

UN chief welcomes progress on inter-Korean talks as vital to reducing tensions in region

9 January 2018 – Welcoming the progress made during Tuesday's high-level inter-Korean talks in the small border village of Panmunjom, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres spotlighted, among others, the agreement to reopen military channels as critical to reducing tensions in the region.

“The Secretary-General [has welcomed] particularly the agreement to work to ease military tensions, hold military-to-military talks, and reopen the inter-Korean military hotline,” said a [statement](#) from UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric, who added that the re-establishment and strengthening of such channels is critical to lowering the risk of miscalculation or misunderstanding and to reduce tensions in the region.

Mr. Guterres also welcomed the decision of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to send a delegation to the Olympic Winter Games, which will be held from 9 to 25 February in PyeongChang, Republic of Korea.

“As the United Nations General Assembly has recognized, the holding of the Olympic Games can foster an atmosphere of peace, tolerance and understanding among nations. This is particularly relevant on the Korean Peninsula and beyond,” the statement said.

The Secretary-General seized the opportunity to acknowledge other efforts that have contributed to reducing tensions. “He hopes such engagement and efforts will contribute to the resumption of sincere dialogue leading to sustainable peace and denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula,” the Spokesman concluded.

For UN General Assembly's discussion of and action on a resolution on the 2018 Winter Olympic Games, see press release [here](#)

As Syria war grinds on, Syrian refugees in Lebanon are becoming poorer, more vulnerable – UN

9 January 2018 – More than half the war-weary Syrian refugees in Lebanon are living in extreme poverty and borrowing money for food and to pay rent has become commonplace, the United Nations reported Tuesday.

This news came with a warning that more of these refugees find themselves dependent on international aid amid an uncertain outlook for humanitarian funding in 2018.

Seven years into the crisis, Syrian refugees in Lebanon are finding it increasingly more difficult to make ends meet [and] are [more vulnerable than ever](#), William Spindler, spokesperson of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), told reporters at the regular press briefing in Geneva.

He was briefing on the annual Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR), carried out by UNHCR, the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) and the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)), which showed that 58 per cent of households are currently living in extreme poverty – on less than \$2.87 per person per day.

And the number of households living below the overall poverty line – less than \$3.84 per day – has also continued to rise, Mr. Spindler explained, noting that 76 per cent of refugee households live below that level.

Borrowing money for food, to cover health expenses and pay rent continues to be extremely common, with almost nine out of 10 refugees saying they are in debt.

It is more vital than ever that donors stay the course amid deepening poverty and growing vulnerabilities.

While food insecurity remains critically high, other vulnerabilities continue to grow, such as obtaining legal residency – leaving refugees exposed to an increased risk of arrest and hindering access to work, school or health care.

Overall, Mr. Spindler said, 74 per cent of surveyed Syrian refugees aged 15 and above do not have legal residency in Lebanon.

Self-reliance opportunities remain extremely limited in an economy affected by the Syrian conflict and insufficient external funding.

In 2017, only 36 per cent of the total funding needed to provide adequate humanitarian support in Lebanon was received, as of the beginning of December, underscored Mr. Spindler, noting that under the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, \$2.7 billion is required to meet needs in 2018.

It is more vital than ever that donors stay the course amid deepening poverty and growing vulnerabilities, the spokesperson emphasized.

Syria: 13 million people in desperate need as seventh war-torn winter sets in, UN warns

8 January 2018 – With millions of desperate people across Syria now facing their seventh winter of war, the United Nations warned on Tuesday that intensified military operations in the country's north are forcing families to flee, in the cold, to areas without enough resources to support them.

While some parts of Syria are witnessing a welcome reprieve from hostilities, many others face intensified military operations and conflict, UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric told the regular briefing in New York, noting that more than 13 million people in the country need basic aid and protection.

The UN is deeply concerned for the safety and protection of tens of thousands of people in southern Idlib and rural Hama in northeastern Syria, where ongoing hostilities have reportedly caused hundreds of deaths and injuries of civilians, he added.

Since the first of December, fighting has displaced tens of thousands of civilians already in dire circumstances.

With the onset of winter, safe shelter is among the biggest concerns, as many families are fleeing into areas that are already at full capacity or into communities with depleted resources, Mr. Dujarric underscored.

He also expressed alarm by the increasing hostilities in East Ghouta that continue to put civilians in the line of fire, resulting in civilian deaths and injuries and damaging infrastructure.

We received alarming reports that the only emergency medical centre in Modira in besieged area of East Ghouta was damaged by an airstrike, rendering it inoperable, he said.

Mr. Dujarric also announced that Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock will visit Syria from 9 to 12 January. The UN aid chief is expected to meet Government representatives and see first-hand the impact of the conflict on civilians.

He will assess the humanitarian response and discuss how to improve access and delivery with key interlocutors, the spokesperson elaborated, adding that it will be Mr. Lowcock's first mission to Syria as Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Millions of children across Somalia vaccinated against measles in UN-backed campaign

8 January 2018 – One million children aged six months to 10 years in Puntland and 4.2 million across Somalia were reached during a five-day measles campaign that wrapped up on Sunday, the United Nations has reported.

It is a priority for WHO [World Health Organization] to continue supporting the Ministry of Health and maintaining the close partnership with the local health authorities and partners to [control disease outbreaks](#) like measles and ensure high vaccination coverage for all Somali children,” said Dr. Ghulam Popal, WHO Representative to Somalia.

It is unfortunate that [measles](#) cases are still being reported while there is effective vaccine available,” he added.

The campaign was conducted in partnership with WHO, the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) and Somalia's Ministry of Health.

In 2017, amidst a drought emergency, a total of 23,002 suspected measles cases were reported – alarmingly high compared to previous years. Among those cases, 83 per cent were in children under age 10.

In response to the outbreak, two rounds of vaccination campaigns were conducted in March and April of 2017, reaching 516,934 children aged nine months to five years.

Together with our partners, UNICEF was able to achieve great results for children and families affected by drought in 2017,” says Jesper Moller, UNICEF's acting Representative.

However, the crisis is far from over,” he continued. “The threat of famine continues to loom large, and so does disease outbreaks such as measles.”

During the campaign, a support dose of Vitamin A will be administered to eligible children alongside the measles vaccine. Social mobilizers and health workers supported by WHO and UNICEF are also encouraging adults who are not fully immunized, or not sure of their immunity status, to get vaccinated as well.

The only way to protect children from this deadly disease is through mass vaccination campaigns. And we will remain vigilant and sustain our emergency efforts in 2018,” Mr. Moller concluded.

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease that is transmitted via droplets from the nose, mouth or throat of infected persons. Routine vaccination for children, combined with mass immunization campaigns in countries with low

routine coverage, are key public health strategies to reduce global measles deaths, says WHO.

Western Sahara: UN chief urges easing of tensions in Guerguerat area

6 January 2018 – Deeply concerned over rising tensions near Guerguerat in the buffer strip in southern Western Sahara between the Moroccan berm and the Mauritanian border, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Saturday called for maximum restraint in the area.

According to a statement from a UN spokesperson, the Secretary-General underlined that the withdrawal of Frente Polisario (Polisario Front) elements from Guerguerat in April 2017, together with the earlier withdrawal of Moroccan elements from the area, was critical to creating an environment conducive to the resumption of dialogue under the auspices of his Personal Envoy Horst Kohler.

“[Mr. Guterres] calls on the parties to exercise maximum restraint and to avoid escalating tensions. Regular civilian and commercial traffic should not be obstructed and no action should be taken, which may constitute a change to the status quo of the buffer strip,” the statement concluded.

Western Sahara is located on the north-west coast of Africa bordered by Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria. The colonial administration of Western Sahara by Spain ended in 1976. Fighting later broke out between Morocco and the Polisario Front. A ceasefire was signed in September 1991.

The UN mission, known by its French acronym, [MINURSO](#), was deployed that year to oversee a ceasefire and a UN settlement plan; however, disagreements between the Government of Morocco and the Polisario Front prevented the holding of the anticipated referendum on the territory’s future.

A revised settlement plan [proposed](#) by the United Nations after seven years of diplomatic consultations was rejected by one of the parties in 2004.

In 2017, the UN Security Council affirmed its full support for the commitment of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy towards a solution to the question of Western Sahara.

In this context, the Council requested Mr. Kohler to relaunch the negotiating process with a new

dynamic and a new spirit leading to the resumption of a political process with the aim of reaching a mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara in the

context of arrangements consistent with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations.

The Council also emphasized the importance of the commitment of Morocco and the Polisario Front to continue the process of preparation for a fifth round of negotiations while also encouraging the neighbouring countries, Algeria and Mauritania, to make important contributions to this process.