

UN agency 'alarmed' by uncertainty facing refugees in the process of being resettled in US

30 January 2017 – The head of the United Nations refugee agency today said he is “deeply worried” by the uncertainty facing thousands of refugees around the world who are in the process of being resettled to the United States after the country suspended its refugee programme last week.

According to a news release from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 800 refugees were set to make America their new home this week alone, but instead find themselves barred from travelling to the US.

The statement follows President Donald Trump’s signing last Friday of an Executive Order that, among things, suspends the US refugee programme for 120 days and, according to the media, bars entry of refugees from several mostly Muslim countries, including Syria, until further notice.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi underlined once again UNHCR’s position that refugees should receive equal treatment for protection and assistance, and opportunities for resettlement, regardless of their religion, nationality or race.

UNHCR estimates, based on average monthly figures for the last 15 years, that 20,000 refugees in precarious circumstances might have been resettled to the US during the 120 days covered by the Order.

“Refugees are anxious, confused and heartbroken at this suspension in what is already a lengthy process,” the release said.

“Those accepted for resettlement by the United States are, after a rigorous US security screening process, coming to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity. UNHCR hopes that they will be able to do so as soon as possible,” the release added.

Noting that for decades, the US has been a global leader in refugee protection, a tradition rooted in the tolerance and generosity of the American people, UNHCR expressed the hope that the country will continue its strong leadership role and its long history of protecting those who are fleeing conflict and persecution.

Meanwhile, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) issued a statement on child refugees that might be affected by the new US policy.

“The needs of refugees have never been greater. Worldwide 28 million children have been uprooted by conflict, driven from their homes by violence and terror. They need our help,” the statement said.

“The United States has a long and proud tradition of protecting children fleeing war and persecution. We trust that this support will continue and that the recent measures will prove to be temporary. All refugee children need our support.”

UNICEF said it is committed to continuing its work with governments and other partners around the world to help some of the most vulnerable children everywhere, from Syria to Yemen to South Sudan.

UN mission in South Sudan ‘deeply concerned’ by clashes between Government and opposition forces

30 January 2017 – Amid an outbreak of violence in the South Sudanese city of Malakal, the United Nations mission in the country today called on the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) and the SPLA in Opposition to silence the guns.

“The Mission reiterates its call on all parties to immediately cease hostilities and fully implement the peace agreement,” according to a statement from the Office of the Spokesperson at the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

UNMISS said that as of Sunday, the situation in the town remained “tense.” UN peacekeepers are continuing to regularly patrol the northern town, and report that it is “largely deserted.”

The UN Mission “will continue to act within its capacity to protect South Sudanese civilians in imminent danger,” the spokesperson said, calling for humanitarian aid and access to the affected areas.

South Sudan has faced ongoing challenges since a political face-off between President Salva Kiir and his then former Vice-President Riek Machar erupted into full blown conflict between forces loyal to each in December 2013. The crisis has produced one of the world’s worst displacement situations with immense suffering for civilians.

Despite the August 2015 peace agreement that formally ended the war, conflict and instability have also spread to previously unaffected areas in the Greater Equatoria and Greater Bahr-El-Ghazal regions of the country.

At Youth Forum, UN calls on young people to help realize a better future for all

30 January 2017 – Drawing attention challenges such as climate change, unemployment and inequality, confronting young people around the world, including in places where peace prevails, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today called for the youth to speak up and share their stories.

“Tell us how the United Nations can see the world from your perspective – and answer your concerns,” said Mr. Guterres in a video message to representatives gathered at UN Headquarters in New York for the sixth annual Youth Forum.

According to estimates, about 74 million young people around the world cannot find a job, many youth are driven from their homes due to conflicts, and, in places where there is peace, they suffer violence and discrimination.

The UN chief, however, emphasized that young people are also on the vanguard of progress – as entrepreneurs, activists and community leaders.

“You inspire change [...] you have the talent, energy and ideals to prevent conflicts, defend human rights, secure peace and realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” he added, noting that their messages will help “create a safer and more stable world for all.”

You have the talent, energy and ideals to prevent conflicts, defend human rights, secure peace and realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
UN Secretary-General António Guterres

The Youth Forum, is held annually by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 2012, offers young people an opportunity to voice their opinions, share ideas, and think together about what they can do to achieve sustainable development.

