

Two States 'side-by-side' is the 'peaceful and just solution' for Israel-Palestine conflict: Guterres

A "peaceful and just solution" to the Israel-Palestine conflict can "only be achieved" through two States "living [side-by-side](#) in peace and security", United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres reiterated on Friday

In his address to the [Committee](#) on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which was established by the UN General Assembly in 1975, Mr. Guterres said on Friday that "based on relevant UN resolutions, long-held principles, previous agreements and international law", Jerusalem should be the capital of both States.

"Unfortunately, over this past year, the situation has not moved in that direction", he continued, pointing to protests that began along the border fence with Gaza last year that left hundreds dead and thousands wounded by Israeli security forces.

He also cited "security incidents and provocations by Hamas and other militants in Gaza", including the launching of rockets and incendiary kites that dangerously escalated the situation.

"Thanks to UN and Egyptian mediation efforts, a major escalation was avoided", he continued, appealing to Hamas authorities in Gaza to "prevent provocations". The UN chief said that under International Humanitarian Law, "Israel, too, has a responsibility to exercise maximum restraint", except as a last resort.

Settlements are illegal under international law – *UN chief*

Mr. Guterres underscored that the UN firmly supports Palestinian reconciliation and "the return of the legitimate Palestinian Government to Gaza", as "an integral part of a future Palestinian State".

Spelling out that the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza must be "immediately addressed", he detailed that some two million Palestinians "remain mired in increasing poverty and unemployment, with limited access to adequate health, education, water and electricity", leaving young people with "little prospect of a better future".

"I urge Israel to lift restrictions on the movement of people and goods, which also hamper the efforts of the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies, without naturally jeopardizing legitimate security concerns," the Secretary-General stated.

Lauding the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East ([UNRWA](#)) for its “critical work” in Gaza, the occupied West Bank and across the region, he called on the international community to “significantly” increase efforts to revitalize Gaza’s economy.

Turning to the “risk of further unrest in the West Bank”, the UN chief flagged that Israeli construction and settlement plans have expanded, including in East Jerusalem.

“Settlements are illegal under international law” he asserted. “They deepen the sense of mistrust and undermine the two-State solution”.

Mr. Guterres said he regretted Israel’s decision [not to renew](#) the mandate of the [Temporary International Presence](#) in Hebron, saying: “I hope an agreement can be found by the parties to preserve this long-standing and valuable arrangement.”

“Palestinians have endured more than a half-century of occupation and denial of their legitimate right to self-determination” with both sides continuously suffering from “deadly cycles of violence”, said the Secretary-General.

He indicated that leaders bore the responsibility to “reverse this negative trajectory and pave the way toward peace, stability and reconciliation” and praised the Committee for keeping the focus on the ultimate objective of a “peaceful solution with two States coexisting in peace and security” as the only way to achieve the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

“As I have said repeatedly, there is no Plan B”, concluded Mr. Guterres.

[‘Endemic’ sexual violence surging in South Sudan: UN human rights office](#)

A surge in sexual violence in South Sudan’s Unity state targeting victims as young as eight years old, has prompted a call from the UN human rights office, [OHCHR](#), for urgent Government measures to protect victims, and bring perpetrators to justice.

Despite the signing of a peace deal between belligerents last September, UN investigators found that at least 175 women and girls have been raped or suffered other sexual and physical violence between September and December 2018.

If we go by the main road we are raped, if we go by the bush, we are raped. I was raped among others in the same area repeatedly –
testimony to UN investigators

The actual level of violence is likely to be considerably higher, OHCHR spokesperson Rupert Colville told journalists in Geneva on Friday.

“Obviously (it is) not the whole picture, but they found 175, women and girls who had been either raped, gang-raped or sexually assaulted or physically harmed in other ways,” he said. “And 49 of those girls who were raped, were children.”

According to a joint [report](#) by OHCHR and the [UN Mission in South Sudan \(UNMISS\)](#), attacks against women have decreased significantly since the peace accord was signed on 12 September.

Nonetheless, it warns that such incidents are “endemic” in northern Unity state, on the border with Sudan, creating a sense among communities that it is normal to be a victim of sexual violence.

Victim’s testimony recalls recurring attacks

Citing the testimony of one victim, Mr. Colville explained that many women are raped while fetching firewood, food or water – often more than once – as they lack any protection.

“She said, ‘If we go by the main road we are raped, if we go by the bush, we are raped. I was raped among others in the same area repeatedly on three separate occasions.’”

