

Security Council urged to prevent 'uncontrollable escalation' in Syria

The recent escalating violence across Syria, including allegations of chemical weapons use in a Damascus suburb, could have consequences so devastating they are "difficult to even imagine," a United Nations envoy warned Monday, calling for unity among global powers to prevent a chain of events that could draw in actors far beyond the region.

"Recent developments carry more than ever before the dangers that the Secretary-General has warned about," Staffan de Mistura, the UN Special Envoy for Syria, told an emergency meeting of the Security Council.

"[Dangers] of different Middle East fault lines completely crossing each other and interconnected, of conflicting interests – of both global and regional powers, and forms of escalation that can have absolutely devastating consequences that is difficult for us to even imagine."

In sounding the alarm, Mr. de Mistura reiterated that is it the first time since his appointment (in July 2014), that he has issued such a warning.

"The Council cannot allow a situation of uncontrollable escalation to develop in Syria, on any front," he said.

Amid deadly attacks and heightened human suffering across the war-torn country, the first priority must be to protect civilians, underlined Mr. de Mistura, calling on all sides to respect international law and ensure humanitarian access to all people in need.

He also called for complete respect for Security Council [resolution 2401](#), in which the body demanded an immediate cease in hostilities and conditions that to enable humanitarian aid deliveries and medical evacuations of those in need.

The Security Council's emergency meeting was convened amid sharp deterioration in the situation in the war-torn country with reports of dozens killed in an alleged chemical weapons attack as well as heightened conflict across Syria.

Also briefing the Council today, Thomas Markram, the Deputy High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, said that the Organisation for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons ([OPCW](#)) – which monitors implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention ([CWC](#)) and works to rid the world of such weapons – is gathering information on the alleged incidents over the weekend and will report its findings on this alleged attack.

"There is, sadly, little to be said today that has not already been said. The use of chemical weapons is unjustifiable. Those responsible must be held to account," he underscored.

“The use of chemical weapons cannot become the status quo, nor can we continue to fail the victims of such weapons,” he added.

[With fair play, tolerance and team spirit, sport can score for peace and development, say UN officials](#)

The United Nations can make its voice heard on the power of sport in promoting both peace and development, a senior UN official said Monday, urging participants at a special Headquarters event to “bring out our inner sports fans,” and harness sport as a force for positive change.

“Fair play, tolerance and team spirit – sports have a [unique potential](#) to help develop and reinforce positive life skills and values, and expand prospects, Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)),” told a Headquarters event on ‘Crime Prevention and Sustainable Development through Sport.’

He underscored that sports offer a practical, cost-effective means to help prevent violence and crime, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), adopted by world leaders in 2015 as a blueprint to achieve a healthy planet where people can live free of poverty and hunger by 2030.

“This event is a wonderful opportunity to further advance awareness of the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace, and its vital message,” he continued. “Let us take this chance to engage with sports champions and young men and women around the world. Working together, we can harness sport as a force for positive change.”

The Executive Director highlighted the importance of major sporting events, such as the Olympic Games and the World Cup, saying they “have the power to inspire and build bridges.”

“We must take these events as golden opportunities to raise awareness, to promote tolerance and respect, and advance efforts towards peace and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals,” he asserted.



Office of the President of the General Assembly

Miroslav Lajčák, President of the General Assembly, taking part in the Olympic torch relay in Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea.

Opening the event, Miroslav Lajčák, President of the General Assembly, stressed that tackling crime is essential to changing the world for the better by 2030.

“That is why the [2030 Agenda](#) draws a link between combatting crime and sustaining development,” he stated. “And, that is why I am so glad we are here to examine a driver of both: sport.”

Citing sport as a tool for crime prevention, he noted that research supports the assertion that sport participants have a better chance to reject crime and contribute to achieving the SDGs, saying that teams and associations can build strong social networks, and that sport can boost self-esteem and help communities put their differences aside, “to cheer for the same team.”

He elaborated that sports as educational or community-based activities, help “prevent crime or radicalization.”

While the vast majority of youth are not involved in crime, he asserted that too many become trapped in cycles of violence and criminal activity.

“When we are talking about the role of sport in preventing crime – young people should be leading the discussion,” he said.

Recalling the recent Olympic Games in Pyeongdhang, Republic of Korea, Mr. Lajčák noted that despite months of high tensions, athletes from north and south of the Korean Peninsula had participated together – “under the same flag.”

“This is not yet a success story. But it is a sign that we are moving in the right direction,” he explained, saying “it tells us that our work to strengthen sport, as a tool for development and peace, can, indeed, make a difference in the world outside of these walls.”

Mr. Lajčák concluded by saying: “We need to bring out our inner sports fans! And we need to shout even louder in support of this initiative!”

Former National Basketball Association All Star player Dikembe Mutombo, Olympians and other distinguished athletes and sports personalities participated in the event, which featured panel discussions on how sport can promote development and crime prevention strategies, and youth programmes.

The event was organized by UNODC and the Permanent Missions of Colombia, Italy, Monaco, Qatar and Rwanda to the United Nations to mark the [International Day of Sport for Development and Peace](#), which is commemorated annually on 6 April.

[UN population forum urged to examine ways to protect people on the move, make cities work better](#)

A great migration of humanity into cities is under way, and with millions drawn to urban areas for the promise of a better life, the main United Nations forum on population opened its annual session on Monday examining ways to protect people on the move and help create cities that can embrace the massive number of new arrivals.

“People are moving at high rates within national borders, and international migration is growing more complex, with more countries serving simultaneously as countries of origin, transit and destination,” said Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed at the opening of the 51st Session of the Commission on Population and Development.

Created to advise the UN and its Member States on population issues and trends, the Commission is meeting this year under the theme ‘sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration.’

Over the next week, delegates will tackle a host of matters related to the [dramatic population shifts](#) under way driven by the movement of people from rural to urban areas, between cities of different sizes and from one country to another. By 2030, six of every 10 people will be an urban inhabitant. By 2050, it may be two out of three, according to the UN.

Ms. Mohammed said that some of the rapid population change is due to growing drivers of displacement, including conflict, poor economic prospects and, in some cases, climate-related hazards. But much of the mobility also stems from people seeking new opportunities – better jobs, education and training, expanded social and family connections, and more.

Questions of migration and urbanization cannot be distinguished from those of sustainable development because as young people seek a better life in cities, the potential loss to communities and countries of origin can be significant, she said.

Some cities have successfully managed migration, said Ms. Mohammed



UN Photo/Loey Felipe

Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed makes remarks during the opening segment of the fifty-first session of the Commission on Population and Development.

For example, since 2013, São Paulo has been successful in this endeavor through an awareness-raising campaign focused on ending xenophobia and better policy coordination. These measures have helped the Brazilian city embrace migrants and their families and provide them with assistance.

In London, the Home Secretary and the Archbishop of Canterbury have launched a new scheme to encourage community groups to sponsor a refugee family. An online service for refugees in the UK now makes it easier for any individual to support refugees, allowing local authorities to focus on the provision of public goods and services.

Data collection is crucial to improve collective understanding of the changing situation.

The Government of Zambia has partnered with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) to generate district-level development indicators. Analysis of data collected have been used to inform the latest national development plan and mobilize investments in health and education for children and youth.

The Dominican Republic highlighted the contributions of Haitian migrants to gross domestic product (GDP), as well as the limited services they received.

“Because gaps in understanding are easily filled by myths and misperceptions, better data can usefully inform global discussions of migration and related issues,” Ms. Mohammed said.

“It is for this reason that the Commission on Population and Development, with its focus on population data and its emphasis on evidence-based policy-making, plays such a vital role,” she added.

No one in Myanmar should be left behind on the path to a better future, stresses UN official

Protecting the most vulnerable people in Myanmar – whatever their ethnicity or religion – must be at the heart of the response to the humanitarian crisis in the region, the deputy United Nations aid chief has said.

“Regardless of their ethnicity, religion and citizenship status, we need to [...] ensure that [no vulnerable conflict-affected people are deprived](#) of safe and sustained access to humanitarian protection and assistance,” Ursula Mueller, the UN Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, said on Sunday at the end of a six-day visit to Myanmar.

The international community’s humanitarian response must be focused on protecting the most vulnerable people in Myanmar, she said, must be at the heart of the humanitarian response by the international community, national aid organizations and the Government.”

At the outside of her mission, the senior UN relief official met with State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi where they discussed the importance of ending conflict and to strengthen peace and reconciliation efforts in Myanmar.

Ms. Mueller also met with a number of senior Government officials where discussions focused on humanitarian challenges in Rakhine, Kachin, and Shan states.

‘Humanitarian crisis on both sides of Bangladesh-Myanmar border’

Ms. Mueller, also the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, visited Rakhine state – where widespread violence last year forced hundreds of thousands of minority Muslim Rohingyas to flee their homes for safety, with most [finding refuge](#) in neighbouring Bangladesh.

In Maungdaw township, located near the Myanmar-Bangladesh border, she met with local communities affected by the violence; visited a refugee return

transit site that the Government of Myanmar is constructing, some new housing projects; and witnessed areas where villages had been burned down or bulldozed.

“There is a humanitarian crisis on both sides of the Bangladesh-Myanmar border that is affecting the world’s largest group of stateless people,” said Ms. Mueller, noting that while the crisis in Cox’s Bazar (Bangladesh) has captured the world’s attention, over 400,000 still living in Rakhine state continue to face a life of hardship and marginalization due to movement restrictions.

“These restrictions severely compromise their rights and obstruct their access to health, livelihoods, protection, education, and other essential services,” she stressed.

Humanitarian workers also face access restrictions in different parts of Rakhine.

Furthermore, the situation in Myanmar’s Kachin (far north) and Shan (east) states has also deteriorated since the beginning of this year, with some 100,000 people displaced as a result of conflict between the military and armed groups.

“The conflict in Kachin is one the world’s longest running, yet it is a forgotten humanitarian crisis,” said Ms. Mueller, calling on all sides to ensure the protection of all civilians in line with international law.

Implement recommendations of Rakhine panel ‘in the spirit’ they were written in

Ms. Mueller also underscored the need for the holistic and impartial implementation of [recommendations](#) made by the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State “in the spirit that they were written.”

That panel, headed by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, outlined long-term solutions to help end the violence and marginalization for all communities in Rakhine. It also focused on issues of citizenship and freedom of movement.

The senior UN aid official also reminded that the conditions for the dignified, voluntary, and sustainable return of refugees as well as positive outcomes for internally displaced people in camps can only be reached if the critical issues of freedom of movement, social cohesion, livelihoods, and access to services are addressed.

“The lives of the poorest and most vulnerable communities of Rakhine state, whether they are ethnic Rakhine, Muslim, or from other minority groups, will be profoundly transformed if each recommendation is genuinely addressed and implemented,” she said.

UN launches global network of judges to strengthen integrity in courts

The United Nations on Monday launched an initiative to connect judges around the world so that they can learn from each other about ways to strengthen integrity in courts, such as by preventing corruption and undue political interference into judicial appointments and decisions.

“This Network brings together lead institutions responsible for upholding the rule of law, and as such for attaining peace and justice,” UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed said in a video message to a two-day event in Vienna organized by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to [launch](#) the Global Judicial Integrity Network.

More than 350 high-level members of the judiciary, who gathered for the event, discussed key topics, with a view to present recommendations on strengthening judicial integrity at the global level.

The Network will serve as a platform to assist judiciaries around the world to uphold judicial integrity, promote knowledge-building and peer learning, as well as provide access to a large database of thousands of resources, good practices and other judicial documents for immediate reference.

Justice Elisabeth Lovrek, Vice-President of Austria’s Supreme Court, said: “The Network will strengthen judicial cooperation between courts and tribunals from different legal and cultural traditions. In an increasingly globalized world, this is more important than ever.”

In this first gathering, the Network discussed solutions for some of the key challenges confronting judiciaries today, ranging from undue political interference by the executive and legislature into judicial appointments and decisions, reducing budgets in the face of exploding case-loads and corruption in the justice sector, as well as diminishing public confidence.

Substantive sessions will cover an array of measures to help judiciaries tackle those challenges such as developing codes of conduct; establishing functioning disciplinary bodies and proceedings; balancing accountability and independence; and introducing financial disclosure rules for judges.

The Network will also discuss ways to deal with emerging issues, such as educating judges on the use of social media and the impact of digitalization on judicial integrity.

“Judges need the opportunity to share experiences, exchange good practices and support each other. The Network will continue to serve as a resource for addressing new and emerging challenges, such as those posed by social media

and other technological developments,” UNODC Executive Director Yury Fedotov in his message.

A plenary session on the Network’s specific role in promoting judicial integrity was addressed by Diego García-Sayán, UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers; Christophe Régnard, President of the International Association of Judges; and Judge Rudolf Mellinghoff, President of the Federal Court of Finance of Germany and Member of the Judicial Integrity Group, which is the group of judges that initiated the dialogue on corruption in the justice system in 2000 and developed the Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct.