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Story


Violence in Kasai, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Babar Baloch, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), warned that a resurgence in violence and renewed tensions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s Great Kasai Region could trigger another wave of mass displacement in the country if the situation did not improve. Until recently, the region had experienced a relative period of uneasy calm, but in the past month, more than 24,000 people had fled three separate conflicts related to land disputes, clashes over resources, and confrontations between different ethnic groups, authorities and militias.

The majority of the displaced were seeking refuge on the provincial border areas of Demba.
region in Kasai Central, and Mweka region in the Kasai. As the first humanitarian responders, UNHCR was registering displaced people as well as host community members, whose capacity to help and host the displaced was often limited due to the extreme poverty and high levels of malnutrition in the area. UNHCR was helping the survivors of sexual violence and referring them for medical care and psycho-social support. UNHCR was calling for renewed focus on the Kasai to restore peace and defuse tensions. UNHCR was also appealing for the allocation of resources to respond to the needs of displaced Congolese in the region.

Responding to questions, Mr. Baloch stressed that efforts to bring and maintain peace in the region had to be redoubled. The current situation could turn into a new spark to lead to another wave of mass displacements.

**UNRWA appeal**

Tamara Alrifai, for the United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA), informed that UNRWA was launching a flash appeal for nearly USD 95 million, to help UNRWA’s efforts on mitigating the coronavirus, primarily in the densely populated refugee camps in the region. It would cover assistance to hospitals and cash assistance to those whose livelihoods had been disrupted. The recent increase in the number of COVID-19 cases was worrisome.

On the other hand, the good news was that more than half a million Palestinian refugee boys and girls were going back to school this week. Giving the sense of stability to those children would be beneficial for the youngest population. UNRWA appealed for support for education.

Responding to questions, Ms. Alrifai said that there were new registered COVID-19 cases in Gaza, the West Bank, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, i.e. in every single area where UNRWA worked. The situation in Gaza, one of the most densely populated areas in the world, was very dire, stressed Ms. Alrifai.

**COVID-19**

Margaret Harris, for the World Health Organization (WHO), responding to questions, said that the plan for the time being was to hold regular WHO press conference on Monday and Thursday the following week. Regarding the US announcement on the cutting of funding for the WHO, Dr. Harris said that the WHO had already expressed its position in that regard when the US had announced they were going to leave the organization.

The purpose of the COVAX initiative, informed Dr. Harris, was to accelerate the development and manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines, and to guarantee fair and equitable access for every country in the world. The phase III of vaccine tests was ongoing for a number of candidate vaccines. It was not likely that we would see mass vaccinations before the middle of the next year, explained Dr. Harris. High-risk groups should be vaccinated first; not everybody could be able to simply ring up their doctor and get vaccinated right away, she said, but unless everyone was protected, nobody would be safe. All vaccine therapeutics needed to go through national licensing, informed Ms. Harris. Until vaccines were ready, everyone needed to take actions which are known to be helping, such as physical distancing, washing hands, and wearing masks. Raising false hopes could mean raising complacency.

**Geneva announcements**

Alessandra Vellucci, for the UN Information Service (UNIS), said that today, at 12 noon, the WHO would hold a hybrid press conference from Press Room III on addressing non-communicable diseases and COVID-19. The speakers would be Dr Bente Mikkelsen, Director of Noncommunicable Diseases, and Dr Nick Banatvala, Head of Secretariat, United Nations Task Force on Noncommunicable Diseases.

Catherine Huissoud, for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, informed about a hybrid
press conference in Press Room III on 7 September at 11 a.m. to present the 2020 Report on UNCTAD assistance to the Palestinian people. Press conferences would also be held in Cairo and Ramallah on the same day. The report would be embargoed until 8 September at 7 p.m. Geneva time.

On 9 September at 10 a.m., the Human Rights Council would hold a virtual press conference

Related to its upcoming 45th regular session (14 September-6 October). Ambassador Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger of Austria, President of the Human Rights Council, would speak at the conference.

Ms. Vellucci informed that accreditations for the Council would be issued on an ad-hoc basis, and there would be limited presence of journalists in the Assembly Hall, where the Council would be meeting until the last two days, when the voting would take place in Room XX.

Ms. Vellucci informed that the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) would close its 23rd session at 4 pm today. The session could be followed on UN Web TV.

The Conference on Disarmament, which third and last part of this year session run until 18 September, would hold on 8 September, at 10 am, a public meeting devoted to “new types of weapons of mass destruction”.

On 7 September, at 3:30 p.m., the Committee on Enforced Disappearances would open its 19th session (7-25 September) online. During this session, the Committee would hold a dialogue with Iraq on additional information (on the implementation of the Convention) submitted under article 29(4) of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which would take place in the afternoons of 14 and 15 September, and could be watched at UN Web TV.

7 September would be the first-ever International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies, said Ms. Vellucci in the end. The video-message of the UN Secretary-General was available on the UN website.