

UN agencies rush in medical supplies for thousands wounded in Iran-Iraq earthquake

17 November 2017 – United Nations agencies have delivered medical supplies to the areas of Iran and Iraq struck by a devastating earthquake, and are urging vigilance against the possible outbreaks of infectious and waterborne diseases.

The World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) has airlifted trauma kits and medical supplies to Iran to support treatment for thousands of people injured as a result of the 12 November quake.

Additional trauma kits are available in WHO's emergency logistical centre in Dubai and will be delivered as needed to health facilities reporting [shortages](#), said Michel Thieren, WHO Regional Emergency Director.

While there is no direct link between earthquakes and disease outbreaks, close monitoring for cases of infectious diseases, especially waterborne diseases, is also required, he added.

The supplies, enough to provide surgical care for up to 4,000 trauma patients, were transported from WHO's emergency logistical centre in Dubai to Kermanshah province in western Iran on Thursday. They were immediately delivered to hospitals and other health facilities receiving the injured.

Almost 9,400 people in Iran were injured as a result of the earthquake, including more than 1,000 people hospitalized in Kermanshah province with serious injuries, and 340 more who were transferred to hospitals in neighbouring provinces, including Tehran.

The two cities of Sar Pol Zahab and Ghasr Shirin in Kermanshah province, with a total population of almost 115,000 people, are reported to have suffered considerable damage, with almost 80 per cent of infrastructure destroyed. One main hospital in the province was forced to close, and 49 more health facilities were damaged, but remain open.

In Iraq, WHO's country office deployed a medical team and three ambulances, and delivered four tents and emergency lifesaving supplies sufficient for 200 surgical operations, to hospitals in Sulaimaniyah governorate receiving critical cases.

The earthquake was felt in the major cities of Sulaimaniyah, Halabja, Erbil and Duhok, with a total of eight fatalities and 525 people injured. Darbandikhan in northern Sulaimaniyah was most affected, with damages to Darbandikhan hospital and Sharazoor maternity hospital.

WHO continues to work closely with national health authorities in Iran and

Iraq to monitor the health impact of the earthquake and respond to urgent needs.

Earlier in the week, a Mobile Medical Team from the UN International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) in Iraq [arrived](#) in Kani Bardina village, Warmawa district, to provide medical assistance to families, following the earthquake.

Approximately half of the 40 homes in Kani Bardina village were damaged or destroyed in the earthquake, according to IOM.

The IOM Mobile Medical Team is providing assistance in response to a request from the Joint Crisis Coordination Centre of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq, for medical support in the area to assist those who were injured in the earthquake. The team is receiving guidance from local health authorities.

The IOM Mobile Medical Team visited Halabja Hospital, which during the earthquake sustained damage to the ceiling, floor, and walls, with blocks falling onto empty hospital beds.

The hospital's director Dr. Ranj Zangana explained that they continued to provide services for visiting patients, but those who needed longer-term care were transferred or referred to Sulaymaniyah hospital.

[UN rights chief voices concern about Cambodia election after opposition ban](#)

17 November 2017 – The United Nations human rights chief voiced grave concerns Friday about the conduct of credible, free and fair elections in Cambodia next year following the decision by the Supreme Court to dissolve the main opposition party.

“An [effective multi-party democracy](#) requires an opposition that can operate freely without intimidation and threats and the same goes for a credible, free and fair election,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein in a news release.

The court dissolved the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), the main opposition party, on Thursday after the Ministry of Interior complained that the opposition was plotting a so-called colour revolution against the Government. A total of 118 CNRP members were banned from political activity for five years.

“People need to be able to debate and discuss freely the political affairs of their country, and the decision to dissolve the CNRP has deprived

over three million voters of their representation,” Mr. Zeid said.

The party's dissolution follows the arrest on 3 September of CNRP president Kem Sokha on charges of 'treason' related to comments made in 2013 about his grassroots political strategy to challenge the current Government.

“The use of law against the CNRP and its members is a smokescreen – it is the rule by law, and not the rule of law. The accusations against the CNRP and its members were vague, as were the legal provisions supporting the complaint to dissolve it,” Mr. Zeid said, adding the dissolution of the CNRP was based on alleged criminal acts by Kem Sokha which had not been proved in a court of law.

Mr. Zeid said the party's dissolution and the ban on its members was all the more worrying, given other measures by the Government in recent months, including closure and suspension of civil society groups as well several media companies. It has also been targeting individual journalists and members of non-governmental organizations.

“An essential component of all democracies is a vibrant civil society, including NGOs and press that may sometimes be critical of the Government,” said Mr. Zeid. “Imposing limits on civil society and shrinking their space serves only to stymie the creativity, innovation and ingenuity necessary for Cambodia to continue to develop, and to maintain peace.”

Similarly, he stressed, “a free press is essential to ensure that the public is properly informed of political and other issues so that people can be responsible and engaged actors.”

[Security Council again fails to extend panel investigating use of chemical weapons in Syria](#)

16 November 2017 – Two draft resolutions – one sponsored by the United States and another led by Russia – were defeated in the United Nations Security Council Thursday, blocking renewal of the international inquiry into chemical weapons attacks in Syria.

With a 'no' vote from Russia, as well as a negative vote from Bolivia, and abstentions by China and Egypt, the Council failed to adopt the US text that would have renewed the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the UN, which is set to expire on 17 November.

A negative vote or veto from one of the Council's five permanent members (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and the United States) means a resolution cannot be adopted. This marks the 10th time Russia has moved to block Council action on Syria since the conflict broke out six years ago.

Ahead of today's action on the US-led text, a procedural vote was called by Russia on the sequence of voting on its own draft. The Russian text was also defeated.

In late October, ahead of the release of the Joint Mechanism's final report, the Security Council [failed to adopt](#) a similar measure due to a negative vote from Russia.

