Bi-weekly press briefing - 11 October 2019

11-10-2019 | Press Conferences

Story

**Humanitarian situation in Syria**

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, said that the Secretary-General had the previous day expressed his deep concern about the escalation of conflict in northern Syria. He had said that a de-escalation was absolutely essential and that any military operations must always respect the United Nations Charter and international humanitarian law. There was a road map for a political solution, laid out in Security Council resolution 2254, and any solution must respect the territorial integrity and unity of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Jenifer Fenton, for the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Syria, read the following statement:

“At Thursday’s Humanitarian Task Force meeting in Geneva, Senior Humanitarian Adviser Najat Rochdi emphasized the need for protection of civilians in Syria’s north-east and for Member States to ensure that humanitarian needs across Syria are met.

Humanitarian needs in Syria remain significant and widespread with more than 11 million people requiring some form of humanitarian assistance, including 4.7 million living in areas of high severity of need.

The protection of civilians, humanitarian workers and civilian infrastructure in Syria’s north-east is a growing concern. Ongoing military operations in north-east Syria are likely to exacerbate an already challenging humanitarian situation. Hundreds of thousands of people are at risk of further displacement, and
the delivery of assistance is currently being disrupted with some agencies temporarily suspending operations. Ms. Rochdi reiterated that military operations must fully respect the UN Charter and international humanitarian law; civilians must be protected; sustained, unimpeded and safe humanitarian access to civilians in need must also be guaranteed; and any return of Syrian refugees to this area from Turkey must be voluntary, safe and dignified.

In Syria’s north-west, the humanitarian needs in the Idlib area remain extensive. Four million people are up against a harsh winter, including some 600,000 people who live in tents, makeshift camps or sites for internally displaced persons. For thousands, including women and children, the only shelters they could find are trees in rural areas. While the continued de-escalation in violence is welcome and necessary, Ms. Rochdi voiced her concern to HTF members about reports of recent aerial bombardments and the overall precarious security situation. A shortage of funding is already straining a critical situation. In addition to existing needs, the humanitarian community estimates that USD 242.8 million would be required in order for the UN and its humanitarian partners to meet humanitarian needs. The UN Emergency Response Plan has been revised to respond to 1.1 million people in north-west Syria who may be affected by further escalation in violence.

In Rukban, the UN and the Syrian Arab Crescent (SARC) conducted a humanitarian operation from 26 to 29 September to assist families who had expressed their wishes and intent to depart from the camp, and to provide aid to those who choose to stay. Some 329 people voluntarily departed from Rukban, with many Rukban residents requiring further information about the return process. Further departures are planned in the coming weeks. UN-SARC also provided one month of humanitarian supplies to the people in Rukban, but more supplies will soon be needed. The UN is also awaiting access to the temporary shelters in Homs, for which further co-chairs support was sought. A durable solution needs to be urgently found for those who do not wish to relocate to Syrian Government-controlled areas.

The security situation in Al Hol remains unsustainable with some 68,600 people, 94 percent of whom are women and children, remaining. The UN continues to request that Member States seek solutions for their nationals, including through repatriation, in line with international human rights standards and acceptable international norms and laws, prioritising the best interest of the children.”

Jens Laerke, for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), read the following statement:

“We are very concerned about the impact that military operations may have on civilians in the affected areas in north-eastern Syria.

There are reports yesterday of intense shelling and airstrikes all along the north-eastern Syrian border with Turkey, from Jarablus to the west of the Euphrates to the Iraqi border. There are reports of shelling and casualties on the Turkish side of the border also. Air strikes were confirmed in several locations. Reports indicate that large numbers of people are on the move in search of safety.

Other areas such as Qamishli and Kobane were also affected by cross-border fire.

North-eastern Syria is home to an estimated 3 million people in total. The Syrian Democratic Forces-controlled area potentially affected by the military operation has a population of some 2.2 million people, the majority of whom need humanitarian aid. The potential affected area also includes the Government-controlled cities of Quamishli and Hassakeh city, hosting 450,000 people.

Humanitarian organizations were already assisting on average 850,000 people each month across the affected area.

UN and NGO staff remain on the ground and ready to respond, access and security permitting. But active military operations have had an impact on our ability to provide relief, and local authorities have reportedly imposed strict security measures at checkpoints. Some humanitarian partners in the north-east have
temporarily suspended movement and activities due to insecurity.”

