

UN chief pays tribute to courage, resilience of people of Central African Republic

27 October 2017 – Addressing lawmakers in the Central African Republic, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Friday stressed the international community's commitment to helping tackle the myriad challenges plaguing the conflict-torn country, and strongly defended the role of the UN peacekeeping force there.

"I wish to pay tribute to the people's courage, resilience and determination to overcome great adversity," Mr. Guterres told the National Assembly in the capital, Bangui, on the final day of his visit to the country.

"The task of solving this crisis lies first and foremost in the hands of the people of the Central African Republic. Nobody is in a better position to help the country than its own citizens," he added.

The UN chief noted that the country's enormous difficulties include insecurity, a humanitarian crisis and slow progress towards development.

Armed groups are fragmenting and multiplying. One in four Central Africans is displaced. Development programmes are needed for neglected rural areas. Religion and ethnic origin have been manipulated to create division among communities, severely polarizing a fragile country.

"The Central African Republic is at risk of sliding back into open inter-communal violence," Mr. Guterres said.

The UN integrated peacekeeping mission there, known by its French acronym, MINUSCA, will use force when the State's stability is threatened, and each time civilians need protection, but does not favour any religious or ethnic group, he said, adding that their actions can assist in creating a space to build peace through dialogue.

However, he said: "Nowhere in the world has the use of force alone resolved a conflict. We therefore need not only more peacekeepers, but more political initiatives for peace."

Calling on donors to fulfil their commitments to provide humanitarian aid, he stressed the importance of supporting the country's recovery and peacebuilding plan.

The National Assembly has a vital role to play in ensuring the efficient delivery of government services, not just in the capital, but at the local level, he said.

"We are all committed to the return to peace," he said, noting that

a cessation of hostilities is undoubtedly important, but there is also a need to bring peace to people's hearts.

“The Central African Republic has suffered for far too long. As representatives of the people, you have a central part to play in turning the situation around,” he told the lawmakers.

Noting the historical generosity of the Central Africans who, over the years, have opened their borders to refugees from neighboring countries, the Secretary-General pledged that the UN would continue to accompany and support Central Africans.

According to his spokesman, Mr. Guterres then travelled to the PK5 area, a traditionally Muslim part of Bangui that has been the site of violence against the community.

He listened to the concerns of community leaders, including issues regarding safety and discrimination, as well as the lack of economic opportunities for young people. He also heard from local Christian leaders who spoke of reconciliation.

The Secretary-General underscored his deep belief that religious conflicts are often the result of political manipulation and not religious differences, noting that for years, Christians and Muslims had coexisted peacefully in the country.

The Secretary-General then held a roundtable with youth leaders and a separate session with women leaders.

On his way to Paris, during a stopover in Yaoundé, the Secretary-General is expected to meet with the President of Cameroon, Paul Biya, to discuss a number of regional and national issues, the spokesman said.

Rohingya crisis: UN agencies focus on improving access as overcrowded camps hampers response

27 October 2017 – As the number of Rohingya refugees sheltering in southern Bangladesh crosses 800,000, United Nations agencies responding to the crisis are working hard to ensure access in the difficult to reach area so that much needed assistance can be delivered in a timely manner.

“With so many people having settled in such a small area, site planning and management is vital for the protection of Rohingya refugees,” noted the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM) in a [news release](#).

“We are working with [humanitarian] partners and the Government to ensure access to displacement sites, all of which developed on hilly terrain, which is extremely difficult to reach with services,” it added.

There are now 817,000 refugees in Cox’s Bazar (the southern-most district of Bangladesh) including 200,000 who had been seeking refuge there prior to the exodus that began in late August. All but 46,000 among them are living in makeshift shelters or displacement sites, set up on hilly terrain, making access extremely challenging.

For instance, IOM has been trucking in over 740,000 litres of water into the settlements, where often it has to be hand-carried up steep hills to bring it close to the elderly and children, who might not otherwise get access to it.

Building roads and basic infrastructure such as drains and stairways, is therefore critical to ensure that all refugees – and in particular the most vulnerable – can receive services as quickly as possible as well as to prevent spread of disease.

IOM has also dispatched health teams to provide emergency and primary health services to over 53,000 patients. It has also distributed personal hygiene kits to thousands.

The UN migration agency has also constructed 660 emergency pit latrines and 100 mobile toilets; dug twelve deep-bore tube wells to provide settlements with clean drinking water; and set up child delivery facilities and a patient stabilization unit in Kutupalong – one of the largest settlements.

It has also constructed “safe spaces” in settlements, where women and girls can come together, talk and spend time together in a protected environment – giving them much needed psychosocial support – as opposed to staying alone in a tiny shelter all day.

At the same time, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) [has relocated](#) some 1,700 new refugees from Kutupalong to a Government-allocated site in south-eastern Bangladesh, decongesting existing facilities in the overcrowded camp.

Since Tuesday, volunteers have been helping vulnerable refugees to carry their belongings to the new site.

UNHCR is also distributing household items and shelter kits containing plastic sheets, bamboo poles and ropes.

According to Babar Baloch, a spokesperson for the UN refugee agency, a total of 5,000 refugees will be moved to the newly-opened site, which is part of a larger 3,000-acre piece of land known as Kutupalong Extension.

