UNOG Bi-weekly press briefing 8 September 2020

08-09-2020 | Press Conferences

Story

Poisoning of Alexei Navalny

Rupert Colville, for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said that the High Commissioner welcomed the news that Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny had emerged from his coma in a Berlin hospital. She urged the Government of the Russian Federation to carry out, or fully cooperate with, a thorough, transparent, independent and impartial investigation, after German specialists said they had “unequivocal proof” that Navalny had been poisoned with a Novichok nerve agent. High Commissioner condemned the poisoning.

“The number of cases of poisoning, or other forms of targeted assassination, of current or former Russian citizens, either within Russia itself or on foreign soil, over the past two decades is profoundly disturbing,” Bachelet said. “Navalny was clearly someone who needed state protection, even if he was a political thorn in the side of the government. It is not good enough to simply deny he was poisoned, and deny the need for a thorough, independent, impartial and transparent investigation into this assassination attempt. It is incumbent on the Russian authorities to fully investigate who was responsible for this crime – a very serious crime that was committed on Russian soil.”

Full statement can be read here.

Responding to questions, Mr. Coville said that other examples of poisoning included Sergey and Yulia
Skripal in 2018, Alexander Litvinenko in 2006, and Anna Politkovskaya in 2004; Colville also mentioned the shooting of Boris Nemtsov in 2015. OHCHR was in no position to apportion blame for Navalny’s poisoning; the responsibility to properly investigate Navalny’s and all other cases lay with the Russian authorities. The issue of Navalny’s poisoning may come up during the upcoming Human Rights Council’s session, but that was for the Member States to decide. In the past, the Council had created a number of commissions of inquiry, but that too was an issue for the States, explained Colville.

Alessandra Vellucci, for the UN Information Service, added that the Director-General of the Organization for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons had stated that the allegations of the use of the nerve agent, a chemical weapon, were an issue of grave concern, and contrary to the norms established by the international community.

**Incitement to violence against journalists and human rights defenders in Pakistan**

Rupert Colville, for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), stated that the OHCHR had followed with increasing concern numerous instances of incitement to violence against journalists and human rights defenders in Pakistan, in particular against women and minorities. Especially worrying were accusations of blasphemy – which could put accused individuals at imminent risk of violence.

OHCHR had raised its concerns directly with the Government and urged immediate, concrete steps to ensure the protection of journalists and human rights defenders who had been subjected to threats. OHCHR also stressed the need for prompt, effective, thorough and impartial investigations with a view to ensuring accountability in cases of violence and killings. The leadership should unequivocally condemn incitement to violence against religious minorities and what appeared to be an increase in the use of blasphemy laws for personal or political score-settling.

OHCHR press briefing note is [here](#).

**Arrival of Rohingya vessel in Aceh**

Paul Dillon, for the International Organization for Migration (IOM), stated that, after more than seven months stranded at sea, the largest group of Rohingya refugees to arrive in Indonesia since the Andaman Sea crisis in 2015, were receiving support from local authorities supported by the IOM, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), and partners.

The 296 Rohingya – primarily women and children – had landed in northern Aceh on 7 September and were under the care of local authorities. IOM was helping the Government to ensure that all arrivals receive rapid COVID-19 tests as required by Indonesian authorities and accompanying the process to find them suitable and safe accommodation. Those events underlined yet again the urgent need to continue to ensure the safe, timely disembarkation of refugees and migrants at sea in a manner that addresses public health concerns.

IOM press release can be found [here](#).

Babar Baloch, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), welcomed the life-saving disembarkation of approximately 300 Rohingya refugees on the northern coast of Aceh, Indonesia the previous morning. Having survived some seven months at sea in desperate conditions, an unknown number were in need of medical attention.

Approximately 330 Rohingya refugees were understood to have embarked on the journey in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, in February. Their hazardous ordeal had been prolonged by the collective unwillingness of states to act for more than six months. Equally, the Bali Process, as the only existing regional coordination mechanism able to convene states on such maritime movements, had failed to deliver comprehensive, regional action to predictably save lives through rescue and disembarkation. At least 30 lives had been lost at the sea.
More information is [here](#).

In response to questions by journalists, Mr. Dillon said that the conditions on board the vessel were reported to have been abhorrent. This journey must have been an imaginable drama for the survivors, added Mr. Baloch. They were all in need of immediate medical attention, which was the focus right now.

**Rescue of migrants in the Sahara**

Paul Dillon, for the [International Organization for Migration (IOM)](https://www.iom.int), informed that an IOM Search and Rescue team operating in Niger’s northern Agadez region the previous week had rescued 83 migrants in distress, in collaboration with the General Directorate for Civil Protection. The rescue on 3 September had taken place in a remote stretch of the searing Sahara Desert, where hundreds of migrants were believed to have perished from dehydration, vehicle accidents and assaults in recent years.

The migrants had been bound for Libya. The group had been stranded for three days without food and water before being spotted by the joint SAR patrol. Many had been dehydrated, injured and in need of immediate medical assistance. Had they not been seen, they would certainly have died, adding to the grim death toll of anonymous migrant deaths in the desert.

Full press release can be read [here](#).

**“United in Science” report**

Clare Nullis, for the [World Meteorological Organization (WMO)](https://www.wmo.int), informed that on 9 September at 5 p.m. Geneva time, UN Secretary-General António Guterres and WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas would present the high-level, multi-agency United in Science 2020. The event would be webcast on webtv.un.org. Accredited UN journalists would also be able to join via Web-ex. The embargo on the press release would be lifted at 1 p.m. Geneva time on 9 September.

The report provided the latest information on greenhouse gas concentrations, the impact of COVID-19 on emissions, and the emissions gap compared to the Paris Agreement targets. It gave details on the global climate 2016-2020 and projections for the forthcoming 5 years. It also considered the impact of climate change on the cryosphere, oceans and fresh water, and looked at how COVID-19 restrictions had affected the ability to monitor climate change.

**Other announcements**

Alessandra Vellucci, for the [UN Information Service](https://www.un.org/dispatch/), reminded that on 9 September at 10 a.m., Ambassador Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger, President of the [Human Rights Council](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/default.aspx), would hold a virtual press conference about the upcoming 45th session of the Council.

Also on 9 September at 1 p.m., the [Group of Eminent Experts (GEE) on Yemen](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/default.aspx) would launch its report investigating human rights violations in Yemen, from September 2014 to June 2020, mandated by HRC resolutions. Speakers would be Kamel Jendoubi, Chairperson of the GEE, Melissa Parke, Member of the GEE, Ardi Imseis, Member of the GEE.
Catherine Huissoud, for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), spoke about the new UNCTAD report “Scaling up Voluntary Sustainability Standards through Sustainability Public Procurement and Trade Policy”, which was published today, 8 September. The report looked at the role of government as a vehicle to drive the adoption of voluntary sustainability standards, which could be a powerful tool to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and other public sustainability commitments. The effectiveness of VSS to contribute to sustainable development depended partly on their degree of adoption by economic operators. In that respect, governments could play a significant role by integrating VSS into public procurement and trade policy.

The Committee on Enforced Disappearances, which had opened its 19th session online on 8 September, would hold public meetings on 14 and 15 September afternoons, to have 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. The session could be followed on http://webtv.un.org/

At 5 p.m. today Geneva time, the President of the General Assembly would give a press conference, which could be watched at http://webtv.un.org/

On 9 September, the UN Secretary-General would participate in the “UN75 Youth Plenary”, which would be an opportunity to support and amplify youth voices for a peaceful, just, and sustainable world as outlined in the priority area of the UN Youth Strategy: Youth 2030. The event can be watched live at http://event.un.org.