

Critical food aid shortages hit Africa's refugees hard, UN warns

20 February 2017 – Across Africa, some two million refugees are facing critical shortages in food assistance, the United Nations warned today.

Refugee operations in 10 African countries have experienced cuts affecting the quantity and quality of food assistance for approximately two million refugees, according to a joint press release from the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

“Millions of refugees depend on WFP food and our work to treat and prevent malnutrition to stay alive. But in Africa they are in danger of being overshadowed by large humanitarian crises elsewhere,” WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin said in the release.

Food rations have been dramatically cut – in some cases by up to 50 per cent – in large operations including Cameroon, Chad, Kenya, Mauritania, South Sudan and Uganda.

Refugees in Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Burundi and Ethiopia have had specific commodities cut including micronutrient fortified blended foods, needed to ensure an adequate quality diet.

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“We can’t imagine how difficult life is for thousands of refugee families with no food, and often denied the possibility to work or provide for themselves in other ways,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi. “Refugees are extraordinarily resilient, but cuts in food assistance – sometimes as high as 50 per cent – are having a devastating impact on the health and nutrition of thousands of families.”

The number of refugees in Africa nearly doubled from 2.6 million in 2011 to nearly five million in 2016, the release said. While donor funding for refugee assistance increased during this period, it did not keep pace with rapidly rising needs. As a result, the humanitarian response is significantly underfunded.

Amid global paradox, solutions that

unify economic and social progress needed – UN labour chief

20 February 2017 – Highlighting that many around the world are left out from being able to benefit from global prosperity dividends and that even flourishing societies are seeing inequalities widen, the head of the United Nations labour agency today called for solutions that can bring economic growth combined with social progress.

In his message on World Day of Social Justice, UN International Labour Organization chief Guy Ryder also underlined that the feeling of absence of social justice: children without secure futures, parents without decent jobs and a general feeling of abandonment, have grave consequences not only for communities and societies, but for economies as well.

“We need solutions that lead away from conflict and towards recovery, to economic growth with social progress, solutions that build institutions girded by labour standards that guarantee rights at work,” said Mr. Ryder.

“In an interconnected world this is a global agenda and a global responsibility,” he added.

Marked this year with the theme ‘Preventing conflict and sustaining peace through decent work’ the Day calls upon the international community work towards eradicating poverty, promoting full employment and decent work, gender equity, and access to social well-being and justice for all.

Mr. Ryder also stressed that lack of decent jobs and the fear that aspirations for a better life will remain unfulfilled multiplies people’s worries, leaving young people without a “stake in society.”

Urging for the formulation of policies that can deliver the decent work opportunities given their importance for the stability and success of societies, he added: “[The words] *Si vis pacem, cole justitium*: ‘If you seek peace, cultivate justice’ [...] are as compelling today as they were when written nearly one hundred years ago when the world was emerging from the ravages of war.”

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In 2007, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 20 February as World Day of Social Justice, inviting Member States to promote national activities in accordance with the objectives and goals of the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly.

Also today, UN independent human rights experts underlined everyone’s right to a standard of living that ensures adequate health and well-being for themselves and their families, including access to food, clothing, housing,

health care and social services.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which sets out these rights, also makes clear that all people are entitled to a social and international order in which their rights and freedoms can be fully realized," said Alfred de Zayas, UN Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order; and Idriss Jazairy, UN Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights.

They also underlined that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include commitments to eradicate poverty, provide clean, affordable energy, promote peaceful and inclusive societies, and implement nationally appropriate social protection systems for all, including social protection floors.

'Historic' day as last FARC-EP members gather to turn in arms – UN mission in Colombia

20 February 2017 – About 300 members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) today arrived in central Colombia's Agua Bonita zone, bringing the number to close to 6,900, to lay down their arms under United Nations verification, and to begin a transition to social, economic and political life, the UN Mission in the country said today.

In the past 19 days they rode cars, buses, boats or walked some 8,700 kilometres [...] across the country, accompanied by over 860 [members] of the tripartite Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (MVM), " read a news release from the UN Mission in Colombia.

The Mission's Chief Observer and MVM coordinator, Major General Javier Pérez Aquino, called the day "historic."

The UN Mission in Colombia and the MVM consider that the FARC-EP's decision to move into the zones " in spite of the limited logistics in the majority of them " very positive," he said.

This decision considerably reduces the possibility of armed contact [...] and we also hope that their presence will accelerate the construction works in these camps, creating the appropriate conditions to continue with the process that will lead to their reinsertion into the social, economic and political life," he added.

