

# Security Council renews Syrian cross-border relief convoys amid ongoing challenges for aid workers

19 December 2017 – The Security Council today renewed the authorization for United Nations relief agencies and their partners to use routes across conflict lines and border crossings to deliver lifesaving assistance to millions in north-west and southern Syria through Turkey and Jordan.

In a resolution adopted by a recorded vote of 12 in favour and three abstentions (Bolivia, China and Russia), the 15-member Council called on Syrian authorities “to expeditiously respond to all requests for cross-line deliveries submitted by the UN and its implementing partners and to give such requests positive consideration.”

Also in the resolution, the Council underscored the need for a political solution to the conflict in Syria and urged all concerned stakeholders to facilitate a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition to end the conflict.

“The Syrian people will decide the future of Syria,” stressed the Council.

The use of cross-line routes was [first authorized](#) by the Council in July 2014 through a resolution that also tasked the UN with monitoring the loading of the aid consignments as well as their openings, such as by customs officials, to confirm the humanitarian nature of these relief consignments.

The renewal today authorizes the cross-border aid deliveries as well as the monitoring of consignments until 10 January 2019.

## ***Aid workers face overwhelming access challenges***

Also today, Mark Lowcock, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator told the Council that the situation for close to 400,000 Syrians trapped in in eastern Ghouta, an area designated as a “de-escalation zone,” remains unbearable with intensive air and ground-based strikes reported daily – except for a two-day pause – since mid-November.



Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, briefs the Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East



Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy for Syria, briefs the Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East

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The situation is particularly dire for more than 500 individuals in need of urgent medical evacuation, of whom over 420 are women, children and the elderly.

“There have already been 16 civilian deaths among those waiting for permission to leave eastern Ghouta for medical reason [...] all that is needed is the green light from the Syrian authorities for these people to go to hospitals just a few miles outside of eastern Ghouta,” said Mr. Lowcock.

In his briefing, the top UN relief official also outlined the continuing challenges humanitarians face in delivering vital assistance to the millions in need across the war-torn country, including in places which have not seen any relief supplies in months.

***No real progress from the Geneva talks, UN Special Envoy says***

Also during the same meeting, the UN Special Envoy for Syria told Council members the latest round of [intra-Syrian talks](#) between the Government and opposition, which wrapped up last week in Geneva, failed to achieve any real progress.

“The opportunity to begin a real discussion or negotiation was not seized,” said Staffan De Mistura.

“A golden opportunity was missed for many reasons: psychological, because we are at the end of the year; political, because we are at the end, we want to believe, of a major military operation; and from a human point of view because most Syrians have been asking and waiting for this in order to see the situation changing for them,” he said.

Speaking to the press last Thursday, Mr. De Mistura had expressed disappointment at the Syrian Government’s lack of engagement on any issue other than counter-terrorism, before adding that he intended to call a new round of talks in January.

SEE ALSO: [‘Golden opportunity’ missed for progress on intra-Syrian talks, says UN envoy](#)

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**[Ukraine: UN agencies stepping up aid to most vulnerable as temperatures](#)**

# plummet

19 December 2017 – As temperatures plummet across Ukraine, the United Nations refugee and migration agencies said Tuesday that they are stepping up assistance to the most vulnerable people affected by the conflict in the country's east.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) is increasing distributions of aid to the displaced.

[“Winter brings additional hardship](#) to the population,” UNHCR spokesperson Andrej Mahecic said at a press briefing in Geneva, noting that temperatures can plummet to minus 10 degrees Celsius, or 14 Fahrenheit, in December and minus 20 C, or minus 4 F, in January.

“Most live in poorly insulated homes and a smaller number in collective centers, and are unable to cover the rising utility costs,” he said.

The aid comprises clothes, warm jackets and boots, coal for heating and cash grants to cover winter expenses. Recipients include some 15,300 people, who are mainly single parents, elderly, families with many children, and people with disabilities or chronic illnesses.

Most have been displaced from their homes in eastern Ukraine by the conflict in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, which is now well into its fourth year. Near the line of contact between the Government and the non-Government controlled areas, houses are frequently damaged by shelling.

In some villages, gas pipes have been damaged by shelling and, as a result, coal and firewood represent the sole means of heating homes. UNHCR staff report that people are often forced to make a choice between buying food and medicines, or fuel to heat their dwellings.

