



## UNOG Bi-weekly press briefing 15 September 2020

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### Story

#### 45<sup>th</sup> Human Rights Council

Rolando Gomez, for the Human Rights Council (HRC), said the Council had started its [forty-fifth session](#) on 14 September, with the updates from the High Commissioner and discussions on Myanmar, and COVID-19 and human rights. Around 11 a.m. today, there would be a general debate on the High Commissioner's global update, including Nicaragua and Venezuela; more than 100 States and 70 NGOs were scheduled to speak. At the end of the day, the Council should hear from the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to access to safe drinking water and sanitation. On 16 September, the Council would hear from the Special Rapporteurs on slavery, right to development, and truth and reconciliation. On 18 September at 10 a.m., Mr. Gomez said an urgent debate would take place on the situation in Belarus, for which there was no time limit.

At 2 p.m. today, the Commission of Inquiry on Syria would launch its next report, covering the period from January to July; there would be a virtual press conference. On 16 September at 2 p.m. there would be a press conference by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela. Finally, on 17 September at 10 a.m., the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi would virtually present their conclusions and written report on human rights violations committed in Burundi since May 2019 in the context of the electoral process in 2020 and the main risk factors after the 2020 elections.

#### Aftermath of the fire in the Moria camp, Greece

Philippe Leclerc, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), speaking from Greece, said that an estimated 11,000 asylum seekers were without adequate shelter on the Greek island of Lesbos after the Moria Reception and Identification Centre had burned down the previous week. UNHCR was stepping up its support to respond to critical and immediate needs. Greek authorities, who held overall responsibility for the management and coordination of the humanitarian response, had now identified a location on Lesbos, close to Mytilene town, in the area of Kara Tepe, to temporarily house the most vulnerable children, men and women who had been made homeless in a series of blazes.

UNHCR was assisting in the setup of that new temporary tented facility to accommodate those most at risk and providing technical advice and sharing expertise regarding site setup and planning. UNHCR was also supporting the national health authorities in establishing a medical area at the new site, in accordance with WHO guidance, providing three tents, installing a hall and fencing to serve as isolation areas. UNHCR had further provided a one-off emergency top-up of cash assistance valued at 50 per cent of the regular monthly amount, to cover urgent needs of those affected. Once vulnerable asylum seekers were gradually transferred to this new site, it was important to promptly initiate, for those authorized to leave, the processes for their safe and orderly transfer to the mainland, in suitable accommodation.

Full briefing note is available [here](#).

Luciano Calestini, for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), speaking from Greece, confirmed that there were huge works currently ongoing at the new accommodation site; the authorities were confident that up to 12,000 spaces would be available by the end of this week. Several international and local organizations were available on site to provide help to those in need. The immediate hope was that the conditions for the 11,000 refugees, migrants and asylum seekers would be improved shortly. The big concern was negative rumours circulating which were discouraging the refugee population from entering the new accommodation premises. There were 3,800 children among this population; 407 unaccompanied children had been relocated to Thessaloniki, with IOM's assistance, and were expected to be sent to other European States. Another 35 unaccompanied children had now been identified; efforts were underway to reunite them with their families.

Mr. Calestini said the next step, after a reunification of the separated children, would be psycho-social support for all and access to some form of education, for the time they remained on Lesbos. All stakeholders were urged to ensure that time be as short as possible.

Safa Msehli, for the International Organization for Migration (IOM), read a [statement](#) by IOM Director-General Antonio Vitorino. The IOM was calling on European States and the European Union (EU) to take a twin-track approach, urgently supporting the immediate shelter and care for the displaced migrants and refugees while setting up longer-term solutions rooted in European solidarity.

“While the priority right now is to address the immediate needs of migrants and refugees in Lesbos, more sustainable solutions are needed. This can be achieved through a stronger relocation system and a concrete show of solidarity from European States. We need more relocation commitments in these trying times, while the EU establishes a more predictable and effective system based on responsibility sharing,” said Mr. Vitorino.

Due to the exceptional coordination efforts of IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF, and with the EU's financial support, over 400 unaccompanied children had been moved from the island to the mainland within 24 hours of the blaze in anticipation of their relocation to other European States. IOM reminded that the Moria centre had been built to host some 3,000 people but had been overwhelmed by the number of migrants and refugees reaching four times its initial capacity.

