

[Transcript] Global News Podcast / Mounting anger over slow response to Libya floods

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This is the Global News podcast from the BBC World Service.

I'm Alex Ritzen and in the early hours of Sunday the 17th of September these are our main stories. Bodies are being washed back onto the beach of Libya's Derna, almost a week from the devastating flood. More than a week on from Morocco's earthquake, we hear from one of the aid workers trying to bring relief in the Atlas Mountains.

There's 40 people left in that village and they're sleeping between two tents, one for women and one for men. And that morning there had been a significant aftershock. And the British comedian Russell Brand is accused of rape, sexual assaults and emotional abuse at the height of his fame.

Also in this podcast, Ukraine tries to create a safe corridor through the Black Sea for ships taking its farm produce to the world and protests around the world at the killing a year ago of an Iranian woman, Masa Amini, for apparently refusing to wear a headscarf. I believe that Iranian people, they never lose hope. They actually lost everything but not hope. They want to end this regime. We need a global rally against dictatorship.

A week after floods devastated large parts of the eastern Libyan city of Derna, survivors have expressed their fury at government leaders, accusing them of failing to save thousands of people who died after two dams failed. But the international relief effort is now getting underway. An Italian naval ship has arrived with tents, blankets, water pumps and tractors. And the World Health Organization said enough supplies for a quarter of a million people arrived in Benghazi, almost 250 kilometres away. Aid flights have also come in from Russia, Romania and Saudi Arabia. Our correspondent Anna Foster sent this report from Derna.

A bustling city, now a wasteland. The destructive power of water has ripped the heart from Derna. Its survivors left wracked with grief and anger. We were told to stay inside our homes.

Why? They should have told us there was a storm, told us the dam was old and crumbling. Some of these destroyed buildings were 100 years old.

Ferris Gassar lost five members of his family in the raging current. One was his ten-month-old daughter. He shows me their pictures, first alive and then their bodies. This was what brought him here. A convoy of ministers from the Eastern Government, one of Libya's two opposing authorities. Fighting has decimated the country's infrastructure. Ferris says it's proved fatal. I spoke to the Eastern Prime Minister Osama Hamad.

How did this happen when the dams were supposed to keep people safe? It was a very strong cyclone, he told me, too strong for the dams. Here in the centre of Derna, the destruction is total. And when you look down this valley, at an area that used to be filled with apartment buildings, homes, cars, thousands of people with lives that have all been picked up and swept out to sea, you wonder how a city like this can ever recover.

Down at the port, Derna's dead are still returning to the city. Recovery teams watch the waves

and wait for them. This morning, three more bodies were pulled from the debris, but thousands of others, swept far from here, will never come home.

Ana Foster in Derna. Rana Kosefi, the Deputy Chief of Mission for the UN Refugee Agency, the UNHCR in Libya is also in Derna. She spoke to James Kumrasami.

It's a horrific scene. I really haven't seen anything like this. I'm not even sure I can explain it. You already see the impact of Storm Daniel on your way to Derna. It took us over eight hours from Benrazi. This is usually a four-hour drive. You can see the road split in half. I saw massive rocks and when I asked my colleagues, they explained that they were coming from the neighboring mountain to the coastal areas. These rocks have demolished and destroyed homes. When I got to Derna, we specifically went to the old city. I saw shops and homes that were flattened. I've even seen shops that were submerged in the mud and you could tell how high the mud had reached. It is really, really a very horrific scene and the impact. I can't explain it.

What are the rescue operations?

We saw all kinds of different search and rescue teams. I know that there have been different countries from Europe and then the region in the Middle East and North Africa have sent their teams. They are right now focusing on search and rescue. I've heard of stories of individuals who were rescued alive under the rubbles. Don't forget this is the sixth or seventh day since the storm hit last Sunday. This is the number one priority right now. In addition to extracting the deceased and the corpses that have now been washed away into the sea or are buried under the rubble, so body bags are needed. Additional search and rescue teams are needed. Time is off the essence obviously because every second counts in the lives of those individuals who remain alive under the rubble. People are still being pulled out alive. It's miraculous as the locals are saying. It's giving them some sense of hope. It goes without saying that the levels of shock and trauma and fear and panic amongst the local residents in Derna and the neighbouring cities that were affected by the storm is massive. Many families continue to look for their missing family members. A lot of them have been split. A lot of them have been displaced. A lot of them have made their way to the neighbouring cities to be hosted by their relatives or friends.