Mr. Laerke added that the Under-Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, was currently in Turkey and would shortly issue a statement.

Christian Cardon de Lichtbuer, Deputy Head of Operations for the Near and Middle East of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), said that the situation in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic had been very fragile even before the latest extremely worrying developments. More than 100,000 persons had been stranded in camps, most of them women and children. The political situation was extremely complex, there had been conflict in the country for more than 8 years and 11 million persons needed humanitarian assistance. However, the events of the previous 48 hours had brought all the ingredients for yet another humanitarian crisis in the country. ICRC called on all actors involved in the fighting, both on the ground in north-eastern Syria and outside, to ensure respect for the basic rules of international humanitarian law: respect for civilians, and respect and protection for all those who were not – or were no longer – participants in the fighting, including the thousands of detainees being held in the area. The humanitarian actors must be allowed to do their work – which, even previously, had been but a drop in the ocean compared to the needs that existed. ICRC also called on all States with nationals stranded in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic to take the opportunity to repatriate them immediately.

Marixie Mercado, for the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), read the following statement:

“In Ras al-Ain, the Alouk water pumping station reportedly came under attack early yesterday morning (10 October). This station provides safe water to at least 400,000 people in Hassakeh governorate, including displacement camps. Technical and operational staff have not been able to get to the water station to repair it due to ongoing hostilities.

In Tal Abiad, two schools have reportedly been taken over for military use.

UNICEF partners in Tal Abiad and Ras al-Ain have had to stop most of their work. Many of their staff and volunteers are among the displaced population. Child Protection programmes have been suspended in Ras al-Ain, Mabrouka camp, Tal Halaf, Sulok and Tal Abiad. Health and Nutrition response in Ras al-Ain and Mabourka camp have also been suspended. Schools in these areas are closed and water supply is affected.

UNICEF maintains presence in Qamishli through staff, facilitators and partners. We have stocks of water, sanitation and hygiene, health and nutrition supplies, plus winter clothing, to meet the needs of 45,000 children and women for one month. We have more supplies in pipeline.

We reiterate the appeal made by our Executive Director on Wednesday for parties to protect children and the civilian infrastructure on which they depend – in accordance with international human rights and humanitarian law.”

Hervé Verhoosel, for the World Food Programme (WFP), read the following statement:

“WFP continues to support people in the north-east despite the acute deterioration in the security situation.

WFP is deeply concerned about the possible impact of developments in north-eastern Syria and is closely monitoring the situation on the ground.

Displacement: Mass population displacement has been reported since the escalation of violence. Over 70,000 people from Ras Al-Ayn (Al-Hassakeh governorate) and Tal Abyad (Raqqa governorate) had been displaced so far.

The majority have moved to host communities in Al-Hasakeh district, several thousand have left to rural Ar-Raqqa governorate, and many others are moving towards Ar-Raqqa city where the local council prepared
four public shelters to receive IDPs, where WFP will be covering food needs.

WFP Response: In Al-Hasakeh, WFP is providing emergency food assistance (ready-to-eat meals) to around 11,000 people through our partner the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, WFP with partners continue to assess the needs on the ground. In Raqqa, WFP is coordinating with the local council and partner NGOs on the ground to assess the food need and provide emergency food assistance.

WFP Preparedness: In coordination with the UN Humanitarian Country Team, WFP is prepositioning ready-to-eat meals, nutritional supplies, and food rations to respond to immediate needs of people who had to flee their areas. WFP is prioritizing emergency response to the people on the move while allocating enough rations to ensure the continuation of regular food distribution.

WFP operations in the North-east: WFP supports close to 650,000 people in north-eastern Syria with monthly general food assistance through WFP field office in Qamishli. The majority of them (580,000) people are currently living in Kurdish-controlled areas.

The impact on WFP operations: As of today, WFP and its partners continue to support people in the north-east despite the acute deterioration in the security situation. WFP is closely monitoring the situation on the ground. The distribution of food assistance requires secure and regular access to ensure that life-saving food assistance is reaching hundreds of thousands of food-insecure people in the North-east.

About WFP Qamishli office: WFP currently has 32 staff members operating in the Field Office in Qamishli. Some precautionary measures have been taken for their safety, which will be reassessed as needed.

WFP and the UN reminds all parties to the conflict, and those who have influence over them, of their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure at all times.”

