

Children not a 'bargaining chip' in tug of war between Syrian parties – UN advisor

7 December 2017 – The United Nations advisor for Syria said Thursday that obstacles stopping humanitarians from delivering aid and carrying out medical evacuations in besieged parts of the war-ravaged country are not being lifted, and “children are dying” as a result.

“We need help from the parties on the ground, by the Government, by all of those nations who have influence and they are not helping us as they should,” Jan Egeland, the UN Senior Advisor for Syria, told reporters in Geneva after a meeting of the Humanitarian Taskforce on the country.

The “epicentre” of the suffering, he said, is eastern Ghouta, where some 400,000 are besieged, cut off from aid and medical help.

“Six months ago a very detailed plan was delivered to the Government for needy cases of evacuation, on medical grounds. Since then, names have been added regularly and [...] we now have a revised list of 494 names,” explained Mr. Egeland.

Twelve among them have died waiting for “a half an hour drive to hospitals in Damascus and elsewhere,” he stated, noting that relief workers and aid convoys remain stalled.

“Why are we not rolling? Because of lack of facilitation letters from the Government,” he said.

Assistance to other Syrian towns and cities, including Foua and Kefraya – which are besieged by armed opposition groups – and Yarmouk, besieged by many groups, including forces loyal to the Government, also remain stalled due to disputes among the parties – on what the UN adviser referred to as – “simultaneous exchange of convoys.”

I would like to say that civilians, children, no one can be a bargaining chip in some kind of tug of war, where many things are negotiated at the same time Jan Egeland, UN Senior Advisor for Syria

“I would like to say that civilians, children, no one can be a bargaining chip in some kind of tug of war, where many things are negotiated at the same time. These have a right to be evacuated and we have an obligation to evacuate them,” he said, adding:

“So, I’d say, I have failed, I feel we have not been able to fix it, it is very, very heart breaking to get photos every day from children who are increasingly malnourished and who are increasingly dying and not being able

to help them.”

Government delegation to return to Geneva talks on 10 December – UN mediator

At the same press briefing, Staffan de Mistura, the UN Special Envoy for Syria announced that the Government delegation – currently on a recess – is expected to return to Geneva for the [intra-Syrian talks](#) on Sunday and that work has continued with the opposition delegation.

“We shall assess the behaviour on both sides, Government and opposition in Geneva, and based on that we will then decide how this [...] can be a building up or not, or a sabotage of [the Geneva process],” he said.

“If that is the case, we will draw our own conclusions,” added the UN negotiator, noting that any type of new initiative as an opportunity of supporting the Geneva process, building on the process – and coming back to the process.

“That is the position of the [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres,” he said.

Ukraine: UN and partners seek \$187 million amid humanitarian crisis that is ‘worse than it’s ever been’

7 December 2017 – The humanitarian situation in war-torn eastern Ukraine is worse than ever, and people are at breaking point, the senior-most United Nations aid official in the country said on Thursday, as he launched a response plan.

“From my perspective, the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine is worse than it’s ever been since the onset of conflict in 2014,” said Neal Walker, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Ukraine, in Geneva.

He urged UN Member States to support the country’s 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan ([HRP](#)), which calls for \$187 million to help 2.3 million people in the country’s east.

“Today, I call on the Member States to show their solidarity by supporting this important appeal,” said Mr. Walker, stressing that “lasting peace is the only humanitarian solution for millions of people affected.”

Amid a spike in needs and ongoing clashes in the east between government forces and separatists, Mr. Walker noted Ukraine as being among “the most forgotten” conflict.

Entering its fourth year, many of the affected people have exhausted their

savings and ability to cope, and are now forced to choose between food, medicine, shelter or their children's education. Millions risk daily shelling, intensive fighting and other hostilities.

At the same time, through only five operational checkpoints along a 457-kilometre 'contact line,' up to one million people cross every month to access basic services, social benefits and maintain family networks.

"The people of eastern Ukraine continue to [pay the highest price for the conflict](#)," maintained Mr. Walker.

Of the 4.4 million affected people, some 3.4 million require humanitarian assistance and protection – 2.3 of whom are considered to be the most vulnerable, including the elderly, women and children.

"While Ukraine may no longer be front page news, millions of men, women and children urgently require our help," he underscored.

The HRP outlines the key humanitarian relief and protection activities required by 32 international and 16 national organisations in 2018, including throughout the harsh winter months.

[DR Congo: Hunger crisis, scarce funds could push Kasais to brink of catastrophe, UN agency warns](#)

7 December 2017 – An acute hunger emergency ravaging Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)'s strife-torn Greater Kasai region could transform into a long-term disaster if additional resources are not made available urgently, the United Nations food relief agency warned Thursday.

"[Without immediate donor support, many – particularly women and children – will die](#)," said Claude Jibidar, the head of the UN World Food Programme (WFP) operations in the DRC.

The eruption of violence in what used to be a poor but peaceful region has claimed countless lives and forced nearly 1.4 million people from their homes.