Rana Kasefi from the UNHCR. Staying in North Africa, it's just over a week since a devastating earthquake struck Morocco, killing nearly 3,000 people. Some villages in the Atlas Mountains, the epicentre of the quake, have also been venting their frustration at the lack of help from the authorities. Africa original editor Richard Hamilton has been finding out more from a British aid worker who's been trying to get help to people there.

Ella Williams is a British student who's been conducting field research in the Atlas Mountains for her PhD on girls' education. Last Saturday morning, while back in the UK, she received a desperate phone call from one of her friends. Naima told her she was trapped in the rubble in her village, Tagrentaft, and that her mother, father, brothers and sisters had all died when their house collapsed. Ella tried to get a military helicopter to locate Naima, but without success. Ella also works for a charity, the British Moroccan Society, so she flew out to Marrakesh and on Thursday delivered supplies to two villages.

The entire village of Ashashi is completely destroyed. It's one single pile of rubble and the smell of the animals that died underneath the rubble was quite overpowering, but the thing which for me just touched me the most and brought tears to my eyes is that despite

everything, the villagers welcomed us with aspic and dates, which is traditional berber soup, and they cooked that in darkness because they hadn't got any light up there. So, you know, despite everything, Moroccan hospitality is continuing and that was a really special moment. She walked back to another village where she slept in a tent, but it was a troubled night. There's 40 people left in that village and they're sleeping between two tents, one for women and one for men. About 3am in the morning, there was a storm, a windstorm, which was very noisy, sand and dust was falling into the tent, rocks were falling, and that morning there had been a significant aftershock, which was still in people's minds. So, when all this was happening at 3am in the morning in pitchblackness, people were convinced that there was going to be another quake and the women in the tent got up and they got together and they started reciting the first verse of the Quran. They're still living in fear that the earthquake is coming back. One of the young women summed up this feeling of trauma among the community. Even if there is no earthquake, she said, the earthquake is always in our minds. Just after this interview, Ella finally received news of her friend who she'd tried so hard to rescue. Naima had been found taken to a hospital, but later died from her injuries.

Richard Hamilton. A deal that had allowed Ukraine to export grain was abandoned by Russia in July. Now, though, a temporary corridor is being used to do just that and two ships are due to load nearly 20,000 tonnes of wheat destined for Africa and Asia. Meanwhile, Ukraine says it will continue to focus its war efforts on Crimea, this after a successful operation against the Sevastopol naval base on Wednesday and in the wake of questions over its use of weapons against the peninsula. I spoke to our correspondent, Paul Adams.

Since the middle of July, Russia has not been part of the Black Sea grain initiative, which was negotiated by the UN and Turkey more than a year ago. Now, since then, there have been attempts to see if vessels can reach Ukrainian ports and can leave Ukrainian ports via a temporary corridor, which does not rely on Russian cooperation. That temporary corridor hugs the Black Sea coast close to Romania and Bulgaria. And until now, all we knew was that about five vessels had managed to leave Ukrainian ports. Those were vessels that had been stuck there since the beginning of the war. They weren't carrying grain. They were carrying other cargoes. What we've seen for the first time is that two vessels, relatively small bulk carriers, are prepared to take the risk of using it, that corridor, to reach Ukrainian ports, to load up with wheat and to export that. So that is the first time we have seen a movement towards Ukrainian ports rather than simply away from them.

Meanwhile, Ukraine very much defending its right to attack Russian targets in Crimea. Yeah, we've seen a lot of activity this past week. Obviously, the spectacular raid on Sevastopol on the home of the Black Sea fleet on Wednesday, which very substantially damaged two vessels, a landing ship and a submarine, and caused extensive damage to the important dry dock facility in Sevastopol, where parts of the Black Sea fleet are maintained and repaired. And the following day, an attack on one of Russia's principal air defense systems in Crimea. We've been getting more and more details

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as the week has gone on about that Sevastopol raid, with the Ukrainians now saying that a special forces team was involved. They inserted themselves using boats onto the Crimean Peninsula. They were present at Sevastopol when that missile attack took place. So a pretty daring operation involving special forces, cruise missiles, drones. These efforts by Ukraine are becoming more and more sophisticated. And I think this is a major worry for Russia because Crimea is an absolutely vital integral part of its logistical hinterland for its forces in southern Ukraine, and is also, as far as Moscow is concerned, an absolutely integral part of the Russian Federation.

