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In Uganda, UN chief meets with South Sudanese refugees, urges world to show solidarity

Secretary-General António Guterres visits the Imvepi refugee settlement Arua district, northern Uganda. UN Photo/Mark Garten

22 June – With Uganda hosting almost one million South Sudanese refugees “as sisters and brothers and sharing with them their land and everything they have,” United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today urged the international community to show solidarity with those that had fled their homes, as well as with the Ugandan Government and people.

“In a world where so many people are selfishly closing their doors, closing their borders, not allowing refugees to come, this example deserves praise [and] admiration from the whole international community,” Mr. Guterres told reporters at the Imvepi Refugee Reception Centre in the Arua district of northern Uganda.

Imvepi is the first stop for many South Sudanese refugees once they cross the border into Uganda. The camp, which opened in February this year, is already filling up; hosting some 120,000 refugees, mostly women and children, fleeing violence and instability in the neighbouring country.

In just the past year, the overall refugee population in Uganda has more than doubled – from 500,000 to more than 1.25 million – making the East African country host to the world's fastest growing refugee emergency.

The UN chief pointed out that tomorrow, the international community would have the opportunity to express its solidarity, “responding to our appeal for massive financial support, both for humanitarian aid for the refugees, but also for the



investments necessary for the education system, the health system, the infrastructure, the [local] environment, to be able to cope with this enormous challenge.”

Mr. Guterres was referring to the 'Solidarity Summit,' which opened today in the Ugandan capital, Kampala, and is expected to wrap up tomorrow. Co-hosted by Uganda and the UN, the event aims to rally international support for refugees and host communities in the form of donations, investments and innovative programmes.

“At the same time, I cannot forget that twelve years ago I was here, in June, in this same place. I was [marking] World Refugee Day with South Sudanese refugees that were singing with joy because they were going back home soon,” said Mr. Guterres, who is the former UN High Commissioner for Refugees. He said he had later accompanied many of them across the border with the hope that their new country would live in peace.

Unfortunately, that had not been the case. South Sudan's leaders “do not deserve the people of their country,” said the Secretary-General, stressing that the South Sudanese people have been suffering enormously [in an] endless war.”

“It is time for the war to end. It is time for all the leaders of South Sudan to understand that they need to stop this war,” he said, expressing gratitude for the efforts made by the Heads of State of the region, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the African Union and by the UN to help create the conditions for peace to be re-established.

“Peace in South Sudan is a must for these people to be able to have a future,” said the Secretary-General.

UNESCO chief deplores destruction of iconic mosque and minaret in Iraq's Mosul



Al Nuree Mosque and its Al Hadba Minaret in Mosul, Iraq. Photo: UNESCO.

22 June – The head of the United Nations cultural agency today deplored the destruction of historic religious architecture in Iraq's Mosul city by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) fighters.

“The Al Hadba Minaret and AlNuree Mosque in Mosul were among the most iconic sites in the city, and stood as a symbol of identity, resilience and belonging,” said Irina Bokova, the Director General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

“When Da'esh targeted the mosque and minaret a few months ago, the people of Mosul formed a human chain to protect the site, proving once again that the protection of heritage cannot be delinked from the protection of human lives,” she added.

Located in the Old City area of western Mosul, the Great Mosque of al-Nuree was considered one of the main historical mosques in Iraq. It was originally built by Nureddine Zangi in 1172AD, during the Abbasid Caliphate.

It underwent several renovations and restorations throughout the years. Its outstanding iconic feature was the leaning minaret known as al-Hadba (the hunchback), which had retained its authentic architectural and structural features for hundreds of years.

“This new destruction deepens the wounds of a society already affected by an unprecedented humanitarian tragedy, with three million internally displaced persons and 6.2 million in need of immediate humanitarian assistance. This calls for immediate and strengthened international mobilization,” said the Director-General.

Since the Iraqi Government's launch of an offensive to oust ISIL from Mosul in October 2016, around 750,000 to 800,000 people have been displaced from the city. Many are trapped or being used as human shields.

“Despite all odds, the spirit of resilience embodied by al-Hadba must prevail and UNESCO will continue to stand by the people of Iraq to regain their heritage and fight back against all forms of extremism and violence through culture, education and human rights,” Ms. Bokova declared.

Millions could escape poverty by finishing secondary education, says UN cultural agency

22 June – While a new United Nations study shows that the global poverty rate could be more than halved if all adults completed secondary school, data show high out-of-school rates in many countries, making it likely that education completion levels will remain well below that target for generations.

