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Security Council establishes UN peacekeeping mission in Central African Republic



Residents of Bangui came out to see Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon when he visited the Central African Republic on 5 April 2014. UN Photo/Samir Afridi

10 April - Deeply concerned about the deteriorating security situation and ongoing human rights abuses in the Central African Republic (CAR), the Security Council today approved the establishment of a nearly 12,000-strong United Nations peacekeeping operation to protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian access in the war-torn country.

Unanimously adopting a new resolution, the Council authorized the mandate of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in CAR (MINUSCA) through 30 April 2015.

The new mission will take over the responsibilities of the African-led International Support Mission, known as MISCA, and, as from 15 September 2014, will initially comprise up to 10,000 military personnel, including 240 military observers and 200 staff officers, as well as 1,800 police personnel, including 1,400 formed police unit personnel and 400 individual police officers, and 20 corrections officers.

Further, the Council requests Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to incorporate the presence of the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA) into MINUSCA as of today and to ensure "a seamless transition" from one entity to the other.

Welcoming the establishment of the new Mission, Mr. Ban underscored that the Council's action "will lead to the immediate, concrete and sustainable support that the Central African people need and deserve."

In a statement issued by his spokesperson in New York, the UN chief called once again for an immediate end to the killings, targeted attacks and other atrocious human rights violations that continue with total impunity.

He commended the tireless efforts of MISCA, which, he said, will continue to implement its mandate until 15 September, alongside French forces known as Sangaris, and the recently authorized European Union Force in the Central African

Republic, EUFOR.

“The United Nations will work closely with MISCA to ensure a seamless transition to MINUSCA,” said the statement, which included a strong call by the Secretary-General on all partners to increase their support to MISCA until MINUSCA becomes fully operational.

The Secretary-General recognized the important role of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the African Union, and the Mediation led by the Republic of Congo in support of the political transition in the Central African Republic.

“This is the moment for the international community to demonstrate its collective support to the efforts undertaken by the Transitional Government, under the leadership of Catherine Samba-Panza, to bring long-lasting peace, stability and reconciliation to the Central African Republic,” said Mr. Ban.

The statement goes on to express the UN chief’s deep appreciation for the committed and courageous work of all UN personnel in the CAR and, in particular, for the exemplary dedication of his Special Representative Babacar Gaye and the rest of the staff of the Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic, BINUCA.

Mr. Ban paid a visit to the CAR this past weekend to focus the world’s attention on a crisis that has been marked by widespread atrocities and suffering, and to call on the country’s citizens to heed the lessons of neighbouring Rwanda and stop the violence.

The UN chief’s visit came amid a recent escalation in fighting in the CAR capital, Bangui, between Christians and Muslims. The crisis, which began in December 2012, has left thousands of people dead, and 2.2 million, about half the population of CAR, in need of humanitarian aid. More than 650,000 people are still internally displaced, and over 290,000 have fled to neighbouring countries in search of refuge.

INTERVIEW: WFP chief declares ‘the time is now’ for Central African Republic



WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin speaks to a little boy in the Central African Republic during her visit in late March 2014. Photo: WFP

10 April - Racing against time and bad weather, prodding fickle donors and an indifferent general public, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) is working on all fronts to support millions of desperate people in the Central African Republic (CAR) and to keep international attention focused on the escalating crisis.

The conflict in the CAR, where a 2012 rebel-led coup has given way to vicious Muslim vs. Christian reprisal attacks and massive human rights violations, has all the grim hallmarks of the world’s other crisis hotspots – Syria, where what began as anti-Government protests has, over the past three years, devolved into a civil war that shows no signs of stopping; and South Sudan, where a political rivalry exploded into full-scale conflict this past December, devastating the world’s youngest country.

For all the needs in CAR, and they are enormous – the country’s economy has been wrecked, thousands of people have been killed, hundreds of thousands have been displaced, and 2.2 million, about half the population, require some form of humanitarian aid – the dire situation has failed to grab the media headlines or generate much enduring public interest.

