

UN can help, but Yemen's warring parties must commit to peace – outgoing UN envoy

A destructive pattern of zero-sum politics has plunged Yemen into ever deeper poverty and desolation, the United Nations envoy for the war-torn country said Tuesday, emphasizing that while the UN and the wider international community can try to bring about a favourable environment for a path to peace, Yemeni decision-makers must stop the fighting and bloodshed.

“Conflict has gradually destroyed the economy, healthcare services, housing, roads and schools – everything that Yemenis need in order to live and prosper,” said the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, briefing the Security Council a final time before he steps down at the end of the month.

“I call on the parties to cease hostilities, reactivate negotiations aimed at a peaceful settlement,” he urged.

Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed said the country was already embroiled in conflict when he took up his post in April 2015, and he said that as the conflict deepened, so did the socio-economic misery, making Yemen the world's largest man-made humanitarian crisis, which has claimed thousands of lives and driven many times more from their homes.

Across the country, more than three-fourths of the population – over 22 million persons are in need of humanitarian assistance, including more than 8.4 million who are severely food insecure.

Prices of essential commodities in the country have skyrocketed, the value of the currency has dwindled, salaries have not been paid in months and in some cases, years, and the country's health, water and sanitation, basic services and education system are in tatters, with money which could have been used to maintain such services and stimulate economy being used to fund the war.

Worst affected are Yemen's women, who remain at a heightened risk of sexual and gender-based violence and have seen their rights “shrink by the day,” added Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed.

“I heard many Yemeni women saying that they ‘live in a big prison’ where their freedom of speech is restricted. Those who do speak up face a constant threat of persecution and violent attempts to silence them,” he expressed.

The UN Special Envoy concluded by saying that a roadmap for peace in Yemen exists but the parties to the conflict need to build confidence among themselves and launch it.

“The only part missing is the commitment of parties to make concessions and

give priority to the national interest,” he said, wishing Martin Griffiths – a seasoned former diplomat and humanitarian worker, appointed by the UN Secretary-General as his new Special Envoy for Yemen – every success in his efforts.



UN Photo/Manuel Elias

John Ging, Director of Operations at the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) briefs the Security Council on the situation in Yemen.

Also briefing the 15-member Security Council today, John Ging, the Director of Operations at the UN Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, also underscored that an end to hostilities and “meaningful” engagement of the parties is vital to ensure a lasting political solution.

However, until that happens, humanitarian response is critical to save lives.

“Securing full funding for [the \$2.96 billion [Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan](#)] is a top priority,” he said, noting that the Central Emergency Response Fund recently allocated \$50 million to humanitarian efforts in the country.

Mr. Ging also underscored the need to ensure unhindered, safe and secure humanitarian access into as well as within the country to allow resources be delivered to those in need. At the same time, allowing and maintaining free flow of commercial imports is imperative, as is ensuring that Government employees and civil servants are paid their salaries.

“Finally, it remains important to emphasize that protection concerns remain at the centre of the response,” urged the senior UN aid official, reiterating that all parties to the conflict are obligated to spare civilians and civilian infrastructure in military operations.

UN peacekeeping chief wraps up three-day visit to Lebanon

The head of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations has wrapped up a visit to Lebanon with a call on leaders from Lebanon as well as Israel to take advantage of the role UN peacekeeping can play in finding political solutions to conflict.

The Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, concluded on Tuesday the Lebanon leg of his wider Middle East tour to visit UN missions, including the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), and high-ranking government officials in the region.

While in Lebanon, Mr. Lacroix met with President Michel Aoun and other senior officials, and saw first-hand the crucial work done by UNIFIL, in close coordination with the national armed forces.

UNIFIL was established in 1978 following Israel's invasion of southern Lebanon after the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) carried out a deadly attack on its territory.

Today, some 10,500 peacekeepers from 41 countries are serving in its area of operations and at sea as UNIFIL is complemented by a six-vessel Maritime Task Force: the first and only one of its kind in UN peacekeeping.

Mr. Lacroix praised the Lebanese Government's continuous support and cooperation in implementing the UNIFIL mandate, which includes monitoring the cessation of hostilities in the wake of the July 2006 conflict.

The UN peacekeeping chief also underlined the need for the parties to work together to build on the years of relative calm since then.

"It is important for the leaders on both sides to take advantage of the window of opportunity that UNIFIL has helped provide to work towards a permanent ceasefire and long-term solution to the conflict as envisaged in UN Security Council resolution 1701," he said. "A peacekeeping operation helps create the space for political solutions."

Security Council resolution 1701, adopted in August 2006, called for an end to hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah in south Lebanon.

It mapped out steps for a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution to the conflict.

Mr. Lacroix toured the UNIFIL area of operations and the Blue Line, a border demarcation established in June 2000 to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon following another invasion in June 1982.

“I am impressed with the work of UNIFIL and its high tempo of patrolling both during the day and at night as well as their activities to maintain stability, especially along the Blue Line,” he said.

Mr. Lacroix expressed appreciation for the UN force’s efforts to de-escalate tensions through its participation in a forum bringing together senior Lebanese and Israeli officials which was chaired by UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander, Major General Michael Beary.

[Dry, hot weather likely to reduce harvests in southern Africa, UN warns](#)

Southern Africa’s water sources and crops are under serious pressure as a long dry spell and high temperatures have taken hold in the region, the United Nations agriculture agency said Tuesday, warning that after record maize production in 2017, food shortages are set to worsen this year.

The [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO) said that while cereal stocks in the region are ample, the spell of [dry weather and erratic rains](#) earlier in the season signals multiple risks to agricultural yields and may aggravate the impact of the Fall Armyworm pest.

