

In West Africa and the Sahel, signs of democratic progress amid continued 'devastating' violence: UN

There have been "positive developments" when it comes to democratization across the vast West Africa and Sahel region, but that has been "competing with the volatile security situation" particularly around areas where terrorist groups are active such as the Lake Chad Basin, the head of the UN Office for the region ([UNOWAS](#)) told the Security Council on Tuesday.

Citing the spillover of the Malian crisis into Burkina Faso and Niger, and the widespread violence by non-state armed groups throughout the region, Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, said that "the complexity of recent attacks...has had a devastating impact on local communities."

He added that allegations of human rights violations by security forces are of deep concern as they undermine the international community's collective efforts. "I call upon Governments of the region to prevent such violations and to bring perpetrators to justice," he said.

In the Lake Chad Basin, despite gains made by the Nigerian armed forces and the Multinational Joint Task Force, Boko Haram and the so-called Islamic State's West African Province, remain active. To date, more than 2.3 million people remain displaced.

"The trend of Boko Haram using female suicide bombers continues," he explained, noting that almost one in five suicide bombers is a child. Mr. Chambas called for increased financial support for the humanitarian response in the four conflict-affected countries of the region – Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad – as it remains "critically underfunded".

The UNOWAS head mentioned that violence between farmers and herders is an increasing security threat in the region. "Farmer-herder conflicts are becoming more sophisticated and deadlier, especially in Nigeria's Middle Belt," he said, mentioning the "scores of deaths" resulting from this conflict in June alone.

The Special Representative stressed that addressing these security challenges in the region can only be achieved with the implementation of comprehensive strategies linking security and humanitarian interventions to development and human rights initiatives.

A United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) has been developed, along with a UN Support Plan to mobilize resources for the 10 countries covered by the UNISS.

Amid the armed violence, the last few months have seen an upsurge in popular

discontent in the region manifested through often violent demonstrations calling for political and economic reforms. “We must collectively continue to urge Member States to provide an enabling environment for the exercise of the freedoms of expression and assembly which are critical in consolidating democracy and good governance”.

Citing the abolishment of the death penalty in Benin and Burkina Faso, recent elections in Guinea, the Gambia and Sierra Leone, he noted that the region continues on a positive trajectory towards democratisation.

However, “democratic gains in the region are not immune to reversal,” he stated, citing the example of Togo’s recent political crisis that led to the cancellation of parliamentary elections. “There is a need for democratic consolidation through genuine processes of national reconciliation. This should be the focus of our international engagement.”

[New import restrictions risk triggering ‘dramatic deterioration’ in Gaza, says UN Humanitarian Coordinator](#)

Following further restrictions on goods and supplies that can be moved across the border of the Gaza Strip, the top United Nations humanitarian official there has called for urgent measures to prevent an already critical humanitarian situation from getting worse.

“As events over the weekend demonstrate, the situation in Gaza is extremely [precarious](#),” said Jamie McGoldrick, Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory, after visiting the Gaza Strip.

“I am deeply concerned about the imposition of further restrictions at Kerem Shalom, which is the lifeline for Gaza’s population,” he added, referring to the key border crossing with Israel. “Should they continue, these additional restrictions risk triggering a dramatic deterioration in an already fragile situation and desperate humanitarian conditions, particularly for the health sector,” said Mr. McGoldrick, who is also the [Deputy Special Coordinator](#) for the Middle East Peace Process.

On 9 July, Israel imposed new restrictions on goods going into Gaza, tightening them further on Monday, to prohibit all goods except medical and food supplies. Fishing along the Gaza coast was also limited to just three nautical miles offshore.

According to media outlets, no fuel will now be allowed to enter through Kerem Shalom until Sunday. Reports say that Israel imposed the measures in

response to the flying of incendiary kites and balloons from Gaza towards Israel that have resulted in over 750 fires, burning more than 7,000 acres of Israeli land.

Particularly worrying is the impact that shortfalls in fuel will have on providing critical water, hygiene and sanitation services in Gaza, which depend on donor-funded emergency fuel to power back-up generators, according to the UN humanitarian affairs office for the Palestinian Territory ([OCHA](#)).

Currently, water and sanitation facilities have only a seven to 10-day supply, while health facilities have less than seven days of emergency fuel supplies.

“These developments come against the backdrop of a worrying escalation in hostilities in recent days,” said OCHA, with “some 15,000 Palestinian injuries since 30 March in the context of demonstrations; a health system on the verge of collapse; and an 11-year humanitarian crisis created by an Israeli blockade that has raised concerns over collective punishment and an internal Palestinian political divide.”

At present, the humanitarian funding appeal for the occupied Palestinian Territory, 70 per cent of which targets Gaza, is only 23 per cent funded. Moreover, \$4.5 million is urgently needed for emergency fuel, which runs out in early August.

“We are steps away from a disastrous deterioration, with potential broad impacts not only on Palestinians in Gaza, but the region,” said Mr. McGoldrick. “Everyone with the ability to improve the situation must take a step back, prevent further escalation and reduce the suffering of ordinary Palestinians in Gaza.”

The UN spokesperson said on Tuesday that the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)) was implementing various schemes to help boost employment opportunities and mitigate the harsh socio-economic conditions in Gaza.

First, over a 12-month period, UNDP will create more than 2,500 immediate and short-term jobs, directly benefiting nearly 3,000 people – with the aim of women filling 40 per cent of the jobs.

Second, a recently launched rapid employment scheme is offering short- to medium-term employment opportunities to some 1,500 young men and women, including persons with disabilities.

[‘Unlock full power of business’ to](#)

achieve Global Goals, UN deputy chief tells forum

Businesses can contribute in important ways to the realization of a world free of poverty and hunger by 2030, including through job creation, technological innovation and the provision of finance resources, the United Nations [Deputy Secretary-General](#) said on Tuesday.