Rupert Colville, for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), read the following statement:

“We have begun receiving reports of civilian casualties – as of last night we had reports of seven civilians, including two women and a boy who had been killed with another boy injured, during the first two days of the Turkish operation. In addition, a civilian man was reported killed in Jarablus on 9 October and a woman and a boy injured yesterday during counter-attacks and ground strikes by Kurdish non-State armed groups.

We have received disturbing reports that airstrikes and ground-based attacks by Turkish army and affiliated armed groups have affected key civilian infrastructure and objects such as water pumping stations, dams, power stations, and oil fields. On 9 October, water reportedly ceased to flow from the main water supply station in the area of Alouk in al-Hassakeh governorate, as a result of a Turkish airstrike. It is likely that thousands of people will be deprived of adequate access to clean water in the area supplied by the station.

We are also hearing that areas in northern Syria, such as Afrin, al-Bab, Jarablus, and Azaz that were already under the control of Turkish forces and/or affiliated armed groups, are continuing to face lawlessness and rampant criminality and violence. We have had specific reports of intimidation, ill-treatment, killing, kidnapping, looting and seizure of civilians’ houses by the Turkish-backed armed groups in these areas, with civilians reportedly seized by members of these groups from their homes or at checkpoints, accused of affiliation with specific Kurdish armed or political groups. The fate and whereabouts of many of those civilians remain unknown.”

As the Turkish operation continues inside Syria, we would like to stress the following:

• The parties to the conflict should avoid using explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas. By their very nature, indirect-fire weapons such as artillery increase the risk to civilians and civilian
• Civilians and civilian infrastructure are to be protected from attack and from the effects of the hostilities.

• Attacking, or rendering useless, objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as water and sanitation facilities, is prohibited.”

Responding to questions from journalists, Mr. Laerke, for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said that the policy of OCHA and other United Nations agencies was always to stay in the field if at all possible, in order to deliver humanitarian assistance. They were therefore doing that, notably at the United Nations hub in Quamishli, but their ability to operate was seriously hindered by the fighting and the strict security measures imposed at checkpoints by local authorities. Some partner non-governmental organizations had relocated their staff.

Neither OCHA, nor any of the other humanitarian agencies, had been involved in establishing any safe zones. OCHA had not received reports of any air strikes or other hostilities outside of the zone targeted by the Turkish armed forces. However, the absence of reports did not mean that none had taken place.

Christian Cardon de Lichtbuer, for ICRC, said, in response to journalists’ questions, that it was as yet difficult to assess how many persons had fled as a result of the conflict or where they were moving to. Their numbers could be counted at least in thousands. Many areas to the south of the current conflict zone, such as Raqqa, had seen their infrastructure destroyed in previous fighting and were contaminated with munitions; they could not accommodate thousands more displaced persons. ICRC was continuing to work in north-eastern Syria, in cooperation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, assessing needs and looking at ways of stepping up its activities. A field hospital had been set up in Al Hol camp and might now be used to treat victims of the current operations. The situation was changing extremely quickly, and it could only be assumed that people would move southwards, perhaps towards the border with Iraq. ICRC, with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, hoped to be able to help meet their needs. The focus was on the provision of food and health care, but also on helping displaced persons keep in touch with their families.

On the question of the detainees held in the area hit by the conflict, ICRC had previously had access to several places of detention and hoped that it would be able to continue monitoring the situation. As detainees were no longer participating in fighting, they too deserved protection.

Andrej Mahdic, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), responding to questions from journalists, said that any area designated as a safe zone for refugees must meet the requirements of international humanitarian law, including having the consent of the host Government, and being run on a civilian basis. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, had, the previous day, reiterated the position of UNHCR that any return of refugees to Syria had to be voluntary, dignified and at a time when it was safe to return. It was up to refugees to decide when they wished to return. The displacement caused by the conflict was now internal, within the borders of the Syrian Arab Republic; it seemed that people were moving to the south but there had been no reports of any arrivals in Iraq. The Al Hol refugee camp, which was affected by the military action, was administered by the Kurdish authorities, and UNHCR was not aware of what their plans might be. The situation in the camps was very complex, with groups of Iraqi nationals, displaced Syrians and a large group of third-country nationals.

