

Idlib deal could save three million 'from catastrophe' says UN chief, as militants are urged to lay down arms

A deal reached between Russia and Turkey to create a demilitarized buffer zone protecting citizens "from catastrophe" in Syria's Idlib region is a welcome development, [UN Secretary-General](#) António Guterres said on Thursday, before urging all parties to make a "strong commitment" to it.

"I welcome the agreement three days ago between President Erdogan of Turkey and President Putin of Russia, to create a demilitarized buffer zone in Idlib", Mr Guterres told journalists in New York.

"If properly implemented, this could save three million civilians – including one million children – from catastrophe."

In his appeal to "all the parties" to implement the agreement, the UN chief highlighted the need to ensure the protection of civilians and humanitarian access.

International humanitarian law must also be respected and everyone involved in the more than seven-year conflict should work "urgently for greater progress" in the Geneva process to find a political solution to the situation.

If properly implemented, this could save three million civilians – including one million children – from catastrophe – *UN chief António Guterres*

Mr Guterres's comments followed a meeting earlier in the day of the Humanitarian Access Task Force on Syria, led by Senior Adviser to the UN Jan Egeland.

Echoing the UN chief's comments, Mr Egeland said that the deal between Russia and Turkey was a welcome development, before appealing to armed militants there not to fight "to the last civilian".

"What some groups have said is that they are preparing to fight," Mr Egeland told journalists in Geneva. "And our message to them is...we hope you're not going to fight to the last civilian".

After meeting with more than 20 Member States, Mr Egeland explained that the fine detail of the freshly-inked deal had yet to be decided.

"We were informed of the details of the agreement," he said. "We were also informed that many details are being worked out and that the two countries,

Russia and Turkey, would be in contact with us as humanitarians, to explain how we can ensure protection of civilians, access for the 12,000 humanitarians who are inside of the zone and the many who will continue assistance, both cross-border and potentially cross-line, from Government-controlled areas.”

The agreement between Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russia’s President Vladimir Putin reportedly creates a 15-20-kilometre-wide de-escalation zone in Idlib to be patrolled by Russian and Turkish troops.

The Special Advisor to the UN highlighted the dangers of further violence in Syria’s last opposition-held area, where half of Idlib’s population of nearly three million are internally-displaced civilians and a million are children.

It was essential that the aid lifeline from Turkey to Syria “must not be cut” by fighting “that could still happen” as part of this agreement, he said.

Some 10,000 fighters in Idlib are classified as terrorists by the UN.

Insisting that the “ruthless and reckless armed groups” which had committed crimes in Syria should not escape justice, Mr Egeland said that he hoped interlocutors would offer them alternatives to fighting.

“The listed organizations, terrorist organizations have many, thousands and thousands of fighters... They are in many parts of Idlib,” he said. “And among them are many who say they would fight until the end, and that is very, very worrisome.”

Terrorist organizations have many thousands of fighters... in many parts of Idlib...And among them are many who say they would fight until the end – *UN Special Adviser, Jan Egeland*

With so many armed groups there vying for control, the Senior Advisor to the UN called on Member States reiterated that it was a “war crime” to blend into civilian populations and to locate next to homes, schools or hospitals.

“The so-called ‘war on terror’ is not called off,” Mr Egeland said. “On the contrary, there will be in the future air raids against the listed organizations. There will also be fighting between armed groups, armed actors and the so-called terrorists, the so-called radicals.”

‘Too few’ judgements so far on serious crimes committed during Syria conflict

Also in Geneva, the head of the UN-appointed International, Independent and Impartial Mechanism ([IIIM](#)) into the worst crimes committed in Syria announced that there had been “far too few” judgments made against perpetrators to date.

Criminal investigations taking place in a number of countries – notably in Europe – were “undeniably a source of hope” for victims, Catherine Marchi-

Uhel told journalists.

“But the road is still a long one,” she added, noting that “the large majority” remained “disillusioned” by the absence of the possibility of justice for them at an international level.

After starting work on evidence-gathering earlier this year, the Mechanism has so far collected almost 900,000 records, the equivalent of four terabytes of data.

This includes “high-value” testimonies gathered by other UN accountability bodies such as the Commission of Inquiry on Syria, Ms. Marchi-Uhel explained, adding that the Mechanism also engages with national war crimes units in various States and with Syrian non-governmental organizations.

To date, the Mechanism has received seven requests for assistance from national prosecutors. It expects to open “two or more specific investigative case files” before the end of the year, the IIM head said.

[It's 'time for concrete action' says UN chief, welcoming inter-Korean agreement](#)

The United Nations Secretary-General [António Guterres](#), on Thursday welcomed the outcome of the third inter-Korean summit this year, and the “important agreements” contained in the Pyongyang Joint Declaration, issued by the leaders of the two Koreas.

He [commended](#) the “determination and diplomacy” shown by the leaders of North Korea, formally known as the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), and South Korea, formally known as the Republic of Korea.

