

[Mexico: UN chief saddened by pipeline blast in which dozens were killed](#)

The United Nations' Secretary-General, António Guterres, learned with sadness of the deadly explosion of an oil pipeline on Friday in Hidalgo State, Mexico, and extended the UN's assistance to the national authorities, his Spokesman said on Saturday.

According to news reports, the explosion was caused by fuel thieves who punctured the gas pipeline north of Mexico City. Fuel theft has become a growing occurrence in the country over the past few years, adding to other security issues.

UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric said in his [statement](#) that Mr. Guterres learned with sadness of the deadly blast which killed over 60 people and injured dozens. The UN chief expressed his condolences to the families of those killed in this tragic event and wished the injured a speedy recovery.

The Secretary-General also expressed his solidarity with the people and Government of Mexico and said the United Nations system in Mexico stands ready to offer assistance to the national authorities.

[Another 170 migrants disappear in shipwrecks, UN agency reiterates call for an end to Mediterranean tragedy](#)

The United Nations refugee agency, [UNHCR](#), [stated](#) on Saturday that "no effort should be spared" in saving lives at sea, following reports of two new shipwrecks on the Mediterranean Sea, in which some 170 people either died or went missing.

"The tragedy of the Mediterranean cannot be allowed to continue," said Filippo Grandi, the [UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#).

According to various NGOs, about 53 people died on the Alborán Sea, in the western part of the Mediterranean. One survivor is understood to have been rescued by a passing fishing boat after being stranded for more than 24 hours at sea and is receiving medical treatment in Morocco.

According to UNHCR, Moroccan and Spanish rescue vessels have been searching

for the boat and survivors for several days to no avail.

The Italian Navy are also reporting another shipwreck on the central Mediterranean. Three survivors, who were taken for treatment on the island of Lampedusa, reported that another 117 people, currently dead or missing, had boarded the ship with them in Libya.

UNHCR has been unable to independently verify the death tolls for these two shipwrecks, but in 2018, 2,262 people lost their lives attempting to reach Europe via the Mediterranean Sea.

“We cannot turn a blind eye to the high numbers of people dying on Europe’s doorstep,” said Mr. Grandi. “No effort should be spared, or prevented, from saving lives in distress at sea.”

UNHCR’s statement said it is “concerned that actions by States are increasingly deterring NGOs from conducting search and rescue operations”, and is calling for these to be lifted immediately”.

At the same time, “greater efforts are needed to prevent refugees and migrants from taking these desperate journeys in the first place”, UNHCR stressed, calling for “more safe and legal pathways to access asylum in Europe... for those fleeing war and persecution so that no one feels they have no other choice than to put their lives in the hands of unscrupulous traffickers and smugglers”.

[UN rights expert calls for civilian protection as fighting escalates between military and armed group](#)

Calling on the Myanmar Government to “immediately reverse its decision not to allow access to all humanitarian organizations”, the United Nations expert on human rights in the South-East Asian country said on Friday, that “it’s vital that assistance is able to reach those who have fled violence in the region”.

Voicing alarm at the escalating violence in northern and central Rakhine state and Chin state, the UN Special Rapporteur on human Rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, urged all sides, including the State military and ethnic armed groups, to show restraint and protect civilians.

In a [statement](#), Ms. Lee added that “blocking humanitarian access is a serious violation of international humanitarian law”.

On 10 January, a letter was sent by the Rakhine state government to the UN

and international humanitarian agencies with instructions, apart from the UN [World Food Programme \(WFP\)](#) and the International Committee of the Red Cross, to suspend their activities in the five townships in northern Rakhine that are affected by the conflict, Ponnagyun, Kyauktaw, Rathedaung, Buthidaung and Maungdaw.

Since November last year, the Arakan Army separatists and the Myanmar military have been engaged in heavy fighting, which has resulted in deaths and injuries to civilians. Since early December, at least 5,000 people have been displaced from their homes.

Condemning the attack by the Arakan Army on the four Border Guard Police posts on 4 January and expressing concern at the Myanmar military disproportionate response to the attack, Ms. Lee stressed that “all the people of Rakhine state, including the Rakhine, Mro, Daignet, Hindu and Rohingya, have already suffered enough”.

The UN human rights expert also expressed her concern about the risks of “exacerbating divisions among communities in an already fractured state, further complicating the complex situation that exists in the country”.

The latest violence comes amid a wider pattern of sporadic but at times intense fighting between ethnic groups and the authorities in Myanmar dating back more than 70 years in some cases, since independence in January 1948.

Ms. Lee called on the Government to prioritise the safety and well-being of “all the people of Rakhine State and work towards peace around Myanmar”.

[Thousands returning to Nigeria's restive Borno state 'at risk'; UN 'gravely concerned'](#)

Amid reports that Cameroon is forcing several thousand Nigerians to return to Borno state in the country's crisis-gripped north-east, the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) deplored the move, saying it has put lives “at risk”.

Aerial view of Rann, Borno State, North-eastern Nigeria. 5 July 2018., by WFP/Inger Marie Vennize

“We are [gravely concerned](#) for the safety and well-being of all these people”, UNHCR said in a statement.

On 16 January, 267 Nigerian refugees, who had crossed into Cameroon in 2014, were forcibly returned.

