

UN Envoy urges Burundi leaders to 'seize opportunities for national unity and peace'

The Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Burundi, Michel Kafando, has called on the country's leaders to "seize the opportunity" offered by the recent adoption of a new constitution, to create a new political environment that is "conducive to the consolidation of national unity and peace".

Addressing the UN Security Council on Thursday, he commended in particular the adoption on 3 August of a roadmap for the 2020 elections that brought the various political leaders to a consensus. The Special Envoy commended President Pierre Nkurunziza for his recent commitment to leave office in 2020 and for pledging his "full support" for whoever emerges from the voting process, as the new president.

The current crisis in Burundi began in April 2015, when President Nkurunziza began his campaign for a disputed third-term in office, triggering protests and a failed coup attempt.

In his briefing, Mr. Kafando noted the improvement of the security situation since the 17 May national referendum on the new constitution which saw nearly three-quarters of voters registering their approval, or 73 per cent.

"Since the constitutional referendum, apart from some objections by the opposition, the situation has remained calm," he said, all the while encouraging the government to "remain vigilant".

Regarding the humanitarian situation caused by the onset of the crisis three years ago, the Special Envoy commended the efforts made by Burundi, Tanzania and the UN refugee agency ([UNHCR](#)), to enable the voluntary return of some 35,000 Burundian refugees since September last year.

"These efforts must be sustained, respecting the principles of voluntary returns and guaranteeing the dignified reintegration of the returning refugees in their host communities," he stated.

He concluded his briefing calling on the authorities to finalise their agreement with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) so that that his own office in Bujumbura, the capital of Burundi, could "operate in the best conditions".

UNICEF chief 'horrified' at air strike that hit school bus in northern Yemen

The Head of the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has strongly condemned the airstrike against a school bus in northern Yemen on Thursday, which according to news reports has killed more than two dozen children.

"Attacks on children are absolutely unacceptable," said UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore [on Twitter](#) on Thursday. "I'm horrified by the reported airstrike on innocent children, some with UNICEF backpacks. Enough is enough."

The attack hit the schoolbus in a market in Dahyan, in the northern province of Saada. While the exact death toll remains to be confirmed, initial news reports indicate that the number of casualties could be well above 60, with dozens severely injured. Many of the children were reported to be under the age of 10.

"Attacking children is the lowest any party of this conflict can go," UNICEF Yemen Resident Representative Meritxell Relaño told UN News. "There is no justification whatsoever to attacking children."

According to the [UN Children's Fund](#), since conflict between pro-Government forces and Houthi rebels escalated in 2015, about 2,500 children have been killed and 3,600 maimed in Yemen.

The head of the UN agency there called all warring parties to "respect international humanitarian law," and spare children, civilians and civilian infrastructure to prevent Yemen from falling "further into the abyss and the humanitarian catastrophe" it has been facing for over three years.

Yemen's conflict has its roots in uprisings that date back to 2011, but fighting escalated in March 2015, when an international coalition led by Saudi Arabia intervened militarily at the request of Yemen's President.

Attacks against civilians have been the scourge of this conflict. According to the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#), "tens of civilians were killed in violence in several governorates" in the past 10 days alone. On 3 August, during a particularly deadly attack, one of the last functioning hospitals, Al Thawra in Al Hudaydah, [was struck](#), reportedly causing the death of dozens of vulnerable, sick and injured civilians.

"We've said this before and we are saying it again – parties to the conflict are obliged to do everything possible to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. This is not a voluntary commitment – it is mandatory on all belligerents," said Lise Grande, UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen, in the [latest OCHA report](#) on the situation there. "So many people have died in Yemen – this conflict has to stop."

Thai citizenship means 'dream of a brighter future' for cave rescue boys, says UN Refugee Agency

The decision of the Thai Government to grant statehood to three of the boys recently rescued after being trapped in a flooded cave, along with their football coach, has been welcomed by UN Refugee Agency, [UNHCR](#).

Following global media coverage of the rescue, it emerged that although the three youngsters together with their coach were resident in Thailand, they were officially stateless. Almost half a million people in the country, often from nomadic hill tribes and other ethnic groups that have been based in border regions for centuries, do not hold Thai citizenship.

Granting the "Wild Boars" team members secure status should make a significant difference to the prospects of the boys and their coach, according to Carol Batchelor, UNHCR's Special Advisor on Statelessness: "by granting them citizenship, Thailand has provided them with a formal identity that will pave the way for them to achieve their aspirations and to participate as full members of society".

Worldwide, several million people are stateless, and can find themselves denied access to basic rights and services. Other restrictions include being refused the right to travel, marry, own property, or work.

Thailand has been hailed by UNHCR as a leader in regional efforts to end statelessness. In the last decade 100,000 people have been granted Thai citizenship, and the Government has committed to finding nationality solutions for all those living within its borders, by 2024.

Referring to the Thai rescuees, Batchelor referred to the Government's actions as "a shining example of how positive action by a State, can aid people and quickly resolve their stateless situation. We welcome this effort by Thailand and urge all States hosting stateless populations to help eradicate this entirely avoidable blight on humanity."

UNHCR says it will continue to support the Thai Government and stateless communities in Thailand to reach the country's ambitious 2024 target.

Nagasaki is 'a global inspiration' for peace, UN chief says marking 73rd anniversary of atomic bombing

"Nagasaki is not just an international city with a long and fascinating history. It is a [global inspiration](#) for all those who seek to create a safer and more secure world," Mr. Guterres said.