Hervé Verhoosel, for the World Food Programme (WFP), said that WFP was working with the United Nations country team; given the speed at which the situation was changing, flexibility was of the utmost importance. He had no information on the capacity of the four public shelters for internally displaced persons in Ar-Raqqa city that had been set up by the local council.

Rupert Colville, for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said that the cases of lawlessness had occurred in areas that had already been under the control of armed groups affiliated with the Turkish forces. For instance, on 25 August 2019, the house of an elderly couple, both in their seventies, had been raided by one such group. The house had been looted and the couple beaten with guns and fists.
The husband had died on the spot and the wife, seriously injured, had died two weeks later.

Marixie Mercado, for the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), said that an estimated 68,000 people remained in Al Hol camp, with women and children making up more than 90 per cent of the population. Of the estimated 47,000 children in the camp, approximately 19,000 were Syrian. The rest, 28,000, came from 60 different countries, including 20,000 from Iraq. Most were under the age of 12. Those children were among the most vulnerable. They faced enormous legal, logistical and political challenges accessing basic services and returning to their countries of origin. UNICEF was asking that those children should be treated as victims, not perpetrators, and that every decision should be made in their best interest. She added that UNICEF was currently ensuring the provision of most of the water supplies in Al Hol camp.

**Attack on synagogue in Germany**

Rupert Colville, for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), read the following statement:

“We echo the Secretary-General’s strong condemnation of Wednesday’s attempted attack on worshippers in a synagogue in Halle in Germany, during which two people were killed and two others wounded.

Reports from the German authorities are already suggesting this was almost certainly a white nationalist attack, and a clear example of extreme anti-Semitism – deliberately carried out on Yom Kippur, one of the holiest days in the Jewish calendar.

Copies of the live-streamed video had reportedly been downloaded before their removal from the broadcasting platform and are still circulating online. The attempt by the Halle gunman to copy the methodology of the man who killed 51 people in two mosques in Christchurch, including by live streaming his planned – but fortunately in this case unfulfilled – mass killing on social media, underscores the need to deal more effectively with spreading white nationalist extremism, and indeed all forms of racism and xenophobia.

This horrific attack is the latest example of an extremely disturbing rise in violence directed at Jews in many places, including a sharp rise in incidents in Germany. We need to take notice and take further action to address the fear and insecurity that the increase in violence is sowing. The links between incitement to hatred and violence and the actual carrying out of violent hate crimes, based on race, religion or ethnicity, should no longer be in any doubt in anyone’s mind. Nor should the dangerous cross-fertilization of violent extremism of all sorts via the internet and social media. No society can consider itself immune from this form of viral hatred.

The most recent report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief notes with serious concern that the frequency of anti-Semitic incidents appears to be increasing in magnitude in several countries where monitors are attempting to document it, including online, and that the prevalence of anti-Semitic attitudes and the risk of violence against Jewish individuals and sites appears to be significant elsewhere as well.

We echo the Secretary-General’s heartfelt statement that places of worship around the world “must be safe havens for reflection and peace, not sites of bloodshed and terror,” and that greater efforts should be made to identify and take measures to safeguard religious sites at risk.”

Answering questions from journalists, Mr. Colville said that it was important that countries should monitor and quantify such attacks, whether against Jews, Muslims, members of black communities or other groups. There was no question that the expression of hatred on the Internet was intertwined with violent attacks against large numbers of people, and governments needed to make concerted efforts to take more effective measures to combat it.
Israel: cases of torture

Rupert Colville, for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), read the following statement:

“The UN Human Rights Office notes with concern the alleged torture of a 44-year-old Palestinian man, Samer Al A’rbeed, who was arrested by Israeli Security Forces on 25 September as a suspect in a bomb explosion that killed a 17-year old Israeli girl near Dolev settlement in the occupied West Bank. Al A’rbeed remains in the hospital in an induced coma and on artificial respiration, with critical injuries sustained after his arrest, including broken ribs and severe kidney failure. This development is placing a spotlight on serious gaps and failings in Israel’s laws and practices in relation to its unequivocal obligation under international law to eradicate torture and cruel and inhuman treatment.

Al A’rbeed’s lawyer, who was only allowed to see his client four days after his arrest (on 29 September), alleges he was tortured. The Israeli Security Agency (Shin Bet) stated to the media that Al A’rbeed did not feel well during his interrogation and had to be transferred to the hospital. The Israeli Ministry of Justice has announced an inquiry.