“The new analysis on education's far-reaching benefits released today should be good news for all those working on the Sustainable Development Goal to eradicate poverty by 2030,” said Irina Bokova, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

“It shows that we have a concrete plan to ensure people no longer have to live on barely a few dollars a day, and that plan has education at its heart,” she added.

Based on the effects that education had on growth and poverty reduction in developing countries from 1965 to 2010, the new analysis by UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report team, shows that nearly 60 million people could escape poverty if all adults had just two more years of schooling.

“If all adults completed secondary education, 420 million could be lifted out of poverty, reducing the total number of poor people by more than half globally and by almost two-thirds in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia,” according to UNESCO.

The paper, from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) on reducing global poverty through universal primary and secondary education, is being released ahead of the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF) which will be held in New York from 10 to 19 July and focuses on poverty eradication in pursuit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It demonstrates the importance of recognizing education as a core lever for ending poverty in all its forms, everywhere.

Studies have shown that education has direct and indirect impacts on both economic growth and poverty. It provides skills that boost employment opportunities and incomes while helping to protect from socio-economic vulnerabilities. An equitable expansion of education is likely to reduce inequality, lifting the poorest from the bottom of the ladder.

However, if current trends continue, of the 61 million primary school age children currently out of school, 17 million will never to set foot in a classroom – one in three of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa, Western Asia and Northern Africa, and more than one in four of those in Central Asia and Southern Asia.

Moreover, girls in poor countries continue to face particularly steep barriers to education.

While UNESCO underscores that education must reach the poorest in order to maximize its benefits and reduce income inequality, according to the GEM Report, children from the poorest 20 per cent of families are eight times as likely to be out of school as children from the richest 20 per cent in lower-middle-income countries.

The paper stresses the need to reduce the direct and indirect costs of education for families.



Youth in the classroom. Photo: Deshan Tennekoon/World Bank.

Global narcotics market 'thriving;' range of available drugs diversifying at alarming pace – UN



Drug seizures, South Africa. Photo: UNODC

22 June – Of the quarter of a billion people who used drugs in 2015, about 29.5 million – or 0.6 per cent of the global adult population – were engaged in “problematic use” and suffered from drug use disorders, including dependence, according to report out today from the United Nations drugs and crime agency.

Opioids were the most harmful drug type and accounted for 70 per cent of the negative health impact associated with drug use disorders worldwide, said the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

“There is much work to be done to confront the many harms inflicted by drugs to health, development, peace and security, in all regions of the world,” said UNODC Executive Director Yury Fedotov in a statement on the launch of the 2017 World Drug Report.

Marking 20 years of its publication, the report provides a global overview of the supply and demand for opiates, cocaine, cannabis, amphetamine-type stimulants and new psychoactive substances (NPS), as well as their impacts on health.

This year's report states that opium production is up and the cocaine market is “thriving.” In 2016, global opium production increased by one third compared with the previous year and this was primarily due to higher opium poppy yields in Afghanistan.

The report also highlights the scientific evidence for hepatitis C causing greatest harm among people who use drugs; and spotlights further diversification of the thriving drug market, as well as changing business models for drug trafficking and organized crime.

Disorders related to the use of amphetamines also account for a considerable share of the global burden of disease. And while the NPS market is still relatively small, users are unaware of the content and dosage of psychoactive substances in some NPS. This potentially exposes users to additional serious health risks.

The 2017 report finds that hepatitis C is causing the greatest harm among the estimated 12 million people who inject drugs worldwide. About 1.6 million people are living with HIV and 6.1 million are living with hepatitis C, while around 1.3 million are suffering from both hepatitis C and HIV.

Overall, three times more people who use drugs die from hepatitis C (222,000) than from HIV (60,000).

Changing business models for drug trafficking and organized crime

In 2014, transnational organized crime groups across the globe were estimated to have generated between one fifth and one third of their revenues from drug sales. Mobile communications offers new opportunities to traffickers, while the 'dark net' allows users to anonymously buy drugs with a crypto-currency, such as bitcoin.

While drug trafficking over the dark net remains small, there has been an increase in drug transactions of some 50 per cent annually between September 2013 and January 2016 according to one study. Typical buyers are recreational users of cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine, hallucinogens and NPS.

Drugs and terrorism

Although not all terrorist groups depend on drug profits, some do, notes the report. Without the proceeds of drug production and trafficking, which make up almost half of the Taliban's annual income, the reach and impact of the group would

probably not be what it is today.

Up to 85 per cent of opium cultivation in Afghanistan occurs in territory under some influence of the Taliban.

Many aid groups unable to manage war zone risks, says UN-backed report

22 June – Humanitarian aid workers want to help people in some of the biggest war zones, but extreme risks and threats are paralyzing their operations, a United Nations-backed report today concluded.

“Conflict parties' lack of respect for the fundamental tenets of international humanitarian law and the brutality and volatility of today's armed conflicts make it extremely difficult and dangerous for these brave aid workers to deliver humanitarian assistance and protection in complex emergencies,” said UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien, whose Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) co-produced the report.



On a UN Humanitarian Air Services (UNHAS) aircraft before landing in Dinsoor, central Somalia. Photo: UNOCHA

Presence and Proximity: To Stay and Deliver, Five Years On, produced by OCHA, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and Jindal School of International Affairs in India, is based on interviews with more than 2,000 international and national aid workers, and includes case studies on humanitarian aid in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic (CAR), Syria and Yemen.

“It is our duty as aid workers to work where needs are greatest,” said Jan Egeland, Secretary General of NRC. “But our international humanitarian community is failing too many people in too many places, from Syria and Yemen to South Sudan and Nigeria. Extreme risks and threats are paralysing too many organizations and their ability to deliver aid and save lives.”

Among its findings, the report found that as overall needs in the field have grown, so have the funding gaps, which necessitate cutting of projects and aid work.

Based on interviews with aid workers, the authors also concluded that abductions of workers are on the rise, criminality is seen as a rising threat, and the number of incidents against national aid workers has increased.

“Humanitarians expressed an increased sense of risk and vulnerability, even though most major security incidents affecting humanitarians occur in a very small number of countries and tend to reflect the increased level of humanitarian activity in proximity to ongoing conflict rather than expanded targeting of humanitarians around the world,” the authors wrote.

The report is a five-year follow-up to the 2011 document, *To Stay and Deliver*, which provided advice and recommendations to practitioners on critical issues, such as risk management, responsible partnerships, adherence to humanitarian principles, acceptance and negotiations with relevant actors.

Among the conclusions, the authors wrote that “not enough progress has been achieved since 2011, and many of the recommendations contained in the initial report remain particularly relevant today.”

Other trends noted that humanitarians are more focused on security analysis, and that remote programming – the concept of using local organizations to help implement aid activities – can generate risks and undermine the quality of protection and humanitarian programmes.

UN chief appoints Lebanese official as head of operations in Libya

22 June – A Lebanese political science professor and political advisor to the United Nations in Iraq has been appointed as the Organization's top official in Libya.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres today announced the appointment of Ghassan Salamé as his Special Representative and Head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), which is working to facilitate a Libyan-led political solution to the challenges facing the country.

In a statement announcing the appointment, a UN spokesperson said that Mr. Salamé brings to his new position over three decades of experience in public service and academia.

Mr. Salamé will succeed Martin Kobler of Germany, whom the UN spokesperson said that Mr. Guterres is grateful for his dedication and service, as well as for his effective leadership of UNSMIL.

The announcement comes one day after Mr. Guterres appointed Vladimir Ivanovich Voronkov of Russia as Under-Secretary-General of the newly created UN Counter-Terrorism Office.

Mr. Voronkov, who is currently the Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN agencies in Vienna, will chair the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force Office (CTITF) and serve as Executive Director of the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre.

Yesterday, Mr. Guterres appointed Ana Maria Menéndez of Spain as the next Senior Adviser on Policy.

Ms. Menéndez, who replaces Kyung-wha Kang of the Republic of Korea, currently serves as Spain's Ambassador to the UN Office and other international organizations in Geneva.

Sri Lanka's food gap widens in wake of regional floods and drought, UN agencies warn



Rice drying in Sri Lanka, March 2017. Photo: FAO

22 June – An extreme drought followed by floods has affected large swathes of cropland in Sri Lanka, United Nations agencies reported today, warning that the disaster threatens the food security of some 900,000 people.

Having lost their crops to drought and floods, Sri Lanka's most vulnerable groups are struggling to earn an income, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP). Following the bad harvests, many, the agencies add, are now also forced to buy food from local markets.

As access for families to nutritious food has been reduced – forcing many to eat less – prices at local markets have risen sharply, with rice prices reaching an all-time high in January.

Now, nearly 225,000 households (or about 900,000 people) face food insecurity, the UN agencies say.



Ghassan Salamé of Lebanon, newly appointed Special Representative and Head of the UN Support Mission in Libya UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

A previous joint assessment showed that in 10 districts about one third of the drought-affected population had its regular income reduced by more than half.

