



## **UNOG Bi-weekly press Briefing: Humanitarian Crisis Central Sahel - OCHA, WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR**

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### **Shotlist**

1. Exterior wide shot, Palais des Nations flag alley, nations' flags flying, a cloudy day.
2. Wide shot, press briefing room
3. **SOUNDBITE (English) — Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): “The humanitarian situation has deteriorated sharply over the past two years. Needs are rising faster than funding can keep up. People living in the border region between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger are now at an epicentre of conflict, poverty, and climate change. Without support, we fear that the region could develop into one of the biggest crises in the world”.**
4. Medium shot, journalists in press room
5. **SOUNDBITE (English) - Boris Cheshirkov, Spokesperson for the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR): “Across the wider region, over 2.7 million people have been forced to flee their homes. Shelter, water, sanitation, health, and other basic assistance needs are now immense. The Central Sahel countries of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger are the epicentre of the forced displacement crisis. More than 1.5 million internally displaced people (IDPs) and 365,000 refugees have fled violence in the Central Sahel, including over 600,000 this year alone”.**
6. Close up, WHO spokesperson
7. **SOUNDBITE (English) - Boris Cheshirkov, Spokesperson for the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR): “The level of brutality against civilians is ghastly and systemic. Parents are being executed in front of their children by armed groups with alarming frequency. Less than two weeks ago – on 4 October in northern Burkina Faso – armed assailants killed 25 men in front of**

**their families in an ambush on their convoy as they were returning home in hope for improved security”.**

8. Wide shot, press briefing room at the UN Palais
9. **SOUNDBITE (English) - Boris Cheshirkov, Spokesperson for the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR): “Climate risks in the Sahel are also increasing as rising temperatures are changing rainfall patterns and increasing the frequency and intensity of flooding, droughts, and sandstorms. Recent devastating floods in the region have killed dozens and left hundreds of thousands – many of these displaced in host communities – in urgent need of shelter, clean water, and health services”.**
10. Medium shot, podium press briefing room
11. **SOUNDBITE (English) - Tomson Phiri, Spokesperson for the World Food Programme (WFP): ”7.4 million people currently do not know where their next meal will come from. Our analysis of the World Food Programme shows an additional 7.4 million could be food insecure before the new year starts. This is as a result of several factors, but not least the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic”.**
12. Medium shot, cameraman
13. **SOUNDBITE (English) - Tomson Phiri, Spokesperson for the World Food Programme (WFP): ”Humanitarians are frequently regarded as targets by non-state armed actors across the region, in Burkina Faso, in Mali, in Niger. And this region is on a tipping point. We could see an irreversible slide into chaos, with the risk of a spill-over of instability into border areas of neighbouring countries around the Gulf of Guinea. This could precipitate further deterioration in food security in West Africa”.**
14. Close up, journalist
15. **SOUNDBITE (English) - Marixie Mercado, Spokesperson for UNICEF: “A record 7.2 million children in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger now require humanitarian assistance. This is up to two-thirds in just one year. Over a million children have been forcibly displaced from their homes. Safe water – so critical for the survival of young children and for preventing COVID-19 is scarcer than ever, particularly so among those displaced. Estimates on the number of children who will suffer life threatening malnutrition this year are up by a fifth”.**
16. Medium shot, journalists
17. **SOUNDBITE (English) - Marixie Mercado, Spokesperson for UNICEF: “Across the three countries targeted attacks had already shut down over 4,000 schools before Covid-19 closed down the rest. Verified instances of grave violations against children which include recruitment into the fighting, and rape and sexual violence have risen, especially in Mali”.**
18. Wide shot, press briefing room
19. Wide shot, press briefing room
20. Medium shot, journalists in press briefing room
21. Medium shot, journalists in press briefing room
22. Medium shot, journalists in press briefing room

## Story

### Humanitarian crisis in the Sahel Region (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) reaches a breaking point

The Sahel Region currently faces an unprecedented crisis as escalating violence, rising levels of food insecurity, continued displacement, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic all converge to create one of the worst humanitarian emergencies in the world right now, UN Humanitarian agencies warned today.

Speaking today at a news conference at the United Nations in Geneva, Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that **“the humanitarian situation has deteriorated sharply over the past two years. Needs are rising faster than funding can keep up”**. He added that **“people living in this border region between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger are now at an epicentre of conflict, poverty, and climate change. Without support, we fear that the region could develop into one of the biggest crises in the world”**.

