UNOG Bi-weekly press briefing: Funding Threat Humanitarian Air Flights - WFP

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Shotlist

2. SOUNDBITE (EN) – Elisabeth Byrs, Spokesperson for the World Food Programme (WFP): “Unless a substantial injection of funds is provided by donors by the end of the first week of July, WFP will have no choice but to ground most of its humanitarian air fleet by the end of July. This is a response on a scale never seen before and with the pandemic showing no signs of unabating it is crucial that the response doesn’t stop now when it is needed most”.
4. SOUNDBITE (EN) – Elisabeth Byrs, Spokesperson for the World Food Programme (WFP): “The Common Services budget of $965 million to maintain the air service until the end of the year is only 14 per cent funded. Only 178 million US$ has so far been confirmed or advanced”.
6. SOUNDBITE (EN) – Elisabeth Byrs, Spokesperson for the World Food Programme (WFP): “Without the logistical support provided by these common services, global aid operations would be severely compromised. Hospitals in developing countries would not receive desperately needed medical supplies. Health centres serving pregnant women and undernourished children would not receive life-saving nutritional products for the prevention and treatment of malnutrition”.
SOUNDBITE (EN) – Elisabeth Byrs, Spokesperson for the World Food Programme (WFP): “More than 2,500 responders from more than 80 aid organisations flown to destinations where their assistance is urgently needed. I could also tell you that we have provided enough cargo to fill 120 Jumbo Jets waiting to be transported in coming weeks”.

The demand is expected to increase as supply comes online, and current projections indicate that approximately 700,000 m3 of cargo will need to be delivered across the world by the end of the year. It is therefore paramount that the critical funding gap is filled imminently”.

Wide shot: UN flag with ICRC headquarters
Medium shot: delegate looking at podium (out of shot) holding pen in hand.
Wide shot: UN Geneva, Entry Pregny Gate
Wide shot: Place des Nations with Broken Chair
Wide shot: Broken Chair with UN in background
Global deliveries of critical equipment to tackle COVID-19 pandemic will grind to a halt unless urgent funding is made available to maintain air fleet, UN World Food Program warns

Crucial humanitarian air flights that deliver desperately needed medical supplies and humanitarian workers are in danger of shutting down in July if funding can’t be secured to keep them running, the UN agency in charge of the logistics has said. The UN's World Food Program has been operating such flights to some 132 countries, providing a lifeline of support just as travel bans and closed borders in many parts of the world have caused logistics nightmares for deliveries.

“Unless a substantial injection of funds is provided by donors by the end of the first week of July, WFP will have no choice but to ground most of its humanitarian air fleet by the end of July,” said Elisabeth Byrs, spokesperson for the World Food Programme (WFP), speaking at a press briefing at the United Nations in Geneva. "This is a response on a scale never seen before, and with the pandemic showing no signs of unabating it is crucial that the response doesn’t stop now when it is needed most”.

Using a network of global and regional transportation hubs, the WFP aviation service has over recent months transported huge volumes of urgently-needed medical supplies – including Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), masks and ventilators – as well as staff from scores of aid organisations. WFP also transports goods on behalf of other UN agencies and non-government organisations by road and by sea.

“The common services budget of $965 million to maintain the air service until the end of the year is only 14 per cent funded. Only 178 million US$ has so far been confirmed or advanced,” Ms. Byrs said. Some 787 million US$ are urgently required to sustain these essential air cargo and passenger movement operations until the end of the year.

WFP’s operates a network of so-called "global humanitarian response hubs" - in Guangzhou (China), Liège (Belgium) and Dubai (UAE) -- near the locations where supplies are manufactured, in addition to "regional hubs" (in Ethiopia, Ghana, South Africa, Malaysia, Panama and Dubai). From there, aid workers and humanitarian cargo – such as medicines, ventilators and PPE - can be transported by WFP Aviation to their final destinations in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Cargo transport between global and regional hubs is provided free of charge to the beneficiaries.

WFP’s Byrs warned of severe consequences should the humanitarian flights cease. “Without the logistical support provided by these common services, global aid operations would be severely compromised,” she said.

"Hospitals in developing countries would not receive desperately needed medical supplies," Ms. Byrs added. "Health centres serving pregnant women and undernourished children would not receive life-saving nutritional products for the prevention and treatment of malnutrition.”

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the World Food Program has completed 375 cargo and passenger emergency flights, delivering “more than 2,500 responders from more than 80 aid organisations flown to destinations where their assistance is urgently needed”. Byrs added that “I could also tell you that we have provided enough cargo to fill 120 jumbo jets, waiting to be transported in coming weeks”.

As part of this system, WFP also has access to a global network of contracted air ambulances which have so far carried out nine medical evacuations of United Nations staff.

“The demand is expected to increase as supply comes online, and current projections indicate that approximately 700,000 cubic meters of cargo will need to be delivered across the world by the end of the year. It is therefore paramount that the critical funding gap is filled imminently,” Byrs said.