

## Yemen: Amid spike in casualties, UN relief official says civilians bearing brunt of 'absurd war'

28 December 2017 – After separate airstrikes on a crowded market and a rural farm left nearly 70 people dead earlier this week in Yemen, the top United Nations humanitarian official in the country denounced the incidents and reminded the warring parties of their international legal obligations to spare civilian lives and infrastructure.

“These incidents prove the [complete disregard for human life](#) that all parties, including the Saudi-led Coalition, continue to show,” Jamie McGoldrick, the Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, stated Thursday.

Denouncing “this absurd war,” he said the conflict has only resulted in the destruction of the country and “the incommensurate suffering of its people, who are being punished as part of a futile military campaign by both sides.”

Initial reports from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) indicate that on 26 December, airstrikes on a crowded popular market in Al Hayma sub-district in Attazziah district, in Yemen’s war-ravaged central Taiz Governorate, resulted in at least 54 civilians killed, including eight children, and 32 others injured including six children.

During the past days, residential areas in Al Hayma villages, including a health unit occupied by internally displaced persons, have been subject to a full blockade by the *de facto* authorities and indiscriminate shelling that resulted in casualties among the residents and displacement of many families to safer areas.

Also on 26 December, an airstrike on a farm in Attohayta District, Al Hudaydah Governorate resulted in the killing of 14 people from the same family. These new victims are in addition to 84 civilian casualties reported in the last 10 days, including 41 people killed, and 43 people injured by airstrikes in several governorates throughout Yemen.

“I remind all parties to the conflict, including the Saudi-led Coalition, of their obligations under International Humanitarian Law to spare civilians and civilian infrastructure and to always distinguish between civilian and military objects,” said Mr. McGoldrick.

He noted that the Yemen conflict has hit the grim 1,000-day mark. Civilians have borne the brunt of the fighting, and “I once again remind all parties that it has no military solution. There can only be a political solution.”

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# Brutality against children 'cannot be the new normal' stresses UNICEF

28 December 2017 – The scale of attack on children in conflict zones throughout 2017 is “shocking” said the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), calling on all parties to conflict to abide by their obligations under international law and immediately end violations and attacks against children.

“Children are being targeted and exposed to attacks and brutal violence in their homes, schools and playgrounds,” said Manuel Fontaine, the Director of Emergency Programmes at UNICEF, in a news release Thursday.

“As these attacks continue year after year, we cannot become numb. Such brutality cannot be the new normal.”

According to UNICEF, children have become frontline targets, used as human shields, killed, maimed and recruited to fight in conflicts around the world.

Sexual violence, forced marriage, abduction and enslavement have become “standard tactics” in conflicts from Iraq, Syria and Yemen, to Nigeria, South Sudan and Myanmar, said the UN agency.

In addition to the physical trauma children have had to suffer, far too many children have been subjected to the psychosocial trauma in having to witness shocking and widespread violence.

Hundreds of thousands have been displaced and many children have died as a result of lack of health care, medicines or access to food and water, because these services and were damaged or destroyed in fighting.

In some contexts, children abducted by extremist groups experience abuse yet again upon release when they are detained by security forces, added UNICEF.

In the news release, the UN agency underscored the need of all parties to conflict to abide by their obligations under international law to immediately end violations against children and the targeting of civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals.

UNICEF also called on all States with influence over parties to conflict “to use that influence to protect children.”

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# Sustained cooperation vital to address Somalia's challenges, says UN envoy

27 December 2017 – In a year which saw millions of Somali civilians displaced by armed conflict and thousands more killed and wounded in violence, the United Nations envoy to the country has called for sustained cooperation to tackle a number of pressing challenges.

“No one should underestimate the many challenges ahead, and the serious issues that continue to retard and even threaten further progress,” said Michael Keating, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia.

“These include pervasive corruption, most obviously in politics, and powerbrokers’ willingness to use violence, or the threat of violence, against opponents,” he added.

Noting that the militants have retained the capacity to mount such devastating attacks, Mr. Keating also emphasized that the terrorist group thrives, among other things, on the absence of functional local government and on the many conflicts around the country.

## *Severe and growing humanitarian needs*

At the same time, there is “severe and growing” humanitarian needs across the Horn of Africa nation.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), food security needs are nearly double the five-year average due to limited rain, increased displacement, lack of access to basic services, and continuing insecurity and conflict.

“The number of people in [humanitarian] emergency [phase] have increased tenfold from 83,000 in January to 866,000 people in November 2017,” OCHA said in a humanitarian bulletin.

