

Fears of 'severe deterioration' of humanitarian crisis in eastern Ukraine, warns UN official

8 November 2017 – Recent escalation of fighting in close proximity of critical infrastructure and services in Donetsk, eastern Ukraine, could endanger over a million lives, the top United Nations official in the country has warned.

“As we enter winter, any disruption of essential services, such as water and heating amid freezing temperatures [could have grave consequences](#),” said Neal Walker, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Ukraine, in a statement Wednesday.

“I remind all parties to the conflict of their obligation to respect civilian infrastructure and to protect civilians. Any intentional disruption of access to quality water supply or critical heating systems is a clear violation of International Humanitarian Law,” he underscored.

In the past six days, the Donetsk Filter Station has been shelled for three consecutive nights. Another station, the Verkhniokalmiuska Filter Station, was hit more than a dozen times in a single night.

Stations such as these provide clean water to some 1.1 million people on both sides of the 459-kilometre ‘contact line’ dividing eastern Ukraine. Furthermore, these stations are also essential to keep heating systems functioning.

“Without sustained water supply, heating systems will stop and health conditions will deteriorate. Children, the elderly, women and people with disabilities may flee their homes in search of heat and shelter,” noted Mr. Walker.

Such an escalation, so close to critical infrastructure, risks prompting a severe deterioration of the ongoing humanitarian crisis on Europe’s doorstep
Neal Walker, UN Humanitarian Coordinator

At the same time, the fighting has also prompted concerns over the possible release of hazardous chlorine gas stored at the two filter stations.

If a single 900-kilogram gas container is hit, anyone within 200 meters might receive fatal dose of the poisonous gas.

The conflict, now in its fourth year, continues to take a toll on civilians, denying the most vulnerable of their basic needs as well as their safety and protection.

In this protracted crisis, millions of families trapped in active hostilities and people displaced are losing hope for a future, said the UN official, calling on parties to uphold their responsibility to facilitate the access of humanitarian organizations to provide critical services for the most vulnerable Ukrainians affected by the conflict.

Both ISIL and Syrian Government 'responsible for chemical attacks,' UN Security Council told

7 November 2017 – 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 the Syrian Government was accountable for the release of sarin in an April 2017 attack in Khan Shaykhun, the head of a Security Council-mandated investigation said Tuesday.

"There has been sufficient evidence of a credible and reliable nature to make its findings," said Edmond Mulet, Head of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism ([OPCW-UN JIM](#)), during a briefing on the entity's [latest findings](#), released on 26 October.

He said 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.

He said the Mechanism has been guided by the terms of reference approved by the Security Council, conducting its work "in an independent, impartial and professional manner."

Mr. Mulet noted that 12 Member States provided case-specific information, including Syria. The Mechanism interviewed over 30 witnesses and reviewed 2,247 photographs, 1,284 video files, 120 audio files and 639 documents. Technical teams visited Damascus and the Al-Shayrat air base in September and October. Syria has engaged constructively with the Mechanism.

VIDEO: A UN report has named ISIL extremists and the Syrian Arab Republic for using chemicals as weapons in the country's protracted conflict. This follows investigations conducted by a UN-mandated Joint Investigative Mechanism, led by Edmond Mulet.

Although it was too dangerous to visit Umm Hawh and Khan Shaykhun, the panel considered that sufficient information had been gathered to come to a solid