In the non-Government controlled areas, where 40 per cent of the households need heating fuel and nearly 90 per cent need winter clothes and insulation, UNHCR is providing 9,000 tonnes of coal to 3,000 households and more than 7,500 pieces of winter clothing.

In Government-controlled areas, UNHCR provides unconditional cash grants to 1,000 households, and winter jackets to more than 4,700 children.

## ***Dire humanitarian situation on Europe's doorstep***

For its part, the UN International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) has started distributing coal to people in need.

“Some 3.4 million men, women and children are locked in a dire humanitarian situation right on [Europe's doorstep](#),” said Thomas Weiss, IOM Ukraine Chief of Mission, during his recent visit to the field.

About 3,800 vulnerable low-income households in non-government-controlled

areas of Donetsk will each receive three tons of high quality anthracite coal, which should be sufficient to cover their heating needs for the entire winter.

The planned assistance in these areas also includes the rehabilitation of the heating systems in up to 20 social and medical institutions, as well as the distribution of 200 cast-iron stoves to families located in least accessible areas, where wood is the only available heating fuel.

In parallel, IOM will in a few weeks transfer a first round of multipurpose cash to 4,000 vulnerable individuals in the government-controlled area, living close to the contact line in both Luhansk and Donetsk regions.

Families told IOM that they used 31 per cent of the funds they received to cover their medical expenses, and spent 23 per cent of the funds on fuel, winter clothing, as well as paying their bills for heating.

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## [UN agencies scale up work in Bangladesh as Rohingya refugee crisis enters fourth month](#)

19 December 2017 – As the Rohingya refugee emergency in Bangladesh enters its fourth month, United Nations agencies are scaling up their relief work to respond to a range of issues, including outbreak of diphtheria, lack of access to sanitation and sexual violence.

The World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) has released \$1.5 million from its [contingency fund](#) to deploy additional staff and resources to combat a rapidly spreading outbreak of diphtheria among Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar. The disease has killed 21, with more than 1,500 probable cases reported.

“The Rohingya refugees are an extremely vulnerable population, with low routine vaccination coverage,” said Roderico Ofrin, Regional Emergency Director, WHO South-East Asia Regional Office. “The funds released will be crucial to sustaining our efforts until we receive more support from donors for this response.”

For 2018, the health sector will request additional funding to help 1.2 million people living in refugee camps and temporary settlements.

Meanwhile, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), people are continuing to arrive in Bangladesh from Myanmar.

However, the agency reports that the pace of the influx has now slowed, with estimated average arrival rates having dropped from 745 per day in November

to 100 per day so far this month.

In a UNHCR-supported [quick assessment survey](#), refugees expressed numerous worries, including feeling unsafe at night given weak shelters and a lack of lighting, and concerns about general safety.

Access to sanitation is still insufficient, leading sometimes to long queues for latrines. Women and girls are anxious about the shortage of private bathing spaces, forcing some to wash outside their shelters in the early morning hours.

The survey also found that some children have to walk longer distances to fetch water and bring firewood. Parents and children want access to education and more safe places for children to play.

Health services are also a wide concern. Increased mental health support for those who have witnessed the killings or suffered torture or rape remains crucially needed.

Refugees cite continued feelings of depression and rejection, especially among the elderly and disabled. Many young people are worried about their uncertain future.

Some refugees said that irregular food distributions and long queues had meant going hungry for days.

Drawing upon the findings of this latest assessment, UNHCR will further refine and reinforce its protection and assistance.

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## [UN rights chief calls for independent probe into Israeli forces 'shocking' shooting of amputee](#)

19 December 2017 – Shocked at the “incomprehensible” killing of a wheelchair-bound amputee protester by Israeli security forces, the top United Nations human rights official has called on the country to open an independent and impartial investigation into the incident.

“International human rights law strictly regulates the use of force in the context of protests and demonstrations. The lethal use of firearms should only be employed as the last resort, when strictly unavoidable, in order to protect life,” Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, [said](#) on Tuesday.

“However, as far as we can see, there is nothing whatsoever to suggest that

Ibrahim Abu Thurayeh [the protester] was posing an imminent threat of death or serious injury when he was killed," he added, stressing: "Given his severe disability, which must have been clearly visible to those who shot him, his killing is incomprehensible – a truly shocking and wanton act."

According to the news release, Ibrahim Nayef Ibrahim Abu Thurayeh, a 29-year-old man from Gaza, who reportedly had both legs amputated after an Israeli attack on Gaza in 2008, was among hundreds of Palestinians marching across farmland towards a fence following Friday prayers on 15 December to protest against the United States' decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

He appears to have been killed by a bullet to the head when he was approximately 20 meters from the fence, it added.

Given his severe disability, which must have been clearly visible to those who shot him, his killing is incomprehensible – a truly shocking and wanton act  
High Commissioner Zeid

Since President Donald Trump's 6 December statement concerning the status of Jerusalem, protests have been held throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in occupied Gaza. The response by the Israeli security forces has resulted in five people being killed, hundreds injured and large-scale arrests of Palestinians, noted OHCHR.

The biggest flashpoint has been in Gaza, where three people have been killed as protesters burned tires, threw stones, sang songs and waved flags along the fence. Israeli security forces have responded with firearms, including live-ammunition, to disperse the protesters.

According to the UN rights office, the use of live ammunition has resulted in over 220 people being injured in Gaza, including 95 on Friday alone, in addition to tens of others who sustained injuries from tear gas or rubber bullets, read the news release.

It also noted reports that suggest a preliminary internal Israeli army investigation has taken place.

"Nevertheless, the High Commissioner called on Israel to immediately open an independent and impartial investigation into this incident, and into all others that have resulted in injury or death, with a view to holding the perpetrators accountable for any crimes committed," it read.

Mr. Zeid also "unequivocally condemned" all attacks against civilians, including the indiscriminate shelling of Israeli civilian areas by armed Palestinian groups operating out of Gaza.

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# Over 130 civilians killed in 11 days in airstrikes in Yemen, reports UN rights office

19 December 2017 – Voicing deep concern over the surge in civilian casualties in Yemen in airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition, following the killing of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh earlier this month, the United Nations rights office has urged all parties to the conflict to ensure that civilians are protected.

According to Rupert Colville, the spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 136 civilians and non-combatants – including women and children – have been killed and another 87 injured in airstrikes in Sana'a, Sa'ada, Al Hudaydah and Taizz governorates in the period from 6 to 16 December.

"We urge all parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, including their obligation to respect the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution," Mr. Colville told the press at a regular [media briefing](#) in Geneva Tuesday.

"They should take all feasible precautions to avoid, and in any event to minimise, the impact of violence on civilians," he stressed.

Among the incidents verified by OHCHR, four civilians were killed and four injured on 9 December when coalition airstrikes hit the official Yemen TV channel, Qanat Al Yemen, which has been under the Houthis control since September 2014.

[The parties to the conflict] should take all feasible precautions to avoid, and in any event to minimise, the impact of violence on civilians  
OHCHR spokesperson Rupert Colville

At least another seven civilians were killed when airstrikes struck a hospital in Al Hudaydah on 10 December. Some Houthi military vehicles were reported to be next to the hospital compound at the time of the airstrikes.

On 13 December, coalition airstrikes struck a prison building and a prison yard at a military police compound in the Shaub district of Sana'a, killing at least 45 people and injuring 53. All victims were reported to be detainees and said to belong to resistance forces loyal to President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi.

The airstrikes also claimed the lives of a number of children.

On 16 December, nine children and one woman – returning home from a wedding party – were killed in coalition airstrikes in Marib governorate

and another 14 children died when airstrikes hit a farmhouse in Al Hudaydah governorate.

***OHCHR 'greatly concerned' over reported violations by Houthis***

Also at the briefing, the OHCHR spokesperson expressed concern over reported recent violations by Houthis against members of former President Saleh's political party, the General People's Congress (GPC) including attacks and arbitrary detentions.

There have also been unconfirmed reports of summary killings and detention of people affiliated to the GPC, although verification of these reports by our Office has been difficult as witnesses fear possible repercussion from the Houthis, said Mr. Colville.

Since the eruption of violence in Yemen in March 2015 and as of 14 December, the UN rights office has documented total of 5558 civilians killed and 9,065 injured.