

[UN chief inks pact to better coordinate counter-terrorism support to Governments](#)

Secretary-General António Guterres has signed a United Nations systemwide agreement to improve the coordination and coherence of the Organization's activities to help Member States implement the UN's counter-terrorism strategy.

The principal aim of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact is "to ensure that the United Nations system can have a [better impact](#) and provide stronger and more efficient counter-terrorism capacity-building support to Member States," said a statement issued on Friday by UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric.

The Compact, which is an agreement between 36 UN entities, is to be signed by the heads of these entities, as well as INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization, as a symbol of their commitment to coordinating activities at the Headquarters and in the field.

Last year, Mr. Guterres created the [UN Office of Counter-Terrorism](#) with the aim of enhancing coordination and coherence of the UN activities on the subject.

[Ethiopia: Prime Minister steps down, UN chief welcomes political reforms, released detainees](#)

United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres issued a statement on Friday taking note of the recent decision by the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Hailemariam Desalegn, to resign, to "allow further political reforms to take place in the country aimed at widening democratic space."

Through his spokesperson, Mr. Guterres asserted that the Government of Ethiopia expressed its intention to continue implementing governance reforms and increasing participation in the political process.

"The United Nations welcomes the steps so far undertaken in that direction, including the [release of detainees](#)," he underscored, adding that the UN

considers Ethiopia “a valued partner in peace and security, development, humanitarian and human rights issues in the Horn of Africa and the African continent,” and will continue to support the Government and its people in implementing reforms to enhance governance, stability and development.

“The United Nations also takes note of the recent declaration of a state of emergency and stresses the importance of avoiding actions that would infringe on the human rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens, the peace, security and stability of the country, or impact on the delivery of humanitarian assistance,” concluded Mr. Guterres.

[‘We can achieve peace, stability, prosperity in the Sahel,’ UN chief tells Brussels conference](#)

The United Nations and its partners met in Brussels, Belgium, on Friday to strengthen support for a group of five nations in Africa’s troubled Sahel region which are facing pressing challenges including extreme poverty, food and nutrition crises and violent extremism.

The International Conference on the Sahel brought together the UN, the European Commission, the African Union and the so-called ‘Group of Five’ or G5 Sahel countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) hailed the meeting as a timely effort that demonstrates the international community’s support for the region’s efforts to prevent violent extremism and fight terrorism and organized crime.

“Together – the G5 Sahel countries, the African Union, the European Union and the United Nations – we can achieve peace, stability and prosperity in the region,” he said in a video message played at the conference.

The UN chief also praised the G5 Sahel Joint Force, a joint military initiative by the five countries to respond to the many interlinked challenges confronting them.

“It is also essential to reinforce the programmes envisaged under the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, which provides an overarching framework aimed at strengthening governance, resilience and security,” he added.

The troops will conduct cross-border counter-terrorist operations and donors at the conference have pledged \$516 million for the force, according to media reports.

The head of UN peacekeeping, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, told the gathering that the global organization is in a good position to start supporting the force through its integrated operation in Mali, known by its French acronym, [MINUSMA](#).

This assistance is in line with a UN Security Council resolution adopted in December which provides for operational and logistical support for the Sahel force.

The Sahel stretches between the Sahara to the north and the wider Sudan region to the south. According to the UN's humanitarian wing, across the region, over 30 million people face food insecurity, one in five children under the age of five suffers from acute malnutrition and at least 4.9 million are displaced by the effects of conflicts.

[Rights violations in South Sudan may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes, concludes UN panel](#)

United Nations panel on human rights violations in South Sudan documents unspeakable cruelty against civilians, not just limited to widescale brutal massacres and sexual violence but extending to individuals trying to defend themselves or their families and had their eyes gouged out, their throats slit or were castrated.

A United Nations inquiry into allegations of human rights violations and abuses committed during the ongoing conflict in South Sudan has concluded that some of the violations may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Since conflict erupted in the world's youngest nation in 2013, over four million people have been driven from their homes.

["Holding those in charge in South Sudan accountable](#) for the intentional suffering they inflict on their own people is crucial to stemming this humanitarian catastrophe," Andrew Clapham a member of [Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan](#), said on Friday.

The Commission, established by the Human Rights Council in March 2016, has [identified](#) more than forty senior military officials who may bear individual responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity in the country.

In addition to investigating allegations, the Commission is also mandated to collect and preserve evidence for use in the Hybrid Court and other

accountability mechanisms agreed under the 2015 peace agreement.

Urging for the swift setting up of the court, Yasmin Sooka, the Chair of the Commission underscored “ultimately this is the only way to stop the rampant devastation of millions of human lives by South Sudan’s leaders.”

The public report, which reflects only a portion of the information in the 58,000 documents and 230 witness statements collected, documents abhorrent instances of cruelty against civilians, including massacres, sexual violence as well as destruction of homes, hospitals and schools.

People who tried to defend themselves or their families had their eyes gouged out, their throats slit or were castrated.

It also noted that children have been recruited by all sides in the conflict and forced to kill civilians; in many cases they have watched loved ones raped or killed. The elderly have not been spared either.

Unable to flee on foot they have been left behind in villages only to be hacked to death or burned alive, it adds.

The [report](#) is to be discussed by the Human Rights Council – the highest UN intergovernmental body on all matters related to human rights – next month.

[UN migration agency reports rise in displacement in northern Mali](#)

A resurgence of communal violence and armed conflict in recent weeks has led to an increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in northern Mali, the United Nations International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) reported on Friday.

Despite a drop in numbers towards the end of 2017 – from 40,743 individuals in October to just over 38,100 in December – latest figures show an additional 8,164 displaced persons have registered in the regions of Mopti, Menaka, Timbuktu and Gao.

IOM said the increase has put “significant pressure” on humanitarian operations, given the fragile security situation in the region.

“Northern Mali still holds the largest number of IDPs especially due to the deterioration of the security situation,” according to a press release by the agency.

Mali, located in West Africa, was rocked by a political crisis in 2012, including a military coup and rebellion its northern region.

A United Nations peacekeeping mission, known by the French acronym, [MINUSMA](#), has been supporting the political process and stabilization efforts since 2013.

The UN migration agency had expected an end to internal displacement in Mali by the end of last year, “provided there was no resurgence of armed conflict or communal violence to complement the provision of adequate humanitarian assistance to IDPs and host communities.”

However, IOM said that in addition to the tensions in the north, the international community “has struggled to mobilize” funding to support vulnerable communities and IDPs.

IOM and its partners plan to respond to the new wave of displacement, funds permitting.