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Humanitarian Assistance to IDP's in Pakistan

Pakistani returns to north-west top 1 million, reports UN

21 August 2009 - Around 1.6 million of the over 2 million people displaced by conflict in Pakistan's north-west have returned to their villages, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said today, citing Government figures.

The vast majority of the nearly 2.3 million people who had escaped clashes between Government forces and militants were sheltering either in schools and other public buildings, with host families or in rental accommodations.

As a result of the returns, 13 camps have closed down, while another 17 still remain open in North West Frontier Province (NWFP). According to the Provincial Department of Education, the number of schools occupied by internally displaced persons (IDPs) has decreased from 947 to 454, with 2,340 families still living in schools.

Inside This Issue:

PAGE 2: UN agencies discuss early recovery efforts with Pakistani authorities

PAGE 3: Veteran French diplomat named UN special envoy for assistance to Pakistan

PAGE 4: Nobel-winning economist says UN best suited to oversee global economic overhaul

PAGE 5: UN health agency advises South-East Asian nations in fight against A (H1N1) virus



More than 2 million have been displaced by renewed fighting in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province

Over half of the returnees went back to the districts of Swat and Buner, among the areas hardest hit by the fighting, while the rest returned to Dir and Shangla districts.

To help those returning to their places of origin, the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have pledged to provide shelter assistance to about 10,000 families whose homes were damaged.

Meanwhile, the World Food Programme (WFP) is distributing food in Waziristan, where the Government says almost 12,630 families have been displaced as a result of a separate military offensive.

OCHA also reported today that donors have stepped up contributions to the \$542 million Pakistan Humanitarian Response Plan, which is now more than 60 per cent funded.

UN agencies discuss early recovery efforts with Pakistani authorities

25 August 2009 – United Nations officials have wrapped up a mission to Swat district in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP) to discuss the strengthening of humanitarian assistance to those uprooted by military operations in the region, as well as early recovery efforts.

"We met district authorities and national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and established the need for early recovery activities to start as soon as possible," said UN Humanitarian Coordinator Martin Mogwanja, who led the mission.

"So far the humanitarian community has distributed food and health kits but we want to expand our assistance," he stated.

As of last week, the Pakistani Government estimated that around 1.6 million of the over 2 million people displaced by conflict in NWFP had returned to their villages.

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Over half of the returnees went back to the districts of Swat and Buner, among the areas hardest hit by the fighting, while the rest returned to Dir and Shangla districts.

During their mission to Swat, UN agencies gained a better understanding of the current situation and found that

PAGE 6: Otherwise healthy people do not need antivirals for H1N1, says UN health agency

PAGE 7: Youth to mobilize against climate change in 100 cities – UN

PAGE 8: Remembering victims of Baghdad bombing, UN marks first World Humanitarian Day

education and health were of the highest importance, according to a news release issued by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).



Returning families walk past closed shops, other buildings in Swat District in Pakistan's NWFP

OCHA added that it is planning to open a satellite office in Swat that will work closely with the district authorities and other humanitarian actors on the ground.

The mission to Swat included representatives of OCHA, as well as the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

To assist the Government and the international community to respond to needs in the wake of the country's displacement crisis, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon yesterday announced the appointment of veteran French diplomat Jean-Maurice Ripert as his Special Envoy for Assistance to Pakistan.

Mr. Ripert, who is currently France's Ambassador to the UN, will be tasked with promoting a "strategic, coherent and comprehensive approach to supporting the humanitarian, recovery and reconstruction needs of crisis affected areas" in concert with the Pakistani Government and international partners.

Veteran French diplomat named UN special envoy for assistance to Pakistan

24 August 2009- Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appointed the current French Ambassador to the United Nations as his Special Envoy for Assistance to Pakistan, a newly-created position, it was announced today.



New Special Envoy for Assistance to Pakistan, Jean-Maurice Ripert (left), with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (File photo)

In his new capacity, Jean-Maurice Ripert will, in concert with the Pakistani Government and international partners, promote a "strategic, coherent and comprehensive approach to supporting the humanitarian, recovery and reconstruction needs of crisis affected areas," according to a press statement accompanying the announcement.

The position was created by the Secretary-General to help the Government and the international community to respond to needs in the wake of Pakistan's displacement crisis, which at its zenith earlier this year had forced over 2 million people from their homes in the South Asian nation's northwest.

Among Mr. Ripert's tasks will be creating a comprehensive approach among bilateral and international financial institutions, as well as mobilizing resources and support.

