

# REGULAR PRESS BRIEFING BY THE INFORMATION SERVICE

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Corinne Momal-Vanian, Director of the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, chaired the briefing which was also attended by Spokespersons for the International Labour Organization, World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Programme, the World Food Programme, the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration.

Syria

Marixie Mercado for the United Nations Children's Programme (UNICEF) said UNICEF and partners were stepping up vaccination campaigns in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey amid measles outbreaks in a region that was already struggling to provide humanitarian assistance to millions of people affected by the crisis in Syria.

In Iraq, which saw its last measles outbreak in 2008, 332 cases of measles had been reported, and 80 confirmed, in northern Domiz camp. In Syria, 133 cases had been confirmed across the country – it was important to note that those were sporadic cases, not concentrated in any one region. In Jordan – which saw its last measles outbreak in 1994, at least five cases had been identified among Syrian refugees in Za'atari camp. In Turkey, there had been 3,000 - 4,000 measles cases reported across the country, including 300 among Syrian refugees. In Lebanon, over 300 cases had been confirmed among Lebanese and refugee children by the Ministry of Health since January.

As of today, Ministry of Health teams in Syria had reached over 550,000 children across the country, Ms. Mercado stated. Access was more difficult now than compared with last year's vaccination campaign. Teams, for example, had been totally unable to function in Ar Raqqa and Dera'a. Other areas that were especially difficult to reach due to insecurity include districts

in rural Damascus, Aleppo, Deir Ezzour and Idlib. In Aleppo and Hasakeh, WHO was only able to bring in vaccines last Friday. The campaign was being conducted by around 60 mobile health teams, travelling for the most part in private vehicles. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) helped to facilitate access to hot spots, and in some districts the campaign had been conducted by Ministry of Health health workers using SARC mobile clinics. In one incident in Homs last week, one SARC mobile team was shot at seven times, injuring three doctors.

Around 4.25 million people were now displaced inside Syria, and over 1.4 million Syrians had fled into neighbouring Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt. Nearly half of the displaced and refugee populations were children, the vast majority of whom were now living in cramped, overcrowded, unsanitary conditions where diseases could rapidly spread. The routine immunisation system had been hit hard, but comprehensive numbers on routine immunisation coverage were unavailable because the reporting had broken down, Ms. Mercado said. The last routine vaccination reporting available was from January and February 2013, from just six out of 14 governorates in Syria. Those figures showed coverage in those governorates to be around 60 per cent, compared to the 95 per cent routine immunization coverage achieved across the country prior to the crisis.

Answering a question about whether any children had died from measles, and whether UNICEF were concerned about other childhood diseases such as polio, Ms. Mercado said there were no reports so far that children had died from measles. The assessment was that the outbreaks had so far been contained in Syria and across the region, in large thanks to an immunisation campaign last year which vaccinated 1.3 million children against measles and 1.5 million children against polio. However, yes, Ms. Mercado said, the concern was very real given conditions that were very conducive to the spread of disease: things were not getting any better for Syrians inside and outside of the country. Responding to a second question, Ms. Mercado confirmed there were no specific recommendations for immunizations for children crossing borders, adding that the concern was to support the routine immunization system in Syria which was what provided the greatest protection for children. In clarification Ms. Mercado said children were not vaccinated at borders, they received vaccinations at either the camps or within their host communities.

Elisabeth Byrs for the World Food Programme (WFP) said amid mounting concern about the deepening suffering caused by conflict in Syria, WFP today welcomed a generous contribution from the Government of the United Kingdom of £28.3 million (approximately US\$43 million) that would help provide much-needed food assistance to tens of thousands of Syrians both inside and outside their country. Thanks to the support of the UK, among other donors, WFP would be able to provide food rations to displaced families in Syria itself, as well as supporting more than half a million refugees in neighbouring countries. WFP would also use the new UK contribution to issue food vouchers to thousands of Syrian refugees who were either sheltering in camps in Turkey or as urban refugees in Lebanon. In both countries, providing support for the refugees was stretching the capacity of communities and governments.

Ms. Byrs noted that the United Kingdom had provided US\$82 million to WFP for its Syria-related operations since the start of the crisis. She also stressed that WFP needed US\$19 million per week for these operations and that there was still a gap of US\$40 million for it to be able to continue them until June.

#### Central African Republic

Ms. Momal-Vanian, read out a press statement from the United Nations Security Council, issued yesterday following their briefing by Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs on the situation in the Central African Republic (CAR).

The members of the Security Council expressed strong concern at the worsening humanitarian and security situation, and the weakening of the CAR institutions. The members of the Security Council also expressed serious concerns at reports of human rights violations and abuses. They recalled their support for the efforts of the Economic Community of the Central African States (ECCAS) and the African Union to solve the crisis. They expressed their support for the transition process and the results of the N'Djamena Summit, in the framework of the Libreville agreements of January 11, 2013. The members of the Security Council supported and saluted the efforts of the United Nations in a very challenging environment, to address the crisis. They expressed their willingness to consider further options to stabilise the CAR.

