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Story


Environmental impact of the Beirut explosion

Jihan Seoud, Programme Manager at the Environment and Energy Programme of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Lebanon, speaking from Beirut, said that the impact on the environment of the recent explosion was a major concern, particularly when considering that the situation preceding the explosion had been already dismal. As a result of the destruction of the Port of Beirut, huge quantities of construction and demolition waste had been generated. Estimates varied between 100,000 and 800,000 tonnes.

The UN and the European Union were working together to ensure that debris removal and waste management was done properly and in an environmentally-sound manner, and not simply disposed in ways that would pose a threat to the environment or human health. The cost of environmental remediation and recovery resulting from the explosion was estimated at over USD 100 million, which was to be added to the Cost of Environmental Degradation in Lebanon, estimated at USD 2.35 billion in 2018. Reconstruction needed to be greener: integrating solar power, energy efficiency measures, insulating material and climate-
resilient design in the reconstruction of buildings. A key aspect was that supplies necessary for reconstruction such as cement, tiles and glass were imported or donated from outside Lebanon since local supplies were limited and came at a high environmental cost since uncontrolled and illegal quarrying was a major concern in Lebanon.

So far, Ms. Seoud concluded, only small emergency funding had been secured from donors; much more is needed and fast.

More information on UNDP’s work in Lebanon can be found here.

**Sudan**

Alessandra Vellucci, for the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), read the previous day’s statement by the Spokesman of the Secretary-General, in which the Secretary-General welcomed the initialing in Juba of a peace agreement between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan Revolutionary Front and Sudan Liberation Army led by Minni Minawi. The Secretary-General congratulated the people of the Sudan for that historic achievement and commends the parties to the negotiations for their political will and determination in working toward the common objective of peace. The full statement had been distributed to the media.

Full statement can be read here.

Jens Laerke, for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said that heavy rains, mostly in Ethiopia, had triggered severe flooding in Sudan, where over the weekend the Nile had reached nearly 17.5 metres, the highest level in 100 years, according to the Sudanese authorities. In Khartoum state alone, more than 21,000 people had been affected by flooding and the Government had declared a state of emergency there. Across the country, as of 25 August, 380,000 people had been affected and 90 had been killed due to the floods.

Access to clean water - critical in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic - had also been affected. Around 2,000 water sources were contaminated or non-functional, according to initial assessments.

A quick response had been possible because the Government, UN agencies and partners had pre-positioned supplies to respond to the needs of 250,000 people before the rains started. Overall, the Sudan Humanitarian Response plan, which asked for USD 1.4 billion, was 44 percent funded.

Shabia Mantoo, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), stated that heavy seasonal rains had caused flash floods and rivers to burst their banks, including the Nile in the capital Khartoum and its twin city Omdurman, and affected thousands of internally displaced people, refugees and host communities in Sudan. Homes and community buildings had been badly damaged and destroyed leaving many in desperate need of shelter. Some had lost all their previous possessions and had been left facing the prospect of starting over again from scratch.

An estimated 125,000 refugees and internally displaced people had been affected in total, particularly in East Sudan, White Nile, Darfur and Khartoum, many in urgent need of shelter and other emergency assistance. Rains had been particularly heavy in North Darfur, leaving an estimated 35,000 IDPs, locals and refugees in need of help. UNHCR and partners, in collaboration with the Government of Sudan, were providing emergency aid to affected populations in White Nile, including plastic sheeting to 3,500 refugees in Al Jameya camp and 65,000 other displaced and host community in the state.

Full statement is available here.

**Detecting COVID-19 cases in Ecuador**

Shabia Mantoo, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), said that refugee community networks were helping detect COVID-19 cases in Ecuador, as part of a Community Epidemiological Surveillance
System (CESS) developed by the UNHCR.

The system was helping ensure the early detection and referral for treatment of COVID-19 cases among the country’s refugee population. Since the system had been launched a month earlier, more than 250 suspected cases had been referred to national health authorities. This innovative, community health referral strategy relies on UNHCR’s pre-existing humanitarian and refugee community networks to help identify COVID-19 cases among refugee and migrant communities. The network comprised partners, community organizations and civil society, complementing the Government’s existing Epidemiological Surveillance System to better reach refugees and migrants, who tended to move continuously within the country. Nationwide, six refugee and migrant-led community organizations had been trained by UNHCR to conduct epidemiological surveillance.

Full statement is available here.

Ice melt in the Arctic, Alps and Himalayas

Clare Nullis, for the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), said that today was the start of the northern hemisphere autumn. Summer had had a major impact on ice shelves and glaciers. WMO’s Global Cryosphere Watch had issued a summary, based on contributions from different partners, which showed that the summer of 2020 had hit the Arctic been marked by many new temperature records. On 20 June, the Siberian town of Verkhoyansk located above the Arctic circle at 67.55°N had experienced 38°C (100.4°F) for the first time. Further north, on the Svalbard archipelago, at 78°N, a new temperature measurement shattered a 41-year-old record, with 21.7°C (71°F) measured in the town of Longyearbyen on 25 July. Even further north, at Eureka station in Nunavut, the Canadian National Weather Service reported 21.4°C (78°F) on the 27 June. The heatwave across the Arctic had been accompanied by record-breaking wildfires in Russia, close-to record low sea ice extent, and the collapse of one of the last fully intact Canadian ice shelves.

Similar temperature trends were being observed in the European Alps, with similar consequences. Temperatures in the Alps had increased by 2°C during the twentieth century. This “amplification” was attributed to the decrease in snow ice cover revealing darker rocks that absorbed more solar radiation. Alpine glaciers suffered tremendously from above-normal summer temperatures. In the Tibetan region in China, persistent heavy precipitation, caused the Jinwuco moraine lake in the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau to break on 25 June causing significant damage.

Ms. Nullis stressed that the floods resulting from the outburst of glacier lakes were becoming an increased factor of high-risk in many parts of the world, putting at risk people and infrastructure. That was a worrisome trend and emphasized the need for sustained risk management and adaptation measures supported by a good understanding of rapid changes in those environments.

COVID-19

Margaret Harris, for the World Health Organization (WHO), responding to questions, said that the WHO’s guidance, developed in cooperation with UNICEF, was for all children under 18 to be using face masks in schools. It was important to teach children how to wear masks appropriately, put them on and dispose of in a recommended way. WHO also recommended that people get vaccinated against seasonal influenza.

Geneva announcements

Catherine Huissoud, for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), informed about a press conference on 7 September at 11 a.m. to present the 2020 Report on UNCTAD assistance to the Palestinian people. The report would be embargoed until 8 September at 5 p.m. Geneva time.

Alessandra Vellucci, for the UN Information Service (UNIS), informed that a press conference by Simonetta Sommaruga, the President of the Swiss Confederation, on the freedom of media would take place.
in Room XVII at 1:15 p.m. today, just after the ongoing event on the same topic in Room XX.

Ms. Vellucci also informed that a press conference to launch the “Global Innovation Index 2020 - Who Will Finance Innovation?” would take place in Press Room III on 1 September at 11 a.m. The speaker would be Francis Gurry, WIPO Director-General.

Ms. Vellucci said that the Fondation pour Genève and UNOG, with the support of the City of Geneva, Genève, would open the travelling exhibition #YouNeedToKnow on 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The exposition, which could be visited at the Place des Nations from 4 to 11 September, would be open on 4 September at 4 p.m. by UNOG Director-General Tatiana Valovaya, Alfonso Gomez, Administrative Councilor at the City of Geneva, and Ivan Pictet, President of the Fondation pour Genève. Journalists were kindly invited to the inauguration.