Responding to questions, Mr. Calestini said that, over the past four years, some 700 children had been relocated to EU States. Ms. Msehli appealed for more solidarity by the EU, while Mr. Leclerc confirmed that the UNHCR was working very closely with the Greek authorities on the island and had thus far provided

800 family tents. The Greek army was now engaged on quickly building the new accommodation. On another question, Mr. Calestini said some refugees and migrants might be reluctant to settle in the new accommodation as they feared that could become their permanent place of residence; many were hoping to go elsewhere.

Margaret Harris, for the World Health Organization (WHO), informed that a WHO team was also on the ground in Lesbos, and an additional medical team from Norway was on its way to the area.

### **Ordeal of the Rohingya refugees in Indonesia**

Shabia Mantoo, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), stated that the UNHCR was saddened by the deaths of three Rohingya refugees who had disembarked in northern Aceh, Indonesia, the previous week. Among the arrivals one young man and two young women, all under the age of 25, had now passed away. UNHCR was also deeply concerned about the health of many others in the group of 293 people, more than a third of whom were identified as in need of hospitalization and medical care.

UNHCR commended the Government of Indonesia and the local community in Aceh for receiving the group and mobilizing support to rapidly meet their immediate basic needs. The tragic episode served as a stark reminder to states in the region that prompt action to provide a safe port could have saved dozens of lives.

Full briefing note is [here](#).

### **New report on progress on food and agriculture-related Sustainable Development Goals**

Pietro Gennari, chief statistician at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), speaking from Rome, said the 2020 report included a new analysis on indicators, such as women's access to land and food losses. There was also a dedicated chapter on the COVID-19 pandemic on data collection. The world was still off track regarding achieving SDG targets related to food and agriculture. The productivity and incomes of small-scale producers were systematically lower than those of larger food producers on average. Gender inequalities in land rights remained pervasive: in nine out of ten countries assessed, relatively fewer women than men had ownership and/or control rights over agricultural land. The percentage of food lost after harvest on farm and at the transport, storage and processing stages stood at 13.8 per cent globally, amounting to over USD 400 billion a year. On a positive side, said Mr. Gennari, most countries had made good overall progress in implementing international instruments to combat IUU fishing and support small-scale fisheries. COVID-19 related lockdowns had had a negative impact on collecting data; statistics remained perennially underfunded, especially now when data was needed to estimate the impact of the pandemic.

More information on "Tracking progress on food and agriculture-related SDG indicators 2020" is available [here](#).

### **2020 hurricane season**

Clare Nullis, for the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), stated that the 2020 Atlantic hurricane season was so active that it was expected to exhaust the regular list of storm names. If that happened, the Greek alphabet would be used for only the second time on record. On 14 September, the US National Hurricane Center had issued advisories on five tropical cyclones over the Atlantic basin. That tied the record for the greatest number of tropical cyclones in that basin at one time, last set in September 1971.

Only the names Vicky and Wilfred remained. The hurricane name lists included only 21 letters out of 26, because it is not easy to find six appropriate names (for the six rotating lists) starting with Q, U, X, Y and Z. In the interests of safety, names had to be easily recognizable and reflect a balance between French, Spanish, Dutch and English names due to the geographical coverage of the storms throughout the Atlantic and Caribbean. The use of the Greek alphabet (Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Epsilon, Zeta, Eta, Theta, etc.) had only happened once before in 2005, when six names from the Greek Alphabet had been used. This was a record-breaking year with devastating hurricanes including Katrina, Rita and Wilma, whose names had all

been retired.

### **Hottest summer on record**

Clare Nullis, for the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), informed that the Northern hemisphere just had its hottest summer on record. It also had its hottest August on record, according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The Northern Hemisphere also had its warmest June-August period on record at 2.11°F (1.17°C) above average, surpassing the now second-warmest such period set in 2016 and again in 2019. The five warmest June-August periods for the Northern Hemisphere had occurred since 2015.

At the global level, it had been the second warmest August on record. It was 1.69°F (0.94°C) above the 20th-century average of 60.1°F (15.6°C), according to NOAA. August 2020 marked the 44th consecutive August and the 428<sup>th</sup> consecutive month with temperatures, at least nominally, above the XX-century average. The 10 warmest Augusts have all occurred since 1998. The five warmest Augusts had occurred since 2015.

