

Yemen: UN verifies nearly 1,500 boys recruited for use in armed conflict

28 February 2017 – The United Nations human rights office today urged all warring parties in Yemen to immediately release child soldiers, noting that the UN has verified the recruitment of 1,476 children, all boys, between 26 March 2015 and 31 January 2017.

“The numbers are likely to be much higher as most families are not willing to talk about the recruitment of their children, for fear of reprisals,” Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), told reporters at the regular bi-weekly press briefing in Geneva.

She said her Office received numerous reports of the recruitment of children in Yemen for use in the armed conflict, mostly by the Popular Committees affiliated with the Houthis.

Since 2015, the southern Arabian nation has been in a conflict between forces loyal to President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi and those allied to the Houthi rebel movement.

Just last week, OHCHR received new reports of children who were recruited without the knowledge of their families.

“Children under the age of 18 often join the fighting after either being misled or attracted by promises of financial rewards or social status. Many are then quickly sent to the front lines of the conflict or tasked with manning checkpoints,” Ms. Shamdasani said.

She reminded all parties to the conflict that the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict is strictly forbidden by international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and when concerning cases of recruitment of children under fifteen may amount to a war crime.

The conflict in Yemen has, between March 2015 and 23 February 2017, led to 4,667 civilian deaths and 8,180 injured civilians.

At the same briefing, Christophe Boulierac, spokesperson for the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), said that every 10 minutes, a child under the age of five died in Yemen from preventable diseases such as diarrhoea, pneumonia or measles, because the health system is on the verge of collapse. Some 50 per cent of the health facilities in the country were not functioning.

“The rate of severe acute malnutrition in children under five had tripled between 2014 and 2016. There are currently approximately 2.2 million malnourished children in the country, including 462,000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition,” he said.

South Sudan: UN official calls for unfettered relief access to avert further catastrophe

28 February 2017 – With hundreds of thousands in need of assistance in famine-struck parts of South Sudan and rising insecurity hampering relief work, a senior United Nations relief official in the country has called on all parties to ensure that humanitarian access is immediate, safe and unhindered across the nation.

“The people of South Sudan are suffering beyond measure. [The famine] represents only the most extreme tip of the iceberg of needs in this country,” said Eugene Owusu, the Humanitarian Coordinator in the country, in a news release issued by the UN Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

On 20 February, famine was formally declared in parts of the country. A formal declaration means people have already started dying of hunger.

“To avert further catastrophe, it is imperative that humanitarian access is able to act swiftly and robustly,” Mr. Owusu underlined.

The UN official’s call follows a series of recent events which have hampered humanitarian operations and placed civilians at risk. For instance, during clashes in Jonglei state, humanitarian compounds were looted by armed actors and community members; and 28 humanitarian workers were forced to relocate from Mayendit County, one of the two counties hit by famine in Unity state, due to insecurity.

Aid workers were also denied access last week to key locations outside of Lainya town, in Central Equatoria, where tens of thousands of people in need have not been reached with aid in months.

RELATED: Famine declared in region of South Sudan – UN

“I implore all parties to this conflict to uphold their responsibilities under international humanitarian law, place the plight of the people first, give aid workers unfettered access, and protect civilians,” Mr. Owusu added.

“Time is of the essence, and lives are in the balance, so it is critical that these words be translated into concrete actions on the ground immediately.”

The news release also noted that President of South Sudan provided reassurances that all humanitarian organizations will have unimpeded access

to needy populations across the country.

According to OCHA, insecurity and lack of access have complicated an already worrying situation: more than 100,000 people face starvation in the famine-declared parts of the country, and a further one million are on the brink of famine. There are also fears that by the height of the lean season in July, some 5.5 million people could face severe food insecurity across the country.

Additionally, since December 2013, about 3.4 million people have been displaced, including about 1.5 million who fled as refugees to neighbouring countries.

Against this backdrop, humanitarian organizations have appealed urgent funds to respond to the escalating crisis, with \$1.6 billion required to provide life-saving assistance and protection to some 5.8 million people across South Sudan in 2017.

[UN health agency announces list of bacteria for which new antibiotics are urgently needed](#)

27 February 2017 – The United Nations health agency today published its first-ever catalogue of antibiotic-resistant bacteria that pose the greatest threat to human health.

The list of priority pathogens consisting of 12 families of bacteria was drawn up to guide and promote research and development (R&D) of new antibiotics, as part of the World Health Organization (WHO)'s efforts to address growing global resistance to antimicrobial medicines.

"This list is a new tool to ensure R&D responds to urgent public health needs," said Marie-Paule Kieny, WHO's Assistant Director-General for Health Systems and Innovation in a news release.