South Korea’s President, Moon Jae-in, became the first leader from the south to travel to the North Korean capital in years on Monday, and at the conclusion of the three days of talks with his northern counterpart, Kim Jong-un, both sides described it as a positive step towards peace.

“The commitments reflected in the joint statement include important military confidence-building measures and a commitment by the DPRK to dismantle missile engine testing infrastructure in the presence of experts from related countries”, said the Secretary-General, in a statement issued by his Spokesperson, adding that “now it is time for concrete action”.

Mr. Guterres called “for unity of the international community to support the

parties in their endeavours towards sustainable peace, security and complete and verifiable denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula in accordance with relevant Security Council Resolutions”.

He also reiterated the commitment and readiness of the United Nations system “to further assist the parties in any way they deem appropriate”.

This Pyongyang joint Declaration came three days after the UN political affairs chief, [Rosemary di Carlo](#), [told](#) the Security Council that the International Atomic Energy Agency ([IAEA](#)) reported having observed in May nuclear signatures consistent with the continued operation of a plutonium production reactor, radiochemical laboratory and alleged uranium enrichment facility in Yongbyon, North Korea.

[Indigenous peoples ‘lag behind on all social and economic indicators’: UN deputy human rights chief](#)

Progress that destroys traditional culture, language, land and human heritage “is not development, but willful destruction”, the UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights said on Wednesday, in defence of indigenous peoples everywhere.

[Kate Gilmore](#)’s comments were followed by the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Ms. [Victoria Tauli Corpuz](#), who expressed concern at a “drastic increase” in attacks against indigenous peoples, and efforts to criminalize them.

In her address to the [Human Rights Council](#), Deputy High Commissioner Ms. Gilmore urged Member States to push for the “full inclusion” of all 370 million indigenous peoples in the 2030 [Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), which calls on all nations to eradicate poverty and inequality.

Near to a third of the world’s extremely poor rural people, the most left behind, are indigenous – *Deputy human rights chief, Kate Gilmore*

Few communities were so vulnerable, she insisted, judging by their depressed social and economic situation in around 70 countries today.

“While but five per cent of the world’s population are indigenous, near to a third of the world’s extremely poor rural people – the most left behind – are indigenous – over 30 per cent,” she said.

They are the “living example of the world’s most disadvantaged, most marginalised, most left-behind people”, she added.

Underscoring the core principle of the SDG Agenda to “leave no-one behind” which the international community committed to in September 2015, the Deputy High Commissioner noted that their aim is also to “reach the furthest behind first...so many” of whom, are indigenous peoples.

To ensure that their rights are fulfilled, Ms. Gilmore highlighted the need to guarantee their basic freedoms – something that State and non-State actors have attempted to suppress, preferring to “silence, punish – even criminalize” – indigenous human rights defenders.



UN Photo/Violaine Martin

Kate Gilmore, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights at the 37th Session of the Human Rights Council, Palais des Nation. 26 February 2018.

These measures included “public rhetoric denouncing and diminishing their rights”, wrongful deployment of anti-terrorism laws, denial of the right to a fair trial and impunity for violence against indigenous activists, she added.

Echoing that message, the UN Special Rapporteur Ms. Tauli Corpuz highlighted the link between threats aimed at indigenous peoples and large-scale private industrial projects involving “extractive industries, agribusiness, infrastructure, hydroelectric dams and logging”.

All States should ensure indigenous peoples are full participants in the 2030 development Agenda strategies – *UN indigenous rights expert, [Victoria Tauli Corpuz](#)*

“These violations are occurring in the context of intensified competition for and exploitation of natural resources, as observed during country visits and reflected in the increasing number of related allegations,” she said, adding that “in several countries”, increased militarization had added to the dangers faced by indigenous peoples.

To improve equality for indigenous peoples, the Deputy High Commissioner’s other recommendations included an appeal to States to gather more accurate data to assess the scale of their first nation communities.

She also called for the empowerment of indigenous peoples whose voice should be “amplified” in all discussions about their development.

“All States should ensure indigenous peoples are full participants in the 2030 development Agenda strategies,” she said. “(In) decision-making and review processes, including in the voluntary review processes.”



UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, at a press briefing on 16 April 2018, at UN Headquarters in New York.

Some progress had already been made in this area, Ms. Gilmore said, referring to the participation by indigenous peoples at the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July, before adding that their inclusion and participation was also needed at national and local levels.

Although the Special Rapporteur’s findings were questioned by some Member States including Russia, which said that one-third of her report consisted of previously published legal assessments, there was support from others.

This included Australia, which, along several other Member States, expressed concern over the increasing amount of attacks on indigenous human rights

defenders worldwide.

[A third of world's out-of-school youth live in conflict, disaster-affected countries: UNICEF report](#)

Childhood is a time for growth, a time for school. But conflict or disaster are depriving 104 million young people between the ages of five and 17 of that foundation, according to a new study by the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)).

