Venezuelan exodus to Ecuador reaches record levels: UN refugee agency steps up aid

One of the largest population movements in Latin American history is under way from Venezuela, according to the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, which on Friday confirmed that it is increasing assistance to neighbouring Ecuador, where more and more Venezuelans are arriving each week.

Amid ongoing social and political upheaval in the South American country, more than half a million people have arrived in Ecuador since the beginning of the year, UNHCR's William Spindler said.

"The exodus of Venezuelans from the country is one of Latin America's largest mass-population movements in history," he added. "Since the beginning of the year, some 547,000 Venezuelans have entered Ecuador through the Colombian border at a daily average of between 2,700 and 3,000 men women and children. However, the influx is now accelerating, and in the first week of August, some 30,000 Venezuelans entered the country. That's more than 4,000 a day."

In response to the situation, Ecuador has declared a state of emergency in the northern provinces of Carchi, Pichincha and el Oro.

The development means that Ecuador can assign additional resources to Venezuelans, many of whom have endured weeks of hardship on their journey to the border, UNHCR spokesperson William Spindler said.

"Many of the Venezuelans are moving on foot, in an odyssey of days and even weeks in precarious conditions," he said. "Many run out of resources to continue their journey, and left destitute are forced to live rough in public parks and resort to begging and other negative coping mechanism in order to meet their daily needs."

The UNHCR spokesperson noted that Ecuador also had a "long tradition of welcoming refugees" in a region where the movement of people across borders was commonplace.

Nonetheless, the rising number of arrivals have led to "pressure" on asylum registrations.

"Xenophobic reactions to the exodus have been noted in some quarters," Spindler said. "The majority of the Venezuelans entering Ecuador continue onwards to Peru and Chile. Up to 20 per cent, however, remain in the country, some 7,000 of whom have sought asylum since 2016. The government-run asylum system is feeling this pressure."

According to UN Migration Agency, IOM, there has been a 900 per cent increase in Venezuelan nationals living abroad on the subcontinent from 2015 to 2017 –

up from 89,000 to 900,000.

Worldwide, the number has risen from 700,000 to more than 1.6 million in the same period.

A lack of visa requirements and other bilateral agreements make it relatively straightforward for Venezuelans to move through Latin America.

Speaking to journalists in Geneva, IOM spokesperson Joel Millman said that Latin American press reports refer to people's pursuit of a "Chilean dream", a reference to the American dream that many migrants are said to pursue when migrating north.

UN should never be a target, Baghdad bombing survivors stress, 15 years after deadly attack

From the UN News archive: 'I could only really see the haze' – Nada Al Nashif and Khaled Mansour

UN Photo/Mark Garten

United Nations staff members march around the Secretariat in New York to express their distress over the bombing of the UN Headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August. In the background are the flags of the United Nations members. (26 August 2003)

Since the 2003 Canal Hotel terrorist attack, which Secretary-General at the time, Kofi Annan, referred to as "the darkest day in our lives at the United Nations", we have looked back on the day through the memories and recollections of UN staff who survived.

Nada Al-Nashif. *Photo: UNESCO*

Khaled Mansour. *UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré*

Among those who told their story back in 2009, were Nada Al Nashif, a Jordanian national of Palestinian origin, who was sitting around a table with colleagues in UN Headquarters, when the explosives detonated, bursting her eardrum in the process. Her desk was swept away by the blast.

Khaled Mansour, an Egyptian who arrived to witness a scene of carnage, offering help, remembers seeing the bloody palm prints of the wounded, as they tried to escape, and a ticking watch on the wrist of a dead colleague emerging from under a sheet, as their body was carried away on a makeshift stretcher.

You can read their full account of the day, by clicking the link here.

Andrew Clapham

UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferre

"There was a general sense that things were turning more violent. It was also extremely hot. It was about 50 degrees and there was not much electricity to

make the air conditioners work and water was not always easy to come by. So, there was a general mounting tension – both climatic and also political.

When the explosion happened, I was extremely fortunate because I was on my own, but there was no flying glass and no flying structures because I was in this solid underground bathroom structure. I can remember the biggest sort of noise I've ever heard in my life. And then the lights went out so I was completely in the dark. And then I remember being sort of trapped a bit but being able to free myself, finding in the dark some stairs, and then seeing a lot of what I suppose can only be described as walking wounded people. Really wounded, trying to find the daylight.