Also speaking at the occasion, ECOSOC President Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava stressed that every day, a number of young people risk their lives, attempting treacherous journeys, seeking refuge from war and conflict. Furthermore, many are fleeing crises caused by financial dislocations and climate change.



ECOSOC President Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava addresses the 2017 ECOSOC Youth Forum. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

Such unplanned movements combined with other processes associated with globalization, he added, “are seen as a path to lower wages, a weakening of cultural and religious identities and rising inequality.”

Underlining the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly for young people, he noted: “It is your future we are building in implementing the Agenda. This is why we need you to play a role in shaping the world you will be living in.”

Similarly, the President of the UN General Assembly, Peter Thomson also highlighted the importance of the SDGs and said that the 2030 Agenda together with Paris Agreement on climate change provides a universal masterplan to place humanity on a trajectory to a safe, secure and prosperous future for all.

VIDEO: Speaking at the ECOSOC Youth Forum, UN General Assembly President tells participants that youth should be ‘fully engaged’ in sustainable development processes.

“Implemented urgently, effectively and at scale, these agreements will transform our world, to one in which extreme poverty is eliminated and prosperity is increased and shared more equitably,” he said, and added that achieving a future envisioned in these documents would require new and bold ideas, innovative and strategic thinking, and urgent collaborative action.

“It will require fundamental changes in the way we produce goods and consume them if our world is to be sustainable,” he added, underscoring: “Youth will have to be at the forefront of this transformation.”

Also speaking at the Forum, Ahmad Alhendawi, Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth called on young people not to lose hope but to become a source of hope to the world and called on all sectors of the society to work with the youth.

AUDIO: UN Youth Envoy Ahmad Alhendawi says young people are “ready and able to do the heavy lifting” to implement the Sustainable Development Goals.
Credit: UN News

The two-day Forum was organized by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in collaboration with the Office of the Youth Envoy of the Secretary-General and the UN Inter-agency Network on Youth Development.

South Sudan: UN and regional partners call for immediate cessation of hostilities

29 January 2017 – The United Nations, the African Union (AU) and regional partners today reiterated their call for an immediate cessation of hostilities in South Sudan and urged the parties to ensure an inclusive political process, both in the proposed National Dialogue and in the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement.

Meeting in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, on the margins of the 28th African Union Summit, the AU, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the UN, held a joint consultative meeting on South Sudan.

According to a joint press statement issued after the meeting, the participants expressed their deep concerns over the continuing spread of fighting, and risk of inter-communal violence escalating into mass atrocities, and the dire humanitarian situation in South Sudan. As such, they reaffirmed their continued and collective commitment in the search for lasting peace, security and stability in the country.

Stating that there can only be a political solution to the conflict, within the framework of the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS), the AU, IGAD and UN reiterated their call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and urged the parties to ensure an inclusive political process, both in the proposed National Dialogue and in the implementation of the peace deal.

The AU, IGAD and the UN reaffirmed their commitment and determination to further enhance their cooperation in support of the South Sudan peace process

Further to the press statement, the participants commended the important work performed by the Chairperson of the Joint Ministering and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) responsible for monitoring and overseeing the implementation of the Agreement and encouraged the AU High Representative for South Sudan to undertake active shuttle diplomacy towards ensuring the inclusivity of the National Dialogue and the implementation of the peace accord, in close consultation with the JMEC Chairperson, the UN and IGAD.

The AU, IGAD and the UN reaffirmed their commitment and determination to further enhance their cooperation in support of the South Sudan peace process, the statement added.

The meeting, chaired by Hailemariam Desalegn, Prime Minister of Ethiopia and Chairperson of IGAD, was also attended by Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson

of the AU Commission; and UN Secretary-General António Guterres. The AU High Representative for South Sudan, former President Alpha Oumar Konare, and the Chairperson of the JMEC, former President Festus Mogae briefed the meeting.

Also in attendance, were the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, the Executive Secretary of IGAD, the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, and other senior officials of the three organizations.

South Sudan has faced ongoing challenges since a political face-off between President Salva Kiir and his then former Vice-President Riek Machar erupted into full blown conflict in December 2013. The crisis has produced one of the world's worst displacement situations with immense suffering for civilians.

