided emergency cash support to nearly 200,000 additional refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey who previously had not received financial aid, along with other efforts to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. The five countries alone hosted more than 5.5 million Syrians, the biggest refugee group in the world. Host communities had shown great solidarity, but they had also suffered loss of livelihoods as a result the COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond the immediate emergency, continued support to national systems was a priority.

Full briefing note is available here.

Responding to questions, Mr. Mahecic said that households led by single mothers, the sick, and the elderly were particularly vulnerable; they were more likely to slide into deep poverty. Mr. Mahecic also reiterated that the High Commissioner Filippo Grandi’s briefing on UNHCR’s Annual Global Trends Report on Forced Displacement at 5 p.m. this afternoon, and the related materials, would be under embargo until 18 June.

COVID-19: mobility restrictions in west and central Africa

Paul Dillon, for the International Organization for Migration (IOM), informed that data collected at 35 key transit points across West and Central Africa by the IOM indicated that regional migration had dropped by nearly 50 per cent during the first half of 2020 compared with 2019 due to government travel restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

On today’s International Day for Family Remittances, the data reflected the double burden low- and middle income countries bore at this time: the response to COVID-19 had caused great disruption to cross-border mobility and trade. One in nine people on earth were affected by remittance flows. Roughly half resided in small towns and rural villages where remittances put food on the table, educated children and supported small businesses, said Mr. Dillon. He added that at least 33,000 migrants were currently stranded at borders including in overcrowded transit centres in west and central Africa as a result of COVID-19 mobility restrictions. In addition, there were more than six million internally displaced persons across the region who were almost exclusively reliant on humanitarian aid, which had been impacted by restrictions on mobility.
Press release on remittances in Chad can be read here.

Mr. Dillon, responding to questions, said that in 2019, according to the World Bank, remittances to low and middle income families around the world had amounted to USD 550 billion. Remittances to low and middle-income countries in 2020 were projected to fall by 19.7 percent to USD 445 billion, representing a loss of a crucial financing lifeline for many vulnerable households.

Alessandra Vellucci referred to the message of the Secretary-General on the Day for Family Remittances, in which he called on all stakeholders to take steps to reduce remittance transfer costs, provide financial services for migrants and their families and promote financial inclusion for a more secure and stable future.

**Geneva announcements**

Catherine Huissoud, for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), informed that a new report on tourism would be presented the following week, at a date to be confirmed. It would deal with the impact of COVID-19 not only on developed countries - US, China, Spain, Italy, but also on Small Island Developing States and other developing countries. Another report - “Commodities at a Glance, Special issue on Battery Raw Material” would be presented at the very end of June or beginning of July.

Ms. Huissoud informed that she would be absent for the following three weeks. During that time, the media could reach her colleague Dan Tengo at +41 22 917 80 33 and dan.tengo@unctad.org.

Alessandra Vellucci, for the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), said that the wearing of masks at press conferences at the Palais des Nations was not obligatory, while it was during meetings.

Ms. Vellucci also informed that the Special Envoy for Syria, Geir O. Pedersen, would be briefing the Security Council at 4 p.m. Geneva time today. The briefing would be webcast on webtv.un.org, and the transcript would be distributed afterwards.

Finally, Ms. Vellucci informed that a virtual press conference on the impact of COVID-19 in Latin America and the response of the World Food Programme would take place today at 4 p.m. The speaker would be Miguel Barreto, WFP Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean.