

# Syria conflict: 2017 deadliest year for children, UN aid official reports

More than 900 children in Syria were killed last year, making 2017 the deadliest year for children in the country's ongoing conflict, a senior United Nations official told the Geneva-based Human Rights Council on Tuesday, warning that the grim statistics may only be the tip of the iceberg.

UN Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis [Panos Moutzis](#) alongside UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights [Kate Gilmore](#) addressed a [high-level panel](#) discussion looking at rights violations against children caught in the fighting, which is entering its eighth year.

"In 2017, documentation of violations of children's rights during the conflict – by all sides – was the highest since the beginning of the conflict. Simply put, 2017 was the deadliest year of the Syrian war for children," Mr. Moutzis told the Council.

The Syria Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism verified that in 2017 alone, at least 910 children killed and 361 injured, the large majority of child casualties occurring in Idleb, Aleppo and Deir-ez-Zor, and other locations.

"There is a child and a grieving family behind every single one of these numbers. Verification of additional cases continues and these numbers only provide the tip of the iceberg of the actual case and scale of violence suffered by children in Syria."

The UN estimates that overall, 400,000 people have been killed in Syria, and more than a million injured.

The fighting has also pushed more than [five million Syrians](#) across the border to neighbouring countries such as Lebanon and Jordan, as well as to Europe and beyond.

Mr. Moutzis reported that children make up over 40 per cent of the 13.1 million people inside Syria who require life-saving humanitarian assistance. And of the more than five million across the country who are in acute need, 663,000 are under the age of five – a figure he described as "shocking."

The UN humanitarian official also expressed deep concern over continued reports of the recruitment and use of children in the fighting by all sides.

"In 2017, 25 per cent of cases involved boys and girls under the age of 15 – of course considered a war crime and prohibited under international humanitarian law," he said.

"Nine out of 10 recruited children served in a combat role: in uniform, armed and with military training. Growing up in conflict, they may have little choice or alternative; they may also have no way out, as killing or detention

by the other side may await them.”

Ms. Gilmore, the UN deputy human rights chief, reported that 2017 also saw the highest number of violations against Syrian children.

“The scale, scope and gravity of crimes committed against children are shocking. Widespread human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law affecting or targeting children are being committed by the Syrian authorities. And perpetrated too by armed groups,” she stated.

“Children are arrested and detained for their family’s alleged association with opposing armed forces. Girls, in particular, are subjected to sexual violence, including rape, forced marriage and sexual slavery by armed groups.”

She recalled that the Syrian conflict began with, in her words, “the denigration of a child” whose “tragic fate” became a rallying call for scores across the country.

Hamza Ali Al-Khateeb, 13, had been detained during protests in the city of Daraa in April 2011. His brutalized body was returned to his family a month later.

Ms. Gilmore said the years of unending fighting means millions of Syrian children have been denied their fundamental human rights and robbed of their childhood.

She concluded her remarks with a warning to the warring parties and their supporters:

“Those responsible for this violence – within Syria and beyond – should know that they are being identified; that dossiers are being built up for their prosecution; and that, with evidence in hand, and before duly convened tribunals, they will be held legally accountable for those crimes that with malice, indifference and great cruelty they continue to wage with scant regard for Syria’s children,” she stated.

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## **UN urges ‘post-ISIL’ new Iraq to draw on religious diversity, support minorities**

As Iraq rebuilds after defeating a terrorist group, the Government must draw on religious diversity and protect minorities, including Yezidi and Christians, a senior United Nations official has said.

“Iraq needs all its components, all its ethnic and religious groups, to rebuild in the [post-Da’esh period](#) and prosper in the future as a stable and united country,” said the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Iraq, Ján Kubiš, in a press release issued Monday.

He urged the authorities to proactively support these communities and ensure the return of minorities who had been persecuted by the terrorist group, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Millions of Iraqis have been displaced since the rise of ISIL and due to a battle to oust the terrorists.

His call comes in the wake of recent criminal and terrorist acts that targeted members of minority communities in Iraq.

Christians are one of the ancient communities in this country, dating back to the early days of Christianity and Mesopotamia. This indigenous community, which in the 1980s counted almost 1.3 million, has dwindled to an estimated 400,000 today, according to community leaders.

Last Thursday, three Christian family members were killed in Baghdad by armed men who stormed their house and stabbed them to death. In the last three years, Christians, particularly in Ninewa Governorate, suffered from the Da’esh terrorism.

Also last week, a member of the Sabeen Mandaean community was kidnapped from his shop in Baghdad and his body was later found on a street. In Nassiriyah in the country’s south, another Sabeen Mandaean was stabbed at his shop but survived after his Muslim neighbours came to his aid.

“Iraq draws its strength from [its cultural and religious diversity](#), and its rich history. This treasure should be protected and nurtured by the Government and the people of Iraq,” Mr. Kubiš said.

“There is no place for intolerance and discrimination, for targeting and suppressing minorities,” he added, urging the Government to support and protect Yezidi, Christians, Shabak, Sabeen Mandaean, and other minorities.

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## [Syria ‘bleeding inside and out’ as conflict enters eighth year, says UN chief](#)

Despite a United Nations Security Council demand to institute a 30-day ceasefire across Syria, airstrikes, shelling and ground offensives have intensified in Eastern Ghouta, Secretary-General António Guterres reported

Monday, warning that the conflict is entering its eighth year with the “grimmest” reality on the ground.

A country known for its ancient civilization and with a people known for their richness of diversity, “Syria is bleeding inside and out,” the UN chief told the 15-member body in his [briefing](#) on the implementation of [Security Council resolution 2401](#) unanimously adopted on 24 February.

Along with a 30-day ceasefire, the resolution calls for delivering aid, evacuating the sick and wounded, lifting sieges, accelerating humanitarian mine action, and protecting civilians and infrastructure.

On Thursday, this conflict will enter its eighth year. I refuse to lose my hope to see Syria rising from the ashes.

According to UN data, the conflict has produced more than 5.6 million Syrian refugees and 6.1 million internally displaced people, with more than 13 million people inside the country requiring humanitarian assistance, including nearly six million children.

“Let me highlight just one stark fact on this grimmest of anniversaries: In 2017, more children were killed in Syria than during any other year since the war began,” he said.

However, violence continues in Eastern Ghouta and beyond, including in Afrin, parts of Idlib and into Damascus and its suburbs, Mr. Guterres said, warning that in Eastern Ghouta, airstrikes, shelling and ground offensives have even intensified and claimed many hundreds of civilian lives, some even saying more than 1,000 were killed.

He reported that none of the Council’s directives have been implemented: the provision of humanitarian aid and services has not been safe, unimpeded or sustained; no sieges have been lifted and not one critically sick or wounded person has yet been evacuated.

All parties involved should be reminded that even efforts to combat terrorist groups identified by the Council do not supersede these humanitarian obligations.

Mr. Guterres noted, however, that in some areas, like Deir ez-Zour and Douma, the conflict is diminishing in intensity.

A ceasefire between the Government and Jaish al Islam forces in Douma is largely holding, he said, noting that their meeting took place yesterday and today, and there has been progress on civilian evacuations and humanitarian aid.

Mr. Guterres’ oral report detailed latest efforts of his Special Envoy for Syria, [Staffan de Mistura](#), to bring about a political solution to the conflict and UN activities to address the humanitarian crisis.

“On Thursday, this conflict will enter its eighth year. I refuse to lose my hope to see Syria rising from the ashes,” he said, “To see a united, democratic Syria able to avoid fragmentation and sectarianism with its sovereignty and territorial integrity respected and to see a Syrian people able to freely decide their future and choose their political leadership.”

Click here for [full remarks](#) by Mr. Guterres.

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## [UN anti-drug conference offers ‘opportunity to chart a better and balanced path’ forward – UN chief](#)

Inclusive partnerships are essential to addressing drug challenges and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), according to the top United Nations panel dealing with all aspects of narcotic drugs.

“With the UN General Assembly special session consensus as our blueprint, we can promote efforts to stop organized crime while protecting human rights, enabling development and [ensuring rights-based treatment](#) and support,” [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) said Monday in a video message at the opening session of the [61st Commission on Narcotic Drugs](#).

“I have called on the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [[UNODC](#)] to develop a comprehensive strategy that works across the three pillars with other UN entities to advance our efforts,” he stressed, referring to the three main pillars of the UN’s work – peace and security, human rights, and development.

UNODC Executive Director Yury Fedotov [said](#) that throughout the coming year, the agency is looking forward to continuing its lead role in the UN’s strategic work on drug issues.

“The Commission on Narcotic Drugs has proven time and again its value in bringing the world together – Member States, UN agencies, regional organizations, civil society, young people and scientists,” he said.

“The political commitment, expertise and experience gathered here represent a vital resource as we seek to find balanced, integrated solutions, drawing on the mutually supportive and reinforcing international drug control conventions and human rights obligations, and working towards the Sustainable Development Goals,” Mr. Fedotov underscored.

The opening session was also addressed by the President of the International Narcotics Control Board, Dr. Viroj Sumyai, and featured a video message from

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

“At this session, UNODC and [WHO](#) [the [World Health Organization](#)] will present a new report on treatment and care for people with drug use disorders in contact with the criminal justice system, and addressing alternatives to conviction or incarceration,” explained Mr. Fedotov.

Over the next week, the session, chaired by Ambassador Alicia Buenrostro Massieu of Mexico, will also consider a variety of resolutions, such as on combating the synthetic opioid crisis, strengthening drug prevention in schools and measures to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission.

“UNODC remains committed to supporting you in all your efforts to improve balanced, evidence-based responses to the challenges to health, security, safety and development posed by drugs,” he concluded.

Along with the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs serves as the central policymaking body within the UN system on drugs. It is one of UNODC’s governing bodies, and its resolutions and decisions provide guidance to Member States, UNODC and the international community.

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## [As rainy season nears, UN faces ‘time pressure’ to deliver aid in South Sudan](#)

With the rainy season approaching in South Sudan, where one in three people have been displaced by more than four years of conflict, a senior United Nations humanitarian official has called for urgent financial support to distribute and preposition life-saving aid supplies.

“Due to [seasonal time pressure](#), we need early funding now to reach millions of people with multi-sectoral assistance during the dry season, through road transport and prepositioning of life-saving aid supplies,” said Alain Noudehou, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in the African country, in a statement issued over the weekend.

He said that rain would make the condition of roads difficult for transporting aid supplies and that airlifts would cost many times more than ground transport.

A recent report analyzing [food security](#) – access to adequate food – projected that more than seven million people, or almost two-thirds of South Sudan’s population, could become severely food insecure between May and July without

sustained humanitarian assistance and access.

We need early funding now to reach millions of people with multi-sectoral assistance during the dry season.

Mr. Noudehou's statement came after a high-level delegation of donors, heads of humanitarian agencies and partners visited Leer in the Unity region of South Sudan to see firsthand the plight of the 90,000 people living there.

The delegation met with the Governor of Leer, community leaders and aid agencies who are currently assisting tens of thousands of people across the region.

Leer was one of two counties affected by famine in 2017. Although the famine was stopped due to intensive humanitarian intervention, the situation remains fragile with about 85 per cent of the population predicted to reach crisis and emergency food insecurity conditions by the end of April.

South Sudan attained independence from Sudan in 2011, but a political face-off between two rival factions plunged the world's newest country into full blown conflict in December 2013.

With the conflict now in its fifth year, nearly 4.3 million people, or one in three, have been displaced, including more than 1.8 million who are internally displaced and about 2.5 million who are in neighbouring countries.

"Once again, I strongly urge all parties to the conflict to stop the fighting and to ensure that humanitarian agencies are given free, safe and unhindered access to all areas of South Sudan, and for all bureaucratic impediments to be removed," said Mr. Noudehou.