

UN agency chiefs call for immediate lifting of humanitarian blockade in Yemen

16 November 2017 – With much of Yemen’s air, sea and land entry points closed, heads of three United Nations agencies on Thursday called for immediate lifting of such blockade in the conflict-ravaged southern Arabian country so that lifesaving humanitarian supplies can pass.

“While the Saudi-led military coalition has partially lifted the recent blockade of Yemen, closure of much of the country’s air, sea and land ports is making an already [catastrophic situation](#) far worse,” said a joint statement issued by World Food Programme (WFP) Executive Director David Beasley, UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Executive Director Anthony Lake, and World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

“The space and access we need to deliver humanitarian assistance is being choked off, threatening the lives of millions of vulnerable children and families,” the statement added.

Since 2015, Yemen has been in a conflict between forces loyal to President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi and those allied to the Houthi rebel movement.

The UN agency chiefs jointly appealed for the coalition to permit entry of lifesaving supplies to Yemen, describing the situation “the worst humanitarian crisis in the world” in which more than 20 million people, including over 11 million children, are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, at least 14.8 million are without basic healthcare and an outbreak of cholera has resulted in more than 900,000 suspected cases.

“Some 17 million people do not know where their next meal is coming from and 7 million are totally dependent on food assistance. Severe acute malnutrition is threatening the lives of almost 400,000 children. As supplies run low, food prices rise dramatically, putting thousands more at risk,” the statement said.

The statement said that all of the country’s ports “including those in areas held by the opposition” should be reopened without delay, as that is the only way that UN-chartered ships can deliver the vital humanitarian cargo that the population needs to survive.

Flights from the UN Humanitarian Air Service “into and out of Yemen” should be given immediate clearance to resume.

“The clock is ticking and stocks of medical, food and other humanitarian supplies are already running low,” the statement said, warning that the cost of this blockade is being measured in the number of lives that are lost.

“On behalf of all those whose lives are at imminent risk, we reiterate

our appeal to allow humanitarian access in Yemen without further delay,” it said.

Nearly a third of Darfur's people still displaced, despite drop in violence, Security Council told

15 November 2017 – The armed groups in Darfur have largely been defeated and the ferocity of intercommunal violence has declined, but anxiety over safety continues to keep many people from returning to their homes, a senior United Nations peacekeeping official told the Security Council on Wednesday.

“However, those positive developments have not led to the voluntary and sustainable return of internally displaced persons,” said Bintou Keita, Assistant Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations, noting that nearly one third of Darfur’s population remained displaced.

Presenting the Secretary General’s latest report on the African Union UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur ([UNAMID](#)), she said the slow returns reflected anxiety about security and lack of confidence about present and future prospects, as progress has been slow on addressing such issues as land, poor resource management, accountability, and security sector reform.

The political process to negotiate a settlement of the conflict in Darfur with non signatories to the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur remains stalled, she said, adding that armed clashes between Government and non signatory forces have subsided.



Ms. Bintou Keita, Assistant Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations speaks to the Security Council on the Sudan and South Sudan & African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur

Describing the Doha Document as integral to addressing underlying communal tensions, she said its full implementation is an entry point for sustaining peace because it touches on the causes of the decades long conflict, including land, displacement and relationships with nomadic herders.

The Government has begun the next stage of its disarmament campaign – the forced collection of weapons – which has raised tensions among militia groups not aligned with Government forces.

She went on to report that intercommunal violence also persisted. On 7 November, UNAMID prevented a group of armed Arabs from entering the

internally displaced persons site, she said, adding that on 10 November, the mission intercepted a group of Arab nomads firing randomly on the outskirts of Sortony.

Emphasizing the importance of augmenting capacity to support longer term peacebuilding activities, she said UNAMID and the UN country team have finalized the integrated strategic framework for 2017-2019, which set out priorities on the rule of law and human rights, durable solutions, and peacebuilding for human security.

With the closure of 11 team sites and reduced numbers of military and police personnel, the mission's civilian staffing has been readjusted and its budget for 2017-2018 revised, she said.

Ms. Keita went on to report that the Jebel Marra Task Force is expected to become operational on 1 January 2018, but voiced regret that the allocation of land on which to open a new team site in Golo is still pending.

Establishing that new team site will be essential to underpinning the concept of reconfiguring UNAMID, and goes hand in hand with the mission's withdrawal from more stable parts of Darfur, she explained.

In conclusion, she said the level of cooperation between UNAMID and the Government of Sudan has been positive overall, although challenges remain in terms of access restrictions and customs clearance at Port Sudan.

Central African Republic: UN mission mandate extended, additional 'blue helmets' authorized

15 November 2017 – The United Nations Security Council on Wednesday extended the mandate of the Organization's peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic (CAR), until 15 November 2018, increased the mission's troop level by 900 military personnel.

The increase in the number of the Mission's 'blue helmets' comes against the backdrop of increasing fighting in the African nation and the resulting added insecurity and misery of its civilian population.

The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in CAR, known by its French acronym, MINUSCA, has also come under numerous attacks, which have killed at least 12 peacekeepers this year and injured many more.

In an effort to draw attention to the fragile situation in the country that, in his words, is "often far from the media spotlight," [Secretary-General](#)

António Guterres travelled to CAR in late October.

In CAR, the UN chief warned of religious divisions in the country, stressing that these rifts are a result of “political manipulation that must be condemned and avoided at all costs.”

SEE ALSO: [UN chief warns of religious divide in CAR, seeks global solidarity to rebuild country](#)

Security Council condemns incitement to ethnic, religious hatred

Through a [unanimously adopted resolution](#), the 15-member Council condemned “in the strongest terms” incitement to ethnic and religious hatred and violence and the multiple violations of international humanitarian law and the widespread human rights violations and abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence, committed – in particular – by the mainly Muslim ex-Seleka and mainly Christian anti-Balaka elements, as well as other militia groups, and the targeting of civilians from specific communities.

The Council also reiterated its serious concerns over the “dire humanitarian situation” in the country because of the deteriorating security situation, and the lack of access for and attacks against relief workers.

According to estimates, over 600,000 people have been internally displaced within the country and more than 500,000 have sought refuge beyond CAR’s borders. This total figure of more than 1.1 million displaced – internally or abroad – is the highest ever recorded for the country.

Also by the resolution, the Security Council called on the national authorities to take concrete steps, “without delay and as a matter of priority,” to strengthen justice institutions and to fight impunity and urged them continue their efforts to restore the effective authority of the State over the whole territory of the CAR.

Human rights, including child protection and sexual violence in conflict

Concerning the human rights situation in the country, the Council reiterated the urgent need to hold accountable all perpetrators of violations and abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law.

It also called upon all parties to conflict, including ex-Seleka and anti-Balaka elements, to end all violations and abuses committed against children, in violation of applicable international law, including those involving their recruitment and use, rape and sexual violence, killing and maiming, abductions and attacks on schools and hospitals.

“[The Council] further calls upon the CAR authorities to swiftly investigate alleged violations and abuses in order to hold perpetrators accountable and to ensure that those responsible for such violations and abuses are excluded from the security sector,” read the resolution.

[Combatting sexual violence on the frontlines, UN peacekeeper in DR Congo honoured with award](#)

United Nations peacekeeper Major Seitebatso Pearl Block was commended on Wednesday for developing a Mission-wide, short message service (SMS) campaign to combat gender-based abuse by connecting with women in remote parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

“I’m very happy, I’m proud to have been recognized for the good that I’ve done in the DRC, and I’m very happy to be receiving this award, I’m ecstatic,” said Major Block, an Information Operations Officer with the UN Stabilization Mission (MONUSCO).

