

Strengthen measures to counter threats posed by returning foreign terrorist fighters, Security Council urges

21 December 2017 – “Gravely concerned” over risks posed by foreign terrorist fighters returning from conflict zones, the United Nations Security Council on Thursday called on Member States to strengthen their efforts to counter the threat through measures on border control, criminal justice, information-sharing and counter-extremism.

In a unanimously adopted resolution, the 15-member Council called on UN Member States to strengthen measures to prevent the transit of terrorists, including ensuring that identity documents were not forged, as well as employing evidence-based risk assessments, screening procedures, and the collection and analysis of travel data to identify individuals who posed a terrorist threat, in accordance with domestic and international law, without resorting to profiling based on discrimination.

The Council also called upon Member States to notify other countries of the travel, arrival, deportation or detention of individuals whom they had reasonable grounds to believe were terrorists as well as to take appropriate action in regards to suspected terrorists and their accompanying family members who entered their territories, including by considering appropriate prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration measures in compliance with domestic and international law.

While emphasizing that Member States were obliged to bring to justice anyone who participated in terrorist acts, the Council stressed the importance of assisting women or children associated with foreign terrorist fighters who might be victims of terrorism.

It also underlined the need for tailored prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies for family members that might have abetted terrorist acts in varied roles.

Further in the resolution, the Council welcomed measures being taken to strengthen travel security, including the approval of a new Global Aviation Security Plan by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and monitoring procedures, calling for continuous upgrading of such procedures in line with developing threats.

Outlining UN efforts to address returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters, the Council urged strengthened cooperation between all counter-terrorism bodies on the issue.

UN peacekeeping operations will keep aiming to reduce their environmental impact – Security Council

21 December 2017 – The Security Council on Thursday said that United Nations peacekeeping missions will continue to consider ways to reduce the environmental impact of their operations, in line with relevant UN resolutions and mindful of the goals set out in international accords on the environment, including the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change.

Through an agreed [press statement](#), the 15-member Council reaffirmed the basic principles of peacekeeping, while stressing that it remains cognizant of the possible environmental impact of the peacekeeping operations it mandates.

The Council underscored the importance that peacekeeping operations endeavor to minimize their impact on the sustainability of the ecosystems where they are deployed, based on sound consideration of the risks, benefits and costs.

Mindful of the goals set out by the international agreements on the environment, including the Paris Agreement, the members of the Security Council expressed willingness that UN peacekeeping missions, in full conformity with the established mandates, continue consideration for the reduction of their environmental impact.

The members of the Council underlined the importance to comprehensively address the environmental impact of peacekeeping operations, in close coordination with the relevant parties involved, including troop and police contributing countries, also through meetings of the Security Council's Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations and of the relevant bodies of the General Assembly.

In addition, the Council recognized that consideration for environmental management includes taking into account the impact of peacekeeping operations on the historical and cultural heritage in the areas of deployment and how segments of the population may be differently affected by environmental degradation.

The Council encouraged UN Member States to incorporate, as appropriate, environmental guidelines into their national training programmes for military and police personnel in preparation for deployment to UN peacekeeping operations.

Afghan parties must agree on 'convincing peace process' to end 40 years of conflict, says UN envoy

21 December 2017 – The United Nations envoy for Afghanistan on Thursday highlighted the need for the country to achieve a political settlement with the armed opposition, pointing to an upcoming February meeting between the parties as an opportunity not to be missed.

“We must use the upcoming winter months, when conflict levels tend to decrease, to advance on this issue before the cycle of violence is renewed next spring,” Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, [told](#) the Security Council.

“I once again call on the Taliban to express a clear willingness to begin negotiations towards a political settlement, and to start the initial dialogue,” he said.

In that context, he highlighted the significance of the ‘Kabul Process’ meeting, to be held on 1 February 2018, where the Government is expected to present a strategic concept for reaching the settlement, as an opportunity that must not be missed.

The so called Kabul Process spells out a transition to greater Afghan responsibility and ownership, in both security and civilian areas.

Mr. Yamamoto, also the head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)), informed the 15-member Council of the holding of the parliamentary elections next year, followed by presidential elections in April 2019.

Timely, credible and accepted elections, he elaborated, are vital to maintain constitutional order and keep faith in the representative system of Government.

Above all, the security and women’s political participation are vitally important the three key factors, added the UN envoy.