Paul Adams in Kyiv. The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, will visit the Italian island of Lampedusa on Sunday after a surge in the number of migrants arriving there. More than 8,000 people have crossed from North Africa on small boats in the past week, prompting protests by residents and a plea for help from Italy's Prime Minister. Here's our Europe Regional Editor, Danny Aberhardt.

The number of migrants arriving in Lampedusa this week has been, in the words of an official from the International Organization for Migration, unprecedented. Many have been transferred to Sicily and elsewhere, but some 2,500 remain. The Italian Red Cross has mounted a colossal effort to meet their basic humanitarian needs, and many residents have gone out of their way to welcome the migrants. But tensions have risen. Other Lampedusans are mounting protests, fearing that a tense city could develop. From today, Lampedusa says enough, nobody, nobody anymore. This message must be conveyed to both Europe and to the government that the Lampedusans are tired.

Yesterday, Italy's right-wing Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, called the situation unsustainable. She wants action from the EU, including expediting a partnership with Tunisia, agreed in Outline in July, which includes measures to help tackle irregular migration. The European Commission chief, Ursula von der Leyen, has accepted Miss Meloni's invitation to visit Lampedusa. Brussels is keen to be seen to be trying to help. Miss von der Leyen's likely to back Italy's demands for solidarity from other EU member states. But that is a perennial source of tension within the bloc. Ultimately, it's individual member states who will decide.

Dani Eberhardt, now.

Women, life, freedom, a rallying cry that echoed across cities around the world on Saturday. From Paris to New York to Tokyo, commemorative rallies were held to mark one year since the death in custody of the Kurdish Iranian woman, Masa Amini. She collapsed after being detained by Iran's morality police for allegedly not properly wearing her mandatory hijab or head covering. A death sparked an uprising led by women and girls, driven by demands not just to end the compulsory dress code, but for much wider freedoms in Iran. The protests were eventually

suppressed, but not the widespread desire for change. Masir Alina Jad is an Iranian women's rights activist.

I believe that Iranian people, they never lose hope. They actually lost everything but not hope. They want to end this regime. The next step, I believe that we need a global rally against dictatorship.

BBC Persians' GR Goal has been following events and spoke to me earlier from a demonstration here in London's Trafalgar Square.

Thousands of Iranian diaspora, Iranian residents in London, in other cities in the UK, came to London in different places in front of Iranian embassy here in the Trafalgar Square and also in front of Downing Street. There was many gathering. More than 550 were killed in the protests last year. Many of the picture of those people were being carried with people. And they were shouting, United Kingdom should designate Iranian Revolutionary Guards Courts as a terrorist organization. So many people were shouting, women live, freedom. And many people here, they see the Iranian Revolutionary Guard as a tool in the hand of Iranian government to suppress the protesters.

Being in contact with many Iranian activists inside the country, particularly in the hometown of Mahsajina Amini in the cities of Saqiz, someone described the scene just like military zone. There are so many armored vehicles, special forces covering their face with blood, hood, and every corner of the streets, every square has been packed with them. They try to prevent any gatherings. The entire city's shops and bazaar was shut down. It was replicated in many cities in the Kurdish region, which was the epicenter of protests last year.

G.R. Goal in London's Trafalgar Square.

Still to come in the Global News Podcast.

I said to her at the end of the conversation, I'll see you tomorrow night. Amy, love you.

She said, love you more and put the phone down. That was the last thing I ever heard from her.

Remembering the British music legend Amy Winehouse in the week she would have turned 40.

The Attorney General for the U.S. State of Texas, Ken Paxton, has been cleared by the State Senate of corruption charges following an impeachment process. Allegations of wrongdoing, which he denied, have been hanging over him since he took office nine years ago. Like his ally, the former President Donald Trump, the Republican claimed he was the victim of a political witch hunt and said the outcome showed the truth prevailed. He still faces a separate state fraud trial. I heard more about Mr. Paxton from our North America correspondent, David Willis.

He gained national prominence over his court battles with then President Barack Obama and he also led an effort to overturn the 2020 presidential election through a lawsuit that was aimed at throwing out the electoral college votes of swing states that were won by Joe Biden. So he represents a particular part of the Republican Party, if you like. He's been suspended without pay since May of this year when he was impeached by the lower house of the Texas legislature by an overwhelming majority over allegations of bribery and abuse of office. That was after it emerged that he requested more than three million dollars in taxpayers' money in order to settle a lawsuit with former staff members whom he fired after they reported his conduct to the FBI and those whistleblowers accused Ken Paxton of doing favors for a local real estate investor who donated tens of thousands of dollars to Mr. Paxton's political campaign. He was impeached, as I said, by the Texas

House of Representatives but has now been acquitted by the state senate on 16 counts following a two-week trial.

