

[UN chief deeply saddened by tragic plane accident in Russia](#)

11 February 2018 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Sunday expressed deep sadness at the plane accident in the Moscow region, Russia, in which all passengers and crew are reported to have died.

In a [statement](#) attributable to his spokesperson, the Secretary-General conveyed his heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims and to the people and Government of Russian Federation.

According to reports, the aircraft lost contact shortly after take-off from an airport in Moscow and crashed near a village about 80 kilometres (50 miles) south-east of the city.

There were 65 passengers and six crew on board the airplane.

[Urgent international action needed to stop soaring violence in war-torn Syria, stresses UN rights chief](#)

10 February 2018 – The United Nations human rights chief on Saturday called for urgent international action to protect civilians caught up in the Syrian conflict, which, he said, saw one of its bloodiest periods with hundreds of lives lost in wave after wave of deadly airstrikes.

The no-holds-barred nature of this assault is evidenced by reports that at least nine medical facilities, six of them in Idlib and three in eastern Ghouta, were hit by airstrikes, said the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, in a news release issued by his office ([OHCHR](#)).

Even by Syria's atrocious standards, these are exceptionally deplorable developments and a cruel irony given that both have been declared 'de-escalation areas', he added.

According to OHCHR, between 4 and 9 February, at least 277 civilians are reported to have been killed, with 230 among them in airstrikes by the Syrian Government and its allies. A further 812 civilians are reported to have been injured.

In one of the worst incidents, a rolling series of airstrikes on

residential areas of Duma (near the capital, Damascus) on 6 February reportedly killed at least 31 civilians, including 12 women and four children, and injured more than 100 others, including 37 children.

In the news release, the UN human rights wing also noted that numerous rockets and mortars continue to be fired from opposition-held areas into populated areas of Government-held capital Damascus and surrounding suburbs, with at least seven civilians reported killed and 18 others injured in various locations between 6 and 9 February.

Even by Syria's atrocious standards, these are exceptionally deplorable developments and a cruel irony given that both have been declared 'de-escalation areas' High Commissioner Zeid

Elsewhere in the war-ravaged country, fighting continues to take its toll with a number of civilians, including children, reportedly killed and injured in Afrin district in north-western Syria.

In the east of the country, civilian casualties are reported in airstrikes and ground-based strikes in areas still under the control of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) primarily in Deir-ez-Zor governorate. However, the greatest threats now faced by civilians in such areas are improvised explosive devices, unexploded ordinance and other explosive remnants of war.

Violations of international law continue on a daily basis UN rights chief

In the news release, Mr. Zeid also said that the various Governments and some armed opposition groups professing to adhere to international humanitarian law and international human rights law, violations continue on a daily basis, despite the creation of so-called 'de-escalation areas' in 2017.

The term 'de-escalation area' is becoming all too reminiscent of the so-called 'safe areas' in Bosnia, which proved anything but safe, as we were starkly reminded during the recent trials of Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic, he added, underscoring that the situation in Syria is 'crying out' to be referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC), as well as for a much more concerted effort by UN Member States to bring peace.

The conduct and management of this war has been utterly shameful from the outset, and the failure to end it marks an epic failure of global diplomacy, the High Commissioner stressed.

Yemen: Raging violence displaces more than 85,000 civilians, says UN refugee agency

9 February 2018 – Surging violence across Yemen has resulted in the displacement of more than 85,000 people in just the last 10 weeks, the United Nations refugee agency reported Friday.

Yemen is the world's largest humanitarian crisis with more than 22 million in need, fuelled by ongoing conflict, a breakdown in public services and a collapsing economy.

"We are particularly [concerned](#) for those that remain in areas close to hostilities in Taiz and Hudaydah governorates," said Cécile Pouilly, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), told reporters in Geneva, Switzerland.

"As a result of prolonged fighting in those two governorates, conditions continue to deteriorate, exposing people to violence and disease without access to basic services," she added, noting that the agency was "alarmed" as hundreds of people are forced to flee their homes each day, due to increasing military operations, particularly on the west coast.

Most of those displaced in these two governorates are trapped inside their homes or in caves as ground clashes, aerial bombardment and sniper fire rage around them.

In addition to new displacements from those fleeing the coast, UNHCR is also observing a spike from other frontline areas, including Yemen's border governorates.

Meanwhile, the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) has launched an appeal for \$96.2 million to fund its 2018 response for the humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

"Three years of conflict have [inflicted suffering](#) on millions, affecting every Yemeni – man, woman or child," said William Lacy Swing, the UN migration agency's Director General, from its headquarters in Geneva.

"With armed conflict ongoing, a stalled peace process and an economic blockade, Yemen is in the grips of a devastating protracted humanitarian and developmental crisis," he added.

Olympic message of peace is universal, UN chief says ahead Pyeongchang Games

9 February 2018 – As the world comes together for the Winter Olympics, which kicked off Friday in Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres called on everyone to recognize and promote the Games' universal message of peace and tolerance.

“The Olympic spirit allows people to be together, from all over the world, to respect each other, to assert the values of tolerance, of mutual understanding that are the basic elements for peace to be possible,” Mr. Guterres [told](#) journalists in Pyeongchang.

Obviously, in the present context, he said, there is a lot of attention for this message of peace in relation to the Korean Peninsula, but the Olympic message of peace is not local.

“It is universal. It's for the world. It is valued in Korea as it is valued everywhere where we struggle to try to address the many complex conflicts that we are facing,” he said.