> My wife was also working for the UN… I heard her voice fairly early on calling my name, so we found each other quite quickly.

My wife [Mona Rishmawi] was also working for the UN. She was the human rights and gender adviser to Sergio [Vieira de Mello], so at that point, my thought was to see if she was ok. And I heard her voice fairly early on calling my name, so we found each other quite quickly. Then of course there was a lot of chaos trying to treat the very badly wounded people. I remember there was quite a lot of concern that there could be a second bomb and it was important to get people to a place of safety. My wife was quite badly injured, she was bleeding a lot and needed stitches so we had a helicopter eventually with the US army to a sort-of field hospital where I watched her stitched up, and unfortunately, I had to identify some of the colleagues who had been taken there and who had died, and nobody knew who they were. And then next I remember after the successful surgery on my wife them telling us that Sergio de Mello had been killed. Which of course we didn't believe at first. We thought it was just a rumor but as you know, it was unfortunately true… that was all a quite intense period.

We were extremely lucky. Other people as you know lost their limbs and were extremely injured. We've always been very grateful for how lucky we were. It was just a question of chance. My wife Mona was supposed to be in the meeting with Sergio and I should have been in my office which was destroyed.

The UN should not be a target…The message should go out that you cannot attack the UN. It's an international crime which will be prosecuted."

Andrew Clapham is Professor of Public International Law at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva. He worked as an Adviser on International Humanitarian Law to Sergio Vieira de Mello, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Iraq.

Mujahed Hassan

Photo courtesy of Mujahed Hassan

“It was the end of the day and I was just getting ready to go play table tennis with my colleagues. The window was to my left and, amazingly, I just decided to switch positions with one of my colleagues who left that day exactly at 4:30. Otherwise I would have been dead.

At that time we had no idea what an IED was, what a car bomb is. We had no idea that these things actually exist. I have never heard that this kind of explosion happened probably like, I think less than a month ago one targeted the Embassy of Jordan. As a result, one of my friends got killed. So we actually were wondering what happened. He had no idea that there was a car bomb or a trailer that came into the building and detonated. We were just looking around making sure what is happening. Is this like, is this for real? Is it just a dream? But I was off looking for my colleagues who were sharing the room, the IT department office with me, and they were found under the rubble.

It was really dusty and I couldn’t see anything. I kept asking the handymen who were coming to help and the people just try to find them because I really cannot see them. Eventually it turned out that they had actually helped them. I was kind of in a shock. I was just trying to make sure that everybody’s going to be safe and I did not know that my injury was severe enough that I had to be taken outside as soon as possible to receive medical care.

I was taken by helicopter to coalition forces facilities. I woke up after three days of losing consciousness, and found myself in the middle of nowhere in a tent. I was evacuated to Jordan, and then because of the severity of my injuries, I was again evacuated with my injured friend, Haider Sousa, to London. And then eventually all the other Iraqi injured stuff were also evacuated to London for follow up.

It took me more than 10 years to recover. Until today I'm still suffering from a lot of injuries and little sequences. I lost my left eye. I have a lot of injuries on my face, my lips, my head, my neck, my arms, my side.

> I had just decided to switch seats with one of my colleagues who left that day exactly at 4:30pm. Otherwise I would have been dead by now.

As I'm speaking of it right now, I, I just remember exactly every single thing that happened that day. And when I returned to Iraq from London, I immediately took a taxi and went to the building and I walked through it floor by floor. The UN is my dream. The UN is my family. I really cannot believe that this thing happened to my family, to the place that I enjoyed working and to my colleagues that I consider my close family members.

I think the only thing that helped me recover is thinking of my fiancée at that time because she believed in me and we were planning our wedding. It was just a matter of days. We got everything ready and then the explosion happened and we had to put everything on hold. I think that the only thing that's helped me to fight back to life…

Working at the UN was a dream. Every day, I would get ready and be excited to go to work to see what kind of a change I can contribute to and I can do to help my country to recover. In the beginning, working for the UNOHCI was about working to survive and support our families. But after UNAMI was created, we had high hopes that now we were to change the future because we really believed in Sergio Vieira de Mello. We were hoping that his team and himself specifically will make a big difference. We were so happy that we will be part of the change. We would be helping our country, our community, our people to recover from the oppression. So every single day was full of hope, full of enjoyment, full of possibilities. That this was the change we had been waiting for. Although it was not achieved, but I'm still hope that you will be able to, to make a difference in the life of the Arab world, and in specific the Iraqi community, Iraqi people.