Winter may be 'harsh blow' to vulnerable children in Middle East, UNICEF warns amid funding gap

27 October 2017 – Freezing temperatures, storms and heavy snowfall will add to the misery afflicting hundreds of thousands of families affected by conflict across the Middle East unless assistance – including cold weather clothing and supplies – is urgently provided, the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has warned.

“Without help, the cold could be [yet another harsh blow to vulnerable children](#) in the region who have already been through so much,” said Geert Cappelaere, the UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, in a news release Friday.

“Children's health is weak from undernutrition, poor healthcare and displacement. Hypothermia and respiratory infections are a serious threat – if left untreated, children will die.”

Conflict, displacement and unemployment for years have already depleted families' resources, leaving them unable to purchase of warm clothing or heating fuel.

Furthermore, if schools are not kept warm, dropout rates are expected to rise, leaving children more vulnerable to early marriage, sexual violence or forced recruitment into fighting.

Staff at the UN agency are working against time to provide warm clothing, winter supplies and blankets before the cold sets in, but the agency is staring at a \$60 million (more than 80 per cent) funding shortfall for its \$73 million appeal.

The lack of resources could leave up to 1.5 million children across Iraq, Syria, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and neighbouring refugee host countries, exposed to the elements.

With sufficient funding, UNICEF aims to provide winter clothing kits to over 800,000 children across the region, including to families that have been displaced by recent fighting; thermal blankets for almost 240,000 children; child friendly spaces and school heating for 105,000 children; and cash assistance to the families of more than 320,000 vulnerable children.

Syria: Suffering of 350,000 civilians in rural Damascus 'an outrage' – UN rights chief

27 October 2017 – The United Nations human rights chief on Friday called on the parties to the conflict in Syria to allow badly needed food and medical supplies to Eastern Ghouta in rural Damascus, describing the situation of at least 350,000 besieged civilians there as “an outrage.”

“The [shocking images](#) of what appear to be severely malnourished children that have emerged in recent days are a frightening indication of the plight of people in Eastern Ghouta, who are now facing a humanitarian emergency,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein in a news release from his office ([OHCHR](#)).

Eastern Ghouta, on the outskirts of the nation’s capital, is being considered one of the “de-escalation areas” brokered in May by Iran, Russia and Turkey under the Astana process. However, residential areas, including those areas previously spared attack, are now being hit on an almost daily basis by ground-based strikes by Government forces and their allies.

The UN human rights office has also received reports of armed opposition groups conducting ground-based strikes on Damascus.

Various armed groups controlling the area have restricted the work of humanitarian organisations, and clashes between these groups have for months limited civilians’ freedom of movement within the region.

The UN last reached Eastern Ghouta on 23 September. Between January and September, the Government only accepted 26 per cent of requests to deliver assistance to besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

“I remind all parties that the deliberate starvation of civilians as a method of warfare constitutes a clear violation of international humanitarian law, and may amount to a crime against humanity and/or a war crime,” said Mr. Zeid.

Unidentified attackers reportedly stormed and looted a food warehouse in the Eastern Ghouta town of Hamourya on 19 October. The following day several hundred people allegedly looted a second warehouse in the town – a possible sign of growing desperation.

“If parties to a conflict cannot meet the needs of the population under their control, they must allow and facilitate efforts by impartial humanitarian agencies to provide aid, including by granting them the right of free passage,” he stressed.

[African regional consultations on UN global compact on migration begin in Ethiopia](#)

26 October 2017 – Although the debate on migration has largely focused on Europe, the global compact being negotiated must be adapted to the realities and peculiarities of each region, including Africa, where more than half of migrants moved to other countries on the continent, a senior United Nations official said Thursday.

“Today’s consultation is an opportunity to analyse migratory trends, challenges and opportunities at the regional and sub-regional levels,” the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for International Migration, Louise Arbour, [told](#) the [African Regional Consultative Meeting](#) on the proposed global compact, which opened in Ethiopia’s capital, Addis Ababa.

Ms. Arbour said that most migration takes place within the same region, noting that in Africa, 52 per cent of migrants moved within the region, mostly between neighbouring countries.

She also emphasized the importance of an increased variety and scope of legal pathways for non-refugee migrants to access labour markets.

Indeed, both the push factors, such as conflict, poverty and climate change, and the pull factors, including labour shortages and informal economies in destination countries, remain too strong for migratory flows to be significantly curtailed.

In such a situation, she said, “the impact of policies seeking to stop migration will only encourage recourse to irregular channels and increase the cost of the journey for the individuals concerned, including them engaging the services of smugglers – too often, fatally.”

“We must therefore better understand what compels people to migrate through irregular channels, and expand regular and legal pathways to better manage the supply and demand in the world’s labour markets,” she stressed.

Consultations at the African regional meeting, which runs through Friday, will inform the process leading up to the adoption of the [global compact on migration](#) by the UN General Assembly in 2018.

The process to develop this global compact for migration started in April 2017. It will be the first, intergovernmentally negotiated agreement, prepared under the auspices of the UN, to cover all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner.