
News & Media

REGULAR PRESS BRIEFING BY THE INFORMATION SERVICE

18 February 2014

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

Central African Republic

Ms. Momal-Vanian announced that Ms. Valerie Amos, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator was in the Central African Republic from today until Thursday on a joint mission with the Executive Director of UN AIDS Mr. Michel Sidibé, who was examining in particular the impact of the crisis on essential health needs. Ms. Amos and Mr. Sidibé would both hold a press conference in Bangui upon the conclusion of the mission, on Thursday 20 February.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon would be briefing the [United Nations Security Council](#) in New-York today in the situation in the Central African Republic, Ms. Momal-Vanian said. The Secretary-General would speak about means of curtailing the violence, save lives, protect human rights, support the delivery of humanitarian assistance and strengthen command and control of the forces on the ground.

Chris Lom, for the [International Organization for Migration](#) (IOM) said that IOM had just conducted a second survey of the return intentions of displaced people (IDPs) in the capital city Bangui, following a similar survey completed last month. The aim of the survey was to identify changes in the IDP community's return intentions, based on over 600 interviews conducted by IOM site facilitators at over 40 IDP sites around Bangui.

Currently, according to the Commission on Population Movement, there were approximately 714,000 IDP's in Central African Republic - some 425,000 outside Bangui, and some 289,000 living in 69 sites in Bangui. The conflict in the Central African Republic had divided the population along both ethnic and religious lines. The situation had deteriorated to the point that Muslims and other minorities did not feel safe anywhere other than in IDP sites. Most people went to work outside during the day but stayed at IDP sites at night.

The results indicated a deterioration in the return intentions of the IDPs. Insecurity was the main reason given for leaving a place of origin (99 per cent of respondents) and 20 per cent of respondents had said that they had changed taken shelter at more than one IDP site.

Mr. Lom said that comparing the two surveys, taken two months apart, showed that the percentage of IDPs who would like to return to their place of origin had decreased, from 72 per cent to 65.5 per cent. There was a significant difference in return intentions of the majority and minority populations: 72 per cent of the majority (Christians) would like to return, while 66 per cent of minorities (Muslims and ethnic minorities) would like to go to another region, their country of origin, or stay at an IDP site. Of those who would like to return, their main priority need was housing, while one month ago the priority need was an improvement in security.

The survey had also indicated the economic hardship of the IDP population: 93 per cent of respondents said they had reduced family members' food portions, 90 per cent had reduced adult food portions to feed the children, and 85 per cent had spent days without eating. All of these indicators had increased since the

January survey.

The final report would be released this week in English and French later this week, Mr. Lom noted.

Answering questions from journalists, Mr. Lom said that IOM only had a presence in Bangui, not in the rest of the Central African Republic. IOM basically had an agreement with the camp coordination management cluster which sent about 40 facilitators out to the 69 camps around Bangui to ask questions and to collect data. However, one of the critical problem facing these people was the fact you could not go back to their camp, week after week, asking questions if you had nothing to deliver.

Mr. Lom said that all of the agencies operating in Central African Republic were desperately short of money, so there was very little to deliver to people although the agencies were on the ground and trying to do their best. There simply were not enough resources to deal with the number of IDPs.

Nigeria Attacks

Ravina Shamdasani, for the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), said they condemned in the strongest terms Sunday's attack by gunmen against eight villages in Adamawa and Borno States, which led to the death of more than 150 people.

According to reports, about 65 persons were killed in seven villages in Adamawa State, while some 90 others were killed in Izge village, Borno State. Many residents had now fled the area for fear of further attacks by the armed men.

OHCHR was appalled by the extreme and indiscriminate violence which Nigeria had witnessed in recent times, including the attacks on two villages on 11 February, which left 39 people dead, 65 injured and reportedly 2,000 homes destroyed.

OHCHR urged the Government to do more to provide security and protection to civilians, especially in areas prone to attacks and where a state of emergency had been proclaimed. It also called upon the authorities to launch a prompt and thorough investigation, and make sure that perpetrators of those gross human rights violations and killings were duly prosecuted and held responsible.

Answering a question about whether the Government could do more, Ms. Shamdasani said while OHCHR understood that the Government was in a very difficult position as the armed groups were extremely strong they stressed that it was the Government's responsibility to protect the citizens who lived in that territory.

Syria

Marixie Mercado, for the United Nations Children's Programme (UNICEF) said she had an important clarification: UNICEF had received information late last night that the 18 children it had said on Friday had been released from the Andalus facility were in fact adults. A major factor complicating age determination especially in the case of children was the near total absence of valid identification.

As of today, there were 56 children in the Al Andalus facility. They included 34 boys between 15 and 18 years old; 10 boys under 15 years old; and 12 girls below 18 years old. Most of the children under 15 and the girls were there with their families, because their fathers or brothers were still being processed.

UNICEF was aware of two unaccompanied children – a seven-year-old girl with relatives in Homs, and a teenager whose parents were in Lebanon, but who had family friends in Homs willing to provide shelter.

UNICEF was advocating for the expedited release of all remaining children. The Governor of Homs had promised to assist in clearances of children, and UNICEF was coordinating with the Ministry of Social Affairs in preparing documentation for children.

Those figures were the most authoritative to date, based on head count, and cross-referencing with data

provided by Shabab al Khair, the non-governmental organization appointed to manage the Andalus facility, but they were not scientific numbers, Ms. Mercado noted.

IOM plane crash in South Sudan

Chris Lom, for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said that yesterday an IOM-chartered cargo plane crashed in Bentiu. The plane landed on the runway at the Rubkona airstrip and collided with two vehicles which were parked on the runway, resulting in a fire. One crew member from the charter company was killed and three were injured. Also, a number of people were injured on the ground, and there was an unconfirmed report that one of those was a WFP staff member. The surviving crew members had been evacuated by UNMISS peacekeepers to Juba.

The plane was carrying relief supplies as part of IOM's programme started on the 31 January. The charter company had successfully completed 27 flights carrying some 154 tonnes of desperately-needed supplies, including drinking water, hygiene and sanitation equipment, medicine, shelter materials and relief supplies including blankets, kitchen sets, soap, buckets and mosquito nets.

The aid was destined by people displaced by the fighting that began on 15 December 2013. There were some 3,239 internally IDP sheltering in the UNMISS base in Bentiu, Mr. Lom based, who were being assisted by IOM staff. A short statement was issued last night by the IOM Juba office, Mr. Lom added.

Libya

Ravina Shamdasani, for the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), said OHCHR was concerned about the potential for a new law in Libya which had led to undue restrictions on the freedom of expression and opinion, and about an increasing number of attacks against journalists in recent months.

Amendments to the penal code passed earlier this month through Law No. 5 of 2014 impose prison sentences on any person "*undermining the February 17 revolution*" and for "*publicly insulting one of the legislative, executive or judicial authorities*".

Law No. 5 of 2014 certainly appeared to go against the spirit of the February 17 revolution, Ms. Shamdasani said. In addition, decision No. 5, passed by the Libyan General National Congress in January, authorised relevant ministries to "*take necessary measures to discontinue and prevent the broadcasting of all satellite channels that are hostile to February 17 revolution or those which undermine the security and stability of the country, or sow discord and sedition among the Libyans*". Such broad and vague language could clearly be used to arbitrarily curtail freedom of expression and opinion, Ms. Shamdasani said.

Yesterday, Libya celebrated the three-year anniversary of the revolution. One of the key documents adopted soon after the revolution was the Constitutional Declaration, which stated that freedom of opinion, freedom of communication, liberty of the press, printing, publication and mass media, and freedom of assembly shall be guaranteed by the State in accordance with the law.

OHCHR called upon the General National Congress to reconsider those legislative amendments to ensure compliance with international human rights standards, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Libya has ratified. The UN Human Rights Office, through the human rights division of United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), stood ready to provide assistance in that regard.

There had also been a worrying number of reports in recent months of killings, intimidation, abductions and other attacks against journalists and media workers across Libya. Most recently, OHCHR received reports of the abduction of five journalists in three separate incidents in Sabha, Tripoli and Benghazi, and attacks on TV stations Libya Al-Ahrar and al-Aseema in Benghazi and Tripoli respectively.

OHCHR condemned the violence and intimidation and called for impartial, speedy, and effective investigations into such attacks with a view to bringing the perpetrators to justice. OHCHR also looked forward to the beginning of the process of drafting the constitution and hoped that Libya would use the opportunity to build upon the commitments made in the Constitutional Declaration and firmly enshrine

human rights principles, including the right to freedom of expression and opinion, in the legal system.

Responding to a request for more detail on the attacks, Ms. Shamdasani said that on 5 February apparently masked gunmen opened fire on the Benghazi bureau of a Libyan TV station called Libya Al-Ahrar and set fire to a satellite transmission truck. Employees have also been the target of attacks in the past and the bureau chief narrowly escaped a murder attempt in August 2013. In another incident, in Sebha, three journalists were kidnapped, and had not been heard of since. On 12 February there was a rocket attack on Al-Asema TV station in Tripoli. It was very difficult for OHCHR to get precise numbers of detainees in Libya as most were held by armed groups, not the Government.

Regarding the drafting of the constitution, Ms. Shamdasani confirmed that the United Nations Human Rights Division in Libya, which was part of UNSMIL, was actively involved in working with the Government on that. The Chief of the United Nations Human Rights Division in Libya was available to talk to journalists upon request.

Chris Lom, for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said that over the last three days IOM had helped approximately 7,000 Libyans living abroad in 13 countries to take part in the country's upcoming constitutional drafting assembly elections on 20 February, at the request of the Libyan High National Election Commission (HNEC). The countries concerned were: Canada, Egypt, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Malaysia, Qatar, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The elections for the drafting assembly were very important as it would be tasked with drawing up a draft constitution which would consequently be voted in by referendum. The assembly would be composed of 20 members from Libya's three regions - Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan. IOM believed that the referendum would happen in the next three or four months, Mr. Lom said.

