

[Maldives: UN rights experts denounce detention of judges as 'direct attack' on Supreme Court](#)

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[Around four million Iraqi children in need says UNICEF, ahead of investment conference in Kuwait](#)

12 February 2018 – Nearly a quarter of all Iraqi children are living in poverty, and in the wake of more than four years of violence, families are being pushed to “extreme measures” in order to survive, said the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) on Monday, as a major conference on rebuilding the country was set to open tomorrow in neighbouring Kuwait.

“Children are Iraq’s future,” [said](#) Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, adding that “the Kuwait Conference for Iraq this week is an opportunity for world leaders to show that we are willing to invest in children – and through investing in children, that we are willing to invest in rebuilding a stable Iraq.”

The joint UNICEF and The UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) assessment entitled [Committing to Change – Securing the Future](#), which is being presented at the conference, concludes that without investment to restore infrastructure and services in war-ravaged cities such as Mosul, the “hard-won gains to end conflict in Iraq are in jeopardy.”

The Government-led battle to liberate swathes of Iraq last year occupied by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) terrorists since 2014, led to widespread destruction of homes, schools, hospitals and recreational spaces.

Since 2014, the UN verified 150 attacks on educational facilities, and around 50 attacks on health centres and their staff. Half of Iraq’s schools are in need of repair, and more than three million children have suffered disruption to their time in the classroom.

As displaced families try to return, the poorest often have little choice but to live in the ruins of their homes, in conditions that are hazardous to children. More than 21,400 homes have been destroyed or damaged in Mosul alone, according to UN figures.

The report indicates that some of the neediest families simply took their children out of school to work, and “many children were forced to fight.”

“Children are hardest hit in times of conflict and urban crisis recovery and reconstruction should be prioritized, adequately supported and quickly implemented,” said Zena Ali Ahmad, Arab Region Director for UN-Habitat.

The UN agencies are appealing at the conference – which runs 13 to 14 February – for commitments to restore basic infrastructure and services for children, including psycho-social support.

A UN Spokesman announced Monday that [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres will attend the Conference and is expected to urge the international community to support the reconstruction of Iraq.

[More than 5,000 child soldiers released in 2017, but tens of thousands still being used in conflict – UN](#)

12 February 2018 – The global commitment to end the use of children in armed conflict led to the release and reintegration of more than 5,000 children in 2017, but tens of thousands of boys and girls are still being recruited, kidnapped, and forced to fight or work for military groups or armed forces at “alarming rates,” according to the United Nations.

“Children can only be freed from armed groups and forces through [a comprehensive reintegration process](#), including medical and psycho-social support, as well as educational programmes and trainings,” the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, said Monday, on the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers.

“Without a strong political and financial commitment to the reintegration process, re-recruitment is unfortunately likely to happen in many conflict situations,” Ms. Gamba added.

Despite progress, boys and girls continue to be recruited, kidnapped, forced to fight or work for military groups or armed forces. The recruitment and use

of children happened in all 20 country situations covered by the mandate entrusted to Ms. Gambia and her office.

Sixty-one parties to conflict out of 63 are listed for this grave violation in the 2016 [Annual Report](#) of the Secretary-General on the issue, making it by far the most widely-spread violation.

“It is our responsibility to show these children that there is hope outside of conflicts, that they can live in peace and security and be allowed to live their dreams,” Ms. Gamba, reminded.

The International Day was initiated in 2002 when the [Optional Protocol](#) to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict entered into force on February 12, 2002. This protocol, which sets the minimum age for recruitment into armed forces in conflict at 18, has been ratified by 167 States.

Is the international approach fit-for-purpose?

Meanwhile, the United Nations University (UNU) has been collaborating with the UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)), the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Luxembourg and Switzerland, to examine whether the international community’s approach to this scourge is effective, or requires adjustments.

The goal is to use [the empirical findings of the research](#) to inform programmatic guidance for actors in the field and to effectively disengage children from armed groups.

In their report, titled *Cradled by Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict*, researchers suggest that most children do not so much “opt” into conflict as “grow” into it.

According to the [report](#), conflict structures the information they see and the choices they make. It pulls and pushes them in many directions. Conflict erodes their relationships. It exacerbates their needs and exposes them to untold risks. Conflict shapes their identity and heightens their need to find meaning in their lives.