Despite the August 2015 peace agreement that formally ended the war, conflict and instability have also spread to previously unaffected areas in the Greater Equatoria and Greater Bahr-El-Ghazal regions of South Sudan.

As new drought hits Ethiopia, UN urges support for Government's 'remarkable' efforts

29 January 2017 – Commending the Ethiopian Government and humanitarian partners on the response to last year's El Niño drought that left 10.2 million people needing food assistance, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres and UN aid chief Stephen O'Brien today said the international community must show "total solidarity" with country as it faces a new drought.

"This High-Level event must express our total solidarity with the Ethiopian people and the Ethiopian Government. And let's be clear: that solidarity is not a matter of generosity. It is a matter of justice and of self-interest," the Secretary-General told those gathered for the event, held earlier today in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, on the margins of the 28th Summit of the African Union.

It is a matter of justice in relation to the enormous generosity of the Ethiopian people themselves, he said, recalling that during his 10 years as UN High Commissioner for Refugees, he had witnessed the way Ethiopia became not only the largest African refugee-hosting country but the country with the most determined policy of keeping all its borders open, even in the most difficult security situations; "an example that, I would say, needs to be thought about in a world where unfortunately, so many borders are being closed."

Moreover, he said, the current crisis has not caught the Government and the

people of Ethiopia unprepared, even if the magnitude of the crisis clearly is above the capacity of the Horn of Africa country to resolve. Ethiopia has persistently applied a policy of building resilience in relation to the natural disasters that unfortunately with climate change have come to be more and more frequent and intense," explained Mr. Guterres.

Showing solidarity with Ethiopia is a matter of self-interest because the link between humanitarian and development with peace and security is growing everywhere, and to invest in building resilience of populations and to invest in the best humanitarian needs in situations of stress like the one we are facing is also to contribute to strengthen peace and security," said Mr. Guterres, noting that a number of countries around Ethiopia are in the midst of deep crises Somalia, South Sudan and Eritrea.

In Ethiopia and beyond, development and peace and security must be tackled jointly UN chief

Describing Ethiopia as a pillar of stability in the region, he said the international community cannot allow the effect of drought to be a promoter of additional instability, social unrest, or conflict as this would have dreadful consequences not only in relation to the conflicts in the area but in connection to displacements of populations, in a world that is so little inclined to receive more migrants, and to global terrorism that is now a threat everywhere.

With all this in mind, he urged the participants to transform this session of solidarity in a commitment to work together not only to address the pressing humanitarian needs of Ethiopia but to join efforts in addressing the huge challenges from a development perspective, a sustainable development perspective and from a peace and security perspective the world faces today.

Just back from a three-day visit to Ethiopia to see first-hand the impact of failed rains in the southern parts of the country, Mr. O'Brien, who is the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, said that in Warder zone in Ethiopia's Somali Region, he had witnessed the immense impact the drought is having on people's lives and livelihoods.

Below average rains in south and southeastern parts of the country caused by the negative Indian Ocean Dipole have led to a new lowland drought. Among the most affected areas are parts of Somali and Afar regions and a number of lowland areas of Oromia and SNNP regions. The new drought has led to severe shortages of water and pasture in the pastoral and agro-pastoral communities. Deteriorating livestock body condition and loss of livestock are also being reported as well as high levels of acute and moderate malnutrition.

We have no time to lose UN Emergency Relief Coordinator

"We need to act now before it is too late," said Mr. O'Brien, calling on the international partners to join the Ethiopian Government in funding the 2017 Humanitarian Requirements Document, which seeks \$948 million

to assist 5.6 million people, whose lives, livelihoods and well-being depend on support from relief partners.

As effective as the humanitarian response to the 2016 El Niño drought has been, Ethiopian farmers and herders in affected areas are still living on the brink, unable to build back their livestock herds, or reinvigorate their small farms, and struggling to sustain themselves and their families, said Mr. O'Brien.

"We have no time to lose. Livestock are already dying; pastoralists and farmers are already fleeing their homes in search of water and pasture; children – more often girls – are dropping out of school to support with household chores, and hunger and malnutrition levels will rise soon if assistance does not arrive on time, particularly among women who are more likely to suffer from health problems and malnutrition during droughts," he stressed.