

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE

SUMMARY RECORD AND ACTION POINTS

New York, 16 June 2020

Introduction

Mr. Mark Lowcock, the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) and Chair of the IASC, convened an *ad hoc* IASC Principals meeting to discuss the COVID-19 response, including an update on the health situation and logistics.

The ERC summarized his outlook for the situation over the coming months in preparation for the IASC biannual meeting taking place next week, which the UN Secretary-General would attend. There is an accelerating problem in many fragile and conflict-affected countries, an uptick in the case load that had not yet reached a peak; we were months away from the peak of the problem; there are serious concerns for the next 3-6 months, including due to the impact of a collapse in the provision of health services, including with 80 million children under the age of 1 year not having received immunization in over 60 countries, increased risk of malaria, among others.

At the same time there were increasing concerns regarding the sustainability of funding to humanitarian operations. While, the Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) had received US\$1.33 billion and there had been a good overall response to resourcing of other Appeals, there are concerns that that in 2-3 months we would be facing difficulties with funding sustainability. While important discussions were taking place in the United States, Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark, for example, they may not come to fruition for some months – the time lapse between how quickly the funding could materialize and the actual programming of funds is of concern.

The ERC thanked the Principals for supporting efforts to increase reporting on results. results-based reporting. He confirmed that the next revision of the GHRP would be issued on 16 July, after which further revisions would be encapsulated by the normal Global Humanitarian Overview process. The ERC had already shared guidance with Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators to ensure that country-based efforts are geared to delivering on the revised GHRP.

He stated the importance of continued efforts to ensure accelerated and increased funding to NGOs and noted the efforts of the IASC Results Group 5 on Humanitarian Financing in taking forward the outcomes of the discussions with the Chairs of the Global Humanitarian Donorship (GHD), including the development of an agenda to progress on a number of areas around quality and flexible funding. In parallel, the ERC referred to ongoing efforts to ensure the accelerated disbursement of Pooled Funds managed by OCHA, noting that some US\$200 million had been disbursed to date, including \$131 from

country-based pooled funds (with the aim of disbursing funds within two weeks to NGOs).

Health Update

Dr. Ibrahima Socé Fall, WHO Assistant Director-General for Emergency Response, updated the Principals on developments in the COVID-19 outbreak. Globally, the situation was worsening and was of particular concern in Central and South America. There were now almost 8 million confirmed cases worldwide, and over 450,000 deaths. Brazil, the United States, India, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom were now reporting the most cases. There had also been a significant rise of infections reported from other countries, such as Peru, Chile and Mexico. Africa had reported increased numbers of infections, doubling every eight days. South Africa, Nigeria and Algeria were reporting the most cases.

There had also been more cases emerging in humanitarian settings, including in camps where COVID-19 was spreading increasingly fast and there was concern for the level of under-reporting, not least due to insufficient testing. Dr. Socé noted that the impact of the pandemic on other health services for malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDs, reproductive health, for example, was particularly worrying. Continuing to respond to these needs and protect these services beyond the current outbreak was vital.

Dr. Socé cautioned that countries which were easing public health and social distancing measures, notably in Europe, must remain vigilant. The gains achieved to curb the epidemic could be quickly reversed. Only yesterday, a cluster of new cases was reported from China. WHO was working closely with the authorities to identify the origin.

Since the last IASC Principals meeting, WHO had updated its guidance on the use of masks to incorporate new research findings and to provide more practical advice to decision makers. WHO had also just finalized a report of the impact of funds raised in response to the Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan.

Update on Logistics

Mr. Amir Abdulla, Officer-in-Charge and Deputy Executive Director of WFP, informed the Principals that all eight logistic hubs were fully operational. 15,000 cubic meters of crucial COVID-19-related items had been moved to 130 countries. While WFP was supporting the transport of items, he acknowledged the critical efforts of WHO, UNICEF and health partners including in sourcing, validating and procurement.

Mr. Abdulla indicated that the global passenger service had rapidly expanded with 331 organizations now registered. To date, 2,300 passengers had been transported to 38 destinations in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, of which 50 per cent were colleagues from the NGO community. More routes were opening up as new agreements were put in place, for example to the Latin America region. WFP was also monitoring the availability of commercial flights where WFP flights may not be needed, which were important for efficiencies and cost savings.

On MedEvac, Mr. Abdulla indicated that ten colleagues from the UN and international NGOs had been medically evacuated to date. The field hospitals in Accra, Ghana and the training facility in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia were in the final stages of development before being handed over to WHO. Preparations for a field hospital in Costa Rica were at an advanced stage and agreements were being put in place for Singapore. There were also positive indications in discussion relating to establishing similar facilities in the Middle East.

However, Mr. Abdulla indicated that, WFP is doing all that is necessary to meet the needs on the ground, current funding levels were not sufficient to cover all transport requests and advance financing mechanisms were stretched to the limit. The ERC acknowledged this concern and stated that a stronger collective effort was needed to ensure sufficient funds for the provision of these critical common services.

Discussion:

SCHR, ICVA and InterAction appreciated the efforts to accelerate the speed and scale of funding to NGOs, including the CERF pilot to disburse the \$25 mn in 5-6 contexts to NGOs via IOM and asked that further information is made available to NGOs on how to access these funds. It was important to sustain this effort, particularly as funding availability was beginning to slow down. InterAction said that real-time feedback loops from the NGOs at the country-level were important to identify obstacles in the flow of funding; emerging data from research by ICVA, InterAction, Plan International, Norwegian Refugee Council and others would support this significantly. Concern Worldwide had also shared the key outcomes of a survey of 92 Bond member organizations of how NGOs were funding their interventions and the challenges they faced in accessing additional funds.

InterAction noted the political, domestic and economic overlay that was creating a delay in funding, compounded by a perception that the epicentre of the pandemic remained in the US and Europe.

ICRC agreed with the ERC that fundraising efforts were reaching a plateau and that the humanitarian community was now faced with an unprecedented gap between needs and financial resources to respond. IFRC reported that the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement had distributed CHF 150 million to 154 national societies.

UN-Habitat joined with others in acknowledging the growing confluence of risks and vulnerabilities and the growing gap between needs and funding availability. In preparing for the reflection with the UN Secretary-General during the Principals' biannual meeting the following week, it was important to note that while the health impact in many of these countries would be severe, the secondary and tertiary burden on the communities affected by the economic crisis would be significant. The IASC needed to also maintain an outlook on living with pandemics. In that regard, UN-Habitat and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction had co-published

an opinion editorial on preparedness¹ for the possibility of future pandemics. Issues around service provision, preparedness and recovery had been an important topic in UN-Habitat's engagement with Mayors who were struggling with the fluidity of these issues in cities.

Regarding the GHRP revision, SCHR indicated that NGOs in the field had not yet been contacted in many countries by the RC/HCs but stood ready to engage in the process. InterAction and ICVA noted that strong humanitarian leadership on the ground translated good consultations with NGOs community; however, they flagged that this was not consistent across HCTs. IOM asked that the situation of stranded migrants be given attention in the revision of the GHRP.

OHCHR expressed particular concern for the risk to routine immunization for children and the potential for the diversion of funds from other important health services, particularly for malaria, HIV/AIDs, sexual and reproductive rights, and gender-based violence, for example. UNICEF updated the Principals that the Global Vaccine Summit had been successful and that a number of pledges had been made which will now be key to looking at how governments can sustain immunizations. In addition to the critical child health issues, there were increasing numbers of children exposed to physical and sexual abuse which was extremely worrying. IFRC informed the Principals that their organization had discussed identifying the gaps in immunization, how they could support governments and institutions and what kind of engagement strategy would be needed at the community level.

FAO highlighted the UN Secretary-General's Policy Brief on the *Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security and Nutrition*, which was prepared by a coalition of organizations, including members of the food security cluster, members of the coalition of Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN), under the leadership of WFP and FAO. Almost all countries with existing food crises had seen a deterioration of the situation. Approximately 30 per cent of workers in the food system had lost their jobs and increasingly, farmers were unable to invest in the next planting season. Although livelihood activities were cost-effective and life-saving, the GHRP for this sector was only 12 per cent funded. More needed to be done to advocate collectively and to scale up response. The Global Network Against Food Crisis would discuss the results of an assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on food security at the end of July. OHCHR welcomed the Policy Brief and the need for urgent measures to support small-scale farming and fishing, particularly for women. The focus on sustainability was especially important and echoed the statement of the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment on the occasion of World Environment Day, 5 June. SCHR also appreciated the Policy Brief and noted that the consortium stood ready to support FAO and WFP in addressing this growing risk.

OHCHR updated the Principals that the UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons had issued a statement on the occasion of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (15 June), highlighting that while older persons have become more

¹ <https://news.trust.org/item/20200615120207-y321f>

visible in the COVID-19 outbreak, their voices, opinions and concerns remained largely unheard.

OHCHR expressed particular concern for the situation in Yemen, where the official case report was lagging far behind actual infections and health services were on the brink of collapse. ICRC agreed that the outbreak in Yemen was reaching new levels and was alarmingly combined with the ongoing violence and consequences of devastating floods. ICRC, alongside the national societies of Norway and Finland and MSF, had deployed an Emergency Medical Team to establish a COVID-19 isolation and treatment facility for an initial period of six months.

ICRC also flagged a serious concern for the humanitarian situation in the Sahel, which had seen a scale-up of fighting, increased displacement and disruption of basic services, alongside the effects of climate change. ICRC was augmenting its response, with a particular focus on Burkina Faso. UN-Habitat also highlighted the growing fragility in countries such as Lebanon, Yemen, Nigeria, Somalia.

IFRC noted the growing number of cases in camps in Cox's Bazar and the limited capacity for testing and intensive care units (ICU). This presented a challenge in terms of duty of care and more was required to ensure that means of care were in place and that colleagues on the ground had the necessary support and materials to continue to providing services.

IOM also highlighted the situation of COVID-19 in camps, including cases among staff. Quarantine sites in some countries were posing an additional problem. IOM highlighted in particular the humanitarian situation of stranded migrants, particularly those waiting at land borders for their opening. These large groups were especially hard to reach due to travel restrictions.