The crisis has also resulted in traditionally high malnutrition rates to skyrocket and according to estimates, 3.2 million people are "desperately" short of food, the UN agency said.

"A lull in fighting has allowed more staff to be deployed [and] aid workers have fanned out into the Kasai countryside. [We have] co-ordinated multi-

agency logistics and humanitarian flights,” it added.

WFP has been working against the clock to help ever more people. Its efforts have helped a population that is growing rapidly by the day – from 42,000 people assisted in September to 115,000 in October and 225,000 in November.

However, money is quickly running and WFP plans to feed almost half a million people in December seem impossible as its resources are so depleted that only half-rations can be distributed.

At the same time, donor assistance is extremely scarce.

Hunger not only puts lives at risk: it is forcing people into prostitution and increasing the risk of sexual violence, stressed Mr. Jibidar, calling on Government partners to do all in their power to “spare Kasai from the kind of decades-long humanitarian catastrophe that has plagued other DRC regions.”

[UN health agency launches first global monitoring system for dementia](#)

7 December 2017 – The United Nations health agency on Thursday launched the first global monitoring system for dementia, which is expected to affect 152 million people worldwide by 2050 – triple the current 50 million – amid the aging of the global population.

Dementia includes Alzheimer’s disease and other types of memory loss and cognitive disabilities.

“Nearly 10 million people [develop dementia](#) each year, six million of them in low- and middle-income countries,” said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), in a news release.

“The suffering that results is enormous. This is an alarm call: we must pay greater attention to this growing challenge and ensure that all people living with dementia, wherever they live, get the care that they need,” he added.

The [Global Dementia Observatory](#), a web-based platform, launched by WHO, can track progress on the provision of services for people with dementia and for those who care for them, both within countries and globally.

It will also monitor the presence of national policy and plans, risk reduction measures and infrastructure for providing care and treatment.

“This is the first global monitoring system for dementia that includes such a comprehensive range of data,” said Tarun Dua of WHO’s Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse. “The system will not only enable us to track progress, but just as importantly, to identify areas where future efforts are

most needed.”

WHO says the annual global cost of dementia is estimated at \$818 billion, equivalent to more than one per cent of global gross domestic product. The total cost includes direct medical costs, social care and loss of income of caregivers.

By 2030, the cost is expected to more than double, to \$2 trillion, a cost that could undermine social and economic development and overwhelm health and social services, including long-term care systems.

To date, WHO has collected data from 21 countries. By the end of 2018, it is expected that 50 countries will be contributing data.

Of the countries reporting data so far, 81 per cent have carried out a dementia awareness or risk reduction campaign, 71 per cent have a plan for dementia, 71 per cent provide support and training for caregivers and 66 per cent have a dementia-friendly initiative.

All of these activities are recommended by WHO in the Global action plan on the public health response to dementia 2017-2025.

The Plan provides a comprehensive blueprint for action that can be taken by policy-makers, health- and social-care providers, civil society organizations and people with dementia and their caregivers.

Global cooperation vital to maximize benefits of migration, says UN envoy

7 December 2017 – Commitment and cooperation from the global community is critical to maximize the benefits of migration and to overcome its challenges, said a senior United Nations official at the conclusion of a stocktaking meeting on the Global Compact on international migration.

While there are challenges, including changing demographics, stresses in the environment, poverty and conflict, human mobility offers immense benefits, such as the promise of more sustainable development, more attuned to international labour market needs and improved working standards, highlighted Louise Arbour, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for International Migration.

“We stand today tasked with the mandate to weave these challenges and opportunities into a global effort to enhance State cooperation in the management of migration,” she said Wednesday at the end of a [three-day meeting](#) in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, that reviewed and analysed the data and recommendations gathered during the [consultation phase](#).

In her remarks, Ms. Arbour reminded the meeting of the tragedy of large mixed flows of people on the move and how to deal with those who are ineligible for international refugee protection yet for whom humanitarian assistance and longer-term solutions are no less urgent.

She also expressed the determination of the UN system to support all Member States in the implementation of the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#).

The next step in this process towards the Global Compact is the Secretary-General's report on migration, expected to be released before mid-January 2018, followed by [intergovernmental negotiations](#) (expected to begin in February and conclude in July).

The Global Compact will be presented for adoption at an intergovernmental conference on international migration that will be held in Morocco at the end of 2018.

Also speaking at the closing of the meeting, Miroslav Lajčák, the President of the General Assembly, spoke of the results achieved so far and added that tough negotiations lay ahead.

The path forward, Mr. Lajčák suggested, is to focus on the strong common positions, the first of which is the acknowledgment that the current response to international migration is not sustainable and this is a global phenomenon that needs an international response.

The UN is the best and, in fact, the only forum in which this response can be formulated, Mr. Lajčák said, noting that this does not mean a diminution of State sovereignty, stating Member States will determine their own migration policies.

The meeting in Puerto Vallarta was co-chaired by Juan José Gómez Camacho, the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the UN, and Jürg Lauber, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the UN, who serve as the co-facilitators of the Global Compact process.