To cover immediate needs, FAO and WFP are calling in the current Crop and Food Security Assessment for the urgent provision of seeds, as well as planting and irrigation equipment for the next planting season, from September to December, as well as support for irrigation systems.

Additionally, both agencies recommend quick and targeted cash assistance for the poorest and most vulnerable families to ensure adequate food intake and to prevent them from incurring unsustainably high debt or adopting other coping mechanisms that could have long-term negative effects.

Rice production to drop by nearly 40 per cent in 2017

Based on findings in the report, which assesses the seriousness of a crisis situation by looking at the food produced nationally and the extent to which poor people can meet their basic food needs, both agencies argue that drought conditions in 2016 and early 2017 led to widespread crop failures, in particular for rice paddy – the country's staple food.

Total paddy production in 2017 is forecast at 2.7 million metric tonnes, almost 40 per cent less than the last year's output and 35 per cent lower than the average of the previous five years.

Following last month's severe flooding and landslides, the agencies note that the heavy rains did not ease the water supply constraints in the drought-impacted north-central and eastern parts of the South Asian country.

Looking ahead, the situation may further deteriorate if the next cropping season fails. Current predictions show the second 2017 paddy harvest – known as Yala, due to be harvested in August and September – is forecast at 1.2 million metric tonnes, 24 per cent below last year's level.

Iraq's children caught in cycle of violence and poverty as conflict escalates, UNICEF warns

22 June – The past three years of intensifying conflict in Iraq have left the country's children trapped in a grinding cycle of violence and poverty, an assessment out today by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has warned, calling on the warring parties to immediately end hostilities.

“Across Iraq, children continue to witness sheer horror and unimaginable violence,” said Peter Hawkins, the UNICEF Representative in the country, in a statement on the launch of the new assessment.

Entitled *Nowhere to Go*, the assessment underscores that more than five million children in the country are in need of urgent humanitarian aid.

“They have been killed, injured, abducted and forced to shoot and kill in one of the most brutal wars in recent history,” Mr. Hawkins emphasized.

In west Mosul, children are being deliberately targeted and killed to punish families and deter them from fleeing the violence. In less than two months, at least 23 children have been killed and 123 have been injured in that part of the city alone, according to UNICEF.

Among others, the assessment on Iraq outlines that since 2014:



A young boy stands next to a fence surrounding the football pitch at Al-Shuhadaa Stadium in the city of Iskandariya, Babil Governorate, Iraq. UNICEF/Khuzai

- 1,075 children have been killed, 152 in the first six months of this year;
- 1,130 have been maimed and injured, 255 in the first six months of 2017; and
- More than 4,650 have been separated from their families.

In addition, over the same three-year period, there have been 138 attacks on schools and 58 on hospitals; over three million children miss school on a regular basis while 1.2 million are out of school; and one in every four children comes from a poor household.

For nearly four decades, Iraq has faced violence, war, sanctions and instability. But in the last three years alone, conflict has displaced three million people – half of them children. Many parts of the country were turned into war zones with civilian infrastructure severely damaged or destroyed. Half of all schools in Iraq are now in need of repairs.

As life opportunities for children dwindle, UNICEF continues to respond to their growing needs and those of their families.

Pointing out that all warring parties owe it to the children of Iraq to end the violence, UNICEF is appealing for an immediate end to the conflict. The agency is also calling for all children affected by the crisis to have access to unimpeded and sustained humanitarian assistance and basic services; and for children in detention to have access to legal protection and services in line with international standards of juvenile detention.

UNICEF also requesting an end to all grave violations against children – including killing, maiming and recruitment – and an end to attacks on civilian infrastructure; freedom for all families to move, should they wish to flee or return to home; and increased investments to improve the quality of education, healthcare and protection services for all children.

Finally, the agency called for sustained humanitarian contributions, noting its funding gap of \$100 million for lifesaving emergency operations in Iraq and to support children returning home to resume their lives.

UN agency condemns killing of two journalists working on assignment in Iraq



UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova. Photo: UNESCO/Ania Freindorf

22 June – The killing of two journalists in Iraq drew strong condemnation today from the United Nations agency tasked with defending press freedom and the safety of journalists.

“Journalists face tremendous dangers in carrying out their job, a job where they provide us with vital information enabling us to build towards peace,” said Irina Bokova, the head of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Kurdish journalist Bakhtyar Haddad and French reporter Stéphane Villeneuve were working together in Mosul, Iraq, on a programme for France 2 when they were killed as a result of a roadside bomb explosion.

Their names will be added to UNESCO's dedicated webpage commemorating the lives of journalists killed in the line of duty.