The surge in conflict-related sexual violence is attributed to many factors including the breakdown in the rule of law, the destruction of livelihoods, forced displacement and food insecurity, after years of civil war.

Large numbers of armed young men, a ‘toxic mix’

But one of the main reasons is the large number of fighters in the area, who have yet to be reintegrated into the national army, according to the peace deal.

Most of the attacks are reported to have been carried out by youth militia groups and elements of the pro-Taban Deng Sudan People’s Liberation Army in Opposition, SPLA-IO (TD), as well as South Sudan People’s Defence Forces (SSPDF).

In a few cases, attacks were perpetrated by members of the group affiliated with reinstated Vice President and peace deal participant, Riek Machar, Sudan People’s Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA-IO (RM)), the UN report says.

“Particularly in this area, there are essentially three main groups who...are involved in these rapes, including the National Government force,” said Mr. Colville. “And a lot of these young men who are heavily armed, are just waiting around...This is a very toxic mix, and there are also youth militia which some of these official groups ally with and you don’t know exactly who they are; they’ve been heavily involved as well.”

Rule of law 'just not applied'

A key challenge is tackling the prevailing impunity throughout Unity state, which is linked to the volatility of the situation across the country, OHCHR maintains.

"There's been very little accountability in South Sudan for what is chronic, endemic problem of sexual violence against women and girls," Mr. Colville said. "Virtually complete impunity over the years, as a result, very little disincentive for these men not to do what they're doing. The rule of law has just not been applied."

Mobile courts provide glimmer of hope for victims

Among the practical measures taken to a bid to help vulnerable communities in Unity state, UNMISS has cleared roadsides to prevent attackers from hiding from potential victims.

A mobile court system is also operational in towns, including Bentiu, which has had "some success" in bringing perpetrators to trial, OHCHR's Mr. Colville said, noting nonetheless that "this is just a drop in the ocean".

"There are thousands and thousands of perpetrators, there are officers involved, there are commanders who've got command responsibility who instead of being investigated and brought to book...have been promoted, and are still in charge of groups operating in this area who are still raping women," he concluded.

[Security Council condemns 'heinous and cowardly' attack in Iran](#)

The United Nations Security Council has condemned "in the strongest terms" Wednesday's "[heinous and cowardly](#)" terrorist attack in south-east Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan Province.

Council Members expressed their deepest sympathy and condolences to the Government and families of the 27 victims on Thursday and wished a "speedy and full recovery" to the 13 injured.

According to news reports, a suicide bomber targeted a bus carrying members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard travelling on a road between two cities in the province, which straddles the border with Pakistan, where armed groups and drugs smugglers regularly operate. A car filled with explosives reportedly detonated alongside the bus.

Terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security – *UN Security Council*

“Terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security”, reaffirmed the Council, underlining the need to hold “perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism accountable and bring them to justice.”

In this regard, they urged all States, in accordance with their obligations under international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, “to cooperate actively” with the Iranian Government in the aftermath of the attack, and all relevant authorities.

Terror attacks are not new to Sistan-Baluchistan. On 29 January three members of a bomb squad sent to investigate an explosion in the province capital of Zahedan were wounded when a second device detonated as they were trying to defuse it, according to news reports. In early December, two people were killed, and some 40 others wounded in the port city of Chabahar during an attack by foreign-backed terrorists.

“Any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed”, reiterated the Security Council members, reminding all States to combat “by all means”, in accordance with the [UN Charter](#) and other international law obligations – including international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law – threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts.

[UN announces roadmap to Climate Summit in 2019, a ‘critical year’ for climate action](#)

2019 is a critical year, the “last chance” for the international community to take effective action on climate change, General Assembly President [Maria Espinosa](#) said on Thursday, during a briefing to announce the UN’s roadmap to the [Climate Summit](#) in September.

Ms. Espinosa was speaking alongside the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on the Climate Summit, Ambassador [Luis Alfonso de Alba](#) of Mexico, at UN Headquarters in New York.

Ms. Espinosa said that, with the deadline for achieving the first targets of the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development fast approaching, described by [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) as “the UN’s blueprint for peace, justice and prosperity on a healthy planet”, the world stood at a crossroads.

Two-thirds of these targets, she said, depend on climate and environment goals, and a five-fold increase in commitments from their current levels is needed in order to meet the targets set at the landmark 2015 [Paris Agreement](#) on dealing with greenhouse gas emissions mitigation, adaptation and finance, due to come into force in 2020.