The veteran diplomat, who started his career in the French foreign service in 1980, "brings to this challenging assignment a wealth of experience in the international fora and a solid track record in consensus building," the press statement noted.

Prior to his current posting, Mr. Ripert served as France's Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva, and from 2003 to 2005 he was the Director of the UN and International Organizations section at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris.

Last week, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that around 1.6 million of the over 2 million people displaced by conflict in north-west Pakistan have returned to their villages, citing Government figures.

Agriculture, Rural Development, and Poverty Reduction

Nobel-winning economist says UN best suited to oversee global economic overhaul

21 August 2009 - The United Nations is the only institution with the legitimacy to oversee democratic reforms of the global economic system to pull the world out of the current recession, Nobel prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz said today.

The UN has a crucial role to play in addressing the roots of the downturn and in reshaping the global economy into a more fair and sustainable system, he said at the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in Bangkok, Thailand.

"As this is a global crisis, a small group of industrialized countries are ill-equipped to deal with it," he said.



Nobel Laureate Joseph E. Stiglitz at UN Headquarters in February 2009

"There are 192 countries in the world, [and] 20 is a small percentage," he added, referring to the so-called Group of 20 (G20) industrialized countries. "Obviously what is necessary to respond to the crisis is not a G20 but a G192." The economic system prior to the current crisis – characterized by excessive financial deregulation coupled with massive consumption financed by debt – is unsound and must be reinvented, Mr. Stiglitz said.

"As we think about this crisis – and we think about the world that will come after it – we should think about how we can create a global economic architecture which works better, for more people, in a more sustainable way."

Protectionist practices, although they may benefit nations in the short-run, can slow global recovery, and any successful response to the crisis requires paying closer attention to the needs of developing countries, said Mr. Stiglitz, who chairs the UN Commission of Experts on Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System.

Earlier this year, that group called for the drastic overhaul of international finance structures, urging wealthier nations to direct one per cent of their economic stimulus packages to help developing countries address poverty. It also underlined the importance of setting up an elected and representative Global Economic Coordination Council, as part of the UN, to meet annually at the head-of-State level to assess development.

"We've now created a global economy but we haven't created the institutions to make that economy work," Mr. Stiglitz, winner of the 2001 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences and professor at Columbia University in New York, said today.

Also addressing today's event on the "UN System and the economic crisis: towards a new global financial and economic architecture" was ESCAP Executive Secretary Noeleen Heyzer, who also appealed for developing nations to have a greater say in reshaping globalization.

In Asia and the Pacific, an agenda for inclusive and sustainable development that is "about bringing economic, social and ecological balance in an integrated whole to address various development deficits and inequalities facing our region is essential, she said.

Health and Population

UN health agency advises South-East Asian nations in fight against A (H1N1) virus

19 August 2009- The United Nations health agency is providing practical information and technical expertise to countries in South-East Asia to help reduce panic and encourage prevention against the influenza A(H1N1) virus, which has already claimed over 80 lives in the region and continues to spread.



Global alarm as influenza A(H1N1) virus spreads

"It is important to remember that Member States in South-east Asia have been preparing for pandemic influenza for years and that preparedness could help them with the current pandemic," said Samlee Plianbangchang, Regional Director for the World Health Organization (WHO).

WHO is assisting countries in the region to strengthen surveillance, laboratory capacity, anti-viral and vaccine production and distribution, and information for the public, she added.

The agency reiterated the need to promote practices such as frequent hand-washing and covering the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing to prevent the spread of the virus, which has now been reported in over 170 countries and territories worldwide.

As of 6 August, the virus had affected over 11,400 people in South-East Asia and led to at least 83 deaths.

Among other issues, the agency noted that in general, identifying sick students and keeping them at home is more beneficial than school closures. In addition, it stressed that the use of surgical face masks is recommended only for patients and healthcare workers.

WHO has transferred technology and development funds to vaccine manufacturers in the region, including Serum Institute of India, Biopharma (Indonesia) and GPO (Thailand), which together have the capacity to produce some 220 million doses of a vaccine annually.

In a bid to reassure the public after concerns were raised in the media, the agency stated earlier this month that the rush to produce a vaccine to fight the spread of the influenza A(H1N1) virus will not jeopardize the safety or effectiveness of any new drug.

To have the greatest impact, vaccines need to be available quickly and in large quantities as they are among the most effective medical interventions for reducing illness and deaths during a pandemic, it added.

WHO calculates that completing the steps involved in developing a new vaccine from start – obtaining a virus sample – to finish, when the first supplies of the approved vaccine available for use, takes around five to six months.

