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Story

Escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel

Alessandra Vellucci, for the United Nations Information Service (UNIS), said that the Secretary-General was following with deep concern the latest security developments, which risked triggering yet another dangerous escalation. He urged all parties to exercise maximum restraint. Tor Wennesland, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, whose office was monitoring the situation, was working closely with all concerned parties to restore calm.

Rupert Colville, for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said that OHCHR was deeply concerned at the recent escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel. According to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, 915 Palestinians had been injured in East Jerusalem and over 200 in the West Bank, most by Israeli security forces. As of 10 May, some 20 Israelis, mainly members of the security forces, had reportedly also been injured. OHCHR condemned all violence and all incitement to violence and ethnic division and provocations. Israeli security forces must allow the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. No force should be used against those exercising those rights peacefully. That had not been the case in the past days. OHCHR was particularly concerned about the impact on children and reiterated UNICEF's call for children to be kept out of harm's way at all times. Moreover, detained children should be released.

Palestinian armed groups had launched some 250 rockets towards Israel in the past 24 hours, reportedly

injuring at least 17 Israeli civilians. The use of indiscriminate weapons was strictly prohibited under international humanitarian law and must stop immediately. Israeli defence forces had carried out airstrikes on Gaza, killing 24 Palestinians, including nine children and one woman, and injuring 103 so far. Israel must respect international humanitarian law. Any attack, including airstrikes, should be directed solely at military objectives, and all feasible precautions must be taken to avoid civilian casualties. Israel must also refrain from punitive measures, such as additional closures and restrictions, that punished the entire civilian population of Gaza.

The full briefing note is available [here](#).

In response to questions, Mr. Colville said that at least nine journalists had been injured by Israeli security forces while covering the protests in Jerusalem in the past three days, and others had been arrested and otherwise impeded from doing their work. The Israeli forces were called on to ensure that journalists were allowed to exercise their function safely. Thus far, it was not fully clear who was behind the rocket launches from Gaza, but they constituted indiscriminate use of deadly weapons in civilian areas, which was a war crime.

Answering another question, Mr. Colville said that while the attack on a high-rise building targeting a single Hamas commander appeared to be disproportionate, it was too early to determine that definitively. Careful scrutiny was necessary before an incident could be characterized as a war crime. Videos could be quite compelling and still not provide a full and accurate picture. Nevertheless, there had been clear cases of use of disproportionate force in the past few days.

Also answering a question, and drawing attention to his statement at the [press briefing on 7 May](#), Mr. Colville recalled that it was strictly against international law, specifically the Fourth Geneva Convention, to transfer citizens of an occupying power to an occupied territory. Ms. Vellucci reiterated that, in a [statement](#) issued on 9 May, the Secretary-General had expressed his deep concern over the continuing violence in occupied East Jerusalem, as well as the possible eviction of Palestinian families from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods. He had urged Israel to cease demolitions and evictions, exercise maximum restraint and respect the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

Questioned about peacekeeping in Jerusalem, Ms. Vellucci spoke about the UN Truce Supervision Organization which had been established in Jerusalem in 1948. As for the deployment of peacekeepers, that was for the Security Council to decide.

Continued crackdown in Myanmar

Alessandra Vellucci, for the [United Nations Information Service \(UNIS\)](#), said that colleagues on the ground were appalled by the ongoing violence at the hands of security forces since the military coup on 1 February. Now in its fourth month, the situation in Myanmar had fast become one of the worst protection and human rights crises in the world.

Rupert Colville, for the [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#), said that over 100 days since the coup in Myanmar, the military authorities were showing no sign of letting up in their brutal crackdown on opponents. At the same time, there was no weakening of the resolve of the civil disobedience movement. As of 10 May, credible sources indicated that the security forces had killed at least 782 individuals. In addition to the killing of peaceful protesters and bystanders, the authorities continued to commit other gross human rights violations against the people of Myanmar, such as raids on private homes and offices, detentions, trials in absentia, collective punishment and possible enforced disappearances. The military authorities were also issuing arrest warrants for civil society activists, trade unionists, journalists, academics and public figures and taking the relatives of wanted persons into custody as leverage. They were also stepping up efforts to dismiss, remove or suspend civil servants, chiefly women, or to pressure them back to work.