UNHCR reported that the Global Trends Report would be launched later this week, close to World Refugee Day. The number of people forcibly displaced was now close to 80 million. UNHCR noted the rising trend of resistance of people wanting to step forward because of the mandated isolation in some locations, which could hide the true number of cases. There had been reports from 41 country operations of increased counts of xenophobia and discrimination. This was an area that warranted strengthened advocacy messages for use by the IASC.

OHCHR updated the Principals that the action point from the last meeting for OHCHR, IOM and UNHCR to propose practical measures to strengthen collective and bilateral advocacy relating to the needs of migrants and refugees in the COVID-19 response was ongoing.

SCHR and InterAction acknowledged emerging global issue of racism and its importance to the humanitarian sector. ICRC outlined internal management steps that the organization had taken. OHCHR welcomed the discussion, noting in particular the role of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism and the Group of Experts of

People of African Descent. This week, the UN Human Rights Council would convene on these issues.

UNDP updated the Principals on the set of indicators established to track the response against the pillars of the UN socio-economic recovery plan, which DCO and UNDP had compiled after two rounds of inter-agency consultations and which now also reflected humanitarian and human rights indicators. This progress monitoring should support the response to the pandemic and in gaining synergy between the humanitarian and development activities.

The World Bank informed Principals on the findings of the Global Economic Prospects Report, which indicated that the global economy would contract by 5.2 per cent this year, pushing between 70 to 100 million people into absolute poverty, revised from 49 million earlier in the year. The World Bank was now analyzing the implications for different sectors, including health. More than \$12 billion had been committed under the new fast-track facility. The World Bank was now looking at opportunities within the crisis to “build back better” in the recovery phase.

Concern Worldwide highlighted the impending 10 July expiration date of UN Resolution of 2504 (2020), which renewed authorization of cross-border humanitarian aid into Syria.

Follow-up actions:

- Accelerate the uptake of WHO’s recent technical guidance, including on the use of masks in the context of COVID-19, through wide distribution amongst member networks. *[IASC secretariat and members]*
- Ensure rapid dissemination of guidance on the final update of the GHRP, which is due to be published on 16 July. *[IASC secretariat and members]*
- Indicate bilaterally to the ERC any specific concerns for countries in need of stronger HCT leadership for development of the next iteration of the GHRP, particularly in terms of consultations with NGOs. *[IASC members]*
- Provide IASC members with an update on progress with the issues identified in Latin America (*specifically in Brazil, Honduras, Haiti and Venezuela*). *[Emergency Directors Group]*
- Step up collective advocacy on funding for the WFP common services. *[ERC in collaboration with IASC members]*
- Finalize the development of advocacy materials for IASC members to use in support of the Human Rights situation of IDPs and Refugees. *[OHCHR, UNHCR, IOM]*
- Identify opportunities to strengthen the response to the rising concerns of racism and discrimination. *[OHCHR in consultation with the OPAG]*
- Provide IASC members with an update on the ongoing work with the CERF-funded, IOM-managed pilot grant scheme for. *[OCHA and IOM]*
- Arrange for a deep dive discussion on key countries of concern, including Yemen, the Sahel Region, Cox-Bazar/Bangladesh, South Sudan and others. *[EDG]*

- In light of the increasing risks to food security, provide IASC members with a situation update and suggested way forward at the upcoming Principals meeting on COVID-19. [*WFP and FAO*]

List of participants:

1. Mr. Mark Lowcock, Emergency Relief Coordinator, OCHA
2. Dr. Ibrahima Socé Fall, Assistant Director-General for Emergency Response, WHO
3. Mr. Amir Abdulla, Deputy Executive Director, WFP
4. Ms. Michelle Bachelet, High Commissioner, OHCHR
5. Mr. Xavier Castellanos, Acting Under Secretary General, IFRC
6. Mr. Sean Callahan, President and CEO, CRS
7. Mr. Dominic MacSorley, CEO, Concern Worldwide
8. Mr. Robert Mardini, Director General, ICRC
9. Ms. Abby Maxman, Chair of SCHR (President and CEO, Oxfam America)
10. Mr. Gareth Price, Executive Secretary, SCHR
11. Mr. Sam Worthington, CEO, InterAction
12. Mr. António Vitorino, Director General, IOM
13. Mr. Roger Yates, Chair, ICVA (Regional Director, Plan International)
14. Mr. Omar Abdi, Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF
15. Ms. Kelly Clements, Deputy High Commissioner, UNHCR
16. Ms. Asako Okai, Assistant Administrator, UNDP
17. Mr. Laurent Thomas, Deputy Director, FAO Geneva
18. Ms. Maria Immonen, Vice-Chair of SCHR (Director of the Lutheran World Federation)
19. Ms. Shoko Arakaki, Director of the Humanitarian Office, UNFPA
20. Ms. Christine Knudsen, Innovation Director of Emergencies, UN-Habitat
21. Ms. Mervat Shelbaya, Chief, IASC secretariat