

Turkey's 18-month state of emergency has led to profound human rights violations – UN report

The United Nations on Tuesday called on Turkey to end its 18-month-old state of emergency, saying that the routine extension of emergency powers has resulted in “profound” human rights violations against hundreds of thousands of people and may have lasting impact on the country’s socio-economic fabric.

“One of the [most alarming findings of the report](#) [...] is how Turkish authorities reportedly detained some 100 women who were pregnant or had just given birth, mostly on the grounds that they were ‘associates’ of their husbands, who are suspected of being connected to terrorist organizations,” said Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in a news release announcing the findings.

“Some were detained with their children and others violently separated from them. This is simply outrageous, utterly cruel, and surely cannot have anything whatsoever to do with making the country safer,” he added.

While taking note of the complex challenges Turkey has faced in addressing the attempted coup in July 2016, as well as a number of terrorist attacks, the [report](#) cites that the sheer number, frequency and lack of connection of several emergency decrees to any national threat seem to point to the use of emergency powers to stifle any form of criticism or dissent vis-à-vis the Government.

During the 18-month state of emergency, nearly 160,000 people have been arrested; 152,000 civil servants dismissed, many arbitrarily; and teachers, judges and lawyers dismissed or prosecuted.

The report also documents the use of torture and ill-treatment in custody, including severe beatings, threats of sexual assault and actual sexual assault, electric shocks and waterboarding by police, gendarmerie, military police and security forces.

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It also notes that about 300 journalists have been arrested under allegations that their publications contained “apologist sentiments regarding terrorism” or other “verbal act offences” or for “membership” in terrorist organisations.

Over 100,000 websites were reportedly blocked in 2017, including a high

number of pro-Kurdish websites and satellite TV channels.

Covering the period January to December last year, the report also states that the April 2017 referendum which extended the President's executive powers into both the legislature and the judiciary as seriously problematic, resulting in interference with the work of the judiciary and curtailment of parliamentary oversight over the executive branch.

By the end of 2017, 22 emergency decrees were promulgated with a further two more since the cut-off date of the report.

The report further underlines the need ensure independent, individualized reviews and compensation for victims of arbitrary detentions and dismissals and calls on Turkey to promptly end the state of emergency, restore normal functioning of State institutions, as well as revise and release all legislation not compliant with its international human rights obligations, including the emergency decrees.

"I urge the Government of Turkey to ensure that these allegations of serious human rights violations are investigated and the perpetrators are brought to justice," said Mr. Zeid, also calling on the Government to allow full and unfettered access to his Office (OHCHR) to be able to directly, independently and objectively assess the human rights situation in the southeast of the country.

Syria: Displacement surges as twin military offensives drive thousands from Afrin and east Ghouta

"In Eastern Ghouta alone, more than [45,000 Syrians](#) have fled their homes in recent days," Andrej Mahecic, spokesperson of the UN refugee agency, told reporters in Geneva, Switzerland.

In the northern Afrin region, he added, an estimated 104,000 people have been uprooted from their homes by the latest escalation in fighting.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) said the newly displaced people from east Ghouta are currently sheltering in rural Damascus but the existing accommodation facilities are extremely congested and overcrowded and lack basic sanitation as the needs are growing by the hour. There are also serious health risks.

In addition, hundreds of thousands of civilians are still trapped in east Ghouta by fierce fighting and are in dire need of aid.

“UNHCR and its partners have been working around the clock to provide life-saving assistance,” Mr. Mahecic said, noting that so far 180,000 core relief items, such as mattresses, high thermal blankets, plastic sheets, winter clothes kits, solar lamps, jerry cans, and kitchen sets, have been delivered.

He stressed the importance of full and unhindered humanitarian access to civilians in need, as well as of full respect of the civilians’ freedom of movement and choice of place where they feel safe.

UNHCR call on all parties to respect international humanitarian law and human rights law in the treatment of civilians both in and fleeing east Ghouta.

In the country’s northwest, UNHCR has scaled up its response to the Afrin crisis, delivering 100,000 core relief items in the last two days.

Some 75,000 are sheltering in Tal Rifaat, while another 29,000 have sought safety in Nubol and Zahraa and surrounding villages in northern rural Aleppo. In addition, some 10,000 people are reportedly stranded at Az-Ziyara.

“A UNHCR team was on the ground in Nubol yesterday where they heard stories of their exhausting journey, walking long hours through the mountains,” Mr. Mahecic said.

The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is also responding to the crises in Afrin and east Ghouta.

“It is now 20 days since we were last able to deliver health and nutrition supplies to Afrin district,” said UNICEF spokesperson Marixie Mercado in a briefing to the media in Geneva.

The source of water to Afrin city was reportedly damaged by fighting. UNICEF-supported trucks, however, have not been able to deliver much-needed safe water to vulnerable areas in the city since March 15 due to the escalation of violence.

In east Ghouta, about 70 per cent of the 45,000 to 50,000 people who have been evacuated since March 13 are women and children.

Despite many challenges at the shelters, “there is a palpable sense of relief – especially among the children,” she said, noting that they arrive hungry and exhausted, but the sound of their laughter fills the yards of the shelters.

The children said how much they wanted to go back to school, and described how, when schools would open in eastern Ghouta, they would go to their classes at 5 a.m., before the sun was out, and return at 8 a.m., before the fighting started.

UNICEF is also concerned about the thousands of those who remain inside Afrin and besieged locations in eastern Ghouta.

She said UNICEF had initially planned to meet the needs of 50,000 people, but

are now preparing to cover around 200,000 people from east Ghouta, including those inside the besieged areas.

Meanwhile, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, briefed Security Council members on the human rights situation in Syria during an informal gathering on Monday.

"The siege of Eastern Ghouta by the Syrian Government forces, half a decade long, has involved pervasive war crimes, the use of chemical weaponry, enforced starvation as a weapon of warfare, and the denial of essential and life-saving aid – culminating in the current relentless, month-long bombardment of hundreds of thousands of terrified, trapped civilians," he said.

"In the city of Afrin, which was captured by Turkish forces yesterday, scores of civilians have been killed and injured due to airstrikes, ground-based strikes, and explosive hazards, and thousands have been displaced," he added.

Find his [full remarks](#) here.

[Cameroonians pour into Nigeria, stretching scant resources – UN refugee agency](#)

As more and more Anglophone Cameroonians flee a violent crackdown in the region and seek asylum in Nigeria, the United Nations refugee agency warned on Tuesday without more funding and assistance, their situation and that of the Nigerian communities hosting them, will become even more desperate.

"Anglophone Cameroonians began [fleeing violence](#) in October 2017 and continue to pour into Nigeria's Cross River, Taraba, Benue and Akwa-Ibom states," Aikaterini Kitidi, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), said at the regular briefing in Geneva.

"In total, over 20,000 refugees have been registered in the area. Women and children account for four-fifths of the population," she added.

A recent assessment by humanitarian groups shows how grim the situation has become – with 95 per cent of the asylum seekers having only three days of food.

Most families are down to one meal per day and their coping strategies people are themselves risky, ranging from borrowing money to cutting food portions or saving food only for children.

Most say they are having to drink water from streams, ponds and other unsafe sources, because of inadequate or dysfunctional drinking water facilities.

“Essential relief items, such as clothing, blankets and plastic sheeting, are available to fewer than 25 per cent of them,” explained Ms. Kitidi.

Moreover, only five in every 100 Cameroonians have proper or independent shelter. The rest have little or no privacy, squatting in rooms with some 10 to 15 people.

A lack of protection from the cold is increasing health concerns as the start of the rainy season approaches.

Additionally, malaria is reportedly increasing. Many participants at the assessment were suffering from fear and anxiety, poor sleep and flashbacks.

According to UNHCR, about 20 to 30 per cent of the asylum seekers have some kind of vulnerability, such as a physical disability.

Three-quarters of the children who recently fled currently cannot access school, because their families cannot afford to pay for books and uniforms. Adults are also struggling to make ends meet.

“A political solution to the situation in Cameroon is urgently needed, so that the Cameroonians can safely and voluntarily return home,” stressed Ms. Kitidi.

“Until then,” she continued, “UNHCR and its partners will continue their efforts to provide assistance and support to this population as long as we are able.”

While UNHCR has worked on an \$18 million contingency plan to help cover their needs, to date, no funds have been received.

Earlier this month, the Nigerian authorities allocated land to UNHCR for shelters, to ensure the refugees’ safety, security and self-reliance.

In line with humanitarian principles, UNHCR acknowledges the authorities’ commitment to assist in moving the refugees at least 50 kilometres from the border.

The UN refugee agency also remains concerned over reports of further Cameroonian nationals’ arrests in Nigeria.

