

UN aid wing sounds alarm on behalf of civilians caught up in rising violence in northern Syria

3 January 2018 – The United Nations humanitarian wing and its partners in Syria on Wednesday expressed deep concern about the protection and wellbeing of tens of thousands of civilians in north-eastern Hama and southern Idlib governorates, following increased hostilities, which have reportedly resulted in scores of deaths and injuries and displacement in the area.

According to a UN spokesperson, yesterday, seven people were reportedly killed and at least 18 people injured after an airstrike hit the Khan Elsobol town in southern rural Idlib. On the same day, 25 people were reportedly injured and several shops and facilities were damaged when shelling hit the main vegetable market in Jisr-Ash-Shugur city in western rural Idlib.

Further airstrikes and shelling incidents were reported in the southern countryside of the governorate, UN Deputy Spokesman Farhan Haq told reporters at the daily briefing in New York.

He said that the UN and its partners are coordinating the humanitarian response in the area through cross-border operations from Turkey. Priority needs include shelter, food, medical supplies, water and sanitation and other humanitarian assistance.

The United Nations reminds all parties to the conflict of the legal obligation to take constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects, stated Mr. Haq.

He went on to say the UN is extremely concerned over a recent string of attacks on healthcare facilities inside Syria. On 31 December, a local hospital in the Idlib Governorate was reportedly damaged by an airstrike, while one day earlier a medical warehouse belonging to an international non-governmental organization was reportedly damaged by barrel bombs.

We continue to call on all the parties to the conflict to end the destruction of hospitals and other civilian infrastructure that is essential for the civilian population, and to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, emphasized the Deputy Spokesman.

The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has more on the recent developments in north-western Syria [here](#)

Amid wave of protests in Iran, UN rights chief urges impartial probe into all acts of violence

3 January 2018 – The top United Nations human rights official on Wednesday urged the Iranian authorities to handle the protests that have taken place around the country “with great care” so as not to further inflame violence and unrest.

“I am [deeply disturbed](#) by reports that more than 20 people, including an 11-year-old boy, have died and hundreds have been arrested during the recent wave of protests in Iran,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, in a separate statement that urged the authorities to investigate all deaths and serious injuries that have occurred so far.

He said the Iranian authorities must respect the rights of all demonstrators and detainees, including their right to life, and guarantee their safety and security. Calling for thorough, independent and impartial investigations of all acts of violence that have taken place, the UN rights chief said there must be a concerted effort by the authorities “to ensure that all security forces respond in a manner that is proportionate and strictly necessary, and fully in line with international law.”

Mr. Zeid stressed that Iranian citizens who take to the streets to express their discontent have a right to be heard, and that the issues they raise should be resolved through dialogue, with full respect for freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly.

“It is incumbent on the authorities that their actions do not provoke a downward spiral of violence, as occurred in 2009,” he warned. “The authorities must take all steps to ensure that this does not happen again.”

The High Commissioner urged the authorities to release from detention any protestors who have been arbitrarily deprived of their liberty, or penalized in any way, for expressing their views and protesting in a peaceful manner. “Peaceful protests must not be criminalized,” he said. “They are a legitimate part of the democratic process.”

Meanwhile, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Wednesday deplored the loss of life in the wave of protests in Iran and said that further violence must be avoided.

A [statement](#) issued by a UN spokesperson said the Secretary-General is following with concern recent developments in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

“He urges respect for the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, and that any demonstrations take place in a peaceful manner.”

Further violence must be avoided,” the statement said.

[Somalia: UN voices deep concern at reported destruction of housing for displaced persons](#)

2 January 2018 – A senior United Nations official in Somalia expressed deep concern over reports of the unannounced destruction of settlements for internally displaced persons (IDPs) as well as humanitarian infrastructure in Mogadishu.

“I am [deeply saddened to learn of evictions](#), without prior notice, of internally displaced persons, in Banadir region,” Peter de Clercq, the Secretary-General’s Deputy Special Representative for Somalia, said in a statement issued on Monday.

“Some of these displaced people have walked long distances from different parts of the country fleeing drought and conflict,” he continued, pointing out that on 29 and 30 December, over 23 IDP settlements, housing over 4,000 IDP households, were destroyed.

Mr. de Clercq, who is also UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, added that personal property and livelihoods have also been lost as people were not given time to collect their belongings before the destruction started.

“Families, including children, women and the elderly are now living in the open,” he underscored.

In addition to engaging with authorities to ensure a solution for the newly displaced people, humanitarian are mobilizing resources to provide life-saving assistance to the affected people.

“I am equally concerned that when everyone is seized of the agenda of improving the lives of Somalis, humanitarian and development installations are being senselessly destroyed, including schools, latrines, water points, sanitation centres, shelters and other related investments generously supported by donors,” said Mr. de Clercq.

Throughout Somalia, more than two million people are now displaced due to drought and conflict, including one million newly displaced in 2017 alone. These people constitute one-third of the 6.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.

“I call upon all parties to protect and assist all civilian people who have fled conflict and drought and that have already suffered so much.

Humanitarians stand ready to cooperate with and support the authorities in this regard," Mr. de Clercq stressed.

Malnutrition rates there are surging and have reached emergency levels in some locations, especially among internally displaced people. Displaced people lack access to food, shelter and basic services, and also face the most serious protection-related risks, such as physical attacks, gender-based violence and movement restrictions.

[Early action key to preventing crises related to El Niño and La Niña – UN relief official](#)

2 January 2018 – La Niña is expected to impact weather around the world in 2018, a United Nations relief official said, urging governments and the international community to act early to mitigate the impacts from this potentially destructive weather pattern and its counterpart, El Niño.

"We know that the earlier we're able to put in place a response, the more efficient and effective that response can be," Greg Puley, Chief of Policy Advice and Planning Section, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), told *UN News*.

El Niño is the term used to describe the warming of the central to eastern tropical Pacific that occurs, on average, every three to seven years. It raises sea surface temperatures and impacts weather systems around the globe so that some places receive more rain while others receive none at all, often in a reversal of their usual weather pattern.

Its counterpart La Niña is associated with cooler-than-average sea surface temperatures, but it also results in extreme weather.

In 2016, 23 countries – representing 60 million people – had to appeal for emergency aid because of El Niño-related weather events.

While there is never 100 per cent certainty that a weather event will happen, Mr. Puley urged governments "to be willing to act on the clues."

He discussed insurance, or forecast-based funding, which released funding early, as innovations that have "no regrets" even if a predicted event does not happen.

"If you're aware that excess precipitation is forecast, for example, you can make some investment to reinforce river beds so that the excess precipitation doesn't result in flooding," he said. "It will cost you \$10 million to

reinforce the river bed. It might have cost you \$50 or \$60 million to provide food, water and shelter to people who are displaced by the flood. You can make those investments when you know.”

AUDIO: Interview with UN OCHA’s Greg Puley

[UN regrets reported loss of life amid Iranian protests](#)

2 January 2018 – The United Nations regrets the reported loss of life resulting from the protests in Iran, and hopes that further violence will be avoided, a spokesperson for the world body said on Tuesday.

“The Secretary General has been carefully following the reports of protests in a number of cities in Iran,” Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesperson for António Guterres, told reporters in New York.

“We regret the reported loss of life, and we hope that further violence will be avoided,” he continued.

“We expect that the rights to peaceful assembly and expression of the Iranian people will be respected.”

According to media reports, several days of demonstrations have left at least 20 people dead.