The General Assembly President walked the representatives of Member States through some of the key events of 2019, leading up to, and following, the Climate Summit. All of the events, she said, share two goals: a doubling of commitments and ambition at a national level, and ensuring the inclusion of diverse groups in the process of climate action.

March will see the General Assembly [High-Level Meeting](#) on Climate and Sustainable Development for All, which is intended to build on the success of [COP24](#), the 2018 climate conference in Katowice, Poland, which led to the establishment of a “rulebook” for the reporting of emissions and the progress made in cutting them, every year from 2024.

The March meeting will welcome representatives of the private sector, civil society and young people, and look to harness the enthusiasm of the latter group, who, said Ms. Espinosa, will be most affected by a warming world.

On the 30th of June, in the build up to the Climate Summit, a “stocktaking” event will take place in Abu Dhabi, followed by a [High Level Political Forum](#) under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council in July, which will see a review of the progress made in achieving [Sustainable Development Goal 13](#) (“urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”).

The Climate Summit will be followed by the first-ever [High Level Political Forum on Climate Action](#), sponsored by the General Assembly on September 24. The year will be rounded off by the 2019 Climate Conference [COP25](#), which will take place in Chile.

Multilateralism, said Ms. Espinosa, is the only effective to combat climate change, which is one of the main challenges facing the world and can only be overcome with constructive input from all. She concluded with a proverb: “‘If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you wish to go far, go together.’ Let’s travel this road together.”

Ambassador de Alba, following Ms. Espinosa, confirmed that the world is falling well behind targets for combating climate change, with only around a third of the necessary work currently completed. He reminded delegates that there are only between 10 and 12 years left to achieve the goals, and called for a ramping up of ambition.

The Special Envoy added that, despite the challenges, an optimistic signal must be given: that it is possible to counter climate change, enjoy economic

growth and eradicate poverty. “We can also meet social needs, healthcare needs and human rights needs,” he said, and bring about a “win-win situation to answer the doubters.”

2019 needs to see action, continued Ambassador de Alba, including partnerships with the private sector and civil society, and a huge mobilization of resources (a target of 1 trillion dollars per year to support developing countries has been set), to invest “in our future, for jobs in a green future.”

[Humanitarian crisis in Yemen remains the worst in the world, warns UN](#)

An estimated 24 million people – close to 80 per cent of the population – need assistance and protection in Yemen, the UN [warned](#) on Thursday. With famine threatening hundreds of thousands of lives, humanitarian aid is increasingly becoming the only lifeline for millions across the country.

According to the [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#) the “severity of needs is deepening”, with the number of people in acute need, a staggering 27 per cent higher than last year, when it was already the most acute crisis on the globe.

Thursday’s [2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview for Yemen report](#), shows that 14.3 million people are classified as being in acute need, with around 3.2 million requiring treatment for acute malnutrition; that includes two million children under-five, and more than one million pregnant and lactating women.

Highlighting that more than 20 million people across the country are food insecure, half of them suffering extreme levels of hunger, the report focuses on some key humanitarian issues: basic survival needs, protection of civilians and livelihoods and essential basic services.

“The escalation of the conflict since March 2015 has dramatically aggravated the protection crisis in which millions face risks to their safety and basic rights”, OCHA reports.

The UN agency data shows that a total of 17.8 million people lack access to safe water and sanitation, and 19.7 million lack access to adequate healthcare. Poor sanitation and waterborne diseases, including cholera, left hundreds of thousands of people ill last year.

Meanwhile, grain which could help feed millions, is still at risk of rotting in a key Red Sea storage facility because conditions are too unsafe to reach it, UN Special Envoy [Martin Griffiths](#) and UN Emergency relief chief [Mark](#)

[Lowcock](#) said earlier this week.

Death toll and displaced people

During the past four years of intense conflict between Government forces and Houthi rebels have left tens of thousands dead or injured including at least 17,700 civilians as verified by the UN.

The agency adds that an estimated 3.3 million people remain displaced, up from 2.2 million last year, including 685,000 people who fled fighting in Hudaydah and on the west coast, from June onwards. According to the UN Refugee Agency ([UNHCR](#)), the number of sites hosting displaced people has increased by almost half over the past 12 months.

Pledging conference

In a bid to respond to the urgent humanitarian needs, the United Nations and the Governments of Sweden and Switzerland will convene the third [High-Level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen](#), later this month.

The event is scheduled for 26 February in Geneva and seeks to garner support for the humanitarian response and alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people. At the beginning of this month, UN Emergency relief chief Mark Lowcock said that \$4 billion would be needed.