

Gaza requires changed political reality, renewed commitment to avoid total collapse

The lack of a political process to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to be the single largest impediment to Palestinian development, and an escalation in hostilities could completely break down service delivery in Gaza, a United Nations report said Friday.

“The UN and partners will continue to [highlight the key concerns](#) and areas for intervention, but the parties need to make the difficult choices and compromises to achieve a long overdue resolution to this conflict,” said the report compiled by the office of the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process ([UNSCO](#)).

Some 25 years after the beginning of the Oslo process, this prolonged period of conflict management and of transition without end will not lead to a solution that meets the needs and aspirations of Palestinians and Israelis.

The report notes that Gaza – an occupied Palestinian enclave – continues to present the greatest risk of escalation alongside an acute humanitarian crisis with the potential for a complete breakdown in service delivery.

To properly address the issues facing Gaza, the report suggests:

First, the humanitarian crisis must be addressed to ensure hospitals and health clinics function, essential drugs are available, sewage and water treatment is provided, and the electricity situation is immediately improved.

Second, increased efforts are needed to finalize the reconstruction of physical damages from the 2014 conflict, and simultaneously to revive Gaza’s moribund economy, and revitalize its productive sectors.

Third, investment in longer-term infrastructure projects is needed to ensure Gaza remains livable.

The report also stresses the need for a changed political reality on the ground, including the resumption by the Palestinian Authority of its full responsibilities for the people, governance and infrastructure of Gaza.

Hamas, a Palestinian faction, must cease its military build-up, including the construction of tunnels and the firing of rockets towards Israel, while Israel’s closure regime must fundamentally change to allow for the recovery and development of the Strip through movement and access of people and goods.

UN appeals for nearly \$1 billion to address 'critical needs' of Rohingya refugees, Bangladesh host communities

To meet the urgent needs of nearly 900,000 Rohingya refugees and more than 330,000 vulnerable Bangladeshis in the communities hosting them, United Nations agencies and their humanitarian partners appealed jointly on Friday for \$951 million.

"We are talking about truly [critical needs](#) here both on the part of the Bangladeshi communities who have so generously opened their doors, and of a Stateless and refugee population that even prior to this crisis was among the world's most marginalised and at risk," UN [High Commissioner for Refugees](#) Filippo Grandi said in Geneva, launching the 2018 Joint Response Plan (JRP) for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis.

Over the months since the most recent Rohingya influx began, it has become the world's fastest growing refugee crisis – with tens of thousands fleeing by land and sea daily from Myanmar's northern Rakhine state at the peak of the emergency.

The Bangladesh Government and people have responded with extraordinary generosity and hospitality to the 671,000 Rohingya refugees who have arrived since 25 August.

Almost seven months in, refugees continue to arrive and the situation in Cox's Bazar remains fluid.

The Kutupalong-Balukhali site, where some 600,000 refugees are living, is now the largest and most densely populated refugee settlement in the world.

Precarious conditions and the ongoing emergency response there are about to be further challenged by the approaching monsoon season, placing more than 150,000 Rohingya refugees at risk of landslides and floods, threatening disaster on top of the current emergency.

"The solutions to this crisis lie inside Myanmar, and conditions must be established that will allow refugees to return home," said Mr. Grandi. "But today we are appealing for help with the immediate needs, and these needs are vast."

Complementing Bangladesh's continuing efforts, the 2018 appeal aims to bring together more than 100 UN agencies and national and international non-governmental organizations to ensure that refugees and host communities receive the life-saving assistance, protection and the support they desperately need. It also includes contingency planning for 80,000 more refugees in the coming months.

“The needs and vulnerabilities of the Rohingya refugee population in Bangladesh are immense,” said William Swing, Director General of the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM).

“Many Governments generously supported the last Rohingya crisis appeal. Given the large scale of the emergency and the amount of humanitarian services needed to ensure lives can be protected with dignity, continued and enhanced support is necessary,” he added.

Fifty-four per cent of the appeal is to ensure food, water and sanitation, shelter and other basic aid, with food alone accounting for 25 per cent of the total.

While acknowledging great appreciation for the generosity with which the response has been funded, Mia Seppo, UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh, lauded the Government’s efforts.

“In terms of being the first responders, in terms of providing land, in terms of keeping its borders open, in terms of providing asylum, in terms of building roads, extending electricity networks, providing food, seconding civil servants, providing police and army to keep order in the camp. The biggest donor to this crisis continues to be the people and the Government of Bangladesh.”

The humanitarian response faces immense challenges, including congested conditions, gender-based violence and critical public health concerns, namely measles, diphtheria and diarrhoea.

So far, the emergency response from September 2017 to February 2018 has received \$321 million of the \$434 million required.

[UN refugee agency scaling up support as ‘horrific’ violence in DR Congo drives thousands into Uganda](#)

In the span of just three days – between 10 and 13 March – more than 4,000 people, mostly terrified women and children, have crossed into Uganda from crisis-gripped eastern provinces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the United Nations refugee agency said Friday.