As the UN Security Council prepares to deploy a 12,000-strong peacekeeping force for the war-torn country, the most adventurous traveller will still have a tough time finding it on a map; the landlocked nation is nestled in the Congo basin, a volatile neighbourhood at the heart of the continent.

Yet, WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin says that from the capital, Bangui, to Bossangoa and the most remote reaches of the country, the agency is hard at work, trying to save lives, bolster livelihoods and prevent the “forgotten crisis in CAR from deteriorating into a neglected tragedy.”

“While there is a significant amount of media and donor attention to Syria and South Sudan, we must bring that level of attention to the Central African Republic,” she said, in an interview with the *UN News Centre* following her recent trip to the country, adding: “We cannot prioritize one hungry child over another.”

Donors have generously provided more than \$37 million towards WFP’s emergency response in CAR. However, the agency still requires nearly \$70 million to carry out operations there up to the end of August, while in neighbouring countries WFP’s operations require a total of more than \$17 million to provide food assistance to refugees who have fled the crisis.

Raising awareness – and funding – will be even more important in the coming days and weeks as the rainy season in CAR begins in earnest. “We are entering a very challenging period where people will be dependent on the international community for assistance and could potentially not receive that support.”

“We cannot let that happen. If we do, it will result in children who are already potentially malnourished, becoming severely malnourished. And women who need our support for food would go hungry. We could see a situation where we go quickly from food insecurity to severe hunger,” Ms. Cousin said.

“We are working to get food to people,” the WFP chief continued, describing a complex operation that has already reached more than 400,000 people in the first months of this year.

And while the plan is to get to 1 million people by the time the heavy rains start, WFP has, unfortunately, been unable to raise the funds required to purchase the commodities and preposition them in a way that will allow the agency’s workers to access communities that will be most in need during the rainy season when roads that are already barely passable become inaccessible.

“The rainy season has already started. Light rains are happening right now. And when the heavy rains start in places like CAR, there are no all-weather roads,” said Ms. Cousin.

Underscoring the stark reality for relief workers and needy populations alike, she added: “The inability to preposition food in remote communities when the roads are drivable would mean that the only way of accessing them would be by airdrop. So, during the period of greatest needs, this would effectively triple the cost of an operation that is already underfunded.”

“This is why we believe the time is now to tell the story of the people of the Central African Republic,” she said, echoing the theme of the agency’s recently-launched ‘CAR Can’t Wait’ emergency funding campaign that will match every donation dollar for dollar.

Racing ahead of what could become an even more devastating humanitarian crisis, where “pictures of skeletal, severely underweight children document [the international community’s] failure and neglect,” WFP is using social media, international publications and other innovative methods to raise awareness among traditional and non-traditional donors about the need for immediate action.

As Ms. Cousin explained, while WFP usually receives donations throughout a funding campaign, “we are working to help our...donors understand that the time is now for CAR because donating in May [at the height of the rains and after another month of deprivation] will not give us the same ability to assist as donating today. The costs will escalate significantly between now and May to help that same hungry child.”

One key target for those donations will be to support people’s ability to feed themselves. That will mean doing everything possible to ensure that farming communities do not miss the current planting season. The success of the main planting season this month in the centre and the south, followed by the main planting season in May in the north, could be a critical turning point for food security in the country, where around 75 per cent of the population rely on small-scale agriculture for their food and income, according to the UN.

Yet, a recent joint study carried out in the country by WFP and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) revealed that between 92-94 per cent of those polled said that they do not have enough seeds or tools essential for the season.

“We are working with FAO to distribute the necessary [supplies],” Ms. Cousin said, but added that FAO is also underfunded and has just enough resources to support about half the people who need seeds and tools.

