

**Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator**  
**Mr. Stephen O'Brien**  
**Statement to Member States on his 16-21 July 2017 mission to the Central African**  
**Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

*New York, New York, 7 August 2017*

**as prepared for delivery**

Distinguished Ambassadors and representatives of the Permanent Missions to the United Nations in New York, ladies and gentlemen,

I deliberately chose to travel to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic as part of my very last visit as Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. Each of these countries is facing a critical humanitarian and political crisis that demands our urgent attention.

In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, the complex political and humanitarian crisis is growing every day as the dynamics of violence shift across the country, causing conflict to break out in new areas such as the traditionally peaceful Kasai region.

**It is not business as usual in the DRC. Truth is that the hideous violence, death and lack of protection is not confined to the Kivus in Eastern DRC anymore. Conflict is rapidly spreading across the country and in appalling ways, even in a country blighted by violence and insecurity for decades.**

The humanitarian and protection of civilian situation in the five provinces that make up the **Kasai region** is worsening every day, with a devastating upsurge of violence since June this year. Since the conflict began one year ago, 1.3 million people have been displaced, most of them internally, but also with a growing number of people fleeing to neighbouring Angola (30,000 people reported so far).

Most of the affected communities have been left with no means of survival. Given the gravity of the situation, on 9 June, I declared the Kasai region an **OCHA corporate emergency**. Other agencies are also in a process of reviewing their internal classification levels.

A new [report](#) by the [Office](#) of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [warns](#) that violence in the Kasai provinces is taking on an increasing and disturbing ethnic dimension. Information gathered by a team of UN human rights investigators suggests that some of the violations and abuses committed in the Kasais may amount to crimes under international law. I made it clear in my visit that whoever the perpetrators may be, evidence should be gathered, preserved, and investigations, arrests and prosecutions should follow. Even more important, are the millions who tonight need our help to survive or to be protected. But the primary responsibility is with the Democratic Republic of the Congo's federal and regional Government.

Meanwhile, and beyond the Kasai region, inter-community clashes in the **Tanganyika** province is also causing the displacement of thousands more IDPs. I saw with my own eyes how the Moni IDP site in Kalemie had been attacked by a militia, causing its 22,000 people to flee – once again in fear of their lives. I saw the fears and sheer despair in the eyes of people. All they asked for was security and safety.

And in **North and South Kivu**, where I also travelled, the more 'traditional' hotbeds of humanitarian need, clashes between armed groups continue to cause widespread displacement, leaving millions of people displaced from their homes. We began this year estimating that one million additional people would be displaced by conflict this year. Our estimates have been greatly, grievously surpassed.

Today, the Democratic Republic of the Congo hosts the **largest internally displaced population of any country in Africa, with 3.8 million IDPs.**

**Humanitarian needs are staggering; we must invest now to help strengthen the response.**

The multiple complex emergencies, combined with deep vulnerability and structural fragility have led to a staggering **7 million people in DRC to need emergency assistance tonight to survive.** Some 1.9 million of those in need are children suffering from severe acute malnutrition. Meanwhile, 35 million people in DRC are at risk of epidemic diseases, including malaria, cholera, measles and yellow fever.

The current violence in DRC is marked by horrifying abuses and, today, 1.6 million people face protection risks. Six hundred cases of sexual violence have been reported since last year against women, girls, and boys. In the Komba IDP site in the Kasai region, I met a woman, Mangasa Kalone, who told me how she

was almost burned alive as her village was attacked. Children have been separated from their parents at alarming rates, they have been torn away from their occupied or damaged schools and have been forcibly recruited into armed groups. How many more clues do we need before we act?

This mounting protection crisis comes just as the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC, MONUSCO, faces budget cuts, which puts at severe risk the Mission's capacity to perform its protection mandate, and which will put more pressure on the UN Country Team to shoulder this responsibility. I have seen an excellent UN team, and a committed HTC and UN and NGOs humanitarian partners willing to do their best to ensure that we don't let the people of the DRC down.

### **Funding remains a critical challenge in responding to the crisis in the DRC.**

The humanitarian funding gap is also growing just as violence mounts. **The inter-agency humanitarian response plan of US\$812.5 million is less than one quarter funded, and we are now in August, well over half way through this year, representing our lowest funding level in a decade.** This includes a \$64.5 million emergency appeal for the Kasai crisis, which is just 11 per cent funded.

Just because the political situation has become more unstable, because of postponed Presidential elections – unquestionably a driving factor in this staggering increase in violence in DRC – is no reason for the resources to relieve the increased suffering of the DRC people.

The humanitarian community is ready to invest its resources to mount a robust response to the Kasai crisis in line with needs, but to do so we do need investments, as we are starting operations from scratch, in an area where we have not traditionally operated.