The Security Council press statement is available in full [via this link](#).

Adrian Edwards for the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said UNHCR had advised governments worldwide against forcible returns to the Central African Republic (CAR). That was in light of the current fluid and dangerous situation in CAR, including the wide prevalence of human rights violations and the grave and deteriorating humanitarian situation. The return advisory was issued late on April 25. It stressed that under current circumstances many people fleeing CAR were likely to meet the OAU Convention and 1951 Refugee Convention criteria for refugee status. The situation in CAR had worsened since December 2012 when Seleka forces launched a series of attacks from the north before taking over the capital, Bangui, in late March. In the wake of the offensive, targeted killings, arbitrary arrests and detention, torture and recruitment of children had been widely reported. Rape, disappearances, kidnappings, as well as extortion and looting in Bangui and other parts of the country were also being reported. Humanitarian access to the people affected remained severely restricted. The violence of recent months had seen some 173,000 people displaced internally, and almost 50,000 made refugees – mainly fleeing to neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (37,000) but also to Chad (5,000) and Cameroon (2,000).

UNHCR's aim through issuing the advisory was to see that humanitarian and asylum principles were upheld until conditions in CAR allowed for safe and dignified returns. It was also important that asylum remained civilian in nature, and for that reason we were recommending that states exert caution to identify combatants and separate them from the refugee population. The advisory stressed that exclusion from refugee status may need to be looked into for some individuals, beyond those who were combatants. That would apply, for example, to people who may have been involved in war crimes and crimes against humanity in CAR.

Answering questions, Mr. Edwards said that as far as he knew there had been no forcible returns so far, and the purpose of the advisory was to make sure there were none. UNHCR issued such return advisories most commonly in conflict situations. It was crucial that in light of the situation in CAR people were not sent back. States had primary responsibility when it came to security issues, Mr. Edwards said in response to another question, adding that UNHCR worked with States to ensure that refugee populations were civilian in nature. Under the 1951 Convention there were a number of reasons why you might exclude someone from having refugee status and

being a combatant was one of them. The advisory was sent out worldwide, not just to countries that had refugee populations.

The entire humanitarian community was affected by the crisis; there was negligible access for UNHCR to affected communities in CAR, Mr. Edwards emphasized. UNHCR's work there was extremely, extremely limited and access was badly needed.

## Chad

Jumbe Omari Jumbe, for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said there had recently been a joint fact-finding and assessment mission by IOM, UNHCR and the Government of Chad to the border area of Tissi, between Chad and Sudan. The Mission ended last week, and reported a huge influx of migrants and refugees with extremely pressing needs. The biggest worry was caused by the onset of the rainy season. With the wet season expected to begin in Chad within the next month, the situation of thousands of refugees and Chadian migrants currently stranded at four Chadian border posts was becoming increasingly precarious.

Some 25,000 Chadian migrants were currently stranded at Tissi on Chad's eastern border with Sudan, after fleeing inter-communal fighting between two Arab tribes – the Misseria and Salamat - around the gold mines of Djabal-Amir in Sudan's Darfur region. The fighting, which started in January, has now spread to remote villages in the area. Because of that there was likelihood of a further influx of migrant returnees and Sudanese refugees from Sudan in the near future. IOM has already begun to ship essential non-food relief items to Tissi. It has also begun constructing a transit centre, office and storage facilities in the town.

On Chad's southern border with the CAR, UNHCR has reported that more than 5,000 refugees had entered Chad in the past few weeks and were now temporarily camped in Maro, a town located close to the CAR border. Another vulnerable group of an estimated 900 Chadians migrants from Nigeria has also arrived in remote border towns bordering Lake Chad in the west of the country. IOM was currently planning a joint assessment mission to the area with the Chadian authorities. Another influx was unfolding on Chad's northern border with Libya, where last week IOM was informed of

the sudden arrival of some 2,000 vulnerable Chadians in Wour, Tibesti. The migrants were recently released from detention centres in Libya and arrived destitute. IOM had this year already assisted some 1,600 Chadian migrants returned from Libya.

Many of the migrants who arrived at Chad's border entry points were in a wretched condition, suffering from health problems including respiratory infections, severe dehydration and wound infections. They arrived with few or no possessions and were invariably hungry, thirsty and exhausted. The upcoming wet season in May meant that the humanitarian response in all border regions and particularly in the Lake Chad and Dar Sila (Tissi) regions, needed to be accelerated and aid stocks expanded. When the rains begin, the roads would become inaccessible and eventually impassable. IOM was urgently appealing for US\$ 4 million to respond to the pressing humanitarian needs of the returnees from Libya, CAR, Sudan and Nigeria; the caseload was very overwhelming for Chad.

A journalist asked about reports that the President of Chad said that Chadian migrants in Libya were being trained in military camps there to be used as mercenaries, and about the migratory movements of Chadians. Mr. Jumbe replied that he had no information about those allegations but that migrants crossing the Libya-Chad border were assessed, and no cases had been seen so far of them being soldiers or crossing with weapons, who would not be accepted into the transit centre in any case. Most of them were migrants who had lived in Libya for many years.

It took time to know which people were refugees and which were migrants, Mr. Jumbe said, responding to another question. For example Chadians who had gone to Sudan since 2006, when the civil wars began, and then worked in the gold mines of Darfur, were targeted by Arab tribes. That was the background to the current crisis.

H7N9

Glenn Thomas for the World Health Organization (WHO) provided the latest information on the situation, on which the WHO's position remained the same. As expected there continued to be a small number of sporadic cases. There was no evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission and there had been no reports of animal infection outside of China. Over the weekend cases were reported in three new provinces – Fujian, Hunan and

Jiangxi -located south and south-west of the previously affected provinces. Yesterday five further cases were reported, which brought the total to 126 cases. Of those there had been 24 deaths, and a further 24 patients had been discharged from hospital since the virus emerged.

China was implementing timely and sound prevention and control measures but as the source of the infection, its reservoir, mode of transmission and the best way to control infection in animals, were still unclear investigations continued. WHO and other public health agencies were tracking the virus carefully. WHO welcomed the fact that many Governments were reviewing influenza preparedness plans. Advice for the general public was to continue to practice good food handling and other good hygiene practices. WHO was not currently recommending import bans as a measure to protect humans.

## Haiti

Jumbe Omari Jumbe, for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said he did not often have positive news about migrants and so he was pleased to say that some Haitians were voluntarily deciding to return to Haiti, with help from IOM. Today IOM was providing voluntary return assistance, in coordination with the Dominican and Haitian authorities, to more than 300 vulnerable Haitian migrants living in the Dominican Republic who wished to return to their communities in Haiti. Today's group of 308 returnees, who have been in the Dominican Republic for an average of five years, were returning to their places of origin in the northern Haitian towns of Cap Haitien, Fort Liberté, Limbe, Milot Pilate, and Plaisance. They would be escorted by IOM staff and government migration officials.

IOM has so far helped 2,943 Haitians to return to Haiti. IOM provided transportation to each returnee's place of origin and assistance in clearing customs and border controls. It also gave each returnee a cash stipend of US\$ 50 for initial costs and an additional US\$65 for each child was given to the mother, not the father. Awareness raising materials on cholera-prevention, soap, hygiene items and drinking water was also provided.

## Millennium Development Goals

Jumbe Omari Jumbe, for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said there was an ongoing debate what to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with when they elapsed in 2015. IOM believed

there was a big miss in 2000 when migration was not included as an original MDG and intended to put migration on the new list, because it affected and was affected by all of the current MDGs. For example, in the goal on eradicating extreme poverty, the World Bank estimated that remittances sent by migrants to their families were utilized more efficiently than overseas aid. That was because the money was spent in a more focused way. There were 214 million migrants in the world today, and in Africa alone migrants provided between US\$30 to 40 billion in remittances. Therefore IOM would state its case at the MDG review meeting in October this year.

Last week in Washington IOM and the Organization of American States (OAS) brought together more than 50 embassy and consular officials based in Washington DC to discuss the main trends and challenges of international migration, links between migration and development and the inclusion of migration in the post-2015 development agenda.

#### Geneva activities

Hans von Rohland for the International Labour Organization (ILO) announced two high-level ILO missions to Bangladesh and Myanmar. On 29 and 30 April ILO Deputy Director-General Greg Vines would assist at the first conference of trade unions in Myanmar. The two-day conference "Building a new Myanmar" marked the first anniversary of the entry into force of a new law on freedom of association in the country. Some 500 labour organisations attended the event.

From 1 to 4 May, ILO Gilbert Hougbo, Deputy Director-General for Field Operations, would lead a high-level mission to Bangladesh to urge immediate action to prevent a recurrence of the latest series of entirely avoidable workplace tragedies. Mr. von Rohland highlighted the participation of the Deputy Director-General in a May Day Event on 1 May, and his planned meetings with the Prime Minister (to be confirmed), Labour Minister and representatives of the employers and workers. On 4 May he would visit the site of Ran Plaza building collapse, and a hospital where he would meet with injured workers. That afternoon Mr. Hougbo would hold a press briefing at 3 p.m. at the ILO office in Dhaka.

Glenn Thomas for the World Health Organization announced that an expert would be attending the Friday briefing (3 May) to mark Hand Hygiene Day



and take questions from journalists. He reported that every year hundreds of millions of patients around the world were affected by healthcare-related infections. More than half of those infections could be prevented by caregivers properly cleaning their hands at key moments in patient care.

Ms. Momal-Vanian said the the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights started on Monday (29 April) a three-week session to consider the reports of seven countries, in chronological order: Japan, Iran, Jamaica, Azerbaijan, Togo, Rwanda and Denmark. A background press release was available.

The representatives of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development also attended the briefing but did not speak.