

UN envoy tells Somali refugees in Kenya 'things are gradually getting better' back home

Meeting residents of the world's largest camp for Somali refugees – sprawling Dadaab, located in north-eastern Kenya – the top United Nations official for Somalia expressed his solidarity with their situation and highlighted the gradual progress made in their home country.

“In my opinion – as the mother of a family that is about to return just told me – things are gradually [getting better](#) in Somalia,” the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, Michael Keating, said Thursday at the end of his visit to the refugee complex.

“There is now a stronger State, a federal structure, there are big efforts to try and improve security – yes, Al-Shabaab remains a potent threat – but economic activity is picking up and things are, in a non-linear way, getting better,” he added.

He stressed that returns are voluntary, but sometimes the news emphasizes the negative, including stories about violence and drought.

Dadaab currently has a population of 226,472 registered refugees and asylum seekers. Somalis account for some 96 per cent of the residents of the four camps that make up the complex.

The first camp was established in 1991, when refugees fleeing the civil war in Somalia started to cross the border into neighbouring Kenya. A second influx occurred in 2011, when some 130,000 refugees arrived, fleeing drought and famine in southern Somalia.

While more than 80 per cent of the people who have returned to Somalia are from that second group, Mr. Keating said that some have been at the camp for 27 years, some of them second- and even third-generation refugees.



UN Photo

The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, Michael Keating interacts with refugees outside their houses at the IFO camp in Dadaab, located in Kenya, on 12 April 2018.

"Their links with extended family and communities are much weaker, and so it's a much harder decision for them to leave the relative security of a refugee camp," he said.

Mr. Keating, who also heads up the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), emphasized that his visit was a two-way exchange, and that what he heard was useful for his work and engagement with authorities in Somalia.

While many believed that things are slowly improving back home, "they're still worried about security, job opportunities and education," he said of the feelings of some of the people he had met.

"Like parents everywhere, those I met want the best possible education for their children – and they just don't think that's available inside Somalia. Some of the students I met said the same," Mr. Keating said.

"It's not my job to lecture refugees – I'm here more to listen to them and then take their messages back and factor them in, in terms of how we think about moving forward in Somalia," he stressed.

Winnie Mandela left an 'indelible mark

on the history of the 20th century,' says UN chief

"She was an international symbol of resistance who left an indelible mark on the history of the 20th century," he added.

Mr. Guterres said the outpouring of condolences since her passing shows what an enormous impact Ms. Mandela had not only on the people of South Africa and on the African continent, but for millions around the world.

"Faced with the most heinous of racist and discriminatory regimes, she helped lead the way in showing what it takes to overcome such tyranny – strength, defiance and courage," he said.

The UN chief outlined her personal sacrifices, such as enduring harassment, torture and imprisonment, while noting that her resistance inspired others to keep hope alive through the struggle's darkest periods.

"We are aware that the road before us is uphill, but we shall fight to the bitter end for justice," Mr. Guterres said, quoting Ms. Mandela's remarks following the Soweto uprising and student demonstrations in the mid 1970s.

Noting that while all her actions could not be condoned, the Secretary-General stressed Ms. Madikizela-Mandela's dedication as a strong, fearless woman, who "had to fight patriarchy's definitions of womanhood."

"The combination of patriarchy and racism together meant that black women confronted enormous obstacles from the cradle to the grave – making her own achievements all the more exceptional," he stressed.

In the decades-long fight against apartheid, Mr. Guterres said that the UN stood with Ms. Madikizela-Mandela and South Africa, as they faced unrelenting racism and discrimination.

"Today, as we remember her," he said, "the United Nations reaffirms its commitment to the ideals of equality, justice and humanity for all."

Miroslav Lajčák, President of the UN General Assembly, remarked that Ms. Madikizela-Mandela was willing to sacrifice everything to change the world around her.

"And, we owe [a great debt](#), to people like this," he said. "Their sacrifices benefit all of those who come after them. And [...] change the course of history."

Mr. Lajčák elaborated that in standing up to the political and social structures of her own country, she met strong resistance.