“So as a result we could completely miss this planting season or go through the season with only half the traditional number of people working in the fields. [This] will result in further complication and exacerbation of the food security situation because what is traditionally the lean season – May to September, ahead of the harvests – would then be extended because the harvest would be inadequate to support the food needs in September.”

As such, WFP and FAO are distributing food as a part of the broader seeds and tools campaign.

“These people have nothing; they left their homes and have no means of livelihood support. We want to avoid the temptation to eat the seeds to meet immediate food needs as opposed to planting them. This is just another reason why it is so important to get food into the areas outside Bangui to ensure that people who are planting have not just the ability to feed themselves in the future but also feed themselves today,” said Ms. Cousin.

This of course spotlights another major challenge facing humanitarian agencies: the security situation. The road from Cameroon to Bangui is the only access route to get food into CAR.

“That road is only driven with armed escorts. What we talked to the leadership of [African-led International Support Mission] MISCA about when we were there was ensuring that there is adequate support for transit for not just WFP, but also for commercial traffic to make sure there is food in the markets, as well as the food we bring in to support those in need of our assistance,” she said.

Against this backdrop of daunting challenges, marked by insecurity and chronic malnutrition, the Central African people, Ms. Cousin said, seem confident that their plight will turn around.

“What hit me most when I was there was that despite the ongoing challenges that the people have gone through, they are still hopeful about their future,” she said.

UN chief teams up with global leaders, celebrities to get all children into school by 2015

10 April - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today joined a prominent roster of global leaders, campaigners and celebrities in Washington, D.C. to help launch a new worldwide campaign that aims to get 57 million children into school.

The launch of the Emergency Coalition for Global Education Action comes in response to the news that the international community could fall short on the UN Millennium Development Goal (MDG) to get all children into education by 2015. If the current pace continues, it will be 2086 before all children are in school and learning.

The coalition – which includes singer and songwriter Shakira, actors Jude Law and Goldie Hawn, and CNN International anchor Isha Sesay – will work even harder to accelerate progress until the end of 2015 to ensure all girls and boys are in school.

“You are here to help ensure that every child enjoys his or her right to education – and I am pleased to stand with all of you in working towards that goal,” the Secretary-General said in his remarks on the launch of the new campaign.

Mr. Ban noted that too many children are kept out of school because of displacement, conflict, child labour, child marriage, and sexual and gender-based violence. Moreover, entrenched poverty and lack of security often turn schools and neighbourhoods into places of vulnerability and brutality, instead of opportunity and vitality.

“No girl should be enslaved instead of being in school. No child should be married instead of being in school. No child should be denied an education because his or her country is at war. No child should be targeted for violence because she or



Children in class at this UNICEF-supported kindergarten in Homs, Syria.
Photo: UNICEF/Shehzad Noorani

he wants to exercise the fundamental right to education,” he stated. “Together, we can change this.”

The Emergency Coalition – convened by UN Special Envoy for Global Education, Gordon Brown – calls for four zeroes: zero child marriage; zero child labour; zero discrimination against girls; and zero exclusion from education.

Mr. Brown called the current situation “unacceptable from a moral, economic and global security perspective” and stressed the domestic governments and non-governmental organizations must be pushed to honour their commitments to out-of-school children.

“We made a promise to children worldwide that they would be in school by 2015,” the former British prime minister stated. “We must now put education on the international agenda in a way that cannot be ignored. Together, we will tackle the key barriers to education – child marriage, child labour and discrimination against girls.”

The launch of the Emergency Coalition took place at the 2015 Countdown Summit held in the United States capital to pressure the international community to take action on behalf of children everywhere.

The summit is organized in collaboration with ‘A World at School’ campaign and more than 100 civil society partners working to accelerate progress for children across the world. Sarah Brown, Founder of A World at School, will unveil a network of 500 youth ambassadors from 80 countries who are to work internationally to promote learning for all.

The youth ambassadors form the UN Youth Advocacy Group for the Global Education First Initiative launched by Mr. Ban in September 2012 with the following three priorities: to put every child in school; to improve the quality of learning; and to foster global citizenship.

The ambassadors, including education campaigners Shazia Ramzan and Kainat Raiza who were caught up in the Pakistan gun attack on Malala Yousafzai, will be lobbying Governments for change, getting involved in local projects and trying to raise the profile of what is now a full-blown education emergency. They will also announce a June takeover of the African Union on the Day of the African Child to highlight need for urgent action for education.

A Global Faiths Coalition for Education will also be announced at the summit, which will culminate with a shared plan of action for a 500-Day Countdown campaign to highlight important areas representing the key barriers to education.

Among his other activities today, the Secretary-General attended a symposium organized by the World Bank on learning for all, at which he stressed that there is no greater return than investing in education. “I call on political leaders to show the leadership and foresight needed to reap the many benefits of a well-educated and highly-skilled population,” he said.

“I also call for those investments to be targeted to countries most in need and the young people who are hardest to reach,” he added, noting that this includes children in fragile and conflict-affected States, girls, children with disabilities, children living in remote rural areas and those living in poverty.

Mr. Ban also attended a World Bank event at which leaders called on young people to help make this generation the first in history to end extreme poverty. “I know that your generation can break this vicious cycle of extreme poverty, and I count on your strong engagement and leadership,” he told the event, which featured the inspiring voices and stories of young leaders taking on critical issues – from entrepreneurship to education to gender equality.

UN concerned at 'troubling' political developments in Burundi

10 April - The United Nations today called on the Government of Burundi to address ongoing political violence and restrictions on human rights, saying it is receiving "troubling" information about recent developments in the country.

"The United Nations...has been raising concerns both with the Government of Burundi and at the highest levels in the region and the greater international community," UN spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric told reporters in New York.

The small African country – where hundreds of thousands of people have perished in largely inter-ethnic fighting between Hutus and Tutsis – has recently been witnessing bouts of political violence and growing restrictions on certain fundamental freedoms.

In a briefing to the Security Council on Tuesday, Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman drew attention to the restrictions on political rights and freedoms, and the violence mainly by the youth wing of the current ruling party (CNDD-FDD), including reports about alleged efforts to arm and train the youth wing.

"We are stressing that if no action is taken and serious human rights violations occur, those responsible for manipulating the youth affiliated to political parties and instigating violence would be liable for international prosecution," said Mr. Dujarric.

"In light of Burundi's past, we trust that the Government of Burundi will thoroughly and promptly address the ongoing political violence and restrictions to human rights... This is a concern that is shared by many in the international community and we trust that the Government of Burundi will take this matter seriously."

He added that as the country prepares for 2015 elections, "we hope for steps that would demonstrate a genuine commitment to political pluralism and the democratic process."

The spokesperson noted that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has discussed the political situation in Burundi with the country's President and First Vice-President, as well as with political leaders in the region, including the Presidents of South Africa and Tanzania.

Later in the day, the members of the Security Council echoed these concerns in a statement to the press which noted political tensions in Burundi as well as continued restrictions on the press and on civil liberties, including limitations on the freedoms of expression, of association and of peaceful assembly, including for members of opposition political parties, and for media and civil society organizations, especially in the run up to the elections.

They condemned any recourse to violence, and expressed their concern for the reported acts of intimidation, harassment and violence committed by youth groups in Burundi. They recalled the urgent need for the Government of Burundi to address impunity, while respecting the right of due process, and for all the political parties to publicly condemn all political violence and acts of incitement to hatred or violence, in line with the Constitution of Burundi and the Arusha Agreement.

Further to the statement, the Council encouraged efforts by the Government to ensure a space for all political parties and to continue to improve dialogue between all relevant actors, including civil society, with a view towards ensuring a conducive, free and open environment in the run up to the elections.

Several special envoys for the Great Lakes have also recently voiced the same concerns to the Government. Today the Special Advisor of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, is in the Burundian capital, Bujumbura, on a long-scheduled visit, and he will follow up with the Government on these concerns.