My message today is simple: We have no time to lose. Inaction in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will have dramatic consequences for the Congolese people but also for the stability of the region. I urge each of you to act now to stop a critical situation from worsening further. We owe the millions of women, men, girls and boys of the Democratic Republic of the Congo a humanitarian – and a political - response that is commensurate to their plight, and their will to survive.

## CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

I now turn to the Central African Republic, where the picture is equally challenging. Violence is intensifying, risking a repeat of the devastating, destructive crisis that gripped the country four years ago.

From that terrible situation, the Central African Republic had made relatively tremendous progress over the past two years. It has successfully held democratic elections and strengthened governance systems, albeit with a very short reach across the country; many told me the Central Government's grit runs only as far as 12 km from the edge of Bangui. However, an upsurge of violence risks eroding these hard-won development gains.

I am extremely alarmed by the increased scale and atrocity of needless and brutal violence in the country since the beginning of 2017 and especially concerned about the resurgence of inter-communal violence, incited by armed groups and predatory politicians, that has broken out in Bangassou, Zemio and Obo in the South-East, as well as the crisis in Bocaranga in the North-West, to name a few.

### **Humanitarian needs in the CAR are growing rapidly.**

The recent upsurge in violence has added to humanitarian needs in what is already one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world. With **2.4 million people – representing half the population – in need of humanitarian aid** to survive, the Central African Republic has the largest population in need per capita.

The number of **internally displaced people have risen by 40 per cent this year**, an increase of some 180,000, **bringing the total to well over half a million**, in addition to half a million refugees.

**The protection of civilians** is a central concern, with minority groups throughout the country facing discrimination and attacks based on their ethnicity and religion. While I was there, I noted with some degree of encouragement the sparks of progress for children this year, with students at emergency schools passing their elementary exams. Nonetheless, **one in three children in CAR is still unable to return to school.**

**Bangassou**, which staved off violence four years ago, has not been able to do so this time. I was shocked and horrified to see the conditions of the 2,000 IDPs that were forced to seek sanctuary in the Catholic church, following the attacks on their villages in May. Today, after three months, the site is surrounded by anti-

Balaka elements, threatening to kill them. The risks are extremely high and we must focus properly on whether to relocate them to another site or not. Time is of the essence. We must be ready to make courageous decisions to uphold humanitarian principles. Bangassou is just one of many disheartening examples of the violence unfolding in the Central African Republic right now.

Thankfully, we also have in the Central African Republic a very active Humanitarian Coordinator, who is doing her utmost to respond to the crisis in close coordination with the Government, the UN Stabilization Mission in CAR, MINUSCA and the humanitarian partners. And let me add that there was despicable tenor of comments that because the MINUSCA troops were Moroccan, they were partial and a legitimate enemy. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Moroccan Commander and his troops were professional, impartial, and despite suffering terrible losses in recent days, are not a target. They must retain our and your full support.

We cannot under-estimate the dangerous spread of militant groups in CAR, some of which have the clear intention to ethnically cleanse. Let me repeat this, as I have told Mr. Zeid and Mr. Adama Dieng. The early warning signs of a genocide are there. We must act now, not pare down the UN's effort and pray we don't live to regret it.

I repeat the phrase: how many more clues do we need?

It is all too clear to those on the ground: it is time to authorize an increase in troops and police personnel to enable MINUSCA to deliver on its critical protection mandate. We must act now to contain this crisis.

**As in the DRC, funding levels do not meet the severity of the crisis.**

Our actions must include expanding our financial support. Donor engagement in CAR has declined over the past three years, causing chronic under-funding. The 2017 **Humanitarian Response Plan was revised upwards to US\$497 million** in line with rising needs, but eight months into the year, it is only **24 per cent funded**.

Let me make it clear: If further funding does not come in, humanitarian operations will be interrupted, leaving children without protection, parents without the food to feed them, whole families without access to life-saving healthcare. And, as I have said, the real risk of much, much worse as confessional and ethnic militias rampage through villages 'cleansing' them of people not of their type is just around the corner.

I thank the donors who have supported the pooled funds in both the Democratic Republic of the Congo RC and the Central African Republic and I encourage all of you to channel support through these funds, which drive an effective, rapid, strategic and localised response.

The Central African Republic is at a critical juncture and we cannot give up now. We must do all that we can to protect the political and development gains that we have invested in over recent years. The risk of relapse into another large-scale humanitarian crisis is imminent. I call on each of you here, to step up your efforts for the sake of peace, and for the future of this country and above all, for the future of the people.

Thank you for being here today, and thank you for your support as we work together to deliver a better future for millions of conflict-affected people today and for future generations in Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

These acute, urgent humanitarian crises are not natural disasters – they are manmade. It is therefore within our scope to mitigate and ward off the terrible behaviours, attitudes, violent actions, intimidation and fearful threats – above all, as the UN, being present, providing protection by presence, in sufficient numbers and sufficiently resourced; and with humanitarian relief, sufficiently resourced to save lives, through the United Nations and our brave determined humanitarian international NGO and NGO partners.