And this case really has split the Republicans in Texas, hasn't it?

It very much has. There are some Republicans, member of the lower house, who continue to maintain Alex that the Attorney General is corrupt and unfit for office and that he'd abandoned his obligation to work on behalf, if you like, of the interests of the people of Texas. The Texas House of Representatives elicited testimony from more than a dozen witnesses during that trial who are mostly former senior aides to Mr. Paxton himself. So you're absolutely right. This has proved deeply divisive as far as Republicans who hold the majority there in Texas are concerned.

David Willis. The British actor and comedian Russell Brand has been accused of rape, sexual assault and abusive behavior during a seven-year period. The allegations have been made by several women following a joint investigation by the British media organizations The Times, The Sunday Times and Channel 4's Dispatches programme. Russell Brand has denied the claim, saying all of his past relationships were consensual. On Saturday he performed his one-man show to a sell-out crowd at a theatre in London. The chair of the House of Commons Culture Committee, Caroline Dinanage, has called the allegations very serious and concerning. Our correspondent Helena Wilkinson reports.

The joint investigation says that four women have alleged they were sexually assaulted by Russell Brand between 2006 and 2013. One has accused him of raping her. During the years covered by the allegations, Russell Brand had various high-profile jobs at different times including at BBC Radio 2 and Channel 4 and as an actor in Hollywood films. Channel 4's Dispatches programme has broadcast testimony from the women. One woman says Russell Brand attacked her at his home in Los Angeles in July 2012. Her words are voiced by an actor. He's grabbing at my underwear, pulling it to the side. I'm telling him to get off me and he won't get off. Like holding me up against the wall, pushing himself in me. I was like, oh my God, he raped me.

She says that afterwards Russell Brand sent her a message saying, I'm sorry. Another woman has alleged that Russell Brand assaulted her when she was 16 and still at school and he was 31. The Sunday Times has also reported that other women have made a range of allegations about his controlling, abusive and predatory behaviour. In a video released last night, before the allegations were made public, but after he had been told about them, Russell Brand issued this denial.

These allegations pertain to the time when I was working in the mainstream, when I was in the newspapers all the time, when I was in the movies and as I've written about extensively in my books, I was very, very promiscuous. Now during that time of promiscuity, the relationships I had were absolutely always consensual. What I seriously refute are these very, very serious criminal allegations.

Russell Brand's current agent, Tavistock Wood, have told the BBC they have terminated all professional ties with him. Russell Brand started his career as a stand-up comedian. He went on to host a number of radio and TV programmes. In a statement tonight, the BBC highlighted the corporation took issues seriously and was prepared to act. More recently, Russell Brand has turned away from traditional mainstream media and currently brought us a weekday online show. In a statement, Channel 4 said it was appalled to learn of what it described

as deeply troubling allegations, including behaviour alleged to have taken place on programmes made for Channel 4.

Helena Wilkinson. The Greek Prime Minister, Kiriakos Mitsotakis, has said his country is facing a war during peacetime after experiencing its worst floods and fires in its history. Here's Tom Bailey.

In a keynote address, Mr Mitsotakis said the role of the army would be strengthened in responding to natural disasters, while more funding would be made available for those affected. This will be raised by increasing tourist taxes. Greece has faced its worst wildfire season closely followed by severe flooding, which left 17 people dead. The Prime Minister described climate change as the new enemy. His government has, though, faced criticism over its response with many of those affected, saying it was slow and uncoordinated.

Tom Bailey.

The remote Arctic islands of Svalbard in Norway, the northernmost settlement in the world, have been described as the canary in the coal mine of climate change. They're warming twice as fast as other areas of the Arctic and five to seven times faster than the rest of the world. Hilda Fallen-Strom lives in the Svalbard capital and is the co-founder of Hearts in the Ice, which is joining global protests over the weekend against the burning of fossil fuels. Julian Marshall asked her how the climate in Svalbard has changed over the years. The temperature they have measured is from 1994 and up till today, has risen 10 degrees Celsius for the middle temperature during winter. It's an extreme situation up in the Arctic, and as you know, what's happened in the Arctic doesn't stay in the Arctic, so it impacts the whole world. I've been experiencing avalanches, landslides, loss of sea ice, decreasing glaciers. The whole island is all of a sudden green. You see wildlife is struggling. It impacts everything, actually.