I really believed that no Iraqi had any idea of what was supposed to come, the kind of violence we experienced, from the civil war that almost erupted, and all the destruction, killing, injustice and the corruption that happened afterwards. I was so happy, honestly and truly, every single day was the happiest day of my life. Looking back, I don't look that much towards my injuries, but I always look back with hope that whatever happened is going to teach us and the UN a lesson to make sure that this is not going to happen again.

I strongly believe that any civilian that is being killed by anybody, that this is an act of inhumanity, and this should be prevented at all costs."

Mujahed Hassan is an Iraqi colleague who worked in the IT Department at the time of the attack. He currently lives in San Diego, California, with his family.

Elpida Rouka

UN Photo/Violaine Martin

“I remember photographing the UN flag as we entered the compound around 3:45pm that day, on what was to be my last day on mission in Baghdad. That’s the one picture – eerily blurred – that has survived among all my belongings in the attack, and my laissez-passer [UN passport] which came scorched and shrapneled to me, several months after the attack, to New York.

I went to my office which was exactly below Sergio’s [Vieira de Mello] in that part of the building which is now the famous picture of the collapsed three floors in the ground. I was not supposed to be attending the meeting that my boss was having with [UN Humanitarian coordinator in Iraq] Ramiro Lopes da Silva across the corridor but exactly at 4:05 – the attack was at 4:15 – [my supervisor] Benon Sevan came back across the hallway and said, ‘I think you should attend this meeting’. And literally 10 minutes later, I was sitting across from [head of the UN World Health Organization in Iraq] David Nabarro’s assistant when I saw the diluting pupils, this light flashed first before we heard the thud and then felt the impact. And the next thing I knew was Benon grabbing me and Ramiro and crashing us to the floor to protect us from the flying shattered glass. Beyond that I have a huge gap, a blackout, in how I exited the room which was literally on the precipice where the second floor had collapsed and where Sergio, Arthur Helton and Gil Loescher were trapped. And when I came out onto the lawn, it was a scene of a massacre.

I was soon told I was non-essential despite my protestation at not wanting to leave the scene and sent to one of the US barracks which had become a triage hospital. I remember the moment that the news came through the walkie talkie to say that Sergio was gone. I remember I was the last one to be stitched up

and wearing a t-shirt with “Operation Iraqi Freedom”; it was after the Baghdad curfew and the Americans suggested I stay overnight but I would have none of it…I happened to stay at the by now haunted Cedar Hotel because it was the hotel where Sergio and his team were staying. So three floors were all rooms of ghosts. And I remember Ghassan Salameh putting a shashlik (skewer of grilled meat) and a stiff drink in front of me, and saying – drink up and go to bed. And three days later, I was on the last plane out evacuating the remaining survivors to Amman- same clothes for days and a semblance of a legit looking document to prove my identity, ashen look and all, flying out against a bleeding Baghdad sky.

> I often think about the colleagues we lost that day and the age they were many in their early 30s – there was a certain buzz around that dream team, and they embodied exactly the spirit of the UN flag – defying risk, rising above politics, speaking up for those whose voices were silenced, pushing against all odds and keep going back.

I should say that during that attack, moments after, I had no sense of time, I was lucky that Benon threw the phone at me and said call your parents now. And I was lucky to catch them before the horrific images hit the screens of the world, and before all the landlines and phonelines went dead. Otherwise I dread to even think what my parents would have gone through had I not said – whatever you see, I’m ok, good bye. We didn’t speak again for another four days. They’ve stayed glued to TV screens ever since.

I got my closure when I went back to Iraq four years later (a whole other story this one). Why I think it’s important to remember August 2003 Baghdad is simply because it has essentially changed everything for the UN. How we do things. Who we are. What the world thinks of us. What we think of us. And that doesn’t necessarily reflect only on those who we lost in Baghdad, but we have a responsibility I think to those friends and colleagues, and locals, lost in other places to this day – in Afghanistan, Mali, Somalia, Algeria, Libya, the list is endless.

I often think about the colleagues we lost that day and the age they had many in their early 30s – there was a certain buzz around that dream team, and they embodied exactly the spirit of the UN flag – defying risk, rising above politics, speaking up for those whose voices were silenced, pushing against all odds. It’s 15 years later and I often think they would now be around their 40s and 50s, and the loss of potential, of people who believed in what they were doing, finding the sense of possible where no-one else could or would, the “UN blue” recruits as I call them. Those that wouldn’t allow the UN blue flag of that sandstormy scorching hot August Baghdad day, to remain “blurred”, neither for the outside world, nor for us.

We all have our own coping mechanisms. Mine back then was to return to work. And to continue non-stop in hardship posts for several years following my return to Baghdad in 2007. In many ways, I knew of nothing else. That said, for me while there were no ensuing physical wounds – the one main scar is now

almost undetectable – there was latent PTSD that was left unattended which was then triggered through another traumatic experience two years back. But that has made me even more attune to the need for duty of care of our own by our organization.…it is almost unforgivable that in an international body that purports to be in the service of healing humanity, we are lagging so far behind in addressing the trauma of our own, before we can even begin to think we can ably address the trauma of the peoples we serve. We must all be a little bit more empathetic and kinder to one another because being a target as a civilian or an aid worker is not a one-time thing, the trauma continues unabated and the healing needs to be a collective one."

Elpida Rouka is currently a Maurice R. Greenberg World Fellow at Yale University. She most recently served as Chief of Staff for Staffan de Mistura, the UN Special Envoy on Syria, and remains part of the UN's "good offices" team to that country. She has spent the past 17 years with the UN, and returned to Iraq in 2007.

Darko Mocibob

Photo courtesy of Darko Mocibob

"My last recollection before the blast was being on the phone and talking to my colleague in the Oil-For-Food program here in NY. I was sitting with my back to the window, on the side of the explosion. I don't personally recall the moment of the blast. Some 15 minutes later I started coming back because I lost consciousness completely at the time of attack. My colleague in NY could just hear the line being cut off with nothing else, and then less than half-hour later, the breaking news appeared on screens worldwide. As I was coming back, it may sound funny now but my first thought was what happened, did my computer explode? Because the entire room was a bit of a mess with the

computer on one side, the chair on top of me, the desk was turned over with a lot of dust. I was obviously not processing the gravity of the situation. It took quite a while to realize and I was quite dazed from the blast, and I had, which I couldn't feel at the time, injuries from the flying glass, including on my head and my shoulders. And then the rescue operation started. Rescuers started coming in, checking the offices, slowly taking us out from the building.

Given the number of the injured, there was not enough medical material – bandages in particular – so colleagues were actually tearing up bed sheets to apply first aid.

Because I was classified as "walking wounded" I was directed to an ambulance that was waiting, an Iraqi ambulance, and with a couple of other colleagues was taken to a hospital where a local doctor informed me that I had a number of cuts. At that point the doctor informed me that they would do the stitching but didn't have any anesthetics. That was probably physically the most painful memory of that day because hours after the attack I could feel the stitching without anesthetic.

Little by little I was beginning to realize the magnitude of the deaths. As I saw more colleagues, they would bring more news of this colleague, that colleague, being seriously wounded or being killed. Which psychologically was the hardest moment, learning that colleagues were not with us anymore. Of the 23 victims on the list of who perished that day, I knew personally about half of them and some for years.

> Given the number of the injured, there was not enough medical material, the bandages in particular, so colleagues were actually tearing up bed sheets to apply first aid.

…The following day, following the release, we were taken back to the Canal Hotel to try to retrieve some of our property, in my case, that included passports, including the laissez-passer [UN passport]. My office at the time was on the side of the blast, it was further down on the road that the suicide bomber struck. So the office was damaged but it did not collapse. So I was actually able to retrieve, my suit jacket was still on the back of the chair. Inside there were passports but because of the flying glass, my jacket looked like someone had taken a razor and cut the back of it. For a few years, I actually kept it, and then at some point decided to let go of both the jacket and that terrible memory of it. I remember that even my pockets were full of glass.

Among us who were in Baghdad and who lived through that day, there was a different level of the psychological trauma. What helped me personally was the fact that I lived through another war, in Bosnia, in my own country, so had some experience with that. And I had some familiarity with my injuries – I'm a medical doctor by training – and the attitude, how you decide to develop your mindset after that.

There are those who do not like the UN. Who even organize such atrocities directly against the UN. But by and large in my experience, the Middle East, and even in my own country, the population appreciates the attention and having someone who will hear their word and extend a helping hand.