The report, [A future stolen: young and out-of-school](#), looks at the education situation of children and young people from pre-primary to upper secondary age across all countries, including those affected by humanitarian emergencies.

"When a country is hit by conflict or disaster, its children and young people are [victimized twice](#)," said Henrietta Fore, UNICEF Executive Director.

"In the near term, their schools are damaged, destroyed, occupied by military forces or even deliberately attacked, and they join the millions of young people out of school, and as the years progress they seldom return. In the long term they – and the countries they live in – will continue to face perpetuating cycles of poverty," she elaborated.

The report details that one-in-five youth, aged 15 to 17, who live in countries affected by conflict or disaster have never been in a formal classroom, while two-in-five never completed primary school.

Nearly 303 million youth between ages five and 17, around one-in-five globally, are out of school. One-third of them live in conflict or disaster-affected countries, according to the report launched ahead of the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly.

Moreover, greater than half of out-of-school primary-school-age children live in emergency-affected countries.

It also points out that poverty remains the most significant barrier to education globally, leaving the poorest primary-school-age children four times more likely to be out of school compared to their peers from the richest households.



UNICEF/Ahed Izhiman

On 12 July 2018 in the State of Palestine, 14-year old Marwan sits on the roof of his house to study in the H2 area of Hebron.

UNICEF said that with less than four per cent of its global humanitarian appeals dedicated to education, the report calls for more investment in quality education from pre-primary to upper-secondary, in a safe environment within countries affected by complex humanitarian emergencies and protracted crises.

By current trends, there will be more than 1.3 billion youth aged 10 to 19 by 2030 – an eight per cent increase.

“This is a critical moment in history,” Ms. Fore said. Providing the future workforce with quality education and better employment prospects will yield greater economic and social dividends, according to the report.

“If we act wisely and urgently, we can empower and skill young people to be prepared to create peaceful and prosperous societies,” the UNICEF chief spelled out.

“The alternative is too bleak. We cannot afford to fail,” she concluded.

[Yemen: ‘Time is running out’ to head off devastating famine, warns UN food](#)

agency chief

As conflict continues to rage in Yemen, leading to widespread economic hardship and a rampant inflation, the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) is sounding the alarm over soaring food prices that are affecting millions of Yemenis.

“My primary concern is the innocent children, women and men of Yemen, and I urge all parties to end the fighting and support efforts to build peace,” said David Beasley, WFP Executive Director, in a [statement](#) on Wednesday. “Only an immediate cessation of hostilities will give the humanitarian community the sustained access it needs to provide the food and other vital assistance needed to save Yemeni lives,” he added.

Yemen is facing one of the world’s deepest humanitarian crises with 22.2 million people in need of life-saving assistance, including food, safe water, nutritional support and basic medical care, according to the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) ([OCHA](#)).

The [country’s economy has taken a nose dive](#) since conflict between government forces and their allies, to quell Houthi rebels, escalated in 2015. There has been a 180 per cent depreciation of the Yemeni Riyal in three years. The cost of basic food items has increased by 35 per cent in the past 12 months, leaving many families unable to feed themselves, leading to the world’s largest hunger crisis, with 18 million people – two in three Yemenis – not knowing where their next meal will come from.

International food assistance, most of which is provided by WFP with 6 to 7 million persons reached every month across the country, has been critical in preventing the country from descending into a full-blown famine, but, according to Mr. Beasley, “in the face of growing obstacles and risks, we are now reaching the limit”.

Though the agency intends to scale up its capacity in order to reach up to 8 million people per month, the Head of WFP warns that “if the conflict continues to intensify and economic conditions further deteriorate, we could well see the number of severely food-insecure Yemenis increasing to 12 million”, he said, explaining that “with limited access, escalating insecurity and further damage to the country’s infrastructure” the organisation’s ability to deliver assistance to this number of people would be “extremely challenging”.

Noting that the targeting of humanitarian workers or humanitarian assets and infrastructure “should have no place in Yemen or anywhere in the world”, Mr. Beasley denounced “a spate of attacks, unwitting or otherwise” on WFP’s workers, trucks, warehouses and the silos holding the grain, which are “neutral and should be off limits to anybody involved in this conflict.”

Mr. Beasley also highlighted the fact that “with multiple major humanitarian emergencies across the globe”, the financial brunt of the Yemen crisis is

becoming “a major challenge for the international community.”

Warning that “time is running out for aid agencies in Yemen to prevent this country from slipping into a devastating famine,” the Head of WFP called for new entry points for humanitarian and commercial food imports and a free-flow of commercial and humanitarian food inside the country.

“I urge all parties to the conflict to meet their obligations to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure and take active steps to respect international humanitarian law by ending the conflict and bringing the peace that Yemen so desperately needs”.