conclusion. The Mechanism has also obtained independent expert analysis and assessments and consulted with several international recognized experts in energetic materials and the medical effects of chemical warfare agents. It cross-checked witness statements and ensured that information gathered was credible and reliable. As for the 15-16 September 2016 incident, two women were found to have been exposed to sulfur mustard at Umm Hawsh, he said. A mortar shell containing sulfur mustard hit the house of one of the victims and a second shell containing the chemical agent was recovered lodged in the pavement. Based on the positioning of ISIL and the forensic assessment that the mortar shell came from the direction of areas held by that group, the panel is confident that ISIL was responsible for the use of the mortar shells containing sulfur mustard. As for the 4 April incident involving sarin, it killed around 100 people in Khan Shaykhun. The Mechanism examined eight possible scenarios, including that the incident might have been staged to place responsibility on the Government of Syria, he said. The Mechanism has carefully put together pieces of a complex puzzle, of which some parts are still missing. It could not establish with certainty that the aircraft which delivered the chemical bomb had taken off from Al Shayrat air base, or the type of plane involved. However, Syrian aircraft was in the immediate vicinity of Khan Shaykhun at the time of the bombing. The crater was determined by experts to have been most likely caused by the impact of an aerial bomb travelling at high velocity. In-depth laboratory study into the chemistry of sarin has revealed that the nerve gas used was very likely to have been made from the same precursor chemical that had come from the original stockpile of Syria, based on unique markers. He said the panel is confident that when taken together, all those elements constituted unmistakable evidence that Syria was responsible for the use of sarin at Khan Shaykhun. It is now up to the Council to consider the next steps, he said, asking the 15-member body that in doing so, it also consider the victims of those insidious acts. "Impunity must not prevail," he said, pointing out that today, news about another instance of the use of chemical weapons in Syria has been received.

Briefing on the work of the Organisation for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

Also briefing the Council was Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, who gave an update on the work of OPCW.



Izumi Nakamitsu, UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, briefs the Security Council. UN Photo/Cia Pak

Following a long-standing delay in gaining access, the OPCW is now conducting a visit to two stationary above-ground facilities to confirm their condition. This is the first step in the process of OPCW verification of the destruction of these facilities. She also expressed regret that neither the information provided during the consultations nor the latest submissions by the Syrian Arab Republic have enabled the resolution of all identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in Syria's declaration. Efforts to resolve these issues have been hampered by a lack of original historical records, as

well as an ongoing lack of access to and engagement with senior leaders and officials who have an overarching knowledge of the Syrian chemical weapons programme, she said. On 2 November, the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission submitted its report on the alleged incident of the use of chemical weapons at Ltamenah on 30 March 2017. Given the limitations in some evidence, the Mission was not able to determine “with absolute certainty” the use of a chemical weapon, but was able to determine the presence of sarin on samples that came from the alleged site of the incident. These most recent findings are deeply concerning – all the more so in view of the fact that the mandate of the OPCW-UN JIM is set to end on 16 November. “Allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria have not ceased and therefore nor has the need to identify and hold accountable those responsible for their use,” she said. “The unity of the Security Council will be necessary in order to avoid impunity for the use of these abhorrent weapons.”

Security Council re-authorizes EU-led force in Bosnia and Herzegovina

7 November 2017 – The Security Council on Tuesday extended the authorization of the European Union-led multinational stabilization force in Bosnia and Herzegovina for an additional year, following an analysis by a United Nations envoy that a resurgence of divisive nationalism is threatening to take the country backwards.

“Bosnia and Herzegovina is a complex political and security environment, where negative scenarios can quickly endanger the Dayton Peace Agreement and the progress achieved so far,” Valentin Inzko, the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, told the Security Council.

“For this reason, I am firmly convinced that there is still the necessity to maintain the EU military force on the ground with an executive mandate,” he said.

Unanimously adopting a resolution, the 15-member Council recognized the right of both European Union Force Althea (EUFOR ALTHEA) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) presence to take all necessary measures to defend themselves from attack or threat of attack and authorized Member States to assist both organizations in carrying out their missions.

The Council also urged all parties to step up the implementation of comprehensive reforms, in an inclusive manner, to the benefit of all citizens and in line with the European perspective the country is committed to, calling on them to refrain from any polarizing policy, action and rhetoric.

Mr. Inzko noted that more than 25 years have passed since Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the United Nations in 1992, and more than two decades have

passed since the tragic conflict came to an end in 1995.

The country has since made remarkable progress in many ways, he said, highlighting that the state institutions provided for under the Peace Agreement were established and the three armies that fought each other were unified into one.

Today the country is at a crucial moment in its history, as leaders of all ethnic affiliations aspire to join the European Union and are working towards fulfilling the requirements necessary for the country to be granted EU candidate status, he said.

However, he continued, "As progress on economic and political reforms has significantly slowed down over the last ten years, divisive nationalism and persistent challenges to the Peace Agreement and the institutional arrangements provided for under that agreement have threatened to take the country backwards."

Over the last six months, many key political actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been unwilling to search for the compromises needed to adopt necessary reforms.