… In the fields where we operate, there is often a lot of misinformation. Rumors, half-truths. Outright lies about what the UN is doing. We will never win over everybody. And in conflict situations, the emotions run high, and it's easy to get emotional. And I understand to the extent how some of the attackers felt. I was in a position to read an interview with one of the people involved in the planning of this and he was expressing no regrets. But in his mind the UN was part of the aggression against his country, that's how he saw it.

… Our job is also to interact with people. If we bunker ourselves in, we may be safe up to a point for those who want to do us harm. But we will lose even more, we will lose the trust of the people, we will be isolated and won't be hearing what they're telling us in the conflict or the immediate aftermath of a conflict.

The ones that I often think about and I've been back to Iraq often after the bombing, are our national staff. Some of them who worked with me in '97 and 2003, they still work for the UN and they've gone through difficult periods. They've taken risks and whenever I go, I set aside time to talk with the ones I've known to see how they're doing. And I do hope the UN will continue supporting them in every single way."

Darko Mocibob is the deputy director of the Middle East and West Africa Division within the UN Department of Political Affairs. His first assignment in Iraq lasted 18-months starting in 1997 as a humanitarian observer for the Oil-for-Food Programme.

Francis Mead

UN/Antonio Tibaldi

“It was one of the last times internationals could travel around Baghdad. I remember a very poor city. I remember traveling to the eastern edge of the city and its very bumpy roads and going to a clinic there and talking to somebody who was working with Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders) about how difficult it was to maintain health services. I remember a lot of trash in the streets and partially flooded areas where there was no water system. You had the sense that it wasn’t very safe. But actually we didn’t realize quite how unsafe it was.

The day it happened I was doing a story about mines and unexploded ordnance because that was a huge issue in Iraq. There was a press conference in the Canal Hotel downstairs. I think it started at about 3:30 in the afternoon. So I was sitting in the front row listening to this press conference. We were sitting in an ordinary room. A bunch of people were there, a couple of cameras were rolling at the back of the room, and then suddenly there was an enormous crash. Everything went dark. I think it’s because a lot of debris and dust passed through the room. It made everything pretty much black for two seconds.

Your brain cannot react to what’s going on. And then suddenly you’re looking at an ordinary room covered in dust and you brain kicks in, the adrenaline kicks in, and the first thought was that was an explosion. It sounded like it was in the building. You think – I survived the explosion. I’m still alive. And then your brain does go into survival mode. The next thought that I had was, well, what happens if we rush outside. Maybe they’ll be people waiting outside for us with machine guns. I think that was the moment actually that I was most scared. I wasn’t really that scared after that. There was that one moment of real fear.

Other people were dazed, covered in dust. People looked like white mummies covered in this white dust and sometimes streaked with blood. So I remember that very vividly and people just sitting dazed.

> I carried water and I helped carry some stretchers. And there was an Iraqi colleague in the office who'd been hit on the head and he was dazed and I sat with him and talked to him for a while. I found things to do because after an incident like that, there's a really strong desire to help.

People responded very quickly and even as I stumbled out people had already been pulled out of the rubble, and there a little patch of grass just outside the front entrance and there were already about eight people laid out on this grass. Some of them were probably dead. And (there was) a particularly personal moment that I always feel bad about, that happened to me. I stood next to that patch of grass looking down at these people laid out there and a man was just stirring and becoming conscious and he looked up at me for a moment. And I didn't know what to do because I was really afraid of making things worse. I regret that, because as soon as I got back from the bombing I went and did a first aid training course, to give myself more confidence, and I realized what I could have done, is just held his hand.

Later I found things to do to help. I carried water and I helped carry some stretchers. And there was an Iraqi colleague in the office who'd been hit on the head and he was dazed and I sat with him and talked to him for a while. I found things to do because after an incident like that, there's a really strong desire to help, to do something and combined with fear that you will screw things up.

We were, a couple of days later, flown out to Amman, Jordan, and the UN had provided access to counselors. I never felt angry at the people who set (off) the bomb because it didn't feel like I had very much to do with me. It was you know a symbolic and physical attack on the UN to create more chaos to make the country uncontrollable. It was actually carried out by al-Qaida in Iraq who then became ISIS.

I think people are fairly aware but it's necessary to let people know how dangerous it's become, unfortunately, to work for not just the UN but non-governmental organizations in many countries. We've now become a target. Aid workers, humanitarian workers, political UN workers – we've all become targets. The most difficult side of it obviously is that you know for an organization like the UN to be effective, they need to be able to engage directly with ordinary people. And unfortunately, that's become much more difficult.