“The [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) have [captured the imagination](#) of leaders and general public alike,” said Amina Mohammed at the SDG Business Forum, one of the hundreds of events being held during the 9-18 July gathering devoted to development issues, known as the High-level Political Forum, organized by the UN Economic and Social Council ([ECOSOC](#)).

“The private sector brings both agility in delivery and new approaches to SDG implementation”, she added.

The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and its 17 Goals were adopted by world leaders in September 2015 as a blueprint for creating a healthy, equitable and peaceful world.

“The 2030 Agenda cannot be achieved by Governments alone”, Ms. Mohammed said. “To address the needs of the most vulnerable in communities around the world, we need a bolder approach to partnership, a dynamically engaged business community, and new forms of sustainability financing.”

Businesses contribute to the 2030 Agenda in important ways: as engines of employment; through technological innovation; as sources of finance; and with market-based solutions that bring opportunities for women, young people and vulnerable groups, she said.

“However, much remains to be done to unlock the full power of business as a force for good”, she said, explaining that initiatives by many companies and sectors do not yet amount to the systemic change that is needed to transform economies and societies – including the empowerment of women.

The United Nations has a critical role to play in bringing all stakeholders together, providing a global platform for reviewing SDG implementation, for the passing on of skills and know-how, and for catalyzing partnerships.

One key challenge is the large financing gap, in terms of both public and private resources and investments, she stressed, drawing attention to a High-level Meeting on Financing the 2030 Agenda that the Secretary-General will host in September at UN Headquarters.

UN marks 100 years since Mandela's birth with a vow to continue struggle for equality

Taking stock of his "vast" legacy for mankind, the United Nations will mark 100 years since the birth of the late anti-Apartheid activist, Nelson Mandela, on Wednesday.

"Nelson Mandela was a towering global advocate for justice and equality", said UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) in his video message for [Nelson Mandela International Day](#), annually observed on 18 July, which was inaugurated by UN General Assembly in November 2009, in recognition of his global contribution to the culture of peace and freedom.

Mr. Mandela, who died in 2013, was the first democratically-elected president of South Africa and the country's first black head of State. He had been in prison for 27 years on charges of sabotage before being released and eventually elected president.

"He continues to inspire the world through his example of courage and compassion. Nelson Mandela was held captive for many years. But he never became a prisoner of his past", Mr. Guterres said, noting that Mandela poured his energy into reconciliation and his vision of a peaceful, multi-ethnic, democratic South Africa.

"Rarely has one person in history done so much to stir people's dreams and move them to action", the UN chief said. "That struggle for equality, dignity and justice continues."

In December 2015, the General Assembly decided to extend the scope of Nelson Mandela International Day to also promote humane conditions of imprisonment and to encourage societies everywhere to treat prisoners as a continuous part of society by adopting the revised UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, known as the "[Nelson Mandela Rules](#)".

The Rules added important safeguards, including an absolute prohibition on torture and ill-treatment and clear restrictions on the use of solitary confinement, instruments of restraint and intrusive searches, as well as detailed guidance on prisoners' rights to equivalent health-care services.

"Nelson Mandela spent [27 years in prison](#) in the course of his struggle for justice. He knew better than anyone that 'no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens but its lowest ones'", said Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)).

He said his Office will assist all countries in translating these rules into action, to promote humane conditions of imprisonment and ensure no part of

society is forgotten.

“Nelson Mandela International Day 2018 marks 100 years since the birth of a true hero who left the world a better and more just place than he found it,” Mr. Fedotov said.

[The world ‘must rally’ to support one million Rohingya refugees, UN Migration chief says](#)

A failure to remain focused on the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh “would have tragic outcomes” for the nearly one million children, women and men living in Cox’s Bazar, said William Lacy Swing, Director General of the [International Organization for Migration](#) (IOM), on Tuesday.

He said that the refugee families from the mainly-Muslim minority group who had fled their homes since last August across the Myanmar border, were “in danger of becoming the wretched of the earth, homeless and without a future,” wrapping up a [week-long visit to the country and neighbouring Bangladesh](#). “The world must rally to support them.”

The Rohingya have suffered a pattern of persecution over decades – lacking even the most basic human rights, starting with citizenship – in their native Myanmar.

The IOM chief noted the major improvements made to the camp management in the Cox’s Bazar area, and infrastructure – including pathways, bridges, drainage, sanitation and shelters – carried out by the United Nations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and national partners, since his last visit in October 2017.

However, as monsoon rains turn many hillsides to mud, many Rohingya now live in desperately cramped conditions on bare sandy slopes, with only bamboo and tarpaulin shelters to protect them from the elements, in what has now become the world’s largest refugee camp.

The humanitarian response in Cox’s Bazar, which scaled up in August 2017, is now facing significant funding shortfalls. Mr. Swing warned that with only one quarter of the joint funding appeal for the entire response met so far, much of the progress made in recent months was at serious risk of collapsing. That, he said, would create yet another life-threatening disaster for the Rohingya and the Bangladeshi host community whose resources are already stretched to the limit.

In parallel, the UN Special Envoy on Myanmar, [Christine Schraner Burgener](#), who also visited Bangladesh this week, expressed her sincere appreciation to all the people of the country, in particular host communities, for the help they have offered Rohingya refugees. She echoed the need for greater international assistance.

Calling for accountability for the human rights violations committed, the Special Envoy expressed her support for the implementation of the November 2017 agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar, and last month's agreement between Myanmar, the [UN Refugee Agency](#) (UNHCR) and the [UN Development Programme](#) (UNDP), paving the way towards a conducive environment allowing for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of the people to their place of origin or choice.