Members of Burundi's ruling party youth wing march at a rally in September 2012. Photo: IRIN/Desire Nimubona

Some 437,000 people murdered worldwide in 2012, UN crime agency reports

10 April - Almost half a million people across the world lost their lives in 2012 as a result of intentional homicide, with the highest murder rates logged in the Americas and Africa, and the lowest in Europe, Asia and Oceania, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports.

“Too many lives are being tragically cut short, too many families and communities left shattered. There is an urgent need to understand how violent crime is plaguing countries around the world, particularly affecting young men but also taking a heavy toll on women,” said Jean-Luc Lemahieu, Director for Policy Analysis and Public Affairs at UNODC, during the launch of the agency’s 2013 Global Study on Homicide today in London.



Jean-Luc Lemahieu, Director for Policy Analysis and Public Affairs at UNODC.
Photo: UNODC

Globally, men represent some 80 per cent of homicide victims and 95 per cent of perpetrators. While almost 15 per cent of all homicides stem from domestic violence (63,600), more than two thirds of domestic violence fatalities are women (43,600, almost 70 per cent).

“Home can be the most dangerous place for a woman,” deplored Mr. Lemahieu, adding that “it is particularly heart-breaking when those who should be protecting their loved ones are the very people responsible for their murder.”

Over half of all homicide victims are under 30 years of age, with children under the age of 15 accounting for just over 8 per cent of all homicides (36,000), the study highlights.

UNODC also spotlights that almost 750 million people live in countries with the highest homicide rates – mostly in the Americas and Africa – meaning that almost half of all murders occurs in countries that are home to just 11 per cent of the earth's population.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, 3 billion people – mainly in Europe, Asia and Oceania – live in countries where homicide rates are relatively low.

Globally, the male homicide rate is almost four times higher than for females (9.7 versus 2.7 per 100,000), especially in the Americas (29.3 per 100,000 males), where it is almost seven times higher than in Asia, Europe and Oceania (all under 4.5 per 100,000 males).

While men are mostly killed by someone they may not know, almost half of all female victims are killed by those closest to them such as their intimate partners/family members, in domestic violence situations. This is particularly true in Asia, Europe and Oceania.

The study also spotlights that the consumption of alcohol and/or illicit drugs increases the risk of perpetrating homicide, revealing that, in some countries, over half of homicide offenders acted under the influence of alcohol. Although the effects of illicit drugs are less well documented, cocaine and amphetamine-type stimulants have also been associated with violent behaviour and homicide.

Firearms are the most widely used murder weapons, causing 4 in 10 homicides globally, whereas about a quarter of victims are killed with blades and sharp objects and just over a third die through other means (such as strangulation, poisoning etc.).

Post-conflict societies awash in arms and grappling with weak rule of law and impunity are conducive to organized crime and interpersonal violence, for example in Haiti, where homicide rates doubled between 2007 (5.1 per 100,000) to 2012 (10.2 per 100,000), or in South Sudan, the homicide rate this past year was among the highest in the world. In contrast, in Sierra Leone and Liberia, where reconciliation processes and anti-crime strategies are taking root, security is gradually improving.

As for conviction rates, UNODC says they are on average of 43 convictions per 100 intentional homicides. However, the study highlights strong disparities across regions, with a conviction rate of 24 per cent in the Americas, 48 per cent in Asia and 81 per cent in Europe.

Iran: UN rights experts appeal for urgent medical care for detained political prisoners



UN Photo/Eric Kanalestein (file)

10 April - A group of independent United Nations human rights experts today voiced alarm at the denial of medical care to two political prisoners in Iran who are at risk of dying in detention due to worsening health conditions, and urged the authorities to provide them with treatment.