Another very sad thing about the Iraq bombing is that there have been subsequently other major bombings of the UN and other organizations. There was a major bombing in Nigeria and there was a major bombing in Algeria. I feel terrible about that in a way because those bombings got much less publicity.

… One of the outcomes for me honestly is that I felt more connected with the UN. I was interested and committed to the UN before but the UN became more important to me after that. And that's partly because of the many remarkable people that I saw in Iraq working for the UN who are doing a fantastic job. I really respected that. ”

Francis Mead is a TV producer at UN Video. He previously worked for the BBC and UN agencies, such as UNICEF. He was in 2003 working for IRIN, which at the time was affiliated with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). He has done a documentary and written a book about his time in Iraq.

Esam Al-Khanchi

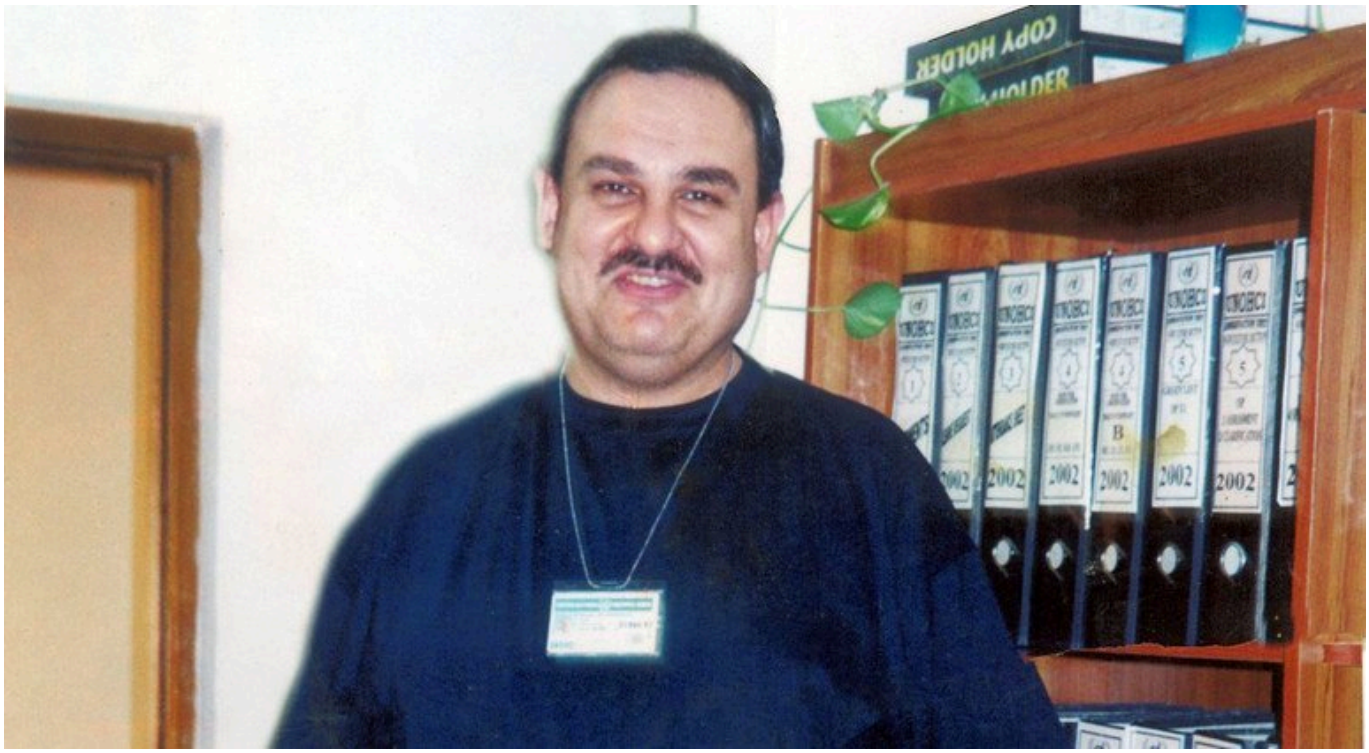

Photo courtesy of Esam Al-Khanch

“All of a sudden it became black and dark. The day turned into a night. Hot iron pieces fell from the sky. The time slowed down, just like in the movies.”