"I am humbled", he told those assembled, "to be here with you to commemorate the women, men and children killed by the nuclear attack on Nagasaki on 9 August 1945," he said conveying his "deepest respect and condolences to everyone here today, and to all the victims and survivors of the atomic bombs".

Calling the city "a beacon of hope and strength, and a monument to the resilience of its people," the UN chief underscored that while the atomic bomb killed and injured tens of thousands, it "could not crush your spirit".

"From the other side of the apocalypse, the *hibakusha* have raised their voices on behalf of the entire human family. We must listen," he asserted. "There can be no more Hiroshimas, no more Nagasakis, and so no more *hibakusha*."

Mr. Guterres noted that 73 years on, fear of nuclear war still prevails, as States are spending vast sums to modernize their nuclear weapon arsenals.

"More than \$1.7 trillion was spent in 2017 on arms and armies – the highest level since the end of the cold war and around 80 times the amount needed for global humanitarian aid," the Secretary-General pointed out.

Disarmament lag

Meanwhile, disarmament processes have slowed and even come to a halt.

"Many States demonstrated their frustration by adopting the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons last year," said Mr. Guterres.

Other deadly weapons also threaten incessant peril, such as chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction, and those developed for cyberwarfare.

Moreover, conflicts fought with conventional weapons are lasting longer and are becoming more deadly for civilians, he added.



UN Photo/Shigeo Hayashi

Ruins of Nagasaki about 800 metres from the hypocenter in mid-October 1945.

“There is an urgent need for disarmament of all kinds, but especially nuclear disarmament,” the UN chief maintained, citing this as the backdrop of his global disarmament initiative launched in May.

Mr. Guterres labelled disarmament “a driving force for maintaining international peace and security”, calling it a tool for ensuring national security.

“It helps to uphold the principles of humanity, promote sustainable development and protect civilians,” he spelled out.

He turned to his [disarmament agenda](#), outlined in May, to “lower the risk of nuclear annihilation, prevent conflict of all kinds, and reduce the suffering that the proliferation and use of arms causes to civilians,” saying that it illustrates how nuclear weapons undermine global, national and human security.

“The total elimination of nuclear weapons remains the highest disarmament priority of the United Nations,” stressed the UN chief, noting that nuclear-weapon States have a lead role.

He called on all countries to commit to nuclear disarmament and to let “Nagasaki and Hiroshima remind us to put peace first every day; to work on conflict prevention and resolution, reconciliation and dialogue, and to tackle the roots of conflict and violence”.

“Let us all commit to making Nagasaki the last place on Earth to suffer nuclear devastation. I will work with you to that end,” he concluded.

Millions at risk if Syria's war moves to last redoubt of Idlib, warns senior aid official

Aid access to embattled Syrians may soon improve following recent military gains by the Government, but the war "cannot be allowed to go to Idlib", the head of the UN's Humanitarian Task Force said on Thursday.

Speaking in Geneva, [Jan Egeland](#) confirmed that fighting in the south-west had largely ended and that Syria's last remaining sieges – in the Shia towns of Foah and Kefraya – have also been lifted.

The potentially positive development means that there should be "no need to negotiate" with the Government of Syria for aid convoy access, the UN Special Adviser said.

Progress should also be quicker because the lorries will no longer have to cross active front lines, he explained.

"Hopefully, we are seeing the beginning of the end to the big war," he said, adding that "there are signs" the UN and humanitarian partners would finally get access to civilians that they have been trying to reach "for a very long time, and that some of the cruel practices of the war are coming to an end".

However, the "tremendous worry" is that the conflict will move to Idlib province and other non-government-controlled areas in Syria's north-west, Egeland cautioned.

"This area is screaming for diplomatic solutions," he said. "It is yearning for the best diplomats, the best military negotiators to sit down between each other and come to agreements, knowing that there wouldn't be another Idlib to be evacuated to."

Idlib and other areas, including Afrin and Azaz, are home to some 4 million people, including 3 million women and children, according to Egeland, who is also Special Adviser to the UN Special Envoy for Syria.

Around 1.4 million of that number have fled from previous conflict hotspots including Aleppo, Eastern Ghouta and the south-west governorates of Dera'a, Sweida and Quneitra.

This area is screaming for diplomatic solutions – UN Special Adviser Jan Egeland

"A small minority" of those in Idlib "would be seen as terrorists", Egeland added, but this was "no excuse for sending the war" to women and children.

Insisting that “this is no tsunami” but rather a “man-made crisis from A to Z”, Egeland appealed to the international community to support the “humanitarian lifeline” which helps some 2 million people every month.

“That lifeline has to be expanded because there will be new people in need,” he said. “There is some fighting happening continuously and finally there has to be protection of civilians, including hospitals and others.”

In a bid to prevent further bloodshed after more than seven years of conflict that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and forced millions to flee, Egeland said that he hoped that countries with influence on the belligerents will be encouraged to reach a political settlement that would spare Idlib.

He singled out the Russian Federation, Turkey and Iran as having “big influence” in Idlib, as well as Western countries and those Gulf countries who also wield influence with armed opposition groups.

“We will push [them] ...to say: learn from Eastern Ghouta, learn from Aleppo, learn from Ar-Raqqa,” Egeland said. “There must be talks, there must be agreements, this war must end not in a bloodbath, but by agreements.”