Otherwise healthy people do not need antivirals for H1N1, says UN health agency

21 August 2009 - Otherwise healthy people infected with the H1N1 virus do not need to be treated with antiviral drugs, the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) said today as it issued new guidelines in the use of the drugs against the pandemic.



Worldwide, most infected patients continue to display typical influenza symptoms and fully recover within a week without any form of medical treatment.

According to the new guidelines, formed by consensus by a global group of experts, healthy patients with uncomplicated illnesses do not need to take antivirals.

The guidelines emphasize using drugs such as oseltamivir and zanamivir, to which the pandemic virus is susceptible, to prevent severe illness and deaths, reduce the need for hospitalization, and shorten hospital stays.

When properly prescribed, oseltamivir is found to significantly curb the risk of pneumonia, a leading cause of death for both pandemic and seasonal influenza.

WHO recommends treatment with the drug as soon as possible among people who are severely or whose conditions begin to deteriorate. Where oseltamivir is not available, zanamivir can be given. The virus is currently resistant to a second class of antivirals, known as M2 inhibitors.

Pregnant women are among the groups considered to be at increased risk, and WHO recommends that they receive antiviral treatment as soon as possible after the onset of symptoms. The agency

cautioned that the presence of underlying medical conditions is not a reliable indicator of all or even most cases of severe illness, with some 40 per cent of severe cases now occurring in previously healthy children and adults under the age of 50.

For children, the guidelines call for prompt treatment for children – including those under five years of age – with severe or worsening illnesses, as well as those at risk of more severe or complicated illness.

Otherwise healthy children over five years, WHO said, do not need antiviral treatment unless their conditions persist or worsen.

If someone with confirmed or suspected H1N1 infections shows symptoms including shortness of breath, chest pain and high fever lasting beyond three days, they should seek immediate medical attention.

Among children, warning signs include fast or difficult breathing, lack of alertness, difficulty in waking up and little or no desire to play.

Earlier this week, WHO, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UN Children's Fund and other groups issued a "Call to Action" to support governments and communities in their bid to minimize the virus' impact.

Environment

Youth to mobilize against climate change in 100 cities – UN



23 August 2009 – Youth-organized rallies will be held in 100 cities across the globe to push governments to 'seal the deal' on an ambitious agreement to curb greenhouse gas emissions later this year, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) announced today.

The largest-ever youth climate change conference, organized by UNEP and drawing some 800 young people, wrapped up in Daejeon, in the Republic of Korea, today, with participants pledging plow ahead with efforts to ensure that global warming remains an international priority, with just over three months remaining until negotiations on a possible new pact end in Copenhagen, Denmark.

"The young people of the world are the generation that will inherit the transformational decisions governments need to take in less than 110 days time," said Achim Steiner, UNEP's Executive Director.

"If their passion, commitment and ideas can be embraced by world leaders and governments over the coming days and weeks, then a climate agreement that can puts the world on track to a low carbon, resource efficient Green Economy can be secured."

During the week-long Tunza International Youth Conference on Climate Change, young people agreed on regional action plans calling for, among other measures, reaching out to other environmental groups educating others about the upcoming Copenhagen conference and utilizing social networking sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, to spread the message.

"There are a lot of indigenous cultures that are losing, because nobody wants to hear what we want to say, what we know about mother earth, and it is frustrating for us because we have so many things to share and the world doesn't listen to us," said Yaiguili Alvarado Garcia from the Kuna indigenous group in Panama.

"There are many things we asked the governments to do and we know it is hard, but we want to work with them, we just want to make a better place for the children, for the animals and plants. It is about time we stop thinking just for us and think also for other beings that cannot speak for themselves. It is time to stop being selfish," she added.

The 17-year-old is one of the 13 newly-elected members of the Tunza Youth Advisor Council, which advises UNEP on how to better engage young people in its work.

Earlier this week, the young people at the Daejeon gathering issued a declaration, entitled "Listen to Our Voices: The Future Needs Strong Vision and Leadership," in which they expressed their "concern and frustration that their governments are not doing enough to combat climate change," and emphasizing that "we now need more actions and less talking."

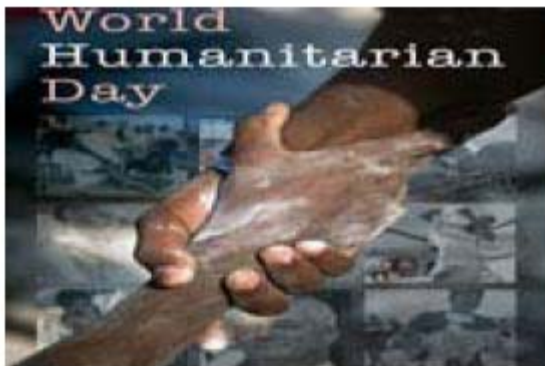
It also asks governments to, among other things, agree on a more fair, just and action-oriented post-Kyoto agreement develop and implement carbon action plans to be monitored by an independent body and support youth efforts to bring about change in the world.

"This statement is the fruit of a diversity of views and voices from young people of different ages and cultures," said Mr. Steiner. "We very much hope the spirit set by these young people will be reflected in the negotiations that will take place in December."

Cross Cutting Themes / Other Issues

Remembering victims of Baghdad bombing, UN marks first World Humanitarian Day

19 August 2009- United Nations officials and staff marked the first World Humanitarian Day today by paying tribute to the efforts of aid workers on the frontlines around the globe and by vowing to redouble the international community's commitment to continue to assist people in need.



Last year the General Assembly proclaimed 19 August as World Humanitarian Day to commemorate the 2003 Canal Hotel bombing in Baghdad, which claimed the lives of 22 UN staff members, including the world body's top envoy in Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello, and wounded more than 150 people.

Speaking at the wreath-laying ceremony at UN Headquarters in New York in memory of the victims of the Baghdad bombing, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted that more humanitarian workers were kidnapped, seriously injured or killed last year during violent attacks than ever before.

"This is unacceptable," Mr. Ban said, pledging to do all that he can as UN Secretary-General to help victims while protecting the security and independence of those who work so hard to save them.

He noted that just yesterday two Afghan UN staff members along with more than half a dozen others were killed in a suicide attack in Kabul, two days ahead of the country's presidential and provincial council elections.

Mr. Ban also voiced his sadness at the violence today in Baghdad, where an "appalling" string of attacks reportedly killed at least 95 people and wounded 500.

In a separate message marking the Day, Mr. Ban said the UN continues to draw inspiration from the legacy of the people who were killed in Baghdad, and noted that the Sergio Vieira de Mello Foundation is establishing an annual prize in his name to recognize outstanding achievements in the peaceful reconciliation of conflict.

Mr. Ban said that the men and women who serve as humanitarian workers "come from many backgrounds. But they share a conviction that one person's suffering is everyone's responsibility." He stressed the need for the international community "to renew our commitment to help vulnerable, voiceless and marginalized people wherever they may be. That is the abiding mission of the humanitarian community."

Joining Mr. Ban at the Headquarters ceremony, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Catherine Bragg noted that aid workers are working in ever more dangerous conditions. "The last two years have been successively the most deadly for aid workers on record," she stated. "Too often, UN and NGO flags and emblems are no longer protections but provocations."

In her message, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay noted that the Baghdad bombing is just one of many attacks against UN staff and other humanitarian workers. In Algiers in December 2007, another 17 UN staff members were killed while two more staff died just yesterday as a result of a suicide bombing in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan.

"Killing those who are trying to help others is a particularly despicable crime, and one which all governments should join forces to prevent, and – when prevention fails – to punish," she said. Ms. Pillay emphasized that humanitarian work and human rights are inextricably entwined.

"And without humanitarian aid," she added, "the basic human rights of millions of people – including the right to seek asylum from persecution, the right to education, and, most fundamental of all, the right to life – would be denied. Similarly, if human rights are ignored during a humanitarian crisis, the crisis will often deepen."

General Assembly President Miguel D'Escoto used the occasion to denounce the escalating attacks on humanitarian workers and demand that those responsible be brought to justice.

"We demand that States fulfil their obligations under international law to protect humanitarian workers and UN personnel, too many of whom continue to be harmed and even murdered, often with impunity," he said in his message.

Margaret Chan, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), issued her own message highlighting the "humanitarian imperative" to extend help to those who have been displaced, or injured, or need food, water, shelter, comfort and essential medical care.

"As the number of emergencies continues to increase, we must remain steadfast in our determination to help – to be quickly on the scene in the growing number of 'hot spots' around the world," she noted, reaffirming WHO's commitment to lead global and national responses to the health component of emergencies.

Aside from the ceremonies in New York and Geneva, events are also being held at UN offices around the world, including in Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Fiji, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, the occupied Palestinian territories, Pakistan Somalia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates and Zimbabwe.

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