You mentioned wildlife there, and of course with that part of the world you associate with polar bears. Are they having to change their habits?

Yes. So what we have seen since their main prey is seals on top of the sea ice, when we now have less sea ice, they need to try to find other sources for food. And what we've seen the last few years is that a few polar bears are getting experts in hunting reindeer. The question the scientists are asking is if this could maybe help a few of the individuals, but probably not the whole species. They're trying to adapt, but the changes are happening so fast. And we also see that the polar bear moms are really struggling to keep their cubs alive. We haven't seen any decrease in the numbers in big range, but we do see that they are really having a huge problem to bring their cubs up to adult age. They starve to death during the summer, and usually the first year.

Is it a better place, though, for humans to live now, Svalbard?

That's a good question. I think we are adaptable, but it's really a matter of how impactful this region is for the whole world. I'd rather have a cold, powerful Arctic than what it is now. It really impacts us, too. I experienced back in 2015 a life-changing event when an avalanche came down to the settlement just a few meters from my house. This avalanche destroyed 12 of my neighbour's houses, and 17 of my neighbours were buried inside their homes. I realised that I really wanted to be not only part of the problem, but also part of the solution.

What is the solution? Because, presumably, all this global warming that you are experiencing

is caused by carbon emissions that have nothing to do with you.

Well, it actually has something to do with me, too, because I'm living up in Svalbard.

We have coal mining, so I encourage everyone to support an energy shift towards renewable energy, and say goodbye to fossil fuel and fossil energy.

Hild Fallen-Strom, the co-founder of the Hearts in the Ice programme in Svalbard.

Amy Winehouse, the multi-award-winning and hugely gifted pop star of the 2000s, would have turned 40 this week. Instead, the British singer died in 2011 at the age of just 27.

Audrey Brown has been speaking to Dale Davis. He was a friend of Amy's and used to be her bassist. He now plays in a tribute act called the Amy Winehouse Band.

I tell you, for the first four years when I was working with her, up until the end of 2007, there were so many great performances. Within two weeks of working with her, we did a gig at Notting Hill Carnival. By the end of the show, I thought your performance was so powerful, you didn't need a band there. And Notting Hill Carnival was going to be a hard place for a young white girl at the time, and halfway through the concert, people just turned up by the end of it. It was completely packed in Power Square, and she was unbelievable. And at that point, I realised what a great talent she was and had to look out for her, really.

When we had first come out, she was very excited about that. She wasn't really a person to boast or anything like that. She'd never really big herself up.

Which musicians did she like to sing? I love the Tony Bennett album, by the way.

Yes. She's a big fan of Donny Hathaway. We've done a couple of his songs in the set.

We did a cover of More Than You'll Ever Know. We're still friends, she recorded as well on a live show. She liked Little Anthony in the Imperials as well. She liked a lot of old stuff.

She loved the specials, obviously. We did the covers with that. But she always managed to take a cover and make it sound like herself.

Tell me about the Amy Winehouse band that you're in now.

It started in 2016, and the first couple of shows were strange, but then once I started to see the audience

reaction and how much they wanted to see this, then I thought, it's a must, really.

And I do it out of love and respect for Amy as well, you know. We saw a lot of each other in the last six months, and I just felt that, you know, it was important to carry that on.

You spoke to her the night she died?

Yes, then I was out with her two nights beforehand. So that was quite surreal when I look at the events

the following day. We were having a nice conversation. I was going to see her the following night, and I said to her at the end of the conversation, I'll see you tomorrow night.

Amy, love you. She said, love you more and put the phone down. That was the last thing I ever heard from her.

So I feel, you know, it's a very bittersweet thing.

Back to her, I go back to black.

Dale Davis, who played bass for Amy Winehouse, and is currently a member of the Amy Winehouse band.

He was speaking to the BBC's Audrey Brown.

And that's all from us for now, but there'll be a new edition of the Global News podcast later.

If you want to comment on this podcast or the topics covered in it, you can send us an email.

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The address is GlobalPodcast at bbc.co.uk.

You can also find us on X, formerly known as Twitter, at Global NewsPod.

This edition was mixed by Danny Cox, and the producer was Emma Joseph.

The editor is Karen Martin.

I'm Alex Ritzen. Until next time, goodbye.

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