“In the summer, power cuts were frequent in Baghdad, so I would have preferred to stay at the Canal Hotel until 5:30 or 6 pm. But on this day, August 19, I do not know why I left my job early. I was about 20 meters away from the explosion and I heard the sound of the iron gate through which we passed every day to the building flying in the air. My mind was in disbelief, and then I heard the screams of my colleagues, who were in the security office.”

Esam began his work with the United Nations in Iraq in 1999, first in the security sector, and then moved to the Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator

in Iraq.

He tells his story in Arabic at https://news.un.org/ar/story/2018/08/1014102

Secretary-General video message on 15th Anniversary of the Terrorist Attack Against the UN Mission In Iraq

Fifteen years ago, the United Nations suffered one of the darkest days in our history.

On 19 August 2003, a terrorist attack against our headquarters at the Canal Hotel in Baghdad killed 22 people and wounded many more.

We remember our cherished colleagues who lost their lives in the service of peace, development and human rights.

Among them was our representative in Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello.

I met Sergio many times, and followed closely his remarkable work in Timor-Leste. I was always impressed by the way he embodied United Nations values and our spirit of service.

Today we pay tribute to all those who died so tragically 15 years ago.

We honour their sacrifice. We will continue their mission. And we will carry forward their memory as we strive to resolve and prevent armed conflict and build a prosperous and peaceful world for all.

Thank you.

‘Pioneering’ former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet officially appointed new UN human rights chief

After a vote on Friday by the United Nations General Assembly in New York, former two-time President of Chile, Michelle Bachelet, hailed a “pioneer” by the UN Secretary-General, has officially been appointed as High Commissioner for Human Rights, effective from 1 September.

Minutes after she was voted in, UN chief Antonio Guterres told reporters he was “delighted” by the news of her official appointment as Michelle Bachelet “has been as formidable a figure in her native Chile, as she has at the United Nations”.

Highlighting her role as the first leader of UN Women, between 2010 and 2013, he said she gave “that new entity a dynamic and inspiring start”. He also pointed to her remarkable career as “the first woman to serve as the country’s President, but also as a survivor of brutality by the authorities targeting her and her family, many decades ago”.

“She has lived under the darkness of dictatorship,” he continued. “As a physician, she knows the trials of people thirsting for health and yearning to enjoy other vital economic and social rights. And she knows the responsibilities of both national and global leadership”.

Following the announcement, Ms. Bachelet said she was “deeply humbled and honored” to have been entrusted with “this important task.”

As this year marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human rights, and at a time when “hatred and inequality are on the rise,” the Secretary-General said it was vital to have a “strong advocate for all human rights” and he “could not think of a better choice”.

“Michelle Bachelet brings unique experience to the United Nations and to all of us, and is strongly committed to keeping human rights at the forefront of the work of the United Nations,” he concluded. “She has my full confidence and support, and I ask all Member States and our partners to extend to her their support”.

Her predecessor in this position, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, who took on the role in September 2014 and who Mr. Guterres described as having served with “leadership, passion, courage and skill” for the past four years, also warmly welcomed her appointment.

“She has all the attributes – courage, perseverance, passion, and a deep commitment to human rights – to make her a successful High Commissioner,” he said on Friday in a statement, adding that the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) “looks forward to welcoming her and working under her leadership for the promotion and protection of all human rights, for everyone, everywhere”.

The UN chief paid special tribute to Zeid, who is stepping down after one term as the key UN voice on global human rights at the end of this month, saying that he wished “to express my deep gratitude to my good colleague and friend.”

Michelle Bachelet will be the seventh High Commissioner since the office was created in 1993. The High Commissioner, is the principle official who speaks out for human rights across the whole UN system, strengthening human rights mechanisms; enhancing equality; fighting discrimination in all its forms; strengthening accountability and the rule of law; widening the democratic space and protecting the most vulnerable from all forms of human rights abuse.

Yemen bus attack just the latest outrage against civilians: UN agencies

An air strike on a busy market area in Yemen that reportedly killed scores of people including more than 20 children on a bus, is likely the worst attack on youngsters in the conflict so far, and the latest in a recent spate of violence targeting civilians, UN agencies said on Friday.

According to the UN Human Rights Office, OHCHR, and UN Children's Fund, UNICEF, at least 21 boys – most of them under the age of 15 – died when their bus was hit on Thursday in Dahyan market in Saada, in the north of the country.

