

# UN rights experts urge Kenya to protect activists testifying in lead pollution case

Four United Nations human rights experts are calling for greater protection for Kenyan activists who have testified against a local lead-smelting plant accused of environmental pollution.

Cases of lead poisoning have been reported in the area near the factory, located in a poor area in the coastal city of Mombasa.

The environmental defenders have been harassed and intimidated since an initial court hearing against the company which took place on 17 May, and fear for their lives.

They are due back in court as part of a class action lawsuit against the Government and the company, on charges of violating the right to a healthy environment, as outlined in Kenya's constitution.

"These environmental defenders should not face threats, harassment, and intimidation when they are exercising their rights legitimately through a legal action," the UN rights experts charged in [a statement](#) issued on Wednesday.

"On the contrary, they should be championed for upholding the Constitution of Kenya."

The experts, who are appointed by the UN Human Rights Council, reported that unknown people have visited the activists' homes at night, repeatedly banging on their doors and yelling for them to come out.

One was even attacked with an unknown substance that caused eye problems and swelling.

Many of the environmentalists have reported the threats to the police, "however investigations appear slow and inadequate," according to the UN experts, who said the activists are now asking to be relocated as they fear for their safety.

The UN experts said they had informed the Kenyan authorities of their concerns on two prior occasions but have received no response so far.

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## UN chief condemns killing of police officers and civilian in Belgium's Liège

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has condemned Tuesday's attacks by a gunman in the Belgian city of Liège, which left two police officers and a civilian dead.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson, the Secretary-General also extended his condolences to the families of the victims, the people and the Government of Belgium.

Mr. Guterres also wished those injured a speedy recovery.

"The United Nations stands in solidarity with Belgium in its fight against terrorism and violent extremism," added the statement.

According to media reports, the attacker – a 31-year-old man who was recently released from prison – had also taken a female hostage at a school before he was killed by police officers. He is also reported to have killed another individual he met while in jail.

Belgian prosecutors are reportedly treating the attacks as an act of terrorism.

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## New political agreement for Libya a 'welcome step' says UN chief

United Nations [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) has welcomed a new Political Declaration for Libya adopted by leading politicians and military leaders on Tuesday, pledging to "work constructively" with the world body to hold fresh elections this year.

The Declaration, signed in Paris, includes Libyan Prime Minister Faiez Serraj, Speaker of the House of Representatives Agila Essa Saleh Gwaider, the President of the High State Council Khalid al-Meshri, and General Khalifa Haftar of the Libyan National Army.

It commits them to work towards both parliamentary and presidential elections in a "secure environment" by 10 December, "at the latest", as well as to respect the poll results.

This “is a significant and welcome step forward in Libya’s political transition,” said a statement issued by the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General.

“The UN, led by Special Representative Ghassan Salamé, will continue to implement the [United Nations Action Plan](#), as supported by the Declaration adopted today,” it added.

The talks were hosted by Emmanuel Macron, the President of France, and were convened under the auspices of the UN.

The meeting in Paris also recognized the importance of developing a constitutional basis for elections and support for Mr. Salamé, as he consults Libyan authorities on a proposal – and timeline – for adopting the constitution.

The four Libyan actors also agreed to participate in an inclusive political conference to follow up on the implementation of the Declaration under the auspices of the UN.

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## [UN calls for ‘new political energy’ to end the conflict in eastern Ukraine](#)

The United Nations top political affairs official on Tuesday stressed the need to breathe life back into ongoing efforts to end the conflict in eastern Ukraine, now in its fifth year, which has killed and injured thousands of civilians, plunging the country into a humanitarian crisis.

“To overcome the status quo, it is imperative to inject efforts with new political energy,” said Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Rosemary DiCarlo, during her briefing to the Security Council.

She said that the conflict between the pro-government forces and separatists “may no longer make major international headlines, but it is neither dormant nor frozen,” requiring attention, particularly to alleviate the human cost of the conflict.

While violence and casualties have declined since 2015, the killing, destruction and immense suffering continues, she said.

The civilian death toll of the conflict has now exceeded 2,700, with as many as 9,000 injured, according to the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR). An estimated 1.6 million people remain internally displaced – the largest uprooted population in Europe and among the 10

largest in the world.

Over half a million civilians live within five kilometres of the 457-kilometre line which divides the opposing forces in eastern Ukraine, subjected day and night to shelling, gunfire, landmines and unexploded ordnance.

"The area around the Line of Contact is now the third most mine-contaminated area in the world," Ms. DiCarlo said.

She argued that a settlement to the conflict should be based on the February 2015 Minsk Agreements, which set out necessary steps to restore peace there.

The 2015 deal was agreed between the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany.

Although "a breakthrough remains elusive", she continued, "we cannot allow ourselves to give in to fatigue or complacency."

In this regard, she urged all parties concerned to implement Security Council resolution 2202 (2015), which supports the package of measures set out in the Minsk Agreements.

She said Tuesday's Council meeting is the first on the situation in Ukraine since 2 February last year, when an upsurge in violence threatened to spiral out of control.

It comes at a time when the fighting has recently escalated along the contact line and several days after a Dutch-led probe into the crash of Malaysian Airline passenger flight MH17 determined that the missile system used to down the plane originated from a Russian brigade. Russia has said that evidence does not exist to support such findings.

"We are all aware of the recent update of the investigation into the MH17 downing," she said, stressing that the Security Council, in its resolution 2166 adopted in 2014, demanded that all States cooperate fully with efforts to establish accountability.

As the Secretary-General has expressed, establishing the truth about this event is an important part of achieving justice for the victims and their families.

"For its part, the United Nations remains committed to supporting the search for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, in a manner fully upholding Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence and in accordance with all relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions," Ms. DiCarlo concluded.

## **Conflict stretches millions of Ukrainians to breaking point**

Assistant-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Ursula Mueller said that last year, landmines maimed or killed 238 civilians.

The [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA) documented one million crossings per month of the contact line. Civilians risk shelling, sniper-fire and landmines as they make the arduous journey through the five official checkpoints where processing times can range from hours, to days.

Over 600,000 people are regularly exposed to hostilities along the contact line. Families live in damp basements, and more than 100,000 children attend schools with windows lined with sand bags. More than 40,000 homes have been destroyed or damaged.

Only 10 days ago, two schools in the Donetsk region were shelled when hundreds of children were attending classes.

In 2018, humanitarians aim to reach 2.3 million people with vital assistance and protection services, but only 13 per cent of the \$187 million needed has been received.

“This has forced agencies, such as the [World Food Programme](#) to withdraw from Ukraine, even though 1.2 million people are food insecure,” she said.

“This conflict has stretched millions of Ukrainians to breaking point. Many displaced people have exhausted their savings and means of survival,” she warned.

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## Promoting biodiversity across all agricultural sectors ‘fundamental’ – FAO chief

Changing how countries across the world produce food is “fundamental” to protecting the future of the Earth’s ecosystem, said the head of the Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) on Tuesday.

With large swathes of the planet’s surface used to grow food, raise animals or produce products such as timber; the agricultural sector – if managed sustainably – can make significant contributions to protecting biodiversity, said FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva.

Addressing a three-day [international dialogue](#) on mainstreaming the key issue into agricultural policies and practices, he called for transformative changes in food production, aimed at producing healthy and nutritious food while simultaneously safeguarding the planet’s biodiversity.

“Biodiversity is essential for safeguarding global food security and nutrition, improving rural livelihoods, and enhancing the resilience of

people and communities,” he said in keynote remarks.

However, planetary biodiversity – at the genetic, species and ecosystem levels – faces a number of threats, the FAO Director-General noted, adding that food production “is a big part of the problem”.

“Biodiversity is essential for safeguarding global food security and nutrition, improving rural livelihoods, and enhancing the resilience of people and communities” – *FAO chief, José Graziano da Silva*

Pointing out that the world still produces food based mainly on 50-year-old principles, often using environmentally unfriendly chemicals, he also described how the loss of agricultural biodiversity poses a direct risk to food security.

“Only three staple crops – rice, maize and wheat – and three animal species – cattle, pigs and chicken – provide the majority of food energy intake in the world,” he said.

Diversifying food sources could play a critical role in ensuring food security; such as genetically diverse plants which are more tolerant to hotter and drier conditions, he said. Similarly, more diverse livestock would allow farmers and pastoralists to breed animals which could adapt to changing environmental conditions.

“This is especially important nowadays in the face of emerging challenges such as the impacts of climate change, rapid urbanization and also a growing population with changing diets,” Mr. Graziano da Silva said.

At the farm level, implementing production practices that prioritize safeguarding biodiversity can also ensure that food can be produced sustainably.

To that end, this week’s FAO conference gathers together people from across the whole sector, to consider real-world examples of how agriculture, fisheries and forestry have been successfully managed to safeguard biodiversity.

A series of working groups will also focus on avenues for mainstreaming biodiversity in agriculture, including global governance; national policies and legislation; financial incentives and investments; and supply chain measures.