And at dusk on 14 January, militants attacked and ransacked the small border town of Rann, about 10 kilometers from the Cameroon border, which continued into the next day, targeting military installations, civilians and humanitarian facilities. At least 14 people were reportedly killed and an estimated 9,000 fled to Cameroon.

“This action was totally unexpected and puts lives of thousands of refugees at risk,” said [UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#) Filippo Grandi.

Cameroon is currently home to more than 370,000 refugees, including some 100,000 from Nigeria.

“I am appealing to Cameroon to continue its open door and hospitable policy and practices and halt immediately any more returns and to ensure full compliance with its refugee protection obligations under its own national legislation, as well as international law”, Mr. Grandi stressed.

North-eastern Nigeria has been particularly hard-hit by the insurgency being waged in the region since 2009.

Attack spreads fear among vulnerable population

Meanwhile, according to [Edward Kallon](#), the country’s UN Humanitarian Coordinator, the deadly attack interrupted aid delivery to some 76,000 internally displaced people in Rann.

New arrivals in Gubio Camp in Maiduguri, Nigeria, following the attack in Baga. As the camp doesn’t have enough shelters, people are sleeping on mats under trees., by OCHA/Leni Kinzli

“The attacks on Rann, that are increasingly frequent, are having a [devastating impact](#) on the civilians taking refuge in this isolated town and severely affecting our ability to deliver life-saving aid to women, men and children in need,” he said.

The attackers looted or destroyed a medical clinic, humanitarian supply warehouses and aid workers’ accommodations, and burned down the nearby market and camp shelters.

At present Rann is inaccessible to international humanitarian organizations both by road and by air.

“This attack has spread fear among an already vulnerable population, and humanitarian assets were also targeted”, stated Mr. Kallon. “I urge the Government of Nigeria to protect civilians, including aid workers”.

Now in its tenth year, the conflict in north-east Nigeria has triggered massive displacement and caused a severe humanitarian crisis with more than seven million people in need.

In addition to the Rann attack, clashes in other local government areas in

northern Borno state have forced more than 43,000 people to flee their homes since November, with more than 32,000 taking refuge in Maiduguri, the Borno capital – many converging on already congested camps.

Libyan authorities must shoulder the burden to support country's 'vulnerable' south

Despite years of promises to address the “vulnerable heart” of Libya – the country's south – conditions around its water and oil resource wealth have continued to deteriorate at “an alarming rate”, the United Nations envoy for the country told the Security Council.

Ghassan Salamé, the Head of the UN Support Mission in Libya ([UNSMIL](#)) spoke to Council members on Friday via video conference in Tripoli about his recent visit to the south – the first since 2012.

“I heard first-hand from citizens who spoke movingly about the terrible hardships they endure”, he said – from the brutality of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or Da'esh terrorist fighters to what he described as lakes of sewage in the region “due to the lack of investment in basic public infrastructure” and foreign mercenaries who slip through porous borders to common criminals alike that prey upon citizens and migrants.

While UNSMIL has built a taskforce to tackle the situation, and agencies are helping, “it is the Libyan authorities who must shoulder the burden” he stated.

Inaction leads to attacks against water pipelines and oil facilities, “which hurt Libya's slowly recovering economy”, and leave citizens vulnerable to armed violence.

Only Libyans themselves can plot a path out of this malaise, towards stability and prosperity – *UNSMIL head Ghassan Salamé*

“Wherever there is fighting, parties must take all measures to protect civilians and civilian facilities and adhere to International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law” or face the consequences, underscored Mr. Salamé.

The Special Representative relayed positive steps made by the Council of the Government of National Accords, including the appointment of Health and Local Governance Ministers, which have “improved our scope to support service delivery and reform”. However, country-wide security remains precarious.

Steady the economy, unite the nation

At the same time, while things are looking up on some economic fronts, such as “long queues of people standing for days outside of ATMs to get a meager fraction of their assets is now behind us” and rising oil production has driven revenue, Mr. Salamé underscored that disturbances in the South over the lack of services have recently slowed production.

“It is essential that such grievances be addressed without resorting to threatening the national economy” he stressed.

UNSMIL has been returned “in full force”, he said, pointing to the reopening of the Benghazi office this month and the opening of an office in the South later this year, stating: “It is vital that we are here, in Libya”.

Underscoring the importance of the National Conference in tackling the country’s underlying dysfunctionalities, he implored Libya to see it as “a patriotic concern that transcends partisan and personal interests” and asked for the Council’s support.

“The political deadlock in Libya has been underpinned by a complex web of narrow interests, a broken legal framework and the pillaging of Libya’s great wealth”, said the Special Representative. “Only Libyans themselves can plot a path out of this malaise, towards stability and prosperity”.

Sanctions in full swing

For his part, Jürgen Schulz, chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, recalled the Committee’s visit in November – the first since the inception of the sanctions regime in 2011 – where they visited Tripoli, but were unable to stop in Beida because the airport was closed.

He also highlighted the timebound measures in Security Council [resolution 2441](#) to prevent illicit exports of petroleum, and said that sanctions criteria would include planning, directing, or committing acts of sexual and gender-based violence.

Mr. Schulz called on Member States to report back to the Committee on the implementation of travel ban and asset freeze measures.