Given the severity of Al A’rbeed’s injuries, we call for the immediate opening of a criminal investigation into the case.

We have also received information that at least three more people arrested in the context of the same investigation have been held in incommunicado detention for a prolonged period of time.

We are gravely concerned that Israeli law does not adequately define, prohibit or criminalize torture and the High Court of Justice has allowed the use of “special interrogation measures,” in violation of the absolute prohibition of torture.

The prohibition of torture is one of the peremptory norms of international law or “jus cogens” from which no derogation is permitted. In other words, the prohibition is binding on all states, in all circumstances, with no exception.

We call on Israel to revise its laws, policies and practices to bring them in line with its obligations under international law, in particular the Convention Against Torture, and ensure that all instances and allegations of torture and ill-treatment are investigated promptly, independently, effectively and impartially.”

In answer to questions from journalists, Mr. Colville said that the prohibition of torture was a peremptory norm of international law (jus cogens) and as such applied to every country, whether or not it had acceded to the Convention against Torture. Torture should never happen, and Israel should ensure that no extraordinary interrogation methods were ever used.

Protests and violence in Malawi

Rupert Colville, for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), read the following statement:

“We are very concerned by an increase in violent protests across Malawi, and the lack of a meaningful dialogue to halt the mounting tensions in the country.

Demonstrations started in the aftermath of the 21 May presidential elections, after some groups disputed the results. They subsequently spread as protesters also began airing economic and social grievances.

While initially peaceful, in recent weeks some of the protests have become increasingly violent and have sometimes been met with excessive use of force. In some instances, security forces have resorted to the pre-emptive use of tear gas prior to the start of demonstrations. One demonstrator reportedly died after being
arrested and beaten by Malawi Defense Forces, and another is in critical condition after being shot by live ammunition, reportedly by police forces.

A number of protesters have also been acting increasingly violently, and on Tuesday, a police officer was stoned to death during a spontaneous demonstration. We have also received reports of protestors looting shops and attacking Government buildings.

We remind the Malawian authorities of their obligation to respect the rights of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, and to distinguish between violent actors and peaceful demonstrators. We urge demonstrators to express their grievances peacefully, without resorting to violence.

We also remind the authorities that the use of force during demonstrations should only be applied in exceptional circumstances, in accordance with applicable international human rights norms and standards, including the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality. In the case of violent demonstrations, law enforcement officials may use firearms only when less dangerous means are not practicable and only to the minimum extent necessary. In any event, intentional lethal force with firearms by law enforcement officials is prohibited, except as a last resort to protect against an imminent threat of death or serious injury.

All allegations of misconduct by security forces, including those resulting in death or injury, should be investigated in a prompt, thorough, independent and impartial manner.

We urge the Government and other relevant actors to urgently engage in a genuine and meaningful dialogue to address the political, social and economic grievances of the population, and reduce tensions. Otherwise, there is a serious risk the situation will spiral out of control.”

Ecuador

Rupert Colville, for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said that the OHCHR Regional Office for South America, in Santiago, Chile, had issued a press release on Monday 10 October expressing its concern at the tense situation in Ecuador and urging the authorities to conduct prompt investigations into the deaths that had occurred during demonstrations over recent days. It had also called for a space to be created for constructive dialogue between the Government and the protestors.

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, said the Secretary-General was concerned about the recent developments in Ecuador. He had recalled the right of peaceful assembly, in accordance with international law, and called on all actors to reduce tensions, avoid acts of violence and exercise maximum restraint. The United Nations system and the Episcopal Conference were supporting preliminary talks with the authorities and different civil society sectors to de-escalate tensions. The United Nations had received a request from the Government to facilitate a dialogue with different civil society sectors. The United Nations stood ready to consider a role in support of dialogue if its engagement was accepted by all the relevant parties.

Mission to Burkina Faso by the Emergency Directors of 11 UN aid agencies and NGOs

Andrew Mbogori, Principal Emergency Coordinator, United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), said that, along with the other emergency directors, he had just returned from a field visit to Burkina Faso to assess the unfolding humanitarian crisis taking place there. He read the following statement:

“UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is joining its partners to warn about the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Burkina Faso’s central and northern regions where each day the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians are being disrupted by insecurity and violence. Some 486,000 have been forced to flee within the country, 267,000 of whom in the past 3 months alone. A further 16,000 are refugees in neighbouring countries.

