

# 'Sharp escalation' in fighting across Myanmar's Kachin state, warns rights expert

Raising alarm over a "sharp" escalation in hostilities in Myanmar's Kachin province, a United Nations human rights expert has called on all parties to ensure greater protection for civilians.

The military have reportedly carried out aerial bombing and used artillery and heavy weapons in civilian areas close to the border with China.

["Innocent civilians are being killed and injured](#), and hundreds of families are now fleeing for their lives," Yanghee Lee, the UN [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar](#), said on Tuesday.

"What we are seeing in Kachin state over the past few weeks is wholly unacceptable, and must stop immediately."

According to UN reports, more than 5,000 civilians have been displaced from villages near the Chinese border in the last three weeks. Children, pregnant women, the elderly and people with disabilities are among those who have been displaced.

In a press statement, the UN rights expert reiterated that all parties to the conflict had to abide by international humanitarian law, and take precautions not to harm civilians.

"Civilians must never be subjected to violence during the course of conflict. All parties must take all necessary measures to ensure their safety and security," she said.

## **Civilians reportedly trapped in village**

Ms. Lee also raised concern over reports that more than 100 civilians have been trapped in the village of Man Wai for the past three weeks, with inadequate access to food or medical supplies.

A food convoy, organized by the Myanmar Red Cross, was reportedly prevented from entering the village last week.

"All parties to the conflict must allow the passage of humanitarian assistance," said Ms. Lee. "Any wilful impediment of relief supplies may amount to war crimes under international law."

In March, as the world's attention was focused on the situation in Rakhine state and the Rohingya refugee crisis, the Special Rapporteur had raised alarm over deteriorating situation in Kachin, Shan and other conflict affected areas of Myanmar.

“In Kachin state, where sporadic violence and intermittent killings have been the norm in recent years, there has been an increase in the frequency and intensity of clashes between the Tatmadaw [Myanmar’s armed forces] and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) since October 2017, resulting in deaths and the displacement of the civilian population,” Ms. Lee said in her [report](#) to the Human Rights Council.

UN Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation, without drawing any UN salary for their work.

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## [Iraqi political candidates have ‘real appetite’ to work together – UN official](#)

Politicians in Iraq are working constructively with each other ahead of this month’s parliamentary elections, a senior United Nations official said.

“Elections by their nature are adversarial,” Alice Walpole, one of the top officials at the UN mission in Iraq, told *UN News*. “One of the challenges in a place like Iraq is to avoid falling back to sectarian hostilities in the run-up to the elections.”

The more than 6,000 candidates vying for some 300 seats in the Parliament have been asked to sign and abide by a code of conduct. The two-page document stipulates that politicians and their parties will avoid hate speech and incitement to violence, and contribute to a peaceful atmosphere.

I think if you encourage people to vote when they’re young and they get into the habit of doing it, then they vote all through their lives.

The positive engagement among politicians is one of the key differences that Ms. Walpole, a [Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Iraq](#), sees between now and when she first began working in Iraq in 2009.

“I detect among politicians a real appetite to move forward and to work for Iraq and to work constructively,” she said.

The elections will be the first held since the Government declared victory over the Islamic State or Daesh. In a televised address in December, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced that more than three years of combat

operations drove out the extremists from the territory they once held, and that Iraqi forces were in full control of the country's border.

The Government has focused on returning thousands of the two million people displaced since the start of the 2014 crisis back home before the polls.

This is particularly important, she noted, for all the people who lived under Daesh for a few years, whose voices were completely lost.

"I think it's really important to enfranchise them so that they get the chance now to say what they want, and people are very conscious that the Government they vote in now will shape the future of the country."

Ms. Walpole disagrees with those who say that holding elections in present-day Iraq is not possible and have called for a delay.

She points to an officially approved timeframe for the Parliament to end and a new one to begin: "It is possible to hold elections when you have a large proportion of your population displaced but you have to put other measures in place."

Those include reaching as many of the displaced Iraqis to encourage them to register to vote.

The voting group includes a high number of youth. Since the last elections in 2014, about four million young Iraqis reached the voting age.

Getting them registered and voting is one of the aims of the Deputy Special Representative and the UN mission in Iraq ([UNAMI](#)), which is providing technical advice to the Government and the Independent Electoral Commission overseeing the elections.

"I think if you encourage people to vote when they're young and they get into the habit of doing it, then they vote all through their lives," Ms. Walpole said.

She noted that the UN has a credibility and a legitimacy in Iraq that it does not enjoy in all countries.

"We're not doing the elections; the Electoral Commission is, and we're advising and supporting. But the fact that we're identified with the elections is giving them credibility and giving people confidence to engage."

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**Almost half-million affected as devastating floods inundate central**

# Somalia – UN mission

United Nations agencies in Somalia have stepped up their response in the wake of devastating flash floods across large parts of the country that have impacted nearly 500,000 people and displaced close to 175,000 from their homes.

According to the UN [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO), current floods are some of the worst the region has seen in recent times and the current water level [exceeds](#) a 50-year return period in most locations.

[“Internally displaced people remain the most vulnerable](#) to the impact of the flooding with many camps located in low-lying areas,” Stéphane Dujarric, the spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, said at a regular news briefing in New York on Monday.