As the armed conflict between the Tatmadaw and some of the ethnic armed organizations intensified, people were fleeing Myanmar and should receive protection and support from neighbouring countries. Greater international involvement was needed to prevent the human rights situation in Myanmar from deteriorating further. Despite the five-point plan agreed at the meeting of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders on 24 April, the Myanmar military leadership had shown no sign of abiding by it.

The full briefing note is available [here](#).

Replying to journalists, Mr. Colville said that the situation in Myanmar was clearly a refugee-creating situation; therefore, people fleeing the violence, especially those with sensitive professions, should at the very least be treated as asylum seekers while their cases were processed. OHCHR had been trying to establish a presence in Myanmar for at least seven years to no avail, though under the civilian Government, it had been able to conduct periodic visits to the country. While other United Nations agencies were active on the ground within their mandates, OHCHR could only put a spotlight on the situation and do its utmost to verify reports of violations. Negotiations were the domain of the Secretary-General, his Special Envoy and ASEAN. However, the Tatmadaw were not responding, so the situation could devolve horrendously.

Freedom of assembly and expression under attack in Algeria

Rupert Colville, for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said that OHCHR was increasingly concerned about the situation in Algeria, where attacks continued on the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly and participation in public affairs. Since the resumption of street demonstrations on 13 February, OHCHR had received sustained reports of unnecessary and disproportionate force against peaceful protesters and of arbitrary arrests. Among other allegations, student marches had been prevented on four occasions, meeting points for demonstrations continued to be blocked and detainees were being subjected to physical and sexual violence.

OHCHR urged the Algerian authorities to stop using violence to disperse peaceful demonstrations, to halt arbitrary arrests and detention of individuals for exercising their rights to freedom of opinion, expression and peaceful assembly and to bring repressive legislation into line with international law. The Office reiterated its call on the authorities to conduct prompt, impartial and effective investigations into all allegations of human rights violations, to hold accountable those responsible and to ensure that victims received redress.

The full briefing note is available [here](#).

Somalia hit by two simultaneous climate emergencies

Jens Laerke, for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said that Somalia was being hit by a double climate disaster, with a drought declared on 25 April and recent torrential rains causing riverine and flash flooding. Although 80 per cent of Somalia had been facing moderate to severe drought conditions, the excessive rains had come too late for the planting season.

The floods had killed at least 25 people, including nine children, in various parts of the country. There was particular concern about Belet Weyne in Hiiran region, which could see unprecedented levels of flooding in the next 24 to 48 hours. In addition, the Juba River had burst its banks, washing away houses and killing livestock. The combined impact of drought and floods was likely to exacerbate the already critical food security situation in Somalia, where more than 2.7 million people – including a very high proportion of children under age 5 – were projected to be food insecure. Both climate shocks would cause displacement, jeopardize access to safe water, increase water-borne diseases and impact livelihoods. Somalia was on the front line of climate change. Since 1990, it had experienced three times the number of climate-related hazards that it had in the previous 20 years.

The 2021 Somalia Humanitarian Response Plan required USD 1 billion to assist four million people but was currently only 19 per cent funded. Within the limited funding, the United Nations and partners had ramped

up responses in drought-affected areas, and urgent efforts were under way to respond to the flash flooding.

Replying to a journalist, Mr. Laerke said that OCHA had already been providing safe drinking water during the drought and was supporting the Government's own efforts to get sandbags to local communities. However, it was difficult to operate with only a fifth of required resources available, and donors were called on to step up donations. It was so far unclear whether the Central Emergency Response Fund would intervene.

Human Rights Council update

Rolando Gomez, for the Human Rights Council, said that the thirty-eighth session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review was reviewing the human rights situation in Latvia that morning and, that afternoon, would adopt the reports on last week's reviews of Denmark, Somalia and Palau. The two remaining reviews, of Singapore and Sierra Leone, would be conducted on 12 May, and the session would close on Friday, 14 May.

Mr. Gomez also said that today, at 3 p.m., the Council would hold a virtual panel discussion – available via webcast in all six official languages – to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption by the General Assembly of the international norm on the responsibility to protect. There would be opening remarks by the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect, followed by an exchange of views on strengthening national policies and strategies to implement the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity through national mechanisms.

World Health Organization announcements

Fadela Chaib, for the World Health Organization (WHO), said that, ahead of the World Health Assembly, to be held from 24 May to 1 June, Dr. Michael Ryan, Executive Director of WHO Health Emergencies Programme, would be holding an online discussion with Dr. Jaouad Mahjour, Assistant Director-General, Emergency Preparedness and International Health Regulations; Dr Bruce Aylward, Senior Advisor to the Director-General and Head of the ACT-Accelerator Hub; and Steve Solomon, Principal Legal Officer, on several major issues that were key to global health security now and in the future. [*N.B.: Since the press briefing, the event had been postponed.*]

Ms. Chaib further said that the World Health Assembly would be followed on 2 June by the session of the Executive Board.

Ms. Chaib announced that the COVID-19 Global Research and Innovation Forum would be held online on 13 and 14 May, from 1 to 6 p.m., and would be entirely open to the public via the WHO website and social media accounts. The Forum would bring together hundreds of leading researchers to review progress on COVID-19 research and establish a revised COVID-19 global research and innovation road map with clear goals, priority actions and milestones. Introductory remarks would be made by Dr. Tedros, followed by Dr. Swaminathan and Dr Ryan. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights would speak, at 3.15 p.m. on 13 May, about how research can contribute to a healthier world for vulnerable populations.

Ms. Chaib also announced that WHO Director-General would hold a press conference on Thursday, 13 May, at 3 p.m., to announce the winners of the second edition of the [Health for All film festival](#). There had been nearly 1,200 submissions from 110 countries, and over 40 per cent of the short films featured COVID-related themes, revealing the pandemic's pervasive and universal consequences.

Ms. Vellucci finally reminded that WHO would hold a virtual press conference on Friday, 14 May, at 9.15 a.m., to present a paper – under embargo until 2.01 a.m. on Monday, 17 May – on the rise in worldwide deaths from heart disease and stroke attributable to long working hours. Speakers would be: Maria Neira, Director, Department of Environment, Climate Change and Health, WHO; Frank Pega, Technical Officer, Department of Environment, Climate Change and Health, WHO; and Jian Li, professor of occupational

health at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Announcements

Tomson Phiri, for the [World Food Programme](#) (WFP), said that a joint WFP/Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) press release on the dire situation of food in southern Madagascar would be circulated that day.

Alessandra Vellucci, for the [United Nations Information Service](#) (UNIS), on behalf of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), said that, speaking on the occasion of the launch of the new [report](#) “Public Expenditure on Food and Agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa” on Monday, 10 May, FAO Director-General had warned that severe underfunding of the agri-food sector was preventing Africa from reaching its potential.

Also on behalf of FAO, she said that the FAO [Food Price Index 2021](#) had been issued on 6 May. The report indicated that international food commodity prices had risen for the eleventh consecutive month in April, with sugar leading the increase and cereals resuming their upward trend. New forecasts pointed to growth in world wheat and maize output. All the information about the two documents was available on the FAO website.

Alessandra Vellucci, for the [United Nations Information Service](#) (UNIS), on behalf of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), said that UNCTAD would be holding a virtual press conference on 12 May, at 2.30 p.m., on the United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development, which would be meeting on 17–21 May. Speakers would be Shamika Sirimanne, Director, Division on Technology and Logistics, UNCTAD; and Angel Gonzalez Sanz, Head, Science, Technology and ICT Branch, Division on Technology and Logistics, UNCTAD.