

[UN chief welcomes announcement by Emir of Qatar to allocate \\$50 million to support Syrian refugees, displaced persons](#)

United Nations [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) has welcomed the announcement by the Emir of Qatar to allocate \$50 million to support Syrian refugees and displaced persons affected by the recent severe weather in the Middle East.

Deputy UN Spokesman Farhan Haq on Thursday confirmed the allocation, telling reporters at the daily UN Headquarters press briefing that the UN chief was very grateful to the Emir and the people of Qatar for their generosity.

“As you know, the recent harsh winter conditions in the Levant has had a horrific impact on populations who were already vulnerable, both refugees as well as the communities hosting them,” Mr. Haq said, adding that humanitarian partners continue to respond to the needs of those affected and are reinforcing preparedness and mitigation efforts.

“These difficult conditions make Qatar’s donation extremely valuable and timely for the UN system’s efforts to help vulnerable people,” he said.

The UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA) [estimated in late January](#) that nearly 2.4 million women, children and men across Syria would struggle during the winter season to get adequate warmth and would require targeted support.

This would include tens of thousands of newly-displaced people, including those in displacement sites and open areas, those who have been displaced multiple times and for long periods and now live in sub-standard shelters, but also returnees and host communities.

The UN relief wing said people would need sleeping bags, winter clothes, plastic sheeting, high thermal blankets, heaters and stoves.

[Two peacekeepers killed in an attack against UN convoy in Mali](#)

Two peacekeepers from the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Mali

([MINUSMA](#)) were killed on Friday following an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attack against a convoy near Douentza, in the Mopti region, central Mali.

The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, strongly condemned the attack which led to the deaths of two 'blue helmets' from Sri Lanka and injured six others.

Mr Guterres conveyed his "deep condolences to the Government of Sri Lanka, and the families of the victims", and wished a speedy recovery to those injured.

A peacekeeper from Burkina Faso was also injured in a separate IED attack against another convoy near the same area, on Thursday.

"These cowardly acts will not deter MINUSMA's determination to support the people and Government on Mali in their pursuit of peace and stability", a [statement](#) issued by his spokesman read.

Just last Sunday, a terrorist attack against the mission's camp in Aguelhok, in the Kidal region, killed ten peacekeepers from Chad.

Recalling that attacks targeting UN peacekeepers may constitute war crimes under international law, Mr Guterres called on the Malian authorities to "spare no effort" in identifying the perpetrators of Friday's attack, so that they can be brought to justice as swiftly as possible.

A proliferation of armed groups fighting government forces and their allies in the centre and northern areas of Mali following a failed coup six years ago, have made MINUSMA the most dangerous mission to serve in as a UN 'blue helmet'. The Malian Government has been seeking to restore stability and rebuild following a series of setbacks, since early 2012.

The escalating violence reported by the UN in parts of the Mopti region has led to widespread displacement of a civilian population already vulnerable due to a lack of protection and basic social services provided by the state.

A team of human rights officers serving with MINUSMA travelled at the beginning of January to the region to investigate recent armed attacks in the settlement of Koulogon Peul, in which at least 37 civilians were killed, and a number of houses and granaries were deliberately burnt down.

[Myanmar Government side-lining](#)

democratic reform, resorting to military era repression: UN expert

The human rights situation in Myanmar continues to deteriorate, as the civilian government fails to bring about democratic reforms and instead resorts to the kind of repression carried out under previous military regimes, said the UN human rights expert Yanghee Lee, [speaking](#) at the end of an 11-day mission to neighbouring Thailand and Bangladesh.

Ms. Lee, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, described the “democratic space” in Myanmar (including freedom of speech and association) as “fragile,” with religious and ethnic divisions remaining across the country, as well as the marginalization and discrimination of minorities: “I am greatly concerned that the enduring repressive environment is discouraging people from speaking out freely about human rights violations and injustices’, she said.

She added that “disagreements, criticism and debate are healthy and necessary in any functioning democracy. Journalists and human rights defenders continue to be targeted for exercising their right to freedom of expression. I call on the authorities to end this mistreatment and immediately release all those unjustly imprisoned.”

The human rights situation in Myanmar, she said, has been further complicated by fighting in several regions of the country, undermining the prospects that some 162,000 Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in the area will be able to return home.

The Myanmar government plan to close IDP camps and relocate people to remote areas, she added, far from their places of origin and removed from economic opportunities and humanitarian support. Whilst they have consulted with the UN on the subject of camp closures, the government have failed to consult with IDPs or organizations working with the displaced populations, and the return of people to their places of origin must be in accord with international standards of safety, voluntariness, dignity and sustainability.

Ms. Lee expressed her deep concern that Internally Displaced People (IDPs) are particularly vulnerable to losing their rights to ancestral homelands, following recent amendments to a law that permits the government to expropriate land, from ethnic areas – including Rakhine, Kachin, Shan and Kayin State where communities have depended on this land for their livelihoods, traditions and culture for generations – at particular risk.

No Rohingya returns, rather ‘a sustained campaign of violence’

As for the potential return of the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees, Ms. Lee stated that Myanmar is not working to created conditions for their return, but is instead engaging in a “sustained campaign of

violence, intimidation and harassment.”

She shared testimony from Rohingya refugees she met during her visit to the refugee camp in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, citing a fresh arrival to the camp who said that her father had been stabbed to death by Myanmar security forces; a refugee who fled with his entire family after his mother and sister were abducted and raped; and videos in which she saw houses burning in Muangdaw township, which, according to information gathered by her team, were set alight by Myanmar security forces working in concert with Rakhine extremists. Under Myanmar’s plan for the return of Rohingya, according to reports in November 2018, Muangdaw was identified as a resettlement area.

Refugees must have say in any island relocation

Ms. Lee also visited the island of Bhashan Char, which the Bangladesh Government is reportedly transforming into a camp for some of the Rohingya refugees, despite concerns that it could be vulnerable to extreme weather events such as cyclones.

She told journalists at a press conference on Friday in the Bangladeshi capital, Dhaka, that she was anxious about whether the conditions on the island, which she described as isolated, are adequate to fulfil the needs and rights of Rohingya’s refugees: “If any plans are made about refugee relocation in the future, refugees must be fully engaged and participate in the process,” she said. “Without a protection framework agreed with the humanitarian community, the plans cannot move forward.”

Climate change recognized as ‘threat multiplier’, UN Security Council debates its impact on peace

As climate change is increasingly recognized as a “threat multiplier” by scientists, political representatives, and civil society across the world, the United Nations Security Council held an open debate on Friday to discuss its concrete impact on peace and security, and focus on tangible ways to diminish the effects of global warming.

“The risks associated with climate-related disasters do not represent a scenario of some distant future. They are already a reality today for millions of people around the globe – and they are not going away,” she stressed.

The meeting took place almost two months after 197 parties to the UN Climate Change Convention [agreed to a concrete way forward](#) on implementing the 2015

[Paris Agreement](#) – which aims to keep global warming under 1.5°C from pre-industrial levels – and ahead of the [UN Secretary-General’s Climate Summit](#), convened for 23 September this year.

Climate risk: to debate or not to debate?

Whether climate change is an issue that should be examined by the UN’s peace and security body to begin with, has been the subject of controversy. Some Member States believe that this is stepping on the toes of other UN entities, specifically mandated with taking a lead on social and economic development, or environmental protection.

The risks associated with climate-related disasters do not represent a scenario of some distant future. They are already a reality today for millions of people around the globe – and they are not going away – UN political affairs chief

The first ever meeting of the Security Council examining the linkages between climate change and insecurity happened in April 2007. Since then, the UN body has increasingly taken steps that effectively acknowledge that the two issues are related: in July 2011, another open debate on the matter was held; in March 2017, resolution 2349 was adopted highlighting the need to address climate-related risks in order to tackle the conflict in the Lake Chad basin; and in July 2018, a debate was held on “understanding and addressing climate-related security risks”.

In a sign of how important the discussion is to many countries, the debate was attended by over 70 Member States and included statements in the Council chamber from a dozen Ministers, including Kuwait, Belgium, Indonesia, Germany and Poland.

‘Keeping up with the challenge’

After citing the various ways in which UN political missions, regional or country-based, are already actively seeking ways to address climate-related security risks, Ms. DiCarlo insisted on the need to focus on three key areas:

- Developing stronger analytical capacity with integrated risk assessment frameworks.
- Collecting stronger evidence base so good practices on climate risk prevention and management can be replicated in the field.
- Building and reinforcing partnerships to leverage existing capacities within and outside the UN system.