During a ceremony at the [UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial Conference](#), under way in Vancouver, Canada, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix presented Major Block with the [UN Gender Military Advocate Award](#), for her outstanding work on the frontlines.

Mr. Lacroix called her “[an inspiration to us all](#) and a strong example of how peacekeeping is about our personnel taking personal initiatives and interacting with local communities to help find solutions to their problems, better protecting civilians and, in turn, saving lives.”

Serving from July 2016 to July 2017, Major Block developed the SMS (text messaging) campaign on conflict-related sexual violence to reach communities difficult to access.

Based in Goma, Major Block interacted with Congolese women, girls, men and boys to better understand their concerns. She trained fellow staff officers and troops to be more aware of gender dynamics within the Mission, which led them to develop more inclusive community engagement projects as part of the Protection of Civilians strategy combating illegally armed groups in eastern DRC.

“I knew I had to take action from the many conversations I had with women’s groups. As a peacekeeper, and as a woman, I think we have much to contribute to making the UN more inclusive and in tune with the communities we serve,” she said.

Major Block said that her idea was to give women the opportunity to report gender-based violence and sexual abuses. She pointed out the campaign also targets men “to say that, sexual violence, specifically in conflict areas is a crime.”

Created in 2016, the UN Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award recognizes the dedication and effort of an individual peacekeeper in promoting the principles of landmark UN [Security Council resolution 1325 \(2000\)](#) UN on 'women, peace and security.'

The UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial brings together defence ministers and other senior representatives from more than 80 countries and organizations to discuss the challenges facing UN Peacekeeping including the under-representation of women, and how to work together to find solutions.

[**Afghanistan opium production jumps 87 per cent to record level – UN survey**](#)

15 November 2017 – A profoundly alarming trend in the cultivation and production of opium in Afghanistan reveals an 87 per cent production increase compared to 2016, the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime ([UNODC](#)) said Wednesday in its [Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017](#).

“It is high time for the international community and Afghanistan to [reprioritize drug control](#), and to acknowledge that every nation has a shared responsibility for this global problem,” said UNODC Executive Director Yury Fedotov.

According to the latest figures released by the Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics and UNODC, in addition to an 87 per cent jump to a record level of 9,000 metric tonnes in 2017, the area under opium poppy cultivation also increased to a record 328,000 hectares in 2017, up 63 per cent compared with 201,000 hectares in 2016.

“For both Afghanistan, and the world, we are [heading towards uncharted territory](#) Additionally, the number of poppy-free provinces in the country decreased from 13 to 10 – and after more than a decade, Ghazni, Samangan and Nuristan lost their poppy-free status. The number of provinces affected by cultivation increased accordingly from 21 to 24.

“These frightening figures should give considerable pause for reflection on whether the calculus on the illicit drugs flowing from Afghanistan adds up to a workable and achievable solution,” he continued, again urging the international community to revisit its engagement with Afghanistan, and to acknowledge that fresh assessments and policy revisions may be necessary.

Pointing to the multiple challenges the increase would pose for the country, Mr. Fedotov stressed, that Afghanistan, “already suffering from the opium produced within its borders, the increases will drive drug abuse, an increased dependency on the illicit economy, and rising levels of corruption.”

Gains on governance and transparency in Afghanistan and surrounding countries will also be challenged by more instability, insecurity, and increased funding to terrorist groups.

“New actors and markets are likely to emerge; some of these new actors may be terrorist groups attempting to use the drug trade to finance their global operations,” Mr. Fedotov explained.

Far greater amounts of opium in the world’s consumer markets would increase health and social problems – also placing added burdens on already stretched Afghan public health services.

The Executive Director called opium cultivation and production “a complex development issue and bound to the [2030 Agenda](#) on Sustainable Development,” for which partnership and coordination is also needed.

“UNODC has created initiatives-including the Triangular Initiative, the Paris Pact and the networking the networks activity-to assist, but engagement must be stepped up to increase effectiveness,” he stated.