The escalating armed violence is causing an unprecedented humanitarian emergency in the Sahel. While visiting Kaya, northeast of Ouagadougou, and Barsalogho, in the central Sanmatenga Province, we
witnessed firsthand the dramatic impact of these tragic events on the affected population.

Thousands of people are on the move, exhausted and trying to find safety among host families or at transit and official travel sites. Many have been repeatedly displaced. The prospects for their immediate return to where they come from are poor. As a result, their needs and those of host families, already vulnerable by food and nutrition crises in the region, are growing. Women and adolescent girls face particular threats given that health and other essential services are lacking."

Meritxell Relano, Deputy Director, Emergency Operations, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), said that more than 2,000 schools, mainly in the north of Burkina Faso, had been forced to close because of attacks and threats, meaning that over 330,000 children and 9,000 teachers were unable to go to school. Around 68 health facilities had also had to close, leaving over 800,000 people without access to health care, in a country where over 1 million children suffered from malnutrition, including 145,000 who had severe acute malnutrition. During their visit, the emergency directors had been able to talk to many children, who were frail and traumatized and wanted only to be able to go to their homes and attend school. The girls felt unsafe in the camps, where they were at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation. The international community was called on to provide funds to combat the humanitarian crisis: of the US$ 187 million that had been requested, only one third had been received. Most of the funding was needed for food security: US$ 31 million for nutrition, US$ 40 million for refugees, US$ 2 million for coordination and US$ 1 million for preparedness; the biggest shortfall was currently in food security needs.

In response to questions from journalists, Mr. Mbogori said that both the Government and the agencies encouraged the settlement of displaced persons in local communities, rather than in camps. They had found shelter in public institutions, but now that the school term had started, that was problematic. One small camp, in Barsalogho, had been set up because ethnic tensions made it difficult to accommodate the displaced persons in the community.

Ms. Relano added that the situation in the north of Burkina Faso had arisen because of the increasing activity of armed groups in the Sahel. Since the beginning of 2019, the Government of Burkina Faso had declared states of emergency in 7 regions and 14 provinces in the north of the country. The armed groups had taken over whole villages in the area and civil servants, including teachers and health workers, had been attacked so many social services were no longer functioning. The situation had worsened rapidly over the previous four months and looked likely to deteriorate even further in the coming weeks and months. It was hoped that the world’s media would now pay attention.

**Second evacuation flight from Libya to Rwanda**

Andrzej Mahecic, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), read the following statement:

“At around 11:20pm last night, a group of some 123 vulnerable refugees arrived at Kigali International Airport, the second evacuation flight to Rwanda from Libya. They have been taken to a transit facility in Gashora, where UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is providing them with life-saving assistance, including food, water, medical care, psycho-social support, and accommodation.

They have been given asylum-seeker status while their cases are assessed and further solutions are pursued, including resettlement, voluntary return to countries of previous asylum, voluntary return to countries of origin where safe to do so and integration with local Rwandan communities.

The group was comprised mainly of Eritreans, as well as smaller numbers from Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan.

Around half of the group (59), were under 18 years old, the vast majority of whom had been separated from their parents and wider family. One of the children had previously been held in detention for more than two
and half years. The youngest evacuee is just eight months old.

Most of the group were evacuated via the Gathering and Departure Facility after UNHCR had previously secured their release from detention. Others were evacuated directly from detention centres, while two had been living in urban areas. Amongst the evacuees included survivors of the 2 July airstrike on Tajoura detention centre.

Individuals were identified based on assessments of vulnerability. The number of available evacuation and resettlement places is not enough to meet the needs, so efforts are made to prioritise those most in need, often including unaccompanied children, survivors of torture and other abuses, people in need of medical treatment, amongst others.

UNHCR is grateful to the support received from Rwanda and Niger, and the African Union, through the Emergency Transit Mechanism in the two countries, as well as other States who have helped us move vulnerable refugees out of harm’s way in Libya.

Following this evacuation, UNHCR has assisted 1,663 vulnerable refugees out of Libya in 2019. However, increased places and faster, more flexible processes are needed to move more refugees away from danger.”

Responding to questions from journalists, Mr. Mahecic said that the reception centre in Rwanda had a capacity of 500, but that individuals would move on as soon as a solution had been found for them, leaving room for more arrivals. The number of flights out of Libya depended on the security situation there. UNHCR would like to move more persons out of danger but would only be able to do that if more places for resettlement were made available.

