

UN experts decry Saudi Arabia's use of anti-terror laws against peaceful activists

2 January 2018 – United Nations human rights experts deplored Saudi Arabia's continued use of counter-terrorism and security-related laws against human rights defenders and urged the release of all those detained for peacefully exercising their rights.

"The rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are [severely restricted](#) in Saudi Arabia," the group said in a joint statement issued on Tuesday.

Religious figures, writers, journalists, academics and civic activists are being targeted, along with members of the banned Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), in a "worrying pattern of widespread and systematic arbitrary arrests and detention," they continued.

"We are witnessing the persecution of human rights defenders for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly, association and belief, as well as in retaliation for their work. The Government has ignored repeated calls by UN experts and others to halt these violations, rectify them, and prevent their recurrence."

More than 60 prominent religious figures, writers, journalists, academics and civic activists are reported to have been detained in a wave of arrests since September, adding to a list of past cases which had already been raised by UN experts with the Government.

"We have written to the Government requesting detailed information about these numerous arrests on terrorism, cyber-crime or any other state security-related charges during that period," the experts said.

The experts noted that they are also seeking government clarification about how these measures are compatible with Saudi Arabia's obligations under international human rights law, as well as with the voluntary pledges and commitments it made when seeking to join the UN Human Rights Council.

"Despite being elected as member of the Human Rights Council at the end of 2016, Saudi Arabia has continued its practice of silencing, arbitrarily arresting, detaining and persecuting human rights defenders and critics," they said.

In addition to previous cases and new arrests since September, the experts pointed to the country's failure to implement two recent opinions of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, calling for "the release of all the human rights defenders concerned in these cases."

"We appeal to the Saudi authorities to ensure their right to reparation and

compensation.”

The experts are independent, unpaid staff appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation.

[On New Year's Day, UNICEF challenges nations to join fight to help more newborns survive first days of life](#)

1 January 2018 – Nearly 386,000 babies will be born on New Year's Day – some 90 per cent in less developed regions – and the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) is challenging nations around the world to make sure more newborns survive their first days of life.

This New Year, UNICEF's resolution is to help give every child more than an hour, more than a day, more than a month – more than survival, – Stefan Peterson, UNICEF's Chief of Health, said Monday.

The agency [reported](#) that Kiribati's Christmas Island in the Pacific would most likely welcome 2018's first baby; the United States, its last. Globally, over half of these births are estimated to take place in nine countries:

- India – 69,070
- China – 44,760
- Nigeria – 20,210
- Pakistan – 14,910
- Indonesia – 13,370
- United States – 11,280
- Democratic Republic of Congo – 9,400
- Ethiopia – 9,020
- Bangladesh – 8,370

While many babies will survive, some will not make it past their first day. In 2016, an estimated 2,600 children died within the first 24 hours every day of the year. UNICEF said that for almost two million newborns, their first week was also their last.

In all, 2.6 million children died before the end of their first month. Among those children, more than 80 per cent died from preventable and treatable causes such as premature birth, complications during delivery, and infections like sepsis and pneumonia.

We call on governments and partners to join the fight to save millions of children's lives by providing proven, low-cost solutions, – said Mr.

Peterson.

UNICEF-supported non-rounded estimates on births and life expectancy by countries: [here](#)

Over the past two decades, the world has seen unprecedented progress in child survival, halving the number of children worldwide who die before their fifth birthday to 5.6 million in 2016. But despite these advances, there has been slower progress for newborns. Babies dying in the first month account for 46 per cent of all deaths among children under five.

Next month, UNICEF will launch 'Every Child Alive,' a global campaign to demand and deliver affordable, quality health care solutions for every mother and newborn. These include a steady supply of clean water and electricity at health facilities, the presence of a skilled health attendant during birth, disinfecting the umbilical cord, breastfeeding within the first hour after birth, and skin-to-skin contact between the mother and child.

"We are now entering the era when all the world's newborns should have the opportunity to see the 22nd century," added Mr. Peterson, but unfortunately, nearly half of the children born this year likely will not. "A child born in Sweden in January 2018 is most likely to live to 2100, while a child from Somalia would be unlikely to live beyond 2075," he lamented.

[DR Congo: UN chief calls for restraint amid reports security forces violently dispersed Kinshasa protests](#)

1 January 2018 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has called on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to exercise restraint amid reports of a violent crackdown by national security forces on demonstrations in the capital, Kinshasa, and a number of other cities.

In a [statement](#) issued late Sunday by his spokesperson, Mr. Guterres expressed concern about reports of the violent dispersion of protests by national security forces, resulting in the death of at least five people, the wounding of several others and the arrest of over 120 persons.

