

Starving children in famine-facing countries threatened by lack of water, sanitation – UN agency

29 March 2017 – In African and Middle Eastern countries facing famine, unsafe water is as dangerous for severely malnourished children as lack of food, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) today warned, noting that nearly 27 million people are at risk in northeast Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen.

Unsafe water can cause malnutrition or make it worse, no matter how much food a malnourished child eats, he or she will not get better if the water they are drinking is not safe,” said Manuel Fontaine, UNICEF Director of Emergency Programmes.

The UN agency is warning that a combination of malnutrition, dirty water and poor sanitation sets off a vicious cycle from which many children never recover.

In northeast Nigeria, where the fight on Boko Haram damaged or destroyed 75 per cent of water and sanitation infrastructure, some 3.8 million people have no access to safe water, according to UNICEF.

In Somalia, about one-third of the population is expected to need access to water and sanitation in the coming weeks, according to the UN agency, pushing the current needs from 3.3 million to 4.5 million of people.

Some 5.1 million people lack safe water, sanitation and hygiene in South Sudan, where half of the water points in the country have been damaged or destroyed.

RELATED: UN aid chief calls for access, funds to prevent spread of South Sudan's famine

The fighting in Yemen has displaced at least 14.5 million people, leaving them without basic sanitation and adequate drinking water, UNICEF cautioned. According to the latest figures, almost 2 million children are at risk of diarrheal diseases which, even before the conflict, were the second leading cause of death among children under the age of five.

UNICEF is working with other UN agencies, national authorities and local partners to provide safe water and sanitation to children.

“But without an end to the conflicts plaguing these countries, without sustainable and unimpeded access to the children in need of support and without more resources, even our best efforts will not be enough,” Mr. Fontaine said.

UN health agency highlights importance of measles vaccine amid Europe outbreak

29 March 2017 – Hundreds of measles cases have been reported in Europe – leading the United Nations health agency to urge families to vaccinate their children and for national authorities to take urgent measures to stop transmission at the borders.

“Outbreaks will continue in Europe, as elsewhere, until every country reaches the level of immunization needed to fully protect their populations,” said Zsuzsanna Jakab, World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for Europe.

At least 500 cases were diagnosed since this January, the majority in France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania, Switzerland and Ukraine.

Measles are endemic in all of the above countries, and the estimated national immunization coverage with the second dose of measles-containing vaccine is believed to be less than the 95 per cent threshold.

“Measles continues to spread within and among European countries, with the potential to cause large outbreaks wherever immunization coverage has dropped below the necessary threshold,” WHO reported.

The largest outbreaks are in Romania, where more than 3,400 cases have been reported since January of last year, and in Italy, where more than 850 cases are expected in the coming weeks.

Measles is a highly contagious virus that remains endemic in most parts of the world. International standards recommend that the Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) vaccine be given in two doses, starting at 12 to 15 months of age, and the second dose at 4 through 6 years of age.

“I urge all endemic countries to take urgent measures to stop transmission of measles within their borders, and all countries that have already achieved this to keep up their guard and sustain high immunization coverage. Together we must make sure that the hard-earned progress made towards regional elimination is not lost,” said Dr. Jakab.

Pro-poor urbanization, sustainable infrastructure can unlock Asia-Pacific's prosperity – UN

29 March 2017 – Some 400 million people in Asia and the Pacific still confront poverty as part of their daily lives due to widening income inequality, despite the region's impressive gains in reducing poverty in recent decades, a United Nations-backed report has found.

As outlined in the report, a renewed strengthening of the social contract is critical for addressing multi-dimensional poverty and the high marginalization and exclusion of people, the Executive Secretary of ESCAP, Shamshad Akhtar, told the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD 2017), according to a press release from ESCAP.

Titled *Eradicating Poverty and Promoting Prosperity in a Changing Asia-Pacific*, the report notes that on top of the 400 million people, or one in 10, living in extreme poverty, more than one in four people in the region's developing countries experience poverty in multiple dimensions, including additional deprivations that impact their health, education, and standard of living.

The report underscores the importance of addressing poverty through pro-poor urbanization, effective management of rural-urban transitions, and investment in sustainable infrastructure.