And with the general elections expected to take place next year, many political leaders have already started exchanging divisive rhetoric rooted in the past and an early electoral agenda have slowed the pace of reform and affected the political climate, he said.

In July, the Constitutional Court struck down provisions of the election law regulating indirect elections to the Federation House of Peoples. If the House is not formed after the next elections, this will most likely prevent the formation of a Federation government and the formation of one chamber of the state-level parliament.

"I want to call attention to this issue now, while there is still time for the parties in parliament to address the problem ahead of the 2018 elections," he said.

Also, in October, the Republika Srpska National Assembly adopted a resolution which asserts the entity's neutrality vis-a-vis integration with NATO.

He insisted that foreign policy is an exclusive responsibility of the state institutions.

In conclusion, Mr. Inzko outlined the major challenges for the political leaders and institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

These include completion of the actions needed to achieve the next steps in Euro-Atlantic integration, ensuring that the 2018 elections can be held and their results implemented smoothly, and the rule of law under which the decisions of courts and the Dayton Peace Agreement are respected and implemented, he said.

UN Security Council urges 'comprehensive response' to piracy off Somali coast

7 November 2017 – Condemning the acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea off the coast of Somalia, the United Nations Security Council today called for a comprehensive response to prevent and suppress such acts and tackle their underlying causes.

In a resolution adopted Tuesday, the 15-member Council also urged Somali authorities, to continue expedite the passing of comprehensive anti-piracy and maritime laws, to establish security forces with clear roles and jurisdictions to enforce these laws, as well as strengthen the capacity of its Somali courts to investigate and prosecute those responsible for piracy.

The Security Council also called upon UN Member States, “working in conjunction with relevant international organizations, to adopt legislation to facilitate prosecution of suspected pirates off the coast of Somalia.”

Also in the resolution, the Council urged all Member States to criminalize piracy under their domestic law and to favourably consider the prosecution of suspected – and imprisonment of those convicted – pirates apprehended off the coast of Somalia as well as their facilitators and financiers ashore, in line with applicable international law.

The UN body responsible for matters relating to international peace and security further encouraged flag States and port States to also consider the development of safety and security measures on board vessels, including, where applicable, developing regulations for the use of privately contracted armed security personnel on board ships, aimed at preventing and suppressing piracy off the coast of Somalia, through a consultative process, including through the relevant UN entities.

The Council also commended the efforts of the European Union Naval Forces (EUNAVFOR) Operation ATALANTA, Combined Maritime Forces' Combined Task Force 151, counter-piracy efforts of the African Union and the naval activities of the Southern Africa Development Community, as well as the efforts of other States to suppress piracy and to protect ships transiting through the waters off the coast of Somalia.

DR Congo: Security Council underscores need to bring killers of UN experts to justice

7 November 2017 – Reiterating the need to bring to justice the killers of two United Nations expert in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Security Council urged the country's authorities to continue to cooperate with investigations into the incident.

The experts, Michael Sharp of the United States and Zaida Catalan of Sweden were abducted in the country on 12 March. Their remains were [found](#) outside the city of Kananga in the DRC's Kasai-Central province by UN peacekeepers two weeks later.

In a statement read out by Ambassador Sebastiano Cardi of Italy, which holds the Council's presidency for the month of November, the 15-member body also encouraged the Group of Experts, of which Mr. Sharp and Ms. Catalan were members, to consider, within its current mandate and in cooperation with relevant actors, including national authorities, issues related to illicit financial activity, including money laundering operations, supporting the activities of armed groups and criminal networks involved in destabilizing activities in the African nation.

"In that regard, the Security Council welcomes the decisions of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region [in October] on the fight against illegal exploitation of natural resources in the Great Lakes region and encourages member States to further increase cooperation in fighting illegal exploitation and trade of natural resources, including gold or wildlife," read the statement.

The Security Council further encouraged the Group of Experts to work with UN Member States and relevant international organizations, such as the UN International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Air Transport Association (IATA), so they can produce recommendations to streamline and enhance the control of unwrought gold transported in carry-on luggage.

Also in the statement, the Council warned against attacks on the UN Mission in the country (known by its French acronym, MONUSCO), UN entities, and their associated personnel, including the Group of Experts, and reiterated its readiness to designate individuals and groups responsible for attacks for sanctions.