Babar Baloch spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) told reporters at the regular news briefing in Geneva that the agency is working with partner organizations in western Uganda [to support the influx](#), many who are exhausted, hunger and deeply traumatized by

“horrific inter-ethnic violence and sexual abuse” they have reportedly endured.

Since the year began, an overwhelming 77.5 per cent of more than 57,000 refugees displaced by the violence in eastern DRC are women and children, according to the agency.

“These numbers are on a larger scale still than in 2017, when some 44,000 fled over the course of the entire year,” he continued. “UNHCR fears thousands more could arrive in Uganda if the security situation inside the DRC does not immediately improve.”

Mr. Baloch said that the majority continue to cross into Uganda via Lake Albert in rickety and unsafe boats from Ituri (province), “a journey that has already cost the lives of several refugees.”

“The situation has been even more dangerous in recent days because of bad weather,” he noted.

Although the lack of access means it is difficult to offer a detailed picture of the situation, UNHCR has received chilling accounts of violence – rape, murder and separation from family members.

“These are linked to the deteriorating security situation, internal conflicts and inter-communal tensions,” the spokesperson maintained, saying that armed men are reported to be attacking villages, looting and burning houses, indiscriminately killing civilians and kidnapping young men and boys.

A growing number of reports indicate that the violence is taking on ethnic dimensions as tribal groups engage in retaliatory attacks.

Dozens of refugees have recounted to UNHCR staff in Uganda, stories of the sexual violence and assaults they have endured – the vast majority of whom are women and girls, as well as some men and boys.

“These alarming reports have led the UN refugee agency and partners to strengthen the systems in place to identify and support survivors of sexual and gender based violence,” stressed Mr. Baloch.

UNHCR has deployed significant additional staff and resources to identify victims and strengthen support, including medical screening at Lake Albert landing sites, sexual and gender-based violence screening at the reception centres and making gender segregation spaces available.

“Working with partners, we have deployed additional staff specifically trained in psychosocial care to increase support to [sexual and gender based violence] refugee survivors and have conducted further outreach with community leaders and networks to ensure refugees are aware of what services are available to them,” he stated.

“We are also working with our humanitarian partners to save lives after a Cholera outbreak killed at least 32 refugees,” Mr. Baloch said, informing that the number of reported cases have significantly dropped from 668 to 160

since the February outbreak.

He pointed out that the nearly \$180 million refugee response funding appeal for Uganda remains poorly funded, “severely restricting capacities of humanitarian organizations to deliver vital aid and assistance.”

Within that appeal, only three per cent of UNHCR’s \$118.3 million requirement is funded.

[Syria: Civilians, including children, killed by airstrikes, shelling in Afrin – UN](#)

Dozens of children have been killed since fighting began in the north-western Syrian town of Afrin, where people are under bombardment, hospitals have been shut down and water supplies cut off, the United Nations have reported.

Along with Eastern Ghouta, the Kurdish-held town is among the worsening flashpoints, as the conflict in Syria enters its eighth year.

“We have been receiving [deeply alarming reports from Afrin](#) in Syria about civilian deaths and injuries due to airstrikes and ground-based strikes,” Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#), told reporters in Geneva on Friday.

She said that the humanitarian situation is reportedly worsening, with Afrin Hospital, the only medical facility equipped for major operations, being inundated by the influx of injured people.

“There is also a severe water shortage due to the reported destruction of a pumping station as well as the control of other water resources by Turkish-led forces,” Ms. Shamdasani said.

She also said that reports indicate that only those civilians who have contacts within the Kurdish authority or the Kurdish armed forces have been able to leave the town.

Civilians are at risk of being killed, injured, besieged, used as human shields or displaced as a result of the fighting, she warned, reminding all parties to the conflict that they must permit civilians wishing to leave combat areas to do so in safety, and to ensure the protection of those who remain.

In New York, the UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) said that “reports from inside Afrin indicate that dozens of children have been killed and many more injured

since the start of hostilities in the district” and “for the last 10 days, children and families have suffered severe water shortages as the source of water for Afrin city has reportedly been cut off.”

“Families are relying on untreated water and boreholes, potentially increasing the risk of waterborne diseases for about 250,000 people,” said UNICEF Communications Specialist Joe English.

He said that there is no official displacement tracking mechanism but local sources estimate around 50,000 displaced people in the city. Families are being hosted by relatives and friends, in shops, government buildings and schools.

Pakistan: UN chief condemns attack at police checkpoint near Lahore

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has condemned yesterday’s attack at a police checkpoint near a mosque in the outskirts of Lahore.

“[Mr. Guterres] extends his condolences to the families of the victims and wishes those injured a speedy recovery,” said a [statement](#) from a UN spokesman, which said the Secretary-General calls for the perpetrators of the attack to be brought to justice.

The statement went on to say that the UN supports the efforts of the Government of Pakistan to fight terrorism with full respect for international human rights norms and obligations.