On 20 October, the United Nations together with Denmark, Germany and the European Union will host a ministerial conference on the humanitarian situation in the Central Sahel to instill a sense of urgency among policymakers about the situation and to raise money for humanitarian action. OCHA’s current response plans in the three countries is only about 40 per cent funded with the crisis reaching a breaking point.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, today has warned of disastrous consequences should humanitarian efforts not urgently arrive to the Sahel region what has become the world’s fastest growing displacement and protection crisis.

Its spokesperson Boris Cheshirkov informed today that **“across the wider region, over 2.7 million people have been forced to flee their homes. Shelter, water, sanitation, health, and other basic assistance needs are now immense”**. Mr Cheshirkov added that **“the Central Sahel countries of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger are the epicentre of the forced displacement crisis. More than 1.5 million internally displaced people (IDPs) and 365,000 refugees have fled violence in the Central Sahel, including over 600,000 this year alone”**.

According to UNHCR, Burkina Faso is one among the poorest countries in the world and one of the most susceptible to climate risks. It faces a major internal security crisis which means almost nowhere in the country it is safe.

**“The level of brutality against civilians is ghastly and systemic. Parents are being executed in front of their children by armed groups with alarming frequency. Less than two weeks ago – on 4 October in northern Burkina Faso – armed assailants killed 25 men in front of their families in an ambush on their convoy as they were returning home in hope for improved security”**, Boris Cheshirkov said.

This year UNHCR has dramatically scaled up their response in the Central Sahel. The agencies has provided emergency shelter to 81,144 displaced people and reached survivors of sexual and gender-based violence through mobile health clinics amid COVID-19. Their interventions have helped 338,411 people to receive essential healthcare services.

With the ongoing climate crisis, fields have flooded while homes and livelihoods have been destroyed. **“Climate risks in the Sahel are also increasing as rising temperatures are changing rainfall patterns and increasing the frequency and intensity of flooding, droughts, and sandstorms. Recent devastating floods in the region have killed dozens and left hundreds of thousands – many of these displaced in host communities – in urgent need of shelter, clean water, and health services”**, said UNHCR’s Boris Cheshirkov.

The World Food Programme (WFP) has sounded the alarm for a serious food and nutrition crisis in the Central Sahel with people in parts of northern Burkina Faso being on the verge of a hunger catastrophe. WFP’s Tomson Phiri said that **”7.4 million people currently do not know where their next meal will come from. Our analysis of the World Food Programme shows an additional 7.4 million could be food insecure before the new year starts. This is as a result of several factors, but not least the socio-**

## **economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic”.**

The upsurge in fighting have not only populations forced to abandon their fields and livelihoods and led to the widespread closure of health facilities and school. It also has an impact on the humanitarian assistance which is getting more and more crucial.

**”Humanitarians are frequently regarded as targets by non-state armed actors across the region, in Burkina Faso, in Mali, in Niger”**, Tomson said. **“This region is on a tipping point. We could see an irreversible slide into chaos, with the risk of a spill-over of instability into border areas of neighbouring countries around the Gulf of Guinea. This could precipitate further deterioration in food security in West Africa”**.

One week ago, WFP has launched the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) in Burkina Faso to transport aid workers across the country, helping them to reach the most in need.

WFP urgently needs US\$ 178 million to be able to respond to the growing needs in the region.

Especially for children the conditions are worsening in one of the world’s poorest and least-developed regions, said UNICEF Spokesperson, Marixie Mercado. **“A record 7.2 million children in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger now require humanitarian assistance. This is up to two-thirds in just one year. Over a million children have been forcibly displaced from their homes”**. Especially safe water, **“so critical for the survival of young children and for preventing COVID-19 is scarcer than ever, particularly so among those displaced”**. UNICEF estimates that **“the number of children who will suffer life threatening malnutrition this year are up by a fifth”**.

UNICEF drew particular attention on some regions of Burkina Faso that are hosting large numbers of displaced people. In Djibo, Gorgadji and Barsalogo communes, mortality rates among children have already exceeded the emergency alert threshold.

UNICEF has been working with partners to provide children with life-saving therapeutic food, immunization against deadly diseases and access to safe water and sanitation. **“Across the three countries, targeted attacks had already shut down over 4,000 schools before Covid-19 closed down the rest. Verified instances of grave violations against children which include recruitment into the fighting, and rape and sexual violence have risen, especially in Mali”**, UNICEF’s Marixie Mercado said.

UNICEF is supporting children who have been released from armed groups or were subjected to sexual violence to recover and reintegrate.