

'No time to lose' as humanitarian catastrophe looms in Somalia – UN agencies

17 February 2017 – Amid worsening of an already devastating drought in Somalia, United Nations agencies have underlined that only a massive and immediate scale-up of humanitarian assistance can help the country avoid falling into another catastrophe.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN World Food Programme (WFP) some 6.2 million people – almost half the country's population – are either severely food insecure or in need of livelihood support.

“Huge numbers of Somalis have come to the end of all their possible resources and are living hand-to-mouth,” said Steven Lauwerier, the UNICEF Somalia Representative, underlining that there is only a small window of opportunity to arrest the looming humanitarian crisis and save lives.

The situation of children is particularly concerning: close to one million children are estimated to be malnourished this year, including 185,000 severely malnourished and in need of urgent lifesaving support. There are also grave fears that this number could increase to 270,000 over the coming months.

The ongoing drought and other shocks have left communities – that have already been battered by decades of conflict – with little to no resources to fall back on, the two UN agencies said in a joint news release.

Whole villages have lost their crops or seen their livestock die. The prices of water and locally produced food have risen dramatically, and thousands of people are on the move in search of food and water.

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The drought has also led to an increase in waterborne diseases with more than 4,000 cases of Acute Watery Diarrhoea/Cholera this year.

“Humanitarian assistance has saved lives in the drought-affected north over the past year, but as the crisis spreads we have no time to lose,” added WFP Country Director Laurent Bukera, noting that together with its partners, the UN agency is “moving as quickly as possible” to reach people with lifesaving support.

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The two agencies further noted that humanitarian access remains con queringly limited in some drought-affected areas of the south, but that WFP and UNICEF are reinforcing their joint efforts to scale up the response in areas that are accessible, where millions of lives are at risk.

The agencies have been responding together to the drought by providing food and water vouchers to hundreds of thousands across the most affected areas of Somalia as well as nutrition assistance.

As additional resources are mobilised, the joint response will continue to expand in the most vulnerable regions.

However, with growing needs, more funds are needed. UNICEF and WFP together still require more than \$450 million to be able to provide urgent assistance required in the coming months.

Global heat melts Arctic and Antarctic sea ice to record lows – UN agency

17 February 2017 – It should be winter on the Arctic pole – the northern most point in the world – but the equivalent of heatwaves have passed over the region this season melting the sea ice volume to a record low in January, the United Nations meteorological agency said.

“Temperatures in the Arctic are quite remarkable and very alarming,” said David Carlson, Director of the World Climate Research Programme which is co-sponsored by the UN World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Council for Science.

Sea ice extent was the lowest on the 38-year-old satellite record for the month of January, both at the Arctic and Antarctic, according to data cited WMO from both the US National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC) and Germany's Sea ice Portal operated by the Alfred-Wegener-Institut.

The Arctic sea ice extent averaged 13.38 million square kilometres in January, according to NSIDC. This is 260,000 square kilometers below the level in January 2016 – an area bigger than the size of the United Kingdom.

“The recovery period for Arctic sea ice is normally in the winter, when it gains both in volume and extent. The recovery this winter has been fragile, at best, and there were some days in January when temperatures were actually above melting point,” said Mr. Carlson.

“This will have serious implications for Arctic sea ice extent in summer

as well as for the global climate system. What happens at the Poles does not stay at the Poles.”

In addition, the ice levels at the Antarctic are also at record lows, even thinner than expected for the summer season there.

UN chief Guterres welcomes the Gambia's rescission of its withdrawal from International Criminal Court

16 February 2017 – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has welcomed the rescission the Gambia's withdrawal from the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

According to statement issued by his spokesperson, Mr. Guterres "welcomes that the Gambia will remain a State Party to the International Criminal Court's founding instrument."

"[He] remains confident that States Parties will continue to further strengthen the Court through a constructive dialogue," the statement added.

The notification concerning the rescission of withdrawal was delivered to the UN chief on 10 February.