Ms. Nullis further said that the 2020 fire season on the West Coast of the US had been record-breaking. The states of California, Oregon and Washington had been worst hit, with entire neighborhoods razed to the ground and forcing the evacuation of thousands of people. Six of the 20 largest wildfires in California's history had happened this year; 17 of the top 20 had happened since 2000. Wildfires were a part of the natural cycle of life in many ecosystems across the western United States. As a fire blazed, it killed pests, while germinating a generation of new seedlings, and the forest growth cycle began anew; however, too many wildfires potentially permanently altered the ecosystem. The Fourth National Climate Assessment, a US government inter-agency report, added Ms. Nullis, noted that from 1984 to 2015, climate change had led to twice as much land being burned than if climate change had not occurred.

### **COVID-19: questions and answers**

Margaret Harris, for the World Health Organization (WHO), spoke about new [testing guidance](#): one was on the antigen testing, which identified the protein of the virus; another was on diagnostic testing. Today's press conference, around 5:30 p.m, would be done jointly with UNICEF and UNESCO, as the focus would be on children. WHO had just issued a guidance on reopening schools safely. Another press conference on 17 September morning would be dedicated to patient safety; a media advisory would be sent out shortly. Regarding the independent panel, Ms. Harris said she would share their communication details, as the WHO did not manage their communications. The list of countries participating in the COVAX initiative was still not published, said Ms. Harris in response to a question. She referred the media to a [GAVI explainer](#). Ms. Harris said there were phase III trials in different parts of the world; no vaccine, to the knowledge of the WHO, had yet successfully completed the phase III trial. WHO could not support any vaccine that had not been proven to be absolutely safe and effective.

### **Geneva announcements**

Clare Nullis, for the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), informed about the International Day to Protect the Ozone Layer, and the WMO would be posting a note on it on its website.

Catherine Huissoud, for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), informed that the new UNCTAD Trade and Development Report would propose a global recovery plan to help countries and developing countries to bring them to a stronger position than they had been before COVID-19. Bold public spending seemed to be the only way to recover better from COVID-19, according to UNCTAD economists. The main press conference would be held in Geneva on 18 September at 2:30 p.m. The press kit would be made available on 16 September on UNCTAD's virtual newsroom and the economists were available for interviews as of now. The report was under embargo until 22 September at 8 p.m. Geneva time.

Elisabeth Byrs, for the World Food Programme (WFP), informed that her interim mandate had come to an

end, and introduced her replacement [Tomson Phiri](#). Mr. Phiri presented himself to the press corps.

Rosalind Yarde, for the [International Labour Organization](#) (ILO), said that on 17 September, the ILO would be publishing a briefing on the financing gaps in social protection in developing countries and the strategies needed to close the gap in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Only 45 per cent of the global population were currently covered by at least one social protection benefit; the rest were completely unprotected. Media could contact Ms. Yarde for more information.

On 23 September, the ILO would be launching its sixth report into [COVID-19 and the world of work](#), looking at labour income losses and the effectiveness of fiscal stimulus. On 23 September, at 11 a.m., there would be an embargoed press briefing by Guy Ryder, the ILO Director-General, and Sangheon Lee, Director of the ILO's Employment Policy Department; the embargo would be lifted at 1 p.m.

Finally, the ILO was launching its sixth [Global Media Competition](#), which would award two published media pieces and two synopses for stories covering labour migration issues. A media advisory would be shared shortly.

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the [United Nations Information Service](#) (UNIS), informed that on 16 September, the Secretary-General would be holding a press conference on the upcoming [75<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly](#). He would also launch a report on the comprehensive approach to COVID-19.

He also informed that today was the [International Day of Democracy](#), and referred to the [Secretary-General's message](#) on that occasion.

The [Conference on Disarmament](#), whose third and last part of the 2020 session officially runs until 18 September, would have a public plenary meeting in Room XVII at 3 p.m. on 16 September.

The [Committee on Enforced Disappearances](#) had decided – upon request of the Iraqi delegation – to postpone its dialogue with Iraq on additional information on the implementation of the Convention, initially scheduled for today and tomorrow, as some members of the Iraq delegation had tested positive for COVID.

The [Committee on the Rights of the Child](#), which had opened yesterday in public its online limited 85<sup>th</sup> session (14 September – 1 October), would hold its next public meeting for the closure of the session, on 1 October at 5 p.m.