Ultimately, the forces of conflict narrow the paths available to children, and tragically, for many, lead to exploitation, violence, and trauma.

These findings undermine the conventional wisdom that “violent extremism” or ideology is predominantly responsible for driving children into armed groups.

The report proposes five principles for more effective international efforts to prevent and respond to child recruitment and use by armed groups: avoid programmes focused primarily on ideological factors; only incorporate ideological components where individually necessary and where they can be embedded into larger, holistic efforts to address the needs and risks of children; ensure all interventions are empirically based; rigorously assess interventions over the long term; and engage children not just as beneficiaries, but as partners.

Civilians in war-torn Yemen 'under fire on all sides' – UN rights chief

12 February 2018 – Raising alarm over continuing civilian casualties in the midst of increased hostilities in war-ravaged Yemen, the United Nations human rights chief underscored that all parties to the conflict are obliged under international humanitarian law to ensure that civilians are not harmed.

The situation in Taizz governorate – located in south-west Yemen – is of particular concern.

“Civilians are under fire on all sides, as Houthi and affiliated forces carry out sniper attacks and indiscriminate shelling, and the Saudi-led Coalition continues to conduct airstrikes,” the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, said in a [news release](#) Monday.

“For the civilians in the city of Taizz, the conflict is not just escalating but inescapable.”

Between 1 and 8 February, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) verified that 27 people were killed and 76 injured in Yemen – more than double the number of civilian casualties confirmed during the previous week.

The actual number could be higher.

Among those killed were three children who lost their lives in shelling by Houthi forces in Al Qahirah district (northern Taizz) on 6 February; and a woman working as field monitor for the Yemen National Commission of Inquiry in Salh district on 8 February.

Elsewhere in the country, eight civilians – including a woman and a child – were killed and 32 injured on 4 February when three airstrikes hit a Ministry of the Interior building in Bani Al Harith district, in Amanat Al Asimah Governorate.

OHCHR officials who visited the scene said that there did not appear to be any military objects near the building, which had previously been hit in January 2016.

Also in the first eight days of February, OHCHR document sniping and indiscriminate shelling by Houthi forces in frontline areas in Hudaydah and Hajja governorates, and airstrikes by the Coalition on areas under the control of the Houthi forces, including in Sana’a, Sa’ada, Hudaydah and Amran Governorates.

Underscoring the obligation on all parties to the conflict to ensure that

civilian populations are not harmed, the UN human rights chief reiterated that “any intentional, direct attack against civilians or civilian objects is considered a serious violation of international humanitarian law.”

Since March 2015 and as of 8 February, OHCHR has documented 15,467 civilian casualties, with 5,974 killed and 9,493 injured.

[World loses a ‘human rights giant,’ says UN chief on death of rights expert Asma Jahangir](#)

11 February 2018 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Sunday expressed his sorrow at the demise of prominent human rights defender and UN Special Rapporteur Asma Jahangir, who passed away at the age of 66.

“We have lost a human rights giant,” said Mr. Guterres in a [statement](#).

“Asma was brilliant, deeply principled, courageous and kind [...] She will not be forgotten,” he added, expressing his condolences to Ms. Jahangir’s family, friends and colleagues, including in the UN and civil society.

She reportedly suffered a cardiac arrest and was taken to hospital, where she passed away.

Ms. Jahangir was the current UN [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran](#), having assumed the position on 1 November 2016. Earlier, from 1998 to July 2004, she was the [Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#), and from August 2004 to July 2010, the [Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief](#).

A national of Pakistan, Ms. Jahangir, was recognized both nationally and internationally for her contribution to human rights and was the recipient of major human rights awards. She worked extensively in the field of women’s rights, protection of religious minorities and in eliminating bonded labour.

She was also elected as the President of the Supreme Court Bar Association of Pakistan and as Chairperson of the country’s Human Rights Commission.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), which supports [Special Rapporteurs and independent experts](#) in the discharge of their mandate, also expressed its sadness at Ms. Jahangir’s passing.

“She was a legendary human rights defender: pioneering, determined,

calm, courageous and a lovely human being," the office said in a tweet posted on its official account.

UN Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based [Human Rights Council](#) the highest UN intergovernmental body on all matters related to human rights to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation.

The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.