The Chief Observer also noted that despite limited logistics, the deadline

for the completion of the laying down of arms – 180 days after the Final Agreement, which came into force on 1 December – stands.

Working hand-in-hand so that 'our children and grandchildren live in a conflict-free country'

In Colombia's capital, Bogotá, as well as at eight regional and 26 local sites, FARC-EP and Government members, along with 350 UN observers, are working together to verify the parties' commitments towards the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities.

"We work together to implement the Final Agreement and I feel hopeful that this process will lead to a country with more social justice," said 45-year-old Esperanza Fajardo, who joined FARC-EP in the 1990's, now working with Government and UN Mission counterparts.

Mayor Alejandro Cruz, from the Government, echoed: "I feel very committed to this process because I want our children and grandchildren to live in a conflict-free country."

Mr. Cruz was twice injured in combat with the FARC-EP and bears a large scar on his chest while Ms. Fajardo joined the rebel group to escape the killings of left-wing *Unión Patriótica* political affiliates.

In early October 2016, Colombian voters narrowly rejected the historic peace accord between the Government and the FARC-EP. That deal led to a cessation of hostilities and agreements on key issues such as political participation, land rights, illicit drugs and victims' rights and transitional justice. The two sides signed a new agreement in late November.

Attack in Somali capital a reminder of extremists' indifference towards human life – UN envoy

19 February 2017 – Strongly condemning today's terrorist attack at a marketplace in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, which reportedly killed at least 25 people and injured dozens more, the United Nations envoy in the country stressed that incident is a brutal reminder of the retrograde tactics employed by violent extremists.

"Killing civilians is despicable and achieves nothing" – except to remind Somalia of the indifference of extremists to human life and suffering, underscored Michael Keating, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and the head of the UN mission in the country (UNSO), in a statement.

“The perpetrators need to be brought to justice swiftly,” he added.

Earlier today, at about 13:00 local time, a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device detonated at the Abagedo market near Kawa Guudey in the Dharkenley district of Mogadishu, claiming the lives of pedestrians and shopkeepers in the vicinity.

According to UNSOM, no group has yet claimed responsibility.

The attack comes at a time when Somalia is preparing for the inaugural celebrations of its newly elected Federal President, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed ‘Farmajo’, who came to office earlier this month amid an “extraordinary public outpouring of euphoria marking the beginning of a new chapter in Somali history that is ripe with opportunity and promise,” noted the statement.

In the statement, Mr. Keating also praised the work of the country’s security forces and first responders in the aftermath of the attack, and offered his condolences to the families and friends of those who were killed.

UN, international organizations condemn attacks on civilians in parts of Central African Republic

19 February 2017 – Voicing deep concern over the security situation in the Central African Republic (CAR), in particular in the Ouaka and Hautte-Kotto prefectures, the United Nations together with the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the African Union (AU), the Organization of La Francophonie (IOF) and the European Union (EU) have commended the acts of violence that have exasperated an already alarming humanitarian situation.

According to a joint statement issued by the five organizations, violence perpetrated by the *Front populaire pour la Renaissance de Centrafrique* and its allies, as well as *Mouvement pour l’Unité et la Paix en Centrafrique* caused heavy civilian casualties as well as significant population displacement, adding to the humanitarian woes in the region.

Demanding that the belligerents cease the hostilities immediately, the organizations emphasized that “all attacks against the civilian population, UN and humanitarian personnel may be subject to judicial prosecution, in line with the [national] legislation and international law.”

They also expressed their deep appreciation for “robust action” undertaken by the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the

CAR, popularly known by its French acronym MINUSCA to protect civilians and help put an end to violence in the areas threatened by the belligerents and encouraged the mission to continue its efforts.

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In the joint statement, the organizations also welcomed the measures put in place for the operationalization of the Special Criminal Court.

They also underlined that only dialogue, in strict adherence with the constitutional and democratic order, will allow the concerned Central African actors to find the appropriate and sustainable responses to their legitimate grievances.

In this regard, they reiterate the importance of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation led by the AU, ECCAS and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and supported by Angola, the Republic of Congo and Chad, noted the joint statement.

In addition, expressing their commitment to work together for the success of the Initiative, in support of the efforts of President Faustin-Archange Touadéra aimed at sustainably promoting reconciliation and inclusive governance in line with the conclusions of the Bangui Forum, the five partner organizations underscored that those armed groups that engage in new violent acts run the risk of excluding themselves from the African Initiative and expose themselves to additional international sanctions.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, plunged the country of 4.5 million people into civil conflict in 2013. Despite significant progress and successful elections, CAR has remained in the grip of instability and sporadic unrest.