The JIM was [established unanimously](#) in 2015 to identify to the greatest extent feasible individuals, entities, groups or Governments perpetrating, organizing, sponsoring or otherwise involved in the use of chemicals as weapons in Syria.

In a [briefing just last week](#), Edmond Mulet, Head of the Mechanism told the Council that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) was responsible for using sulfur mustard in a September 2016 attack in Umm Hawsh and that the Syrian Government was accountable for the release of sarin in an April 2017 attack in Khan Shaykhun.

There has been sufficient evidence of a credible and reliable nature to make [these] findings, he said of the Mechanism's [report](#), which was released on 26 October.

Mr. Mulet stressed that despite the challenges of investigating complex cases during an armed conflict, the Mechanism has taken great care to ensure that its methodology and findings were technically and scientifically sound.

Find out more about Syria and the OPCW [here](#)

[UN envoy urges greater support for Rohingya victims of sexual violence](#)

16 November 2017 – Following a visit to Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, where hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar have settled in makeshift camps, a United Nations envoy has called for enhanced measures to protect and assist victims of sexual violence among the displaced population.

"My observations point to a pattern of widespread atrocities, including rape, gang-rape by multiple soldiers, forced public nudity and humiliation, and sexual slavery in military captivity directed against Rohingya women and

girls,” UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten said Thursday.

The [humanitarian crisis](#) caused by escalating violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state is causing catastrophic suffering. Over 600,000 Rohingya refugees have fled across the border from Myanmar to Bangladesh since 25 August. The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), estimates Bangladesh now hosts more than 800,000 Rohingya refugees.

Ms. Patten’s visit, mainly to Bangladesh’s capital, Dhaka, and to Cox’s Bazar, from 5 to 13 November, was to better understand the nature, patterns and trends of sexual violence related to the conflict in Myanmar and also to assess options for providing support to the Government of Bangladesh, the UN system and other partners to ensure that the rights of conflict-affected women and girls are respected and upheld in the settlements.

“A clear picture is also emerging of the alleged perpetrators of these atrocities and their *modus operandi*. Sexual violence is allegedly being commanded, orchestrated and perpetrated by the Armed Forces of Myanmar, otherwise known as the *Tatmadaw*,” she said.

Other actors allegedly involved include the Myanmar Border Guard Police and militias composed of Rakhine state Buddhists and other ethnic groups, she added.

The release said that her Office has agreed with the Government of Bangladesh to develop a framework of cooperation, focusing particularly on the documentation, training, capacity-building, and strengthening of sexual and gender-based violence services and programmes.

Bangladesh is also in the process of developing a national action plan on women, peace and security, which is an important entry-point for action to address conflict-related sexual violence and other human rights violations against Rohingya women and girls.

However, national institutions and communities in the settlement areas are stretched to the limits of their capacity, to provide the basics of shelter, food, water and primary health care.

In terms of sexual and gender-based violence programmes, there is an acute funding shortfall of more than \$10 million for the next three months to deliver essential services, including clinical case management, community outreach, awareness-raising and the distribution of dignity kits, which contain clothing and sanitary items.

“The international community must come together to support the Government of Bangladesh to address this vast humanitarian and protection crisis,” she urged.

All of the women she spoke with wanted the perpetrators to be brought to justice, and to ensure that these atrocities would never repeat, she said.

“Such words must serve as our moral compass as we chart the way towards a

durable solution that respects the human rights and human dignity of a community that has been called 'the most persecuted people on earth,'" she said.

[In Colombia, UN political chief urges parties to 'stay the course' set out in peace accord](#)

16 November 2017 – More must be done to ensure that the remarkable gains of the first phase of Colombia's peace process are maintained, the top United Nations political official has said, wrapping up a visit to the country with an appeal to all Colombians to rally behind the accord, especially to ensure that former combatants are reintegrated into civilian life.

"I arrived this week, at the request of the Secretary-General, to convey a sense of [growing concern](#) about how the peace process has been evolving over the past several months," the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, told reporters there on Wednesday.

Despite a range of commendable activities under way by the Government, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the international community, Mr. Feltman highlighted three concerns, beginning with the lack of an overall strategy for reintegration, concrete plans and resources to enable its success.

"The drifting of a number of FARC members out of the zones, for a range of reasons that include joining the so-called 'dissidents' is a troubling sign of what could be the result on a wider scale if reintegration efforts are not very substantially accelerated," Mr. Feltman stated.

Secondly, he underscored his apprehension over the security situation in former conflict zones, particularly areas in which FARC vacated while their laying down their arms to convert to an unarmed political movement.

"We share the deep concern about the reported vacuums of authority in many of these areas and the resultant insecurity for communities as other illegal groups move in to fill the void," he underscored.

Mr. Feltman's final concern was about legal uncertainties, predominantly affecting FARC members, which have resulted in delays in approving key legislation.

Citing Monday's decision by the Constitutional Court on the Tribunal, he expressed hope that Congress would quickly adopt the implementing legislation, asserting, that: "This would only be consistent, in our view,

with the decision of the same Parliament to ratify the peace agreement one year ago.”

On the ceasefire between the Government and the National Liberation Army, the Under Secretary-General said: “We hope that the parties can come to a timely decision on its extension past 9 January, and to communicate that as soon as possible to the Security Council.”

While recognizing that the peace process is subject to legitimate debate, Mr. Feltman appealed to all of Colombia’s institutions, parties and to the public at large, saying that despite differing views, “all surely can also see the national interest in ensuring that regions which for more than five decades have been besieged by lawlessness, violence and under-development are now stabilized and integrated fully into the economy and governance.”

“It is our strong view that this can be achieved by the robust implementation of the Peace Agreement,” he added.