The UN chief also extended his appreciation and pride to be at the Winter Olympics and highlighted the cooperation between UN and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), as well as the values for which the IOC and its sister organization, the International Paralympic Committee, stand.

The Winter Olympics opened earlier today (local time) with cultural and artistic performances as well as the customary parade of athletes, which was the delegations from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea under one flag, carried together by a sportsperson from each team.

Olympic torch 'a symbol of hope' – UN General Assembly President

Also today, the opening ceremony saw the conclusion of the long journey of the Olympic Torch that started in November 2017.

In the last leg of its journey, the flame was carried, among others, by Miroslav Lajčák, the President of the UN General Assembly and Thomas Bach, the President of the IOC.

Outlining the commonalities between sport and diplomacy – both about peace and bringing people together – Mr. Lajčák highlighted that the Olympic torch is “probably the best symbol in our times in our world.”

“[It] is a symbol of peace, a symbol of youth, a symbol of sport, communication, a symbol of tradition, a symbol of hope.” he said.

British commander at UN Mission in South Sudan serves as role model for young women

9 February 2018 – Lieutenant Colonel Katie Hislop of the United Kingdom said she was happy to serve as a role model for young women considering a career with the armed forces. The mother of two was the only woman to head a military contingent at the United Nations Mission in South Sudan ([UNMISS](#)).

“I recognize that women are still a minority in most of the armed forces across the world, so in some ways it’s a privileged position,” she said in an interview.

“Fortunately, for me in the UK, it’s a fairly normal position I find myself in. So, if there’s anything that I could do to be a role model for young women who perhaps don’t think that a military career is possible, then I would be happy to do that.”

Lt Col Hislop commanded the UK Engineering Task Force at UNMISS, made up of peacekeepers who are electricians, builders, bricklayers, concreters and plumbers who worked across a wide range of construction projects.

As contingent commander, Lt Col Hislop supervised several projects, including the building of a hospital in the town of Bentiu, located in the north.

Its construction helped to ease the case load at a hospital run by MSF, the humanitarian organization which provides medical aid to people affected by conflict and natural disasters. The new hospital has a surgical facility as well as an emergency department which can treat catastrophic injuries and serious diseases.

“Prior to the hospital being there, there simply wasn’t a facility to treat UN staff,” she said. “If someone is particularly seriously injured, it may well be that they are then transferred to a bigger facility, maybe in Nairobi for instance.”

Other tasks performed by her contingent included building additional landing sites for helicopters and digging drainage channels, particularly during the rainy season.

The UK is among 125 countries providing military and police officers to serve at 15 UN peacekeeping operations worldwide. Over 600 British personnel were deployed with the UN as of December 2017; more than half in South Sudan alone.



Since 1948, thousands of troops from the United Kingdom have taken part in UN peacekeeping operations. More than 100 have paid the ultimate price while defending civilians and supporting operations approved by the UN Security Council. Pictured, UK engineers in South Sudan marking Remembrance Day in honour of colleagues lost in the line of duty. *Photo: UNMISS*



Some 600 UK personnel are currently deployed in UN peacekeeping operations, the majority in South Sudan and Cyprus. Their largest presence is currently in South Sudan, where 400 troops, including 41 women, are deployed with the UN mission in the country in support of the Government and the South Sudanese people. Engineers and medical specialists from the UK have helped to construct a temporary field hospital providing medical care to more than 1,800 people. Pictured, Combat medic from The Black Watch, 3rd Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Scotland. *Photo: British Army/Crown Copyrights*



Corporal Heather McQueen is a vehicle mechanic and maintains all UN engineering vehicles in Malakal, South Sudan. Pictured, Heather speaks with Angelo, a local colleague who assists in maintaining the vehicles. Heather teaches Angelo about how to repair vehicles; he provides her with vital advice on how weather and road conditions in this area of South Sudan affect vehicle maintenance. *Photo: UNMISS*



The UK contribution to UN peacekeeping in South Sudan includes a UK C-130, which flies the Entebbe-Juba-Malakal route, moving humanitarian-enabling supplies, UN material and vehicles, including to the hard-to-reach base in Malakal. *Photo: UNMISS*



Besides contributing troops to South Sudan and Cyprus, the United Kingdom is the sixth largest contributor of financial assistance to UN peacekeeping. Pictured, the Black Watch, 3rd Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Scotland wearing the distinctive blue UN berets ahead of their deployment to the UN peacekeeping mission in Cyprus ([UNFICYP](#)). *Photo: British Army/Crown Copyrights*

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Peacekeepers serving under the UN flag work in difficult and dangerous environments, risking their lives to protect some of the world's most vulnerable people. As of 31 January 2018, the UK has lost 104 personnel in the service of peace.

Overall, 14,528 uniformed personnel from around the globe are serving with UNMISS; 718 of them are women. The UN encourages its troop and police contributing countries to deploy more women in peacekeeping operations;

numerous studies have demonstrated the unique and positive role that women can play in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding.

South Sudan is the world's youngest country, having gained independence in July 2011. The UN mission was initially mandated to support the Government in consolidating peace, thus fostering longer-term state building and economic development, among other duties.

However, political violence that broke out in December 2013 has resulted in thousands killed, with more than four million forced to flee their homes, either to other parts of the country or across the border, for example to Uganda, which is hosting around one million South Sudanese refugees.

UNMISS troops are protecting more than 200,000 civilians in six Protection of Civilian sites throughout South Sudan.

For Lt Col Hilsop, who has completed her deployment to South Sudan, serving under the UN flag was "an absolute pleasure."