“UNHCR urges the Nigerian authorities to refrain from the forcible return of individuals who may have fled persecution in their country of origin, and to respect the principle of non-refoulement or no forced returns,” concluded the UNHCR spokesperson.

Avoid 'mutual aggravation' of the complex link between water scarcity, forced migration, UN agency warns

Severe lack of water affecting two-thirds of the global population for at least part of the year is manifesting into complex challenges, the United Nations food security agency has warned, calling for urgent and comprehensive adaptation efforts to address the situation.

The worst impacted are those dependent on agriculture, explained José Graziano da Silva, the Director-General of the UN [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO), noting that some among them, especially the poorest, may see no alternative to migrate and in search of better livelihoods.

["Migration should be a choice, and not the only remaining option,"](#) he stressed.

Exploring this intricate linkages in its new report, [Water Stress and Human Migration](#), the UN agency also found that full information on these dynamics is lacking for India, Central Asia, the Middle East and central Sahel – areas expected to be hit with above-average surface temperature increases and worsening water scarcity in the next 30 years.

Furthermore, inadequate infrastructure coupled with rising temperatures, human demand (such as for agriculture, energy and industrial sectors) and greater rainfall extremes are expected to add to the water stress.

"While some studies demonstrate a correlation between water stress and higher outmigration, the causal interaction is still not clearly understood," states the report, underscoring the importance to ensure that the water scarcity and migration does not become a case of "mutual aggravation."

Adapting to water woes can help ease burden

Better adaption strategies, including ones that account for climate change impacts, to mitigate the compulsion to migrate is therefore vital.

"Analyzing water scarcity trends and engaging in preparedness are particularly valuable, allowing time to intervene to mitigate pressure for forced migration," said Eduardo Mansur, a senior FAO official on water and land issues.

"Enabling proactive adaptation is a more effective and sustainable strategy than offering a reactive humanitarian response in the face of large-scale distress," he added.

At the same time, the report also highlights that migrants can positively contribute to water management and development in both origin and host

communities through good practices, skills and knowledge transfer, and the use of remittances.

In addition, it also calls for increased attention to the concept of environmental migration as well as more data to understand and pre-empt trends in a timely way.

The launch of the report comes ahead of the with [World Water Day](#) observed annually on 22 March as well as the [World Water Forum](#), currently underway in the Brazilian capital, Brasilia.

The theme for this year's World Water Day is 'Nature for Water' which exploring nature-based solutions to present-day water challenges.

[Thousands suffering amid harrowing conditions in east Ghouta and Afrin – UN](#)

The United Nations in Syria is appealing urgently for help to ease the catastrophic situation for tens for thousands of people impacted by fighting in Eastern Ghouta, outside Damascus, and the northern town of Afrin.

Having seen first-hand the [desperate conditions of people](#) from east Ghouta and Afrin, who are tired, hungry, traumatized and afraid, we need to provide them with urgent aid," Ali Al-Za'tari, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria, said Monday.

"These civilians are facing harrowing humanitarian conditions," he continued. "Many remain trapped by conflict inside East Ghouta and Afrin. All are in desperate need." The fighting in both places has killed hundreds of civilians in the past month and displaced tens of thousands.

Insecurity and fierce hostilities continue to endanger the people of East Ghouta, which UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) has referred to as "[hell on earth](#)."

Most of those interviewed had some health conditions, likely due to years of lacking medicine and health care.

Meanwhile, nearly 100,000 people have been displaced by hostilities in Afrin District. The majority, some 75,000 people, have fled to Tal Refaat and the remainder to Nubul, Zahraa and surrounding villages.

The massive influx of internally displaced people is putting a strain on host communities, which are already overwhelmed. All 16 schools in Tal Refaat are

being used as internally displaced shelters, resulting in the interruption of education.

Since 11 March, some 25,000 people have reportedly left East Ghoutam and on a daily basis UN teams have been visiting Dweir, Adra and Herjelleh in Rural Damascus where they are sheltering. All of these sites are well over capacity, with more people continuing to arrive on a daily basis.

“We appeal to Member States to provide much needed supplies and funding,” underscored Mr. Al-Za’tari.

The UN and its partners, notably through the tireless efforts of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, are fully mobilized to deliver aid on the spot.

“We appeal to all parties to facilitate access to all people in need; and to protect civilians, medical workers, service providers and humanitarian workers,” he concluded.