



UNOG Bi-weekly press briefing 29 September 2020

29-09-2020 | Press Conferences

Story

COVID-19

Alessandra Vellucci, for the United Nations Information Service (UNIS) read parts of the Secretary-General's statement on one million casualties from the COVID-19 pandemic. "Our world has reached an agonizing milestone: the loss of one million lives from the COVID-19 pandemic. It's a mind-numbing figure. Yet we must never lose sight of each and every individual life... As we remember so many lives lost, let us never forget that our future rests on solidarity —as people united and as united nations." Full statement is available [here](#).

Ms. Vellucci informed that on 30 September, the Secretary-General would participate, together with the WHO Director-General, in the [High-level Virtual Event: Tackling Covid-19 together through the ACT-Accelerator](#), organized in the framework of the 75th General Assembly in New York. The event would be webcast live at webtv.un.org from 2:30 p.m. Geneva time.

Margaret Harris, for the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), responding to questions, explained that the WHO was not holding press conferences in person on its premises in order to minimize infection risks for journalists. There was no room at the WHO premises where all interested journalists could be welcomed in a safe manner. Crowded, closed spaces and close contact ought to be avoided, emphasized Ms. Harris.

On the topic of the global partnership to make available 120 million affordable, quality COVID-19 rapid

tests for low- and middle-income countries, Ms. Harris said that the pricing for rapid tests should be limited to USD 5 per test. They should be made as financially accessible as possible. Reliability was clearly a very important factor; the PCR test was still a good standard, though, and rapid tests were not intended to replace PCR. More information on rapid test partnership is available [here](#). Ms. Harris, speaking about the terrible one-million milestone, stressed the words of Dr. Tedros, who said that there was still a chance to turn the tide.

A number of journalists requested that the WHO hold press conferences exclusively for Geneva-based press corps.

45th Human Rights Council

Rolando Gomez, for the Human Rights Council (HRC), said that 38 draft resolutions on a wide range of topics had been tabled, on which the Council would take action the following week. All of those texts were available at the [HRC Extranet](#). Today, the Council should adopt Universal Periodic Reports adopted: Sweden, Grenada, Turkey, and Kiribati. At 2 p.m. the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen would present their findings to the Council, to be followed by an interactive discussion. Afterwards, the Council would hold a discussion on its subsidiary bodies. On 30 September, a general debate on the UPR would be followed by a general debate on the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and presentation of a report by the Working Group on people of African descent. On the agenda for 30 September was also the issue of repercussions and reprisals for those who sought to cooperate with the Council and human rights mechanisms.

Detailed Human Rights Council's agenda can be found [here](#).

Food situation in South Sudan

Matthew Hollingworth, World Food Programme Country Director in South Sudan, stressed that the humanitarian situation in the country was worsening. About 700,000 people were in dire straits as unprecedented flooding swept across the country, submerging whole villages, homes, farmlands, livestock and livelihoods in 36 counties.

Jonglei State had been the worst affected: of the 700,000 of flood-affected people, 230,000 people living in Jonglei had experienced flooding incidents more than once. The flooding crisis came on top of the grim food security situation in Jonglei, where more than 1.4 million people were suffering from acute and severe hunger in addition to more than 300,000 children under five who were acutely malnourished.

Mr. Hollingworth stated that South Sudan had been undergoing a complex crisis: sub-national conflict, economic shocks and high food prices, climate change, seen in the ongoing extreme weather patterns, which were driving vulnerable communities deeper into hunger and despair. In 2020, the flooding was likely to be the worst in 60 years. To counter the damaging effects of these floods, the WFP was aiming to support 700,000 flood-affected people who had lost their harvests and livelihoods, between October to March. The WFP needed at least USD 58 million for the coming six months to continue to deliver emergency lifesaving food assistance to alleviate hunger and malnutrition.

More information on the WFP's work in South Sudan can be found [here](#).

Responding to questions, Mr. Hollingworth said that water-borne diseases were definitely a concern. More than 93 percent of staff who were supposed to be in the field were indeed there in spite of COVID-19 limitations.

Northwestern Sahara Aquifer System

Jean Rodriguez, for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), informed that the UNECE was launching the report "Reconciling resource uses: Assessment of the water-food-energy-

ecosystems nexus in the North Western Sahara Aquifer System”. The aquifer, shared by Algeria, Libya and Tunisia, was North Africa’s largest groundwater reserve, supporting the lives and livelihoods of 4.8 million inhabitants. The aquifer system was naturally vulnerable due its low natural recharge.

Pressures on water had been increasing over the past three decades with the rise of new industrial agriculture, with water abstraction currently standing at three times the aquifer’s natural recharge rate (one billion cubic meters per year). That resulted in pressures on water and soil quality, leading to a vicious cycle of reduced agricultural productivity and increased energy demand for pumping from deep wells.

The report underlined the urgency of taking action across borders and sectors to address the threats leading to the degradation of the aquifer system. Cross-sectoral collaboration was the key to provide the highest level of water, energy and food security, as well as adaptation in the face of climate change.

UNECE press release is available [here](#).

Refugee high education

Shabia Mantoo, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), said that with only three per cent of refugees accessing higher education, UNHCR was urging governments and donors to help bridge critical gaps by ensuring the inclusion of refugee students in national education systems and the continuity of tertiary education programs, as well as offering more places for refugees. The COVID-19 pandemic had been tough for students and especially for refugees, 85 per cent of whom resided in developing or least developed countries.

On the other hand, 2019 had been a record year for UNHCR’s higher education scholarship scheme known as the [DAFI programme](#) (the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative), largely funded by the German government with the Government of Denmark as a new partner.

To withstand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR was calling on governments, the private sector, civil society and other key stakeholders to help strengthen and improve refugee inclusion and accessibility to national education systems in refugee host countries and to secure and safeguard education financing. Without such action, countless futures would be jeopardized, stressed Ms. Mantoo.

UNHCR’s report “Refugee Students in Higher Education” can be found [here](#).

Full press release is available [here](#).

UN General Assembly

Alessandra Vellucci, for the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), informed that the General Assembly would conclude its general debate today. Together with the Prime Ministers of Jamaica and Canada, the Secretary-General today would host a high-level event on financing for COVID-19. It would be followed by an event by UN Women on tackling gender-based violence.

All these events would be virtual and visible on webtv.un.org

Geneva announcements

Tomson Phiri, for the World Food Programme (WFP), informed that the WFP and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) would present on 30 September at 7 p.m. Geneva time the results of the study “The Cost of the Double Burden of Malnutrition: Social and Economic Impact for Guatemala”. The study revealed that malnutrition had significant and negative impacts on disease and mortality rates, in the educational outcomes and productivity. The launch would be done via the WFP Spanish Facebook page.

Vittorio Cammarota, for the International Trade Center (ITC), announced that as of 1 October, Pamela Coke-Hamilton would join the ITC as the Executive Director. Ms. Coke-Hamilton was currently Director of the Division on International Trade and Commodities at UNCTAD. Ms. Coke-Hamilton's full biography was available [here](#). The new Executive Director's first public engagement would be at the Geneva Trade Week on 1 October at 1 p.m. in the [plenary session on trade](#).

Mr. Cammarota also informed that on 7-8 October, the ITC would host the (virtual) [Good Trade Summit](#). More information would be shared later in the week.

Margaret Harris, for the World Health Organization (WHO), informed that the WHO had issued new [fair pricing guidance](#), the goal of which was to ensure that medicines were accessible to everyone.

Ms. Harris also informed that today, 29 September, was the [Heart Health Day](#). Ms. Harris shared a [link](#) at which one's heart health risks could be assessed.

Alessandra Vellucci, for the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), informed that today was the first-ever International Day against Food Loss and Waste, on which occasion there would be an event in New York.

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights had postponed to a later date the opening of its virtual 68th session.

The Committee on Enforced Disappearances would resume its session on 5 October to hold its dialogue with Iraq.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child would hold its next public meeting for the closure of the session, on 1 October at 5 p.m.

Finally, Ms. Vellucci reminded about the inauguration of the new temporary facility at UN Geneva, Tempus, today at 12:30 p.m.