**International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction**

Denis McClean, for the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), said that the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction was being celebrated for the thirtieth year on 13 October. Data from 83 countries showed the loss and damage that resulted from small- and medium-scale disasters, and their link to climate change. Since 2005, on average each year, over 3,000 km of road were washed away, 3,000 schools and 400 health facilities were damaged or destroyed by events such as flash floods, taking a heavy toll on the ability of low- and middle-income countries to invest in achieving the Sustainable Development Goal, including poverty reduction, health and education.

**International Day of the Girl Child**

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, said that today, 11 October, was the International Day of the Girl Child. In his annual message, the Secretary-General said that more than 1 billion girls younger than 18 were poised to take on the future. Every day, they were challenging stereotypes and breaking barriers, as well as organizing and leading movements to tackle issues such as child marriage, education inequality, violence and the climate crisis. To ensure that all girls could reach their potential, the Secretary-General added that we needed concerted efforts and investments in their health, safety and 21st-century skills.

Denis McClean, for the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), added that the nomination of Greta Thunberg, the young climate activist from Sweden, for the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize, paid tribute to all girls who were doing so much to draw the world’s attention to the need for action.

**Launch of a joint report UNCTAD/UN ESCAP on Non-Tariff Measures in the Asia Pacific Region**

Catherine Huissoud, for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), said that the Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report was a biennial publication prepared by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and UNCTAD to explore the impact of recent and new developments in trade and foreign direct investment on countries’ abilities to meet the challenges of
achieving sustainable development. Non-tariff measures (NTMs) affected directly 10 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The theme of the report was “Navigating NTMs towards sustainable development”. It gave an overview of NTM trends and developments in the Asia and Pacific region and evaluated the impacts of NTMs on trade and investment, based on both quantitative analysis and private sector surveys. It gave an evaluation of the cost of NTMs globally.

The report highlighted the importance of aligning NTMs with international standards, and of simplifying procedures related to those regulatory measures. It also included a review of good practices for addressing NTMs unilaterally, as well as through multilateral and regional trade agreements.

The report would be presented by the Director of the Trade, Investment and Innovation Division of UNESCAP, Ms. Mia Mikic, and Ralf Peters, Chief of the Trade Information Section, UNCTAD, in room XXVI at 12 noon on Monday 14 October. There would be two days of discussion on NTMs on Monday and Tuesday 14 and 15 October, a platform for policymakers and researchers to discuss the link between NTMs and the latest developments in the world economy: trade wars, e-commerce, transparency and sustainable development.

Nobel Peace Prize

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, said the Norwegian Nobel Committee had just announced that the Nobel Peace Prize for 2019 would be awarded to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia. The UN Secretary-General had met Prime Minister Ahmed earlier this year and had welcomed the rapprochement between Eritrea and Ethiopia as a positive development for regional peace and stability. He said the United Nations congratulated the winner, adding that a more official statement could be expected later. (A statement attributable to the Secretary-General on the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize was later issued, in which the Secretary-General said that Prime Minister Ahmed’s vision helped Ethiopia and Eritrea achieve a historic rapprochement. The signing of the peace agreement had opened up new opportunities for the region to enjoy security and stability, and Prime Minister Ahmed’s leadership had set a wonderful example for others in and beyond Africa looking to overcome resistance from the past and put people first.)

C40 World Mayors Summit

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, said that the Secretary-General was attending the C40 World Mayors’ Summit in Copenhagen to show his support for the tremendous efforts undertaken by cities, of which more than 100 had, at the United Nations Climate Action Summit in September 2019, committed to work towards zero net carbon emissions by 2050. The Secretary-General would today be giving the keynote address on the theme “The future we want is inclusive and climate action must lift everyone up”.

Geneva announcements

Rhéal LeBlanc, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, said that the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights would hold next Monday a Discussion day on land.

Mr. LeBlanc also said that the Committee on Enforced Disappearances would be closing this afternoon at 4.30 p.m. its 17th session.

Mr. LeBlanc also said that the Human Rights Committee would open next Monday morning its 127th session (14 October-8 November, Palais Wilson) during which it would successively review the reports of Senegal, Belgium, Mexico, Czech Republic, Central African Republic and Cabo Verde.