“Most important, for all of us, is the recognition that deeds must follow words. Major armies and businesses have long recognized the need to prepare for climate-related risks, rightfully perceiving climate change as a threat multiplier,” said the UN Political Affairs chief.

“We cannot lag behind. We must act now, with a sense of urgency and a

commitment to place people, especially those most marginalized and vulnerable, at the centre of our efforts," she stated.

The Administrator of the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)), [Achim Steiner](#), also delivered remarks, by phone. An environmentalist by training, he noted that climate change is "not only affecting the atmosphere, but also the biosphere", and that the world is "not keeping up with the challenge."

He called on the Security Council to recognize the science and empirical evidence, leverage all possible measures that can slow global warming, and invest in climate adaptation and risk reduction for the millions of people already suffering from the effects of climate change.

Mr. Steiner cited some of the hundreds of projects carried out by UNDP in some 140 countries, including a water management system in the Maldives, the development of a vulnerability index to facilitate preparedness, and financial support for vulnerable households in the Caribbean.

Scientists and youth to advise the Council

For the first time in history, the UN World Meteorological Organization ([WMO](#)) was invited to brief the members of the Security Council on climate and extreme weather issues.

Professor Pavel Kabat, Chief Scientist at the WMO brought some clear scientific data to the table, to inform the debate. "Climate change has a multitude of security impacts – rolling back the gains in nutrition and access to food; heightening the risk of wildfires and exacerbating air quality challenges; increasing the potential for water conflict; leading to more internal displacement and migration," he said. "It is increasingly regarded as a national security threat."

He noted that WMO stands ready to support the UN and Member States with "cutting-edge science" and "expert information" so informed decisions can be made.

Before the floor was opened to Members of the Security Council, a youth representative and a researcher on environmental security, Lindsay Getschel, was also invited to speak.

She came to the meeting with three key asks for the UN body:

- A resolution officially recognizing climate change as a threat to international peace and security.
- An assessment on how climate change impacts local youth (e.g., through displacement, unemployment, food insecurity, and recruitment in armed groups).
- A reduction of reliance on fossil fuel energy in UN missions worldwide and a commitment 50 per cent of energy used to be from renewable sources by 2025, with regular reporting to the Secretary-General to monitor progress.

She finished by reminding those present in the room that many across the

world “do not have the luxury to not care about this issue,” and called on world leaders to “live up to their words.”

Alarm over violent attacks on lawmakers, opposition in Malawi, ahead of elections

In Malawi, the UN human rights office, [OHCHR](#), voiced alarm on Friday over increasing, horrific violence there, linked to upcoming elections.

The victims have included politicians, male and female party activists and persons with albinism – the condition where those affected are born with lighter skin, hair and eye colour.

In one recent incident in the north of the country, a 55-year-old man with albinism was repeatedly stabbed in front of his child, before his arms were amputated by his attackers.

UN spokesperson Rupert Colville told journalists in Geneva that Member of Parliament, Bon Kalindo, was also set upon after being arrested for allegedly insulting the President.

“Following his release on bail, on 16 January, Mr. Kalindo was violently assaulted, allegedly by members of the governing Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) youth wing”, he said, adding that the offence took place on the premises of the District Commissioner in the southern town of Mulanje, requiring the parliamentarian to seek hospital treatment.

Mr. Colville added that Edward Govati, a supporter of another opposition party, Malawi Congress, “was savagely attacked” in Blantyre, also reportedly by DPP cadets. “He was extremely badly beaten and also required hospital treatment. Mr Govati had previously been threatened because of his political activities.”

Mr Colville noted that women candidates have faced threats, harassment and intimidation ahead of national elections in May.

DPP cadets were also allegedly involved in an attack last Sunday on several supporters of the United Transformation Movement, (UTM), as they made their way to a political rally in Mangochi.

According to OHCHR, they were forced to take off their party T-shirts, leaving the woman in her underwear and the man who was assaulted, half-naked. He was also reportedly beaten with a beer bottle.

On 23 January, President Peter Arthur Mutharika publicly condemned political violence, including acts aimed at humiliating women in the political arena.

Welcoming the presidential announcement, OHCHR expressed concern that so far no one had been brought to justice for numerous politically motivated attacks committed in the last year.

It also called on the authorities to step up their efforts to protect persons with albinism, and to prosecute and punish alleged perpetrators.