The experts have made a number of urgent appeals to the Iranian Government about the denial of medical care and mistreatment of blogger Mohammad Reza Pourshajari and religious cleric Sayed Hossein Kazemeyni Boroujerdi. However, a formal response from the Government to the most recent appeals is yet to be received, the experts noted in a news release.

“We are gravely concerned about the worsening health condition of Mr. Pourshajari and Mr. Boroujerdi, who require urgent access to specialist medical treatment outside prison,” they stated. “The prison authorities have so far denied this fundamental right, despite prison physicians recommending such urgent care.”

Mr. Pourshajari (aka Siamak Mehr) was arrested for blogging in September 2010, and is currently serving a four-year prison term in Ghezal Hesar prison in Karaj. He had a heart attack and has been suffering from prostate disease, and has kidney stones, high sugar level, breathing problems, and high blood pressure.

Mr. Boroujerdi, currently held in Evin Prison, was arrested for his religious beliefs on 8 October 2006 and is serving 11 years in prison. He suffers from Parkinson’s disease, diabetes and high blood pressure, breathing and walking problems, kidney stones and a heart condition.

According to the news release, the two men’s health condition, deemed to require urgent hospital transfer, has deteriorated due to “physical abuse, poor prison conditions, prolonged solitary confinement, and other forms of repeated torture and ill-treatment.”

The experts reminded the Iranian Government of its obligations under international standards to respect the prisoners’ right to health and to ensure humane treatment, which requires transferring sick prisoners who need specialist medical care to a specialized institution or civil hospital.

“Mr. Pourshajari and Mr. Boroujerdi were imprisoned for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression. They should not only receive urgent medical treatment but also be released,” said the experts.

The Special Rapporteurs on Iran, Ahmed Shaheed; on the right to health, Anand Grover; on torture, Juan Méndez; on freedom of expression, Frank La Rue; and on freedom of religion, Heiner Bielefeldt are all appointed by the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva and charged with monitoring, reporting and advising on human rights issues in an independent and unpaid capacity.

Myanmar: UN welcomes establishment of probe into recent attacks on aid workers



A group of internally displaced people in Myanmar's Rakhine state. Photo: UNHCR

10 April - The top United Nations official in Myanmar welcomed the Government's condemnation of the recent attacks against UN and non-governmental organization (NGO) premises in Sittwe, and its commitment to see perpetrators brought to justice through a newly established investigation commission.

"I welcome the response of the Government [Myanmar] to the attacks against the UN and INGO premises in Sittwe," said Renata Dessallien, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Myanmar, in a press release applauding the President's rapid establishment of the Investigation Commission, to be chaired by the Deputy Minister of Border Affairs, "and the recognition that the incident which sparked the attacks was purely unintentional."

The region has been scene of waves of violence between Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims, which has seen hundreds of people killed and tens of thousands more made homeless.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that the violence on 26 and 27 March, during which UN and NGO offices, living quarters, and warehouses were seriously damaged or looted, was the culmination of months of increasing intimidation and harassment of humanitarian staff and local suppliers by a vocal minority of the Rakhine community.

The March attacks in Sittwe were reportedly triggered by reports that a foreign aid worker had treated a Buddhist flag disrespectfully.

"I welcome the Government's commitment that the perpetrators of violence will be brought to justice," she stressed.

Expressing concern over the impact that the disruption of critical life-saving services is having on the displaced and other vulnerable communities, Ms. Dessallien hailed "the Investigation Commission's assurances to facilitate an immediate return of humanitarian workers to Rakhine state."

She also commended the significant efforts by the authorities to provide assistance in water, food, and health services since the attacks, even if they fall short of meeting the full needs of all people requiring humanitarian aid in the region.

"We would like to support the Government in building their capacity to provide further humanitarian assistance, if requested. It is important that Government take more responsibility for the provision and management of the humanitarian operation," said Ms. Dessallien.

Welcoming the Government's assurances that the safety and security of humanitarian staff will be significantly improved, Ms. Dessallien urged that the same be ensured for all communities in Rakhine State.