"Antibiotic resistance is growing, and we are fast running out of treatment options. If we leave it to market forces alone, the new antibiotics we most urgently need are not going to be developed in time," she warned.

The list highlights in particular the threat of 'gram-negative' bacteria that are resistant to multiple antibiotics. These bacteria have built-in abilities to find new ways to resist treatment and can pass along genetic material that allows other bacteria to become drug-resistant as well.

The WHO list is divided into three categories according to the urgency of

need for new antibiotics: critical, high and medium priority.

Priority 1: CRITICAL

- *Acinetobacter baumannii*, carbapenem-resistant
- *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, carbapenem-resistant
- *Enterobacteriaceae*, carbapenem-resistant, ESBL-producing

The most critical group of all includes multidrug resistant bacteria that pose a particular threat in hospitals, nursing homes, and among patients whose care requires devices such as ventilators and blood catheters. They include *Acinetobacter*, *Pseudomonas* and various *Enterobacteriaceae*, including *Klebsiella*, *E. coli*, *Serratia*, and *Proteus*. They can cause severe and often deadly infections such as bloodstream infections and pneumonia.

These bacteria have become resistant to a large number of antibiotics, including carbapenems and third generation cephalosporins – the best available antibiotics for treating multi-drug resistant bacteria.

G20 health experts will meet this week in Berlin. The list is intended to spur governments to put in place policies that incentivize basic science and advanced R&D by both publicly funded agencies and the private sector investing in new antibiotic discovery.

While more R&D is vital, alone, it cannot solve the problem. To address resistance, there must also be better prevention of infections and appropriate use of existing antibiotics in humans and animals, as well as rational use of any new antibiotics that are developed in future.

Refugees and migrants taking ‘enormous risks’ to reach Europe – UN agency

27 February 2017 – Increased border restrictions and lack of accessible legal ways to reach Europe have caused refugees and migrants to take more diversified and dangerous journeys, such as relying on people-smugglers or using flimsy boats to cross rough seas, a new report by the United Nations refugee agency has revealed.

This report clearly shows that the lack of accessible and safe pathways leads refugees and migrants to take enormous risks while attempting to reach Europe, including those simply trying to join family members, said Vincent Cochetel, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Director of Europe Bureau, in a news release announcing the report.

According to *Desperate Journeys*, issued today by UNHCR, the

closure of the Western Balkan route and the European Union (EU)-Turkey Statement in March 2016, caused a drastic decrease in the number of people reaching Greece via the Eastern Mediterranean route.

However since then, the Central Mediterranean route from North Africa to Italy become the primary entry point to Europe and arrival trends in Italy show that the primary nationalities who crossed to Greece had not switched in significant numbers to the Central Mediterranean route.

In addition to drowning, migrants and refugees also risk of being kidnapped, held against their will for several days, physical and sexual abuse, torture and extortion by smugglers and criminal gangs at several points along key routes.

The Central Mediterranean route

The UN agency pointed out that in 2016, some 181,436 arrived in Italy by sea in need of international protection, and also victims of trafficking and migrants seeking better lives. About 90 per cent of them travelled by boat from Libya, and the top two nationalities of those arriving were Nigerians (21 per cent) and Eritreans (11 per cent).

This route is particularly dangerous and, in 2016, recorded more deaths at sea than ever before.

RELATED: UN reports more than 300 migrant deaths on Mediterranean crossing in first two months of 2017

Furthermore, children making this journey are especially vulnerable, and the number of unaccompanied and separated children arriving is increasing. Last year more than 25,000 came, representing 14 per cent of all new arrivals in Italy.

Their number more than doubled compared to the previous year, said UNHCR.

The Western and Eastern Mediterranean routes

The report also showed that in the last part of 2016, more people reached the continent through the Western Mediterranean route, either by crossing the sea to Spain from Morocco and Algeria, or by entering the Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta.

Similarly, people continued to leave Turkey along the Eastern Mediterranean route from April onwards, but in much smaller numbers. Most crossed the sea to Greece or Cyprus, others also crossed via land into the country or into Bulgaria.

Most who arrived by sea to Greece (87 per cent) came from the top ten refugee producing countries.

This was also the case for those who continued to move along the Western Balkans route: in Serbia, for instance, 82 per cent of those who arrived came

from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria and almost half are children – 20 per cent of those unaccompanied.

These numbers, however, numbers have reduced since April 2016, noted UNHCR.

Additionally, according to the study, tens of thousands of people also have been reportedly pushed back by border authorities in Europe, including in Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Serbia, Spain, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, with many cases of alleged violence and abuses in an apparent attempt to deter further entry attempts.

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 Gumedze (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.