Although people in extreme income poverty are more likely to live in rural areas, they are increasingly found in cities, therefore provision of high quality, low-carbon, and resilient infrastructure is essential.

Asia's infrastructure needs are large and will only grow, with our recent report suggesting that the region will need \$1.7 trillion annually in climate-resilient infrastructure investments, said ADB's Vice-President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development, Bambang Susantono.

How our region chooses to bridge the infrastructure gap will have profound global implications. Concerted efforts, as highlighted in the tripartite report, can help us cover the last mile for infrastructure towards inclusive and sustainable development, he added.

Also addressing the forum was Haoliang Xu, UN Assistant Secretary-General and UNDP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific.

As urbanization booms across Asia and the Pacific, its cities are powering innovation, economic growth, and prosperity, lifting many out of poverty. But there has also been an increase in inequality and exclusion in some regions, he said.

To be more inclusive and to leave no one behind, cities must adopt

innovative policies that align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and prioritize building the resilience of the most vulnerable groups," he added.

ESCAP, ADB, and UNDP also launched a new SDG Data Portal today to provide up to date data on SDG indicators for governments and stakeholders in Asia and the Pacific, along with an outlook assessment on SDGs in the region.

APFSD 2017 is being held by ESCAP in Bangkok from 29 to 31 March 2017. The conclusions and recommendations at the forum will inform discussions of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development at the global level, to be convened in New York in July 2017.

[In Jordan, UN chief urges region's leaders to shape 'new Arab world' able to address differences through cooperation](#)

29 March 2017 – Addressing the League of Arab States Summit in Jordan today, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres highlighted the importance of unity among the countries in the region to confront the challenges it is facing.

"Divisions in the Arab world have opened the door to foreign intervention and manipulation, breeding instability, sectarian strife and terrorism," said Mr. Guterres.

"At this time of transition and upheaval, unity will be critical," he said, emphasizing: "I appeal to your leadership in shaping a new Arab world able to address and solve, by itself, differences through dialogue and cooperation."

In his remarks, the Secretary-General also underscored the importance of partnership between the UN and the Arab League and said that it was his responsibility to use his good offices, in cooperation with Member States, as an added dimension for conflict resolution.

"It is time to end the fighting in Syria," he said, expressing hope that the Astana process can achieve an effective ceasefire.

"By now it should be clear to all involved that while fighting terrorism is essential, any success will prove ephemeral without a political solution that allows the Syrian people to freely decide their own fate," he added, underlining the need, also, to support Syrian refugees in their hour

of need.

Further, welcoming the progress in retaking territories held by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), the UN chief expressed hope that the violence in Yemen and Libya can be resolved soon.

Turning to the peace process in the Middle East, Mr. Guterres underscored that the two-state solution is the only path to ensure that Palestinians and Israelis can realize their national aspirations and live in peace, security and dignity.

“There is no Plan B,” he stated.

Concluding in his address, the Secretary-General highlighted the importance of addressing youth unemployment as well as empowerment of women – both as a matter of human rights as well as a spur to human development.

“Let us recognize the power and responsibility that lies in our hands to improve the lives of the people we serve.”

DR Congo: UN and regional partners express concern about Kasai unrest

28 March 2017 – The United Nations and regional partner organizations today expressed deep concern about the situation in the central Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) where at least two United Nations experts disappeared two weeks ago and dozens of police officers were reportedly found dead.

The UN, the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU) and the International Organization of La Francophonie (IOF) today released a joint statement warning that the level of violence and reported human rights violations necessitate “an urgent response from the country’s political leaders.”

The statement calls on defence and security forces to exercise restraint in the efforts to restore order, and encourages the recently-initiated dialogue between the Government and the Kamuina Nsapu militia.

The UN, AU, EU and IOF also reiterated their call for a credible investigation into the human rights violation and assurances that the perpetrators are held to account.

In the joint statement, the organizations underscored their support for the 31 December 2016 political agreement.

The agreement – facilitated by Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo (CENCO) mediators, and reached in DRC’s capital, Kinshasa, on 31 December

2016 – represents a significant step towards a peacefully managed transition consistent with the democratic principles enshrined in the country's Constitution.