"The Secretary-General calls on the Government and national security forces to exercise restraint and to uphold the rights of the Congolese people to the freedom of speech and peaceful assembly," said the statement.

The Secretary-General went on to urge all Congolese political actors to remain fully committed to the 31 December 2016 political agreement,

which remains the only viable path to the holding of elections, the peaceful transfer of power and the consolidation of stability in the DRC.

That agreement facilitated by Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo (CENCO) mediators, and reached in Kinshasa on 31 December 2016 allowed President Joseph Kabila to stay in power beyond the end of his term and has stipulated that peaceful, credible and inclusive elections would be organized in DRC by the end of December 2017.

[UN chief issues 'red alert,' urges world to come together in 2018 to tackle pressing challenges](#)

31 December 2017 – In his message on the New Year, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres is calling for unity among the global community to tackle overwhelming challenges and defend values shared by all.

“On New Year’s Day 2018, I am not issuing an appeal. I am issuing an alert a [red alert](#) for our world,” said the Secretary-General.

“As we begin 2018, I call for unity. [...] We can settle conflicts, overcome hatred and defend shared values. But we can only do that together,” he expressed.

Recalling that last year he urged that 2017 be a year for peace, the UN chief noted that unfortunately in fundamental ways, the world went in reverse.

Perils, including deepening conflicts and new dangers emerged, and global concerns over nuclear weapons reached the highest since the Cold War, he added.

At the same time, impacts of climate change worsened at an alarming rate, inequalities grew and there were horrific violations of human rights.

“Nationalism and xenophobia are on the rise,” said Mr. Guterres.

Underscoring his belief that the world can be made more safe and secure, conflicts can be settled, hatred can be overcome and shared values defended, he emphasized that unity is indispensable to achieving these goals.

“Unity is the path. Our future depends on it,” said the Secretary-General, urging leaders everywhere to resolve in the New Year to:

“Narrow the gaps. Bridge the divides. Rebuild trust by bringing people

together around common goals.”

VIDEO: Message by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on the occasion of the 2018 New Year.

[After 1,000 days of conflict, Yemen sliding 'from crisis into deepening catastrophe,' UN agencies warn](#)

30 December 2017 – As the conflict in Yemen passes the grim 1,000-day milestone, the United Nations is warning that if humanitarian workers cannot gain greater access and the violence does not subside, the cost in lives will be incalculable.

'As violence has escalated in recent days, children and families are yet again being killed in attacks and bombardments,' the heads of key UN agencies said Friday in a [joint statement](#), as they once again appeal to parties to the conflict to immediately allow full humanitarian access in Yemen and to stop the fighting.

World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) Executive Director David Beasley, and UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) Executive Director Anthony Lake, painted a dire picture of what 1,000 days of brutal violence in Yemen has wrought saying the fighting has driven families from their homes, destroyed hospitals and damaged schools.

'More than 1,000 days of children recruited to fight [...] 1,000 days of disease and death [and] of unimaginable human suffering,” they said, adding that the conflict has created the worst humanitarian crisis in the world – a crisis which has engulfed the entire country.

Some 75 per cent of Yemen's population is in need of humanitarian assistance, including 11.3 million children who cannot survive without it. At least 60 per cent of Yemenis are now food insecure and 16 million people do not have access to safe water and proper sanitation. Less than half of Yemen's health facilities are fully functional and medical staff has gone months without being paid their salaries.

'This horrific tally of the conflict's devastation reflects only what we know. In reality, the situation is likely to be worse. UN agencies do not have full humanitarian access to some of the hardest hit communities. In many, we cannot even assess their needs,” the UN leaders explained.

But this we do know: Yemen has passed the tipping point into a rapid decline from crisis to deepening catastrophe.

While acknowledging some progress in recent days with the first commercial fuel imports allowed into Hudaydah port, following recent commercial food imports, the agency chiefs said it is critical that these supplies are maintained, as restrictions on fuel imports have caused the price of diesel fuel to double, threatening access to safe water and sanitation, and urgent medical care.

Far too many hospitals are short of fuel for the generators that allow them to stay open. Water pumping stations serving over three million people are quickly running out of the fuel they need to operate, while the price of commercially trucked water has increased up to six-fold.

Safe water is now completely unaffordable for more than two thirds of Yemenis living in extreme poverty. All of this threatens to undermine efforts to contain the ongoing, deadly outbreaks of diphtheria, cholera and acute watery diarrhea, they warned.

We remain committed to helping the people of Yemen. We have reached nearly six million people with clean water, distributed 3.7 million litres of fuel to public hospitals, treated more than 167,000 children for severe acute malnutrition, they noted but warned: Yet worsening conditions on the ground threaten to overwhelm our capacity to respond.

Yemen's families should not have to withstand another day of war, let alone another 1,000, the UN leaders concluded.