Reduced harvests are foreseen to intensify food insecurity in 2018, increasing the number of people in need of assistance, according to a new [Special Alert](#) issued by FAO’s Global Information and Early Warning System ([GIEWS](#)).

Maize production hit a record level in 2017 in the Southern Africa subregion, a welcome development after sharp output declines in the previous year caused by an unusually strong El Niño. Cereal production in the sub-region in 2018 is foreseen to fall due to erratic rains, along with an intense dry period in January.

The alert comes as FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva, speaking in Sudan’s capital, Khartoum, emphasized the importance of boosting the resilience of communities – particularly in Africa – in making sure that “[Zero Hunger](#) is possible.”

Precipitation trends also matter greatly for the [Fall Armyworm](#), an invasive species that has now been detected in all countries of the subregion, except Lesotho and Mauritius. While recent heavy rains in some localities may have contributed to containing the pest’s spread, the general dry weather may help it spread and could exacerbate the impact on yields.

UN agencies helping Rohingya refugee camps brace for potentially devastating rains in southern Bangladesh

Against the backdrop of the fast approaching wet season in Bangladesh, United Nations relief agencies are working flat out to strengthen vital infrastructure and boost resilience among hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees living in rudimentary shelters as well as for local communities hosting them.

Assessments by the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM) and partners indicate that at least 100,000 refugees and vulnerable families in the local community in Cox's Bazar – one of the world's biggest refugee settlements – face life-threatening risks from landslides and floods, and thousands more are at risk of disease and being cut off from assistance.

"With emergency situations inevitable when the rains hit, it is crucial we work together now to limit disaster as much as possible before it occurs," Manuel Marques Pereira, the IOM Emergency Coordinator in Cox's Bazar, said in a news release Tuesday

"We need to be able to respond swiftly and effectively during crisis events."

Preparation efforts include providing search and rescue training; setting up emergency medical centres; establishing bases for work crews and light machinery; and upgrading shelters to mitigate disasters. Work is also ongoing to improve roads and drainage, stabilize slopes (to prevent landslides and erosion) and setting up early warning systems.

In addition, IOM has created disaster risk reduction safety committees to warn refugees of what to expect and how to prepare for the wind and rain that are expected to bring deadly floods and landslides.

"It is vitally important to support members of the refugee and local communities with training and information in advance, so they are ready to respond and protect themselves and others when the worst conditions arrive," added Mr. Marques Pereira.

But given the scale of the challenges, including the sheer size of the refugee population, limited suitable land, and harsh environmental conditions, it will be impossible to move everyone at risk, and therefore rapid emergency response action will be critical to save lives.

To improve response, an emergency drill is being conducted on Thursday (1 March) to develop rapid and coordinated operations, which is being attended by IOM, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), humanitarian partners and Government agencies.

Since late August 2017, some 700,000 members of Myanmar's minority Muslim Rohingya community have been driven from their homes due to brutal and widespread violence in Myanmar's Rakhine province, joining some 200,000 Rohingya refugees displaced earlier.

Together with local host communities, the number of persons in need of humanitarian assistance in the region is estimated to number over a million.

[In Geneva, UN chief urges new push to free world from nuclear weapons](#)

Warning that nuclear weapons pose catastrophic risks to human life and the environment, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on Monday called on the international community to make a reinvigorated push to rid the world of such weapons.

"Countries persist in the mistaken idea that nuclear weapons make the world safer," said the Secretary-General, addressing the UN Conference on Disarmament, in Geneva, Switzerland, on Monday.

"At the global level, we must work together towards forging a new momentum on eliminating nuclear weapons," he urged.

Outlining a new initiative to give greater impetus and direction to the global disarmament agenda, Mr. Guterres said the world must respond to the dangers of the over-accumulation and proliferation of weapons, and reinforce the need to integrate disarmament into the UN efforts on preventive diplomacy and peacemaking.

Side-by-side, a focus is needed on the impact of conventional weapons on civilians as well as on the link between disarmament and the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), in particular the resources lost to excessive military spending – resources that could have been used to spur development activities.

"My initiative will strive to offer a new perspective on traditional priorities; and a clear vision for the future; and also, practical and implementable actions," he said, noting that while the challenges are enormous, "history shows that it has been possible to reach agreement on disarmament and arms control even at the most difficult moments."

The UN chief also welcomed the completion of reductions by the United States and Russia under the [New START Treaty](#) (the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty), and urged that the “courageous initiatives” taken by the Republic of Korea during the recent Pyeongchang 2018 Olympic Games be translated into lasting improvements, based on the central objective of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and sustainable peace in the region.

“We must work together towards our common goal: a world free of nuclear weapons,” underscored the Secretary-General.

Speaking alongside Mr. Guterres, the President of the General Assembly, Miroslav Lajčák, stressed that Conference on Disarmament – which was established in 1979 but whose last decision was in 1996 – remains as critical as ever as the demand for disarmament has only risen, not fallen.

“The Conference on Disarmament has been deadlocked since the agreement on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, more than two decades ago,” he said.

“We have to address this reality [...] the Conference is the world’s foremost multilateralism forum on disarmament. It should be producing global frameworks and policies. It should be driving discussions and decisions, around the world. It should have the loudest voice of all,” he stressed.

The [Conference on Disarmament](#), established as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community, is not formally a UN body but reports annually, or more frequently as appropriate, to the UN General Assembly.

Currently, the consensus-based body focuses primarily on the following issues: cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament, prevention of nuclear war, including all related matters, prevention of an arms race in outer space and effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon states against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.