Also in the briefing, Mr. Yamamoto spoke of the country’s regional relationships and expressed concern over increased military activities between Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan, and called on the two countries to find ways to collaborate more effectively to address the issues that affect the populations of both countries.

In closing, the senior UN official said that the Organization remains committed to advancing peace and prosperity in the country.

“I truly hope that empathy for the ongoing suffering of millions of Afghans will move us all to make the efforts necessary to achieve peace and realize the important opportunities that lie beyond a much needed peace agreement,”

he said.

[Aid has not reached 'a single soul' in Syria's besieged areas in December, says UN advisor](#)

21 December 2017 – The list of people requiring life-saving medical help in Syria is getting shorter not because they were evacuated, but because they died, a senior United Nations advisor warned Thursday.

“In many months we reached only 10 or maximum 20 per cent of people in besieged areas. In December, we haven't reached a single soul,” Jan Egeland, Special Advisor to the UN Special Envoy, told journalists in Geneva after meeting with countries that have influence on the warring parties inside Syria, where war has raged for nearly seven years.

Mr. Egeland said that inside “what is left of Syria,” nearly 14 million people need humanitarian assistance and well over half of them get help every month. Things are much more complicated for the 3.4 million people surviving in besieged areas and so-called “hard-to-reach” places, including Eastern Ghouta, Foah, Kafraya and Yarmuk.

The international humanitarian task force has helped “dozens and dozens” of aid convoys reach previously inaccessible areas, but many other places still remain out of bounds, he said, calling for improved aid access to the country's most vulnerable communities in 2018.

Mr. Egeland said although the number of people living in these front-line areas has fallen by nearly a half since 2016, humanitarian access has not improved.



Jan Egeland, Special Advisor to the Special Envoy for Syria at a press conference. UN Photo/ Jean Marc Ferré

He expressed hope that upcoming ceasefire talks in Astana with Russia, Turkey and Iran, would improve access for aid workers, before calling for a political solution to the “quagmire” that Syria has become.

Just outside Damascus, conditions remain dire in Eastern Ghouta, an opposition-held area where 400,000 people are still under siege, amid ongoing mortar attacks by rebels into the Syrian capital.

Food is now only available “to the most affluent,” Mr. Egeland said, warning

that the list of people requiring life-saving medical help is getting shorter all the time – “not because we are evacuating them, but because they are dying.”

He said these include a nine-month old infant born in Eastern Ghouta with a cleft-palate who died a week ago from severe acute malnutrition.

[Conflict casts shadow on fight to end hunger in some regions – UN agriculture agency](#)

21 December 2017 – Conflict and protracted crises in a handful of countries in the Near East and North Africa are hindering efforts to eradicate hunger in the region by 2030, according to a United Nations report published Thursday.

“When countries in the region are suffering from an escalation of conflicts, the aim to tackle the region’s deepest concerns of malnutrition, water scarcity and climate change becomes more challenging but at the same time [more urgent](#),” said Abdessalam Ould Ahmed, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)), at the report’s launch in Cairo, Egypt.

The 2017 edition of the Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) highlights in particular how an ongoing intensification of violence is opening a wide “hunger gap” between countries being affected by conflicts and those that are not.

Mr. Ould Ahmed pointed to “the growing need to implement long-term and comprehensive policies and practices to achieve zero hunger by 2030,” adding that that “only through improved cooperation and solidarity will the region be able to end conflicts and violence and get back to development.”

NENA countries include, Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

In the region’s countries directly impacted by conflict, 27.2 per cent of all people were chronically hungry, or undernourished, during the 2014-16 period. That’s six times higher than the share of the population that was undernourished in countries not affected by strife – 4.6 per cent.

Meanwhile, “severe food insecurity,” another metric used by FAO to measure hunger, in conflict-affected countries is now double that in non-conflict countries.

In Syria, violence has provoked a 67 per cent reduction in the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and severely undermined food security. About 70 to 80 per cent of Syrians now need humanitarian assistance, while 50 per cent require food assistance.

In Iraq, where violence has led to for 58 per cent decline in GDP, 30 per cent of the population needs humanitarian assistance while nine per cent requires food assistance.

Yemen is also being wracked by conflict, leading to a situation in which 70 to 80 per cent of the population are in need humanitarian assistance and 50 per cent require food assistance.

Libya is another hot spot where conflict is undermining food security; there, six per cent of the population are in need of food assistance, according to the report.