

[Global heat melts Arctic and Antarctic sea ice to record lows – UN agency](#)

17 February 2017 – It should be winter on the Arctic pole – the northernmost point in the world – but the equivalent of heatwaves have passed over the region this season melting the sea ice volume to a record low in January, the United Nations meteorological agency said.

Temperatures in the Arctic are quite remarkable and very alarming, said David Carlson, Director of the World Climate Research Programme which is co-sponsored by the UN World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Council for Science.

Sea ice extent was the lowest on the 38-year-old satellite record for the month of January, both at the Arctic and Antarctic, according to data cited WMO from both the US National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC) and Germany's Sea ice Portal operated by the Alfred-Wegener-Institut.

The Arctic sea ice extent averaged 13.38 million square kilometres in January, according to NSIDC. This is 260,000 square kilometers below the level in January 2016 – an area bigger than the size of the United Kingdom.

The recovery period for Arctic sea ice is normally in the winter, when it gains both in volume and extent. The recovery this winter has been fragile, at best, and there were some days in January when temperatures were actually above melting point, said Mr. Carlson.

This will have serious implications for Arctic sea ice extent in summer as well as for the global climate system. What happens at the Poles does not stay at the Poles.

In addition, the ice levels at the Antarctic are also at record lows, even thinner than expected for the summer season there.

[UN chief Guterres welcomes the Gambia's rescission of its withdrawal from International Criminal Court](#)

16 February 2017 – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has welcomed the rescission the Gambia's withdrawal from the Rome Statute of the

International Criminal Court (ICC).

According to statement issued by his spokesperson, Mr. Guterres “welcomes that the Gambia will remain a State Party to the International Criminal Court’s founding instrument.”

“[He] remains confident that States Parties will continue to further strengthen the Court through a constructive dialogue,” the statement added.

The notification concerning the rescission of withdrawal was delivered to the UN chief on 10 February.

The Gambia had formally notified the UN chief, who is the depository of the Rome Statute of the ICC, of its withdrawal from the Rome Statute in November last year – a decision which the Secretary-General deeply regretted, noted the statement.

The statement further noted that over the past two decades, the world has made decisive strides towards building a truly global system of international criminal justice, with the ICC as its centrepiece.

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It added that the Gambia, like so many other African countries, played a major role in the negotiations leading to the adoption of the Rome Statute and was among its first signatories.

The ICC’s founding Rome Statute sets out the Court’s jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and – as of an amendment in 2010 – the crime of aggression. In addition to jurisdiction, it also addresses issues such as admissibility and applicable law, the composition and administration of the Court, investigations and prosecution, trials, penalties, appeal and revision, international cooperation and judicial assistance, and enforcement.

Pakistan: UN condemns deadly terrorist attack on Sufi shrine in Sindh province

16 February 2017 – The United Nations has condemned the terrorist attack on worshippers at a Sufi shrine in Sehwan, in Sindh, Pakistan, today, which reportedly left dozens dead and hundreds injured, and for which the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) has claimed responsibility.

This attack, claimed by ISIL/Da'esh, follows a suicide bombing at a rally in Lahore on Monday, and a suicide bombing on a Government compound in the Mohmand tribal area and an attack on a Government van carrying judges in Peshawar on Wednesday, according to a statement issued this afternoon by the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General.

"We extend our condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government and people of Pakistan, and wish a speedy recovery to the injured. We call for the perpetrators of this attack to be brought to justice swiftly," said the statement, adding that the UN supports the Government of Pakistan in its fight against terrorism in full respect of international and human rights norms.

[Yemen: Senior UN aid official 'appalled' by airstrikes that kill women and children](#)

16 February 2017 – The top United Nations humanitarian official in Yemen today said he was extremely saddened and appalled by the airstrikes that killed six women and a girl gathering for a funeral in a private residence in the Arhab District of Sana'a Governorate yesterday.

"The manner in which the parties to the conflict are waging this war is taking an unacceptable toll on the civilian population in Yemen and as illustrated by this most recent tragedy, women and children are paying with their lives," said UN Humanitarian Coordinator Jamie McGoldrick in a statement.

The statement, issued by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said that health authorities confirm six women and a girl killed, as well as at least 15 other women injured, some gravely. Unfortunately, the number of dead could rise as the critically injured struggle to survive.

"I am alarmed to see this tragic loss of life further escalate the fighting, with reports of a retaliatory ballistic missile strike into Saudi Arabia's Asir region," he said.

This incident comes at a time of severe hardship and suffering in Yemen where imposed import restrictions are causing food scarcity and price hikes resulting in worsening food insecurity and malnutrition across the country.

The economic decline caused by the conflict is leading to the collapse of basic service provision. Sana'a airport remains closed to commercial flights, limiting options for those who need this service to access life-saving

medical care and restricting movements in and out of the country.

