

OCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA, WFP, WHO, IOM

(New York/Geneva/Rome, 13 May 2020) Conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic present a significant threat to life in Libya. The health and safety of the country's entire population are at risk.

Close to 400,000 Libyans have been displaced since the start of the conflict nine years ago – around half of them within the past year, since the attack on the capital, Tripoli, started.

Despite repeated calls for a humanitarian ceasefire, including by the United Nations Secretary-General, hostilities continue unabated, hindering access and the delivery of critical humanitarian supplies. Humanitarian workers face significant challenges every day to carry on with their mission. In March 2020, humanitarian partners reported a total of 851 access constraints on movement of humanitarian personnel and humanitarian items within and into Libya.

The situation for many migrants and refugees is especially alarming. Since the start of this year, more than 3,200 people have been intercepted at sea and returned to Libya. Many end up in one of the eleven official detention centers. Others are taken to facilities or unofficial detention centers to which the humanitarian community does not have access. The United Nations has repeatedly reiterated that Libya is not a safe port and that persons rescued at sea should not be returned to arbitrary detention.

Women and children continue to bear the brunt of the ongoing armed conflict in Libya: over the past year, the United Nations verified 113 cases of grave violations, including killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools, and health facilities. Hospitals and health facilities have been targeted by shelling, further disrupting Libya's fragile health system. Since the beginning of the year, at least 15 attacks have damaged health facilities and ambulances and injured health care workers. These attacks are a blatant violation of international humanitarian law and even more egregious during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The onset of the coronavirus in Libya poses yet another strain on the already overstretched

health system, and further threatens the most vulnerable people in the country. As of May 13, there were 64 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including three deaths, in different parts of the country. This shows that local/community transmission is taking place. The risk of further escalation of the outbreak is very high.

Food security, already a challenge, is being compromised by the spread of COVID-19 and its socioeconomic impact on Libyan families. Latest market assessments show that most cities are facing shortages of basic food items coupled with an increase in prices. Limited market availability of goods and higher prices are impacting plans, as are supply chain disruptions. Continued support to food security inside the country is essential so that this health crisis does not worsen by becoming a food crisis.

We urge all parties to the conflict to protect vital water supply facilities. We are acutely alarmed that water facilities have been deliberately targeted or indiscriminately attacked. This affects thousands of women and children and impedes efforts to implement basic virus prevention measures, such as hand-washing.

We support the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire and a humanitarian pause to save lives and enable the Libyan authorities and their partners to devote their energies to stopping the spread of COVID-19. The international community must not turn a blind eye to the conflict in Libya and its catastrophic effect on civilians, including migrants and refugees, across the country.

Despite enormous challenges, the UN and our humanitarian partners have continued to reach the most vulnerable people in Libya. Funds are urgently required, including for vital enabling services such as the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service, if we are to continue meeting emergency needs. We look forward with anticipation to the pledged financial support to the Humanitarian Response Plan for Libya, as announced by the Government of National Accord. Donors have been supportive. We ask that they continue to show their generosity and stand by the people of Libya in their quest for peace and in this moment of great need.

Signatories

UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock
UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi
Executive Director of UNICEF Henrietta Fore
Executive Director of UN Population Fund Dr. Natalia Kanem

Executive Director of the World Food Programme David Beasley
Director-General of World Health Organization Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director General of International Organization for Migration António Vitorino

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