“Humanitarian Emergency” is a state in which the acute malnutrition rate has surpassed the “emergency threshold” of 15 per cent. In Somalia, the rate stands at 17.4 per cent.

Across the country, some 6.2 million are in need of humanitarian and protection assistance and more than half that number require urgent life-saving assistance. This year witnessed the displacement of a further one million Somalis, taking the total across the country to more than two million.

## *Prospects of humanitarian recovery in 2018 ‘grim’*

However, with forecasts for poor rains during the two main crop seasons and as well as a heightened risk of the La Niña weather phenomenon in early-mid

2018, the prospects for recovery next year look “grim,” said the UN relief wing.

Life-saving assistance will, therefore, remain an urgent priority, it said, noting the need to also address the underlying causes of recurring humanitarian crises.

“In line with the [New Way of Working](#) and building on efforts since 2012 to create household resilience, humanitarian and development partners are pursuing more sustainable mid- to longer-term investment in reducing risk and vulnerability,” said OCHA.

In the same vein, Mr. Keating, who also heads the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia ([UNSO](#)), underscored the need for greater cooperation to overcome the obstacles.

“Lessons can be drawn from 2017, both good and bad. A central one may be that when the most powerful actors cooperate, whether the Federal Government, Federal Member States, parliamentarians, clan elders, business or the international community, great progress can be made,” he said.

“When they do not cooperate, the risks are enormous.”

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## [World could see 1.8 billion tourists by 2030 – UN agency](#)

27 December 2017 – By 2030, there could be 1.8 billion tourists – just over one in five persons in the world – travelling around the globe, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has said.

Speaking with *UN News*, Taleb Rifai, the Secretary-General of UNWTO, highlighted the role of travel and tourism in impacting global developments and making the world a better place.

“It is bringing the world together in an incredibly impressive way: it is making the world smaller, more connected, more informed, and therefore... a more caring world,” he said.

At the same time, the global phenomenon has also brought about serious challenges, including pollution, waste, labour exploitation, prostitution and abuse of children, and looting of natural resources.

Given that all human activity has both advantages and disadvantages, it is up to people to ensure that the impacts from tourism are positive and contribute to sustainable development, Mr. Rifai noted.

“1.8 billion travellers by 2030 could be 1.8 billion opportunities or 1.8

billion disasters and it is all up to us [to choose].”

In recognition of the potential of the tourism industry, the General Assembly had [proclaimed 2017](#) as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development.

Listen to the full interview with the UNWTO Secretary-General below:

**AUDIO:** 1.8 billion tourists set to travel world by 2030

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## [UN chief commends peaceful vote in Liberia, dispatches Nigeria's Obasanjo](#)

27 December 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Wednesday welcomed the peaceful conduct of the second round of the presidential election in Liberia, and announced he is sending former Nigerian leader Olusegun Obasanjo to support the country in the first peaceful transfer of power from one democratically-elected leader to another in more than 70 years.

“The Secretary-General hopes that the will of the Liberian electorate will be respected and that a seamless transfer power will take place within constitutional timelines,” his spokesperson [said](#) in a statement.

Mr. Guterres has requested Mr. Obasanjo, who is a member of the Secretary-General’s High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation, to travel to the capital, Monrovia, from 28 to 30 December.

Liberians yesterday voted in a second round of elections, deciding between Vice-President Joseph Boakai and George Weah, a politician and former soccer star.

The first round of elections in the west African country was held in October. A runoff was originally scheduled for November, but was delayed due to allegations of voter irregularities by a third candidate.

Speaking at the UN General Assembly in September, outgoing President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf “the first woman elected as head of an African country” said that the polls would signal an “irreversible course” towards democracy in the country.

Ms. Sirleaf took office in 2006, ending a civil war that erupted under the leadership of her predecessor, Charles Taylor. This election would be the first time in more than 70 years that the country sees a peaceful transfer of power from one democratically-elected leader to another.

### ***High-level Advisory Board***

Mr. Obasanjo is one of 18 global leaders, senior officials and experts on the high-level board created earlier this year to advise the Secretary-General on mediation and back those efforts around the world.

The former President of Nigeria [was involved in mediation efforts](#) in Angola, Burundi, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa, among others.

The high-level board is part of the Secretary-General's pledge for the UN to embark on a "surge in diplomacy for peace."

The idea, according to Tarja Halonen, former President of Finland and also a high-level board member, is to prevent wars by "hybrid peace-building."

Ms. Halonen spoke to *UN News* during the board's first meeting last month.