

## **Drought threatens 1.5 million Somalis; UN health agency scales up response**

27 February 2017 – Less than half of the people in Somalia have access to basic health services, the United Nations health agency today said, announcing that it is scaling up its response in the country amid a severe drought and worsening food crisis.

“Somalia is now at a critical point as a result of this drought and environmental hazards and lack of basic services,” said UN World Health Organization’s (WHO) Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, Dr. Mahmoud Fikri.

The UN agency said that it is providing “all possible support” to address the ongoing challenges. That includes sending in rapid response teams to areas of greatest threat. That includes sending medicines and medical supplies to health facilities in drought-affected areas.

Some 1.5 million people are believed to be affected by the severe drought and worsening food crisis. More than 400,000 of those people are malnourished children.

In addition, the drought conditions are causing epidemic-prone diseases to spread. These include cholera and measles. According to WHO, since early January, more than 6,000 cases of cholera have been reported, as well as more than 2,500 cases of suspected measles.

The UN has launched an appeal for \$825 million for the first half of 2017 for the pre-famine response. Of this, the health sector requires \$85 million, including \$10 million for the WHO.

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## **In Yemen, UN aid chief rallies support for relief efforts to prevent famine**

27 February 2017 – The parties to the conflict in Yemen need to continue providing humanitarian access, and the international community needs to step up its funding for life-saving operations, the United Nations relief aid chief said today during his visit to the port city of Aden.

“I have come to Aden with the first humanitarian UN flight to lend support to the humanitarians who have been working in this city and in Yemen since the conflict escalated in March 2015,” UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien told reporters there.

“Today, almost 19 million people in Yemen need humanitarian assistance. Seven million people don’t know where their next meal is coming from and we now face a serious risk of famine,” he added.

Mr. O’Brien said the purpose of his visit was also to meet with senior Government officials to discuss how to prevent a possible famine and how to better protect the civilians that are caught in this conflict.

In Aden and the surrounding governorates, 3.1 million people need humanitarian assistance, two thirds of whom are in desperate need of food, he warned.

RELATED: As Yemen’s food crisis worsens, UN agencies call for urgent assistance to avert catastrophe

Yesterday, in meetings with President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi, Prime Minister Ahmed Obeid bin Daghr and other senior officials, the top UN aid official stressed the need for all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law, protect civilians and civilian infrastructure and to allow for unimpeded and immediate full access by humanitarian partners to all of Yemen.

Given the urgency of the situation, they also discussed the need to facilitate commercial imports of food, fuel and medicine, through all ports of Yemen, and the resumption of commercial flights to all of Yemen, Mr. O’Brien said.

“Yesterday, I saw with my own eyes the destruction of the war and the impact on the people living in Aden,” he said, noting that he was especially pleased to know that two babies – a boy and a girl – were born while he was at a maternity hospital. “They are Yemen’s hope and future,” he said.

In the Aden hub, more than 55 humanitarian organizations are working to meet pressing needs.

“We are here to help and provide neutral, impartial life-saving assistance to all people in need, regardless of where they are in Yemen,” Mr. O’Brien said, stressing that there are no military solutions to this conflict and only peace can provide a lasting solution to this unfolding humanitarian crisis.

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**[Germany: UN rights panel highlights racial profiling against people of](#)**

# African descent

27 February 2017 – People of African descent in Germany suffer racial discrimination, Afrophobia and racial profiling in their daily lives, but their situation remains largely invisible to the wider society, a United Nations expert panel said today at the end of its first official visit to the country.

“The repeated denial that racial profiling does not exist in Germany by police authorities and the lack of an independent complaint mechanism at federal and state level fosters impunity,” said Ricardo Sunga, who currently heads the expert panel, in a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Established on 25 April 2002 by the then Commission on Human Rights, following the World Conference against Racism held in Durban in 2001, the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent is composed of five independent experts: Mr. Sunga (the Philippines), current Chair-Rapporteur; Michal Balcerzak (Poland); Mireille Fanon Mendes-France (France), Sabelo Gumede (South Africa) and Ahmed Reid (Jamaica).

A Working Group delegation visited Berlin, Dessau, Dresden, Frankfurt, Wiesbaden, Düsseldorf, Cologne and Hamburg from 20 to 27 February, to gain first-hand knowledge on discriminatory practices affecting people of African descent in Germany.

“There is a serious lack of ethnicity-based disaggregated data, and an incomplete understanding of history, which obscure the magnitude of structural and institutional racism people of African descent face,” Mr. Sunga said, explaining that the Working Group believes that institutional racism and racist stereotyping by the criminal justice system has led to a failure to effectively investigate and prosecute perpetrators of racist violence, racial profiling and hate crimes against people of African descent.

During the eight-day mission, the human rights experts engaged with representatives of the German Federal and State authorities, representatives of national and provincial human rights institutions and civil society. The delegation welcomed ongoing efforts by the administration to address racial discrimination faced by people of African descent.

The Working group will present a report containing its findings and recommendations to the UN Human Rights Council in September 2017.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

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## [UN rights expert calls on Myanmar authorities to protect the Rohingya population](#)

27 February 2017 – Concluding a four-day visit to parts of Bangladesh where she met with members of Myanmar’s Rohingya community who fled there after violence following attacks on a border post in early October and the ensuing military operations, a United Nations expert called for urgent action by the Government of Myanmar to end the suffering of the Rohingya population in the country.

“The magnitude of violence that these families have witnessed and experienced is far more extensive than I had originally speculated,” highlighted Yanghee Lee, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar.

She recounted several allegations of horrific attacks including the slitting of some people’s throats, indiscriminate shootings, houses being set alight with people tied up inside and very young children being thrown into the fire, as well as gang rapes and other sexual violence.

Earlier this month, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) issued a flash report, based on its interviews with the people who fled Myanmar, in which it documented mass gang-rape, killings, including of babies and young children, brutal beatings, disappearances and other serious human rights violations by the country’s security forces.

In addition to the alleged human rights violations occurring within the context of the security operations that followed the 9 October attacks, Ms. Lee also highlighted today how the Government of Myanmar appears to have taken, and continues to take, actions which discriminate against the Rohingya and make their lives even more difficult.

RELATED: UN report details ‘devastating cruelty’ against Rohingya population in Myanmar’s Rakhine province

“I urge the Government of Myanmar to immediately cease the discrimination that the community continues to face, to act now to prevent any further serious rights violations and to conduct prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations into those already alleged to have occurred,” said the UN rights expert.

“We all owe it to those I have met and their fellow community members to do everything in our power to ensure this is done and to give the Rohingya people reason to hope again,” she added.

During her mission to Bangladesh, Ms. Lee visited the capital Dhaka and the town of Cox's Bazar, located near its border with Myanmar, where many members of the Rohingya community had fled to. Ms. Lee will present her full report to the UN Human Rights Council on 13 March.

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## [In Geneva, UN urges upholding human rights amid rising populism and extremism](#)

27 February 2017 – Disregard for human rights is a disease, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today told the opening session of the UN Human Rights Council, urging Member States to uphold the rights of all people in the face of rising populism and extremism.

Addressing the top UN human rights body for the first time since becoming Secretary-General, Mr. Guterres appealed to world governments to speak up for human rights in an impartial way.

Disregard for human rights is a disease, and it is a disease that is spreading North, South, East and West, the Secretary-General told the high-level segment of the 34th regular session of the Human Rights Council, alongside UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein. The Human Rights Council must be part of the cure.

Having lived under the dictatorship of Portugal's António de Oliveira Salazar, Mr. Guterres explained that he was 24 before he knew democracy. Denying his compatriots their human rights had oppressed and impoverished many of them, resulting in a mass exodus, and also brought bloody civil wars to Portugal's former colonies in Africa.

Calling today's world more dangerous, less predictable, more chaotic, the Secretary-General called for making prevention a priority, tackling root causes of conflict and reacting early and more effectively to human rights violations.

He highlighted the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the treaties that derive from it, and urged the Council to be fully engaged on the issues that require their attention.

We are increasingly seeing the perverse phenomenon of populism and

extremism feeding off each other in a frenzy of growing racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim hatred and other forms of intolerance,&#8221 Mr. Guterres said.

&#8220Minorities, indigenous communities and others face discriminations and abuse across the world,&#8221 he added, noting abuse targeting refugees and migrants, and people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and/or intersex (LGBTI).

Among other issues raised, Mr. Guterres also called for protection of the human rights defenders and of journalists who are &#8220essential&#8221 to the checks and balances of any society.

In his address, UN High Commissioner Zeid denounced &#8220reckless political profiteers&#8221 who threaten the multilateral system or intend to withdraw from parts of it.

&#8220We have much to lose, so much to protect,&#8221 the UN High Commissioner said.

&#8220Without a commitment to fundamental human rights, to the dignity and worth of the human person and to the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, our world will become chaos, misery and warfare,&#8221 he warned. &#8220Of all the great post-war achievements, it is this assertion of the universality of rights in human rights law that may be the most noteworthy.&#8221

Speaking directly to the political actors, Mr. Zeid said &#8220the sirens of historical experience ought to ring clear&#8221 and pledged that &#8220we will not sit idly by&#8221 in the face of violations.

&#8220Our rights, the rights of others, the very future of our planet cannot, must not be thrown aside by these reckless political profiteers,&#8221 he added.

For his part, the President of the 71st Session of the UN General Assembly, Peter Thomson, called for greater dialogue and cooperation for peace among Governments, the UN system, civil society and the private sector.

He lauded the Human Rights Council as &#8220essential&#8221 to bridging divides, and called for advancing &#8220with common purpose&#8221 towards sustainable peace.

&#8220Just as the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda recognizes human rights as a cornerstone for sustainable development, so too does the concept of sustaining peace,&#8221 stated Mr. Thompson, urging the Council members to put forward their best ideas, well-honed skills and most determined will to defend the place of human rights in the drive to implement sustainable development and sustaining peace in today's challenging times.