"She was taken away from her children. She was imprisoned. She was tortured," he maintained. "Yet, she continued to demand an end to injustice. And she

inspired many others to do the same – both within and outside the borders of South Africa.”

By refusing to accept the limits of patriarchy, Ms. Madikizela-Mandela also changed the role of women. Her activism led to women’s rights becoming enshrined in South Africa’s new constitution and also ensuring that the reconciliation process that followed was shaped by women.

“And, I believe there were ripple effects, on the international stage,” he argued, citing strengthened women’s roles in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes.

“Perhaps this is not something we immediately think of, when we pay tribute to Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. But her contribution cannot be overlooked,” he said.

[World ‘must nurture the courage to care – and the resolve to act,’ says UN chief, reflecting on 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda](#)

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on Friday urged the world to reflect on the suffering of those who perished, as well as survived, the Rwandan genocide and unite in renewing the resolve to prevent such atrocities from ever happening again.

Speaking at an event commemorating the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, he also expressed that reconciliation is possible, even after a tragedy of such monumental proportions.

“Rwanda has learned from the events of 1994. [So must the international community,](#)” said the Secretary-General.

In his remarks, Mr. Guterres also voiced concern over the rise of racism, hate speech and xenophobia around the world, such as the violence against the Rohingya community in Myanmar, unimaginable suffering in Syria, and the humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

“Today, people are being killed, displaced and abused in many parts of the world,” he noted, underscoring that States must uphold their fundamental responsibility to protect their people.

In parallel, preventing genocide, crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international law is a shared responsibility, he added.

“It is a core duty of the United Nations [and] our Human Rights Up Front strategy and several UN mechanisms aim to do just that – protect people’s lives and sound an early warning before abuses turn into atrocities,” said Mr. Guterres, urging countries to pay heed to the warnings and follow-up with preventative actions to save lives.



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Secretary-General António Guterres (centre) at the General Assembly event commemorating the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda.

Miroslav Lajčák, President of the General Assembly said: “There are many things to say today. But, I want to start with the simplest, and hardest, message of all. Which is, that we failed. We. Failed. We failed Rwanda. We failed to keep our promises. And, simply, we failed to do our jobs.”

“The United Nations cannot run from this. [We must face it – head-on](#),” he continued, stressing that not only do must the international community focus more on people, it must also work to prevent their suffering.

“This means stronger early warning systems. It means better mechanisms to flag – and respond to – early indicators of genocide, including human rights violations. And it means jumping into action – much sooner, and much faster, than we have in the past.”

Estimates of the number of people killed vary from 800,000 to more than one million. The latest General Assembly resolution designating 7 April as the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda cited more than a million people killed during the genocide, including Hutu and others who opposed it.

Also participating in today's commemoration were Issa Konfourou, Permanent Representative of Mali to the UN, in his capacity as Chair of the African Group; Consolée Nishimwe, author of 'Tested to the Limit: A Genocide Survivor's Story of Pain, Resilience and Hope'; and Valentine Rugwabiza, Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the UN. The event was moderated by Alison Smale, UN Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications.

[Short-sighted investment imperils sustainable development for hundreds of millions of people – UN report](#)

While a moderate upturn in the global economy in 2017 drove progress in development financing, a new United Nations report out Friday revealed that the vast majority of investment is still short-term oriented and global commitments to create sustainable economies are not being met.

"The world has the resources to deliver, but they are not allocated where they are needed most," said [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) in the foreword to the 2018 report, "Financing for Development: Progress and Prospects."

The report cites 'short-termism' – an excessive focus on projects that will yield immediate profit at the expense of long-term interests like infrastructure enhancements and job training – as among the major funding challenges to implementing the [2030 Agenda](#) on Sustainable Development.

The UN chief warned: "The choices we make now on financing will be pivotal."

The prospects of some 800 million of the world's poorest remain dire, as the annual progress report on how to finance the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) revealed that the current system rewards investors, financiers and project managers that prioritize short-term profits – correlating to policy makers' excessive focus on short-term considerations.

The results are shelved infrastructure projects in favour of short term priorities that leave small businesses and women excluded from the financial system.

"The good economic news in some regions masks the very real risk that the poorest will be left behind," said Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General for the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

"There is no room for complacency," he added.

According to the report, an increasing interest in socially responsible investing is no substitute for a broader transformation in the financial system.

Pension funds, insurance companies and other institutional investors hold around \$80 trillion in assets. But the majority of their resources are invested in liquid assets, such as listed equities and bonds in developed countries.

Investment in infrastructure still represents less than three per cent of pension fund assets, with investment in sustainable infrastructure in developing countries even lower.

The lack of long-term investment horizons also means that major risks, such as those from climate change, are not incorporated into decision-making.

“If we don’t invest in infrastructure projects like bridges, roads and sewage systems, if the poorest and women are cut off from access to credit and other financial services, we have little prospect of achieving our global goals,” stressed Mr. Liu.

Overcoming the short-term outlook

The report maintains that the solution to the issue lies in a multifaceted approach, which includes changing payment practices and becoming more transparent.

“We have to reach beyond the quick fix if we are going to create a world that can sustain all of us,” said Navid Hanif, Director of Financing for Sustainable Development Office. “Political leadership and public policies are indispensable.”

The report emphasized that in donor countries, political leaders must do more to meet their commitment to provide financial assistance to the world’s most vulnerable countries.

[At Security Council, UN chief pushes for creation of body to determine perpetrators of chemical attacks in Syria](#)

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on Friday again called for the creation of an independent panel that could determine who used chemical weapons in Syria, as the absence of such a body increases the risks of a

military escalation in a country already riven by “confrontations and proxy wars.”

“Syria indeed today represents [the most serious threat](#) to international peace and security,” the Secretary-General said in a [briefing](#) to the Security Council.

“In Syria, we see confrontations and proxy wars involving several national armies, a number of armed opposition groups, many national and international militia, foreign fighters from everywhere in the world, and various terrorist organizations,” he added.

His plea comes after the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), which was created as a body to attribute responsibility for the use of chemical weapons in Syria in 2015, [expired](#) in November 2017.

Due largely to divisions among its five permanent members – China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States – the Council could not adopt three draft resolutions that would have responded to a suspected chemical weapons attack in the Syrian town of Douma.

Mr. Guterres, in a letter to the Council two days ago, he expressed his “deep disappointment” at the failure of establishing an accountability mechanism similar to JIM.

On Wednesday, he also called the Ambassadors of the five permanent members to reiterate his “deep concern about the risks of the current impasse” and stressed the need to “avoid the situation spiralling out of control.”

In today’s briefing to the Council, the UN chief warned that “increasing tensions and the inability to reach a compromise in the establishment of an accountability mechanism threaten to lead to a full-blown military escalation.”

“For eight long years,” he said, “the people of Syria have endured suffering upon suffering. I reiterate: there is no military solution to the conflict.”

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons ([OPCW](#)) – the body monitoring and facilitating implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which entered into force in 1997 – has [dispatched a fact-finding mission](#) to Syria in response to latest allegations of chemical weapons use.

But this body’s work does not go beyond “establishing the facts,” such as whether or not banned chemical substances were used.

Sweden, a non-permanent Council member, on Thursday circulated a new proposal that asks for four things.

It condemns “in the strongest terms” any use of chemical weapons in Syria and expresses alarm at the alleged incident in Douma last weekend; demands full access and cooperation for the OPCW fact-finding mission; expresses the Council’s determination to establish a new impartial and independent

attribution mechanism, based on a proposal by the Secretary-General; and requests the Secretary-General to dispatch immediately a high-level disarmament mission to Syria.

Mr. Guterres, in today's meeting, also highlighted dangerous circumstances encompassing the wider Middle East region, which he said is facing "a true Gordian knot – different fault lines crossing each other and creating a highly volatile situation with risks of escalation, fragmentation and division."

"The Cold War is back with a vengeance, but with a difference," said the UN chief.

The mechanisms and the safeguards to manage the risks of escalation that existed in the past no longer seem to be present, Mr. Guterres said.

Those "fault lines" also include the Palestinian-Israeli divide as well as the Sunni-Shia divide, evident from the Gulf to the Mediterranean.

"Many forms of escalation are possible," he warned.