“The people of Yemen have suffered long enough. Peace is the only solution to help end the suffering in Yemen,” he said, calling on all the parties to return to the negotiation table.

In a separate statement on the incident, UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, stressed that every day, across Yemen, civilians are killed by indiscriminate attacks by all parties to the conflict on residential areas in complete disregard of the rules of international humanitarian law.

“Attacks on civilians are unjustifiable, regardless of the circumstances. Women and children in particular have been subjected to unspeakable suffering in this brutal conflict. This should stop immediately,” he said, calling on all parties to adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law and respect the sanctity of civilian life.

Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed went on to note that the ongoing military clashes on the Red Sea coast are aggravating an already catastrophic humanitarian situation, with tens of thousands of civilians caught in the war zone without access to humanitarian assistance and unable to flee to safety.

“The military activities in the region threaten to disrupt the import of commercial and humanitarian supplies which could have a terrible impact on the food security for large parts of the population,” he said, urging all parties to ensure the unhindered movement of commercial and humanitarian supplies, without which millions of Yemenis are at risk of death and famine.

Aid obstacles are ‘matter of life and death’ for besieged Syrians, says senior UN adviser

16 February 2017 – Assurances have been given to humanitarians by the Syrian Government that obstacles to aid deliveries will be removed across the war-torn country, a senior United Nations adviser said today.

Speaking to journalists in Geneva, UN Special Adviser Jan Egeland said that the agreement was needed to remove what he called an “administrative quagmire” that has prevented all aid from reaching besieged populations by road so far this year.

Ahead of a round of Intra-Syrian negotiations in the Swiss city next week, Mr. Egeland added that the issue is “a question of life and death” for many.

So far this year, aid agencies and their partners have not reached a single besieged area inside Syria by land. There are 13 of these besieged and hard-to-reach areas in all, where well over 600,000 people are increasingly vulnerable, after six years of war.

Mr. Egeland described the lack of aid deliveries as an “enormous disappointment,” before announcing that the Syrian Government had given assurances that requests to deliver food and medical supplies would be met, rather than being blocked at the last moment.

In recent days “men with guns” had jumped onto more than two in three convoys to unload diarrhoea kits for children and maternity kits for pregnant women, Mr. Egeland said.



UN Senior Advisor, Jan Egeland. UN Photo/Luca Solari (file)

“This must change and can change,” he continued, adding that there had been intensive diplomatic activity by the UN or UN envoys and with the help of members of the task force with the Government of Syria, who say that a new and better system avoiding the “administrative quagmire where we have to have green lights from so many instances that in the end no convoy moves to any besieged area.”

Nowhere is aid needed more than in the so-called ‘Four Towns’ of Foah, Kafraya, Madaya and Zabadani.

“We hope and believe it will change now; it must change now. Because if we are not reaching the ‘Four Towns’ very soon we will see again the scenes that we saw when the whole thing started a year ago: people starving.”

With UN-facilitated talks in Geneva due to begin next week, Mr. Egeland said it would send “a very important signal” if aid convoys that were standing by were allowed through to Al Waer in Homs governorate, another besieged location.

‘Mixed results’ for Humanitarian Taskforce’s first year

Assessing the work carried out by the Humanitarian Taskforce in the year since its establishment by the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) to boost aid access, he said the results had been mixed.

The ISSG established respective taskforces on humanitarian aid delivery and a wider ceasefire. They have been meeting separately since early 2016 on a way forward in the crisis. Russia and the United States are the co-chairs of the taskforces and the ISSG, which also comprises the UN, the Arab League, the European Union and 16 other countries.

While noting that the taskforce had nearly trebled the number of people reached in 2016 compared with the previous year, he said progress has been hampered of late.

"The Humanitarian Taskforce could provide access especially through the initiatives of the co-chairs Russia and the United States when they were active and working together, but also other Member States helped us in real time in a number of convoys that were stopped and in the end were helped through checkpoints because of diplomatic initiatives," he explained.

As such, "it is a shame that members of the task force were not able to lift a single siege by negotiations in 2016. There is commitment to try to do that in 2017, it could happen through talks in Astana, in Geneva and elsewhere. 'Lift the sieges' is our appeal. Sieges belong in the Middle Ages, they do not belong in 2017," said Mr. Egeland.

Looking ahead, he appealed for the taskforce's co-chairs to do more, along with Member States who have influence on the Syrian Government and armed opposition, such as Iran, Turkey and the Gulf States.

News from the political front

Meanwhile, according to a UN spokesperson, the Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, met in Moscow today with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov.

They discussed the ongoing meeting in Astana and how best it can contribute to the preparations for the Geneva round of negotiations scheduled for next week. Meetings were useful and productive. Other issues, such as humanitarian access and UN-Russia cooperation, were also discussed.

The spokesperson confirmed that a five-member UN delegation is in Astana to lend its expertise in discussions on the consolidation of the ceasefire regime and related issues.