"The Government has extended its hand to us and we have taken it; now we must jointly deliver a better humanitarian response," she stated.

"As international humanitarian and development organizations return to the region, we need to take the opportunity to build back better, with the full cooperation and engagement of the authorities at all levels," Ms. Dessallien continued, stressing that the UN will be undertaking a thorough review and reframing of the entire humanitarian and development operations in Rakhine.

"If we are perceived as being culturally insensitive, we need to build back better with more cultural and conflict sensitivity. If we are perceived as not transparent, we need to find ways to be more transparent without hampering vital humanitarian



services. If we are perceived as being biased, we need to explain better what we do and why, both in our humanitarian and development work, and we must increase our development assistance to Rakhine communities.”

The humanitarian coordinator in Myanmar also paid tribute to the 11-year-old girl who was killed in the 27 March incidents, deploring that “it is so often the innocent who suffer most by violence.”

Providing West African communities with sound information crucial to curbing spread of Ebola – UN

10 April - Together with Ministries of Health and other partners across seven countries in West Africa, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is using culturally-sensitive communication strategies to disseminate life-saving information in order to contain the often-fatal Ebola virus, through text-messaging, radio shows, TV programmes and door-to-door campaigns.

“Most of the people in this part of the world had never heard of Ebola before,” said Dr. Guido Borghese, UNICEF’s Principal Advisor Child Survival and Development for West and Central Africa.

“In this environment, unfounded fears and rumours spread quickly and widely. More than ever, it is crucial that families have both the means and the right information to protect themselves and prevent dangerous misunderstandings.”

In collaboration with partners such as the Red Cross and the UN World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF mass and digital media, as well as inter-personal communication activities, are being carried out to prevent people from contracting the virus, particularly in mosques, churches, schools, health centres and markets.

These “information blasts” are being implemented in Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d’Ivoire, Senegal, Mali and Guinea-Bissau, where UNICEF is also providing critical prevention supplies, such as soap, chlorine, and gloves to the people in affected communities.

Radio dramas, print materials, TV shows, and even voice messages are automatically sent to mobile phones – we use every appropriate means of communication to reach more people, spread the word in local languages and save lives,” explained Dr. Borghese, as he stressed that “we are running against time to avoid further spread in West Africa.”

The region is facing its first major Ebola outbreak. The disease, which has no vaccine and no cure, has already claimed 111 lives in Guinea and neighbouring Liberia as of 8 April. In total, a growing number of 178 suspected, probable and confirmed cases has been reported in Guinea and Liberia, as well as six suspected cases in Mali.

“Ebola kills people; but more lives are put at risk because of lack of information or misinformation though rumours,” stressed Borghese. “There is no existing vaccine against Ebola. Bringing patients with suspected symptoms to health centres as soon as possible increases their chances of survival and prevents other people from getting infected.”

In order to provide disinfectant products, essential medicines, life-saving supplies, and communication support, UNICEF is urgently appealing for \$1.2 million for Guinea and almost \$1.3 million for neighbouring countries including Liberia, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Guinea Bissau and Mali.



Experts from the European Union Mobile Laboratory (EMLab) ready to support Ebola samples testings in Guéckédou, Guinea. Photo: WHO/S. Hugonnet

UN experts concerned as indigenous group in Cameroon evicted from ancestral lands

10 April - The independent United Nations experts dealing with the rights of minorities and of indigenous peoples today voiced their concern about the eviction and demolition of houses of the Mbororo pastoralist community in Cameroon, and urged a solution to their plight.

An estimated 300 people have reportedly been made homeless and evicted from their ancestral lands in the locality of Banjah, Bamenda. The location of the evictions is the scene of a long-term land dispute between the Mbororo community and the Catholic University in Bamenda.



Pastoralists and their cattle. Photo: IRIN/Gwenn Dubourthoumieu (file)

Mbororo pastoralist communities, who identify as indigenous minorities, account for some 12 per cent of Cameroon's population and often face conflicts over access to and ownership of land and access to water.

Special Rapporteurs on minority issues, Rita Izsák, and on the rights of indigenous peoples, James Anaya, called on the Government and the Catholic University to urgently review the evictions and the demolitions.

"I urge the authorities and the Catholic University in Bamenda to review these actions and their impact on this community and immediately seek a settlement with them," said Ms. Izsák, who visited the Mbororo community in Banjah during her 2013 official mission to Cameroon.

Mr. Anaya recalled that "indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly relocated from their lands or territories," quoting the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. "No relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement of fair and just compensation," he stated in a news release.

The University claims to have paid compensation to community members to acquire and build on the site. Community members claim to have been misled regarding payments and state that they would not voluntarily have agreed to quit their homes and land that they have occupied since 1904.

Three bulldozers, escorted by armed gendarmes, reportedly arrived on 3 April to start demolishing the Mbororo homes. Community members have no alternative accommodation.

The experts highlighted that "appropriate alternative accommodation must still be provided to community members who have been left homeless and extremely vulnerable, even if the evictions are found to be legally justified based on international standards and within a participatory, consensus building process involving the Mbororo people."

"Where possible," they stressed, "the Mbororo must be provided with the opportunity to return to their traditional lands."

"We are saddened that a community whose survival depends on their lands and cattle is now deprived of access to their ancestral lands," they said. "This also contravenes the UN Declaration on Minorities, which requires the protection of existence of minorities, and their unique ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity within the territories in which they live."

Independent experts or special rapporteurs are appointed by the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

With millions facing hunger in Sudan, UN urges support to prevent further crisis



Fighting and inter-tribal violence have resulted in people fleeing their homes and missing critical planting and harvesting seasons. UN Photo/Albert González Farran

10 April - The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) today called for urgent support for farmers and herders in Sudan in order to help prevent a further worsening of the food security situation in the country.

The agency said in a news release that some 3.3 million people are currently suffering from food insecurity with numbers likely to rise to 4 million in the coming months due to a combination of increased conflict and displacement in Darfur, refugee movement from neighbouring South Sudan, poor harvest and spiralling food prices.

In some areas of Sudan, existing crisis levels of food insecurity are expected to deteriorate to emergency levels in the coming few weeks, bringing an even higher degree of acute malnutrition with devastating consequences for vulnerable groups.

“Sudan is a forgotten crisis that is only getting worse,” said Abdi Adan Jama, the FAO Representative in the country. “We urgently need to ensure vulnerable herders and farmers affected by the situation are in a position to regain their livelihoods, feed their families, reduce their dependency on food aid and rebuild their lives.”

UN agencies and partners have so far received only 3.5 per cent of the \$995 million that they requested to carry out urgent humanitarian interventions set out in the Strategic Response Plan for Sudan in 2014.

“About 80 per cent of Sudan’s rural population relies on agriculture for their food and income, and if we do not recognize the magnitude of what is happening and act in time the situation will get much, much worse,” warned Mr. Jama.

FAO is calling for \$19 million for a series of urgent interventions targeting a total of 5.4 million people. So far it has received only \$7 million, leaving a funding gap of \$12 million.

The agency plans to provide 900,000 of the most vulnerable households with livelihood-saving support. This includes multipurpose crops which not only respond to the nutritional needs of families but also protect soil, provide fodder for livestock to sustain milk production, and offer good prices on markets.

High quality and early maturing seed will be provided for the two staple crops, sorghum and millet, and FAO will work to diversify the food basket of affected families by promoting legumes, sweet potato, milk production, and vegetables that can be grown in the rainy season, enabling vital access to supplementary income.

In addition, the Food Security and Livelihoods Cluster, co-led by FAO, plans to vaccinate 11.7 million heads of livestock and ensure supplementary feeding and improved access to pasture and water, which will secure the survival of these important productive assets.