The Gambia had formally notified the UN chief, who is the depositary of the Rome Statute of the ICC, of its withdrawal from the Rome Statute in November last year – a decision which the Secretary-General deeply regretted, noted the statement.

The statement further noted that over the past two decades, the world has made decisive strides towards building a truly global system of international criminal justice, with the ICC as its centrepiece.

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It added that the Gambia, like so many other African countries, played a major role in the negotiations leading to the adoption of the Rome Statute and was among its first signatories.

The ICC's founding Rome Statute sets out the Court's jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and – as of an amendment in 2010 – the crime of aggression. In addition to jurisdiction, it also addresses issues such as admissibility and applicable law, the composition and administration of the Court, investigations and prosecution, trials,

penalties, appeal and revision, international cooperation and judicial assistance, and enforcement.

Pakistan: UN condemns deadly terrorist attack on Sufi shrine in Sindh province

16 February 2017 – The United Nations has condemned the terrorist attack on worshippers at a Sufi shrine in Sehwan, in Sindh, Pakistan, today, which reportedly left dozens dead and hundreds injured, and for which the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) has claimed responsibility.

This attack, claimed by ISIL/Da'esh, follows a suicide bombing at a rally in Lahore on Monday, and a suicide bombing on a Government compound in the Mohmand tribal area and an attack on a Government van carrying judges in Peshawar on Wednesday, according to a statement issued this afternoon by the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General.

"We extend our condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government and people of Pakistan, and wish a speedy recovery to the injured. We call for the perpetrators of this attack to be brought to justice swiftly," said the statement, adding that the UN supports the Government of Pakistan in its fight against terrorism in full respect of international and human rights norms.

Yemen: Senior UN aid official 'appalled' by airstrikes that kill women and children

16 February 2017 – The top United Nations humanitarian official in Yemen today said he was extremely saddened and appalled by the airstrikes that killed six women and a girl gathering for a funeral in a private residence in the Arhab District of Sana'a Governorate yesterday.

"The manner in which the parties to the conflict are waging this war is taking an unacceptable toll on the civilian population in Yemen and as illustrated by this most recent tragedy, women and children are paying with

their lives," said UN Humanitarian Coordinator Jamie McGoldrick in a statement.

The statement, issued by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said that health authorities confirm six women and a girl killed, as well as at least 15 other women injured, some gravely. Unfortunately, the number of dead could rise as the critically injured struggle to survive.

"I am alarmed to see this tragic loss of life further escalate the fighting, with reports of a retaliatory ballistic missile strike into Saudi Arabia's Asir region," he said.

This incident comes at a time of severe hardship and suffering in Yemen where imposed import restrictions are causing food scarcity and price hikes resulting in worsening food insecurity and malnutrition across the country.

The economic decline caused by the conflict is leading to the collapse of basic service provision. Sana'a airport remains closed to commercial flights, limiting options for those who need this service to access life-saving medical care and restricting movements in and out of the country.

"The people of Yemen have suffered long enough. Peace is the only solution to help end the suffering in Yemen," he said, calling on all the parties to return to the negotiation table.

In a separate statement on the incident, UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, stressed that every day, across Yemen, civilians are killed by indiscriminate attacks by all parties to the conflict on residential areas in complete disregard of the rules of international humanitarian law.

"Attacks on civilians are unjustifiable, regardless of the circumstances. Women and children in particular have been subjected to unspeakable suffering in this brutal conflict. This should stop immediately," he said, calling on all parties to adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law and respect the sanctity of civilian life.

Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed went on to note that the ongoing military clashes on the Red Sea coast are aggravating an already catastrophic humanitarian situation, with tens of thousands of civilians caught in the war zone without access to humanitarian assistance and unable to flee to safety.

"The military activities in the region threaten to disrupt the import of commercial and humanitarian supplies which could have a terrible impact on the food security for large parts of the population," he said, urging all parties to ensure the unhindered movement of commercial and humanitarian supplies, without which millions of Yemenis are at risk of death and famine.