“Humanitarian partners on the ground have prioritized water, sanitation, hygiene, [health,] shelter and food response in their interventions.”

The heavy rains and flash floods come only months after a devastating drought left over six million people in need of humanitarian assistance last year.

## **Floods worse than anticipated**

The magnitude of rainfall has been much worse than anticipated, said Yngvil Foss, the deputy head at the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA) in Somalia.

Initially, all humanitarian actors started responding with the means and assets they had available  
– Yngvil Foss, UN aid official

“Initially, [all humanitarian actors started responding with the means and assets they had available](#),” she said, noting that UN relief agencies have been able to raise some money over the past week to scale up critical interventions.

The UN [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), for instance, delivered 4.5 million metric tons of medicines and other medical supplies to Belet Weyne, the capital of the hard hit HirShabelle province, on 29 April.

Peacekeeping troops from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) also evacuated more than 10,000 residents of Belet Weyne from inundated parts of the city as well as provided tarps and water to the flood affected.

## **More funding urgently needed**

However, [more funds are urgently needed](#) to cater to the increasing numbers of

internally displaced persons.

Yesterday, Somalia's President, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmajo" visited flood affected areas and [appealed](#) to the international community for urgent humanitarian assistance.

Somalia's Humanitarian Response Plan for 2018, totalling \$1.5 billion (before the floods), is only 19 per cent funded. Launched by UN agencies and humanitarian partners, the Plan aim to reach some 5.4 million people with assistance.

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## [The world swings from Saint Petersburg on International Jazz Day](#)

Jazz speaks to people from all linguistic, political and economic backgrounds, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said Monday, praising the art form for its ability to promote peace, diversity, and respect for human dignity.

Observed [annually on 30 April](#), the International Day honours the enduring legacy of this musical genre and its power to bring people together.

UNESCO Director General Audrey Azoulay said the message for freedom "is [rooted at the very core](#)" of jazz music, which is defined by improvisation.

"The ability for musicians to come together and listen, play and exchange artistry through this free-flowing expression reflects the spirit of freedom movements across the world," she added.

International Jazz Day 2018 kicked off over the weekend in New Orleans, Louisiana, the birthplace of jazz, with a concert in famed Congo Square – site of the first-ever International Jazz Day event.

UNESCO, in partnership with the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, presented a special *International Jazz Day Salute to New Orleans* concert that recognized the city's 300th anniversary.

Affirming the unifying power of jazz, Mr. Hancock and world-renowned New Orleans trumpeter Terence Blanchard led the free event, which featured vocalists Patti Austin, Ledisi and the renowned Preservation All-Stars.

Beginning 18 April, students in New Orleans were also treated to in-school education programmes that explored the origins, development and significance of jazz – with master classes by Mr. Hancock and Mr. Blanchard.

## A global celebration

Russia's first Concert Jazz Band was founded in 1927... and Saint Petersburg, the global host city of the 2018 International Day, has been bee-bopping ever since.

An all-star global performance from the [Mariinsky](#) Theatre will be streamed live as some three dozen jazz heavyweights, representing [14 countries](#), flex their musical muscles.

With Mr. Hancock and Russian jazz saxophonist Igor Butman serving as co-artistic directors, American jazz pianist John Beasley will direct a stellar lineup that includes The Manhattan Transfer (US), Till Brönner (Germany), Fatoumata Diawara (Côte d'Ivoire), Antonio Faraò (Italy), Gilad Hekselman (Israel), Horacio Hernandez (Cuba), Branford Marsalis (US), Moscow Jazz Orchestra (Russia) and Danilo Pérez (Panama).

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## [Myanmar: Security Council delegation meets top politicians, civil society leaders](#)

The United Nations Security Council is continuing its mission to Bangladesh and Myanmar, taking a first-hand look at the plight of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees who have fled across the border to escape violence.

On Monday, the delegation of diplomats from the Council's 15 member countries arrived in Myanmar's capital, Naypyidaw, holding meetings with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi as well as General Min Aung Hlaing, Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric told reporters in New York.

Ambassadors also met with civil society, parliamentarians and Government representatives.

On Tuesday, the Council members will fly to Rakhine State – the epicenter of the mass displacement crisis, which has been caused by a recurring cycle of clashes between mainly Buddhist residents in the State, and Rohingya Muslims who've also lived there for decades.



Caroline Gluck/UNHCR

United Nations Security Council members visit Kutupalong Rohingya refugee settlement in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

According to the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR), about 671,000 Rohingya refugees have fled targeted violence and serious human rights violations in Myanmar since last August.

In Rakhine, the delegation is expected to meet local government representatives and civil society.

Last week, UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) announced the appointment of Christine Schraner Burgener of Switzerland as his new Special Envoy on Myanmar, to strengthen the world body's efforts to assist Myanmar's peace and reconciliation process.



Caroline Gluck/UNHCR

United Nations Security Council members visit Kutupalong Rohingya refugee settlement in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

The UN Spokesperson added that over the weekend, the Council delegation visited Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, where they listened to testimony from refugees at the Kutupalong Camp.

Before departing for Myanmar early on Monday, the delegation met with Bangladesh's Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, in Dhaka.



Caroline Gluck/UNHCR

United Nations Security Council members visit Kutupalong Rohingya refugee settlement in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh and meet with a group of women and girls.