More than 30 boys were also injured in the aerial bombardment, which was carried out by a Saudi-led international coalition that has backed Yemen President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi against Houthi opposition forces for more than three years.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres strongly condemned the attack on Thursday, urging an "independent and prompt investigation", adding that warring parties must take "constant care to spare civilians".

The UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, said that he was "deeply shocked by the appalling tragedy that claimed so many innocent lives". The UN official has invited the warring parties to Geneva on 6 September in a bid to reach a political solution to the conflict – the first such discussions since 2016.

"This should urge us all to exert more efforts to end the conflict through an inclusive intra-Yemeni dialogue," he added, stressing that he hoped all of those involved in the fighting across the country will "engage constructively in the political process, including consultations scheduled in Geneva in September."

Briefing journalists in Geneva on Friday, UNICEF spokesperson Christophe Boulierac said that the agency believed the air strike on the school bus constituted "the single worst attack" on children since 2015. "No such number of children have been involved in one incident before," he added. Mr. Boulierac explained that following the attack, UNICEF staff on the ground reported chaotic scenes at the hospital where victims were being treated, adding that the number of fatalities could rise.

Reiterating the UN chief's call for Yemen's belligerents to spare civilians, OHCHR spokesperson Liz Throssell noted that the bus attack followed a series of more minor – but deadly – incidents involving youngsters last month.

"A large number of children were killed yesterday appallingly, but in July, there are all manner of smaller incidents," she said. "On 19 July, there were four children killed when a coalition air strike struck a farm. On 30 July,

two children were killed when an air strike hit a motorbike. On 31 July, two children were killed; they were out with their sheep, grazing, and they took a direct hit from an aerial strike."

Turning to the recent targeting of a hospital and other targets in the key Houthi-controlled port city of Hudaydah, the OHCHR spokesperson said that staff there had documented "at least" 41 civilian deaths. Among the dead were six children and four women, Ms. Throssell said, noting that mortars had struck different built-up locations in Al Hawak district.

These included the fishing port, a dock and hangar "at the time full of fishermen and street vendors", the OHCHR spokesperson explained, adding that Al-Thawra hospital was hit shortly afterwards. In that attack, three mortars were fired, including one that landed in a busy street "full of traffic, street vendors and pedestrians", Ms. Throssell said.

Between 26 March and 9 August 2018, OHCHR has documented 17,062 civilian casualties in Yemen; this includes 6,592 dead and 10,470 injured. The majority of these casualties – 10,471 – were as a result of air strikes carried out by the Saudi-led Coalition, it said in a statement.

Amid ongoing conflict in one of the world's poorest countries, UNICEF warned that the consequences for children have been particularly striking.

"Every day in Yemen, children are starving, children are dying because of the level of violence and its consequences," spokesperson Christophe Boulierac said. "1.8 million children are at risk of diarrhoeal diseases, 1.3 million children are at risk of pneumonia, more than 4 million children are in acute need of educational assistance. So, any violence in Yemen, any facility that provides water indirectly threatens the lives of children."

UN underscores the need to celebrate indigenous peoples, not confine them

While migration offers some opportunities, such as the hope of peace, security and better social services, Mr. Liu outlined the challenges, including "poverty, little or no access to education, employment or other social services, as well as human trafficking, gang-related and other violence."

And yet, indigenous peoples have created ways to revitalize their cultures and strengthen their identities.

Taking the podium, Mariam Wallet Aboubakrine, Chair of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, noted that about 65 million have been forcibly displaced overall, including some 21 million refugees, three million asylum

seekers and 40 million internally displaced persons.

“Indigenous peoples are not on the margins of these movements,” she said, pointing out that some migrate for economic reasons, others for natural disasters, conflicts or to protect human rights.

“For some Aboriginal Peoples such as Inuit, Sami, Fulani, Tuareg, displacement is also part of the traditional way of life,” she added.

Ms. Aboubakrine explained that these displacements have been handed down for thousands of years from generation to generation, as a way of preserving natural resources, the environment and biodiversity, saying that it is “crucial” for indigenous survival.

She concluded by urging Member States and the international community to revise migration policies to align with international human rights treaties, including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Opening the panel discussion, Rosa Montezuma expressed pride in being a young indigenous woman, the first to hold the title of “Miss Panama 2018,” expressing her hope of using the opportinity to demonstrate that indigenous women are capable, talented and professional. “Indigenous peoples have the right to live with respect, free of all kinds of discrimination,” she said.