Mr. Lom added that IOM's involvement was in close collaboration with the United Nations country team. It had not been involved in the drafting of the constitution, but was involved with other outreach activities including working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Asylum Seekers to Australia and Papua New Guinea

Babar Baloch, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), said that UNHCR was very concerned about the recent developments on Manus Island in which one asylum-seeker reportedly lost his life and several others were reported injured. UNHCR was in discussions with the Australian Government and welcomed their commitment to investigate those events.

Based on three visits to Manus Island, the latest in November 2013, UNHCR had consistently raised issues around the transfer arrangements and on the absence of adequate protection standards and safeguards for asylum seekers and refugees in Papua New Guinea. Significant shortcomings in the legal framework for receiving and processing asylum-seekers from Australia remained, including lack of national capacity and expertise in processing, and poor physical conditions. UNHCR also highlighted that detention practices were harmful to the physical and psycho-social well-being of transferees, particularly families and children.

UNHCR stood ready to work with the Governments of Australia and Papua New Guinea on how best to ensure that asylum-seekers, refugees and stateless persons received appropriate protection.

In the ensuing questions about the response of the Australian Government, Mr. Baloch said the shortcomings that UNHCR had already highlighted remained in place, and they had a number of concerns as to whether the legal and practical framework in Papua New Guinea, reception and settlements conditions were sufficient. UNHCR stood ready to work with both Governments, but UNHCR's preference was an arrangement that would allow asylum seekers arriving by boat into Australian territory to be processed in Australia. That would be consistent with general practice.

H7N9 update

Glenn Thomas, for the World Health Organization (WHO) responding to a request for updates on H7N9, said a disease outbreak news alert had just been published on the World Health Organization website.

There had now been 355 laboratory-confirmed cases of H7N9, and 67 deaths. That included two cases from Taiwan, five cases from Hong-Kong and one case from Malaysia, which was announced yesterday.

The latest cases to be announced were nine in China, in Jiangsu, Huainan, Guangdong and Hanui provinces. Of those six were men, aged from four to 84 years old. Mr. Thomas specified that two cases were in a critical condition, three cases were in a severe condition and the condition of three other cases were currently unknown. Three of the nine cases were reported to have a history of exposure to live poultry. Investigations were ongoing.

In response to a question, Mr. Thomas said that they were sporadic cases and there was no sustained human to human transmission.

ILO lecture on modern slavery

Hans van Rohland, for the International Labour Organization (ILO), announced that ILO Director-General Guy Ryder would give the inaugural lecture on modern slavery at Liverpool University in the United Kingdom on Friday, 21 February, at 1 p.m. GMT. The Director-General would address the scale of modern slavery along with the economics of forced labour, the social economic background, value change, limitations of boycotts and voluntary initiatives, as well as the importance of fair recruitment practices at the international level.

The speech would take place at the Liverpool Centre for the Study of International Slavery, a new institution which is a joint venture of the United Kingdom International Slavery Museum and the University of Liverpool. The new institution aimed to improve the understanding and share research on slavery, Mr. van Rohland added.

Returns in Mali

Chris Lom, for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) drew journalists' attention to a positive story from Mali reinforcing the impression that people were leaving IDP camps in Bamako to return to the north of the country. More details were in the press release.

Geneva activities

Marixie Mercado, for the United Nations Children's Programme (UNICEF) announced a press conference to take place Friday, 21 February at 10.00 a.m. in Press Room III to launch UNICEF's 2014 Humanitarian Action for Children appeal. There would also be an update on the mission to South Sudan. Ted Chaiban, UNICEF Emergencies Director, would be speaking. An overview of the appeal would be made available to journalists, under embargo, later today.

The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for Haiti would be in Geneva on Wednesday and Thursday this week, Ms. Momal-Vanian announced on behalf of UNOCHA; any journalist who may be interested in interviewing him should get in touch with Vanessa Huguenin in OCHA.

The Conference on Disarmament would hold a public plenary this morning, at 10 a.m. and be addressed by the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations Office in Geneva, Mr. Vinicio Mati, on the assumption by Italy of the Presidency of the Conference for a period of four weeks. Cuba, Venezuela, Egypt, Mexico, Tunisia and Kenya would also make statements.

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) yesterday completed its review of the report of Switzerland, and at 5 p.m. on Friday 21 February would close its eighty-fourth session.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) would today review the report of Iraq, followed this week by reviews of the reports of Sierra Leone (Wednesday) and Finland (Thursday), Ms. Momal-Vanian said.

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The representatives of the Human Rights Council and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development also attended the briefing but did not speak.

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The webcast for this briefing is available here: <http://bit.ly/1kRABVd>

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