

Top UN official commends Niger for tackling complex humanitarian crisis

11 September 2017 – Top UN official commends Niger for tackling complex humanitarian crisis A top United Nations official today commended the Government of Niger for tackling the country's complex humanitarian crisis, including leading the provision of life-saving aid to hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable, and highlighted the need to address its root causes.

"I was impressed to see how brave aid workers are working with the Government to deliver assistance to the most vulnerable people in Niger under difficult and dangerous circumstances," said the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, concluding a three-day visit.

During the visit, the first for Mr. Lowcock since assuming his post earlier this month, he travelled to the Diffa region – where aid has been provided to 400,000 people; one out of two individuals requires humanitarian assistance; and Boko Haram attacks remain a grave threat.

Mr. Lowcock pointed to the success of scaled-up humanitarian support in Niger in recent years, saying: "We have reached millions of people, unquestionably saving lives and averting the worst. But humanitarian needs remain high and sustained international help behind Niger's efforts is critical."

N'Gagam, a village in the Diffa region near the Nigerian border, had a pre-crisis population of 1,000 but now hosts 13,500 people from both Niger and Nigeria whose homes were destroyed or villages are considered too dangerous to return to, according to a [news release](#) issued by OCHA.

A 30-year-old woman named Achaitou, who fled Nigeria to N'Gagam with her four young children, told Mr. Lowcock how she survives with help from the UN and partners. "Despite daily struggles, she maintains her dignity and retains hope for a better future for her children. But she remains terrified of violence by armed groups and often takes her children into the bush at night, risking disease and snake bites."

Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, pays visit to the Diffa region of Niger. Credit: OCHA/Ivo Brandau

The UN humanitarian chief said the Government and people of Niger have shown "enormous generosity and humanity" in hosting refugees and internally displaced persons fleeing violence, not only in the Lake Chad Basin but also in the west, where people have fled insecurity in Mali.

Niger has been an active international partner in efforts to address the crises in both the Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel, according to OCHA.

In Niger, Mr. Lowcock also held meetings with UN officials, international non-governmental organizations and the diplomatic community, in addition to Government officials.

“Niger has done so much right, but faces enormous challenges,” he pointed out, noting that, like other countries across the Sahel, it grapples with insecurity, climatic shocks, extreme poverty and the lack of basic services and infrastructure.

“Together with our humanitarian efforts, Niger needs increased support from development partners, especially to educate its young population and enable them to get jobs. We must tackle the root causes of the crisis alongside the immediate priority of saving lives and protecting people,” he added.

[UN human rights chief points to ‘textbook example of ethnic cleansing’ in Myanmar](#)

11 September 2017 – The United Nations human rights chief today lashed out at the treatment of the Rohingya in Myanmar which has led to more than 300,000 people fleeing to Bangladesh in the past three weeks, as security forces and local militia reportedly burn villages and shoot civilians.

“The situation seems a [textbook example of ethnic cleansing](#),” Zeid Ra’ad al-Hussein told the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, noting that the current situation cannot yet be fully assessed since Myanmar has refused access to human rights investigators.

He cited reports of Myanmar authorities laying landmines along the border with Bangladesh and requiring returnees to provide “proof of nationality,” an impossibility given that successive Myanmar governments have since 1962 progressively stripped the Rohingya population of their political and civil rights, including citizenship rights.

The latest security operation in Rakhine state follows attacks by militants on 25 August against 30 police posts.

The High Commissioner called the response “clearly disproportionate” and “without regard for basic principles of international law,” and said the Government should “stop claiming that the Rohingyas are setting fire to their own homes and laying waste to their own villages.”

“This complete denial of reality is doing great damage to the international standing of a Government which, until recently, benefited from immense good will,” he said.

"I call on the Government to end its current cruel military operation, with accountability for all violations that have occurred and to reverse the pattern of severe and widespread discrimination against the Rohingya population," he added, calling for his Office ([OHCHR](#)) to obtain unfettered access to the country.



Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights addresses the 36th session of the Human Rights Council. UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

Last year, Mr. Zeid issued a report warning that the pattern of gross violations of the human rights of the Rohingya suggested a widespread or systematic attack against the community, possibly amounting to crimes against humanity.

In today's statement, he also addressed Bangladeshi authorities, encouraging them to maintain open borders for the refugees, and the international community to help support the refugees. Humanitarian agencies in Bangladesh today [appealed](#) for \$77 million to aid an estimated 300,000 refugees through the end of the year.

At the same time, he deplored measures taken by India, which has said it is not a signatory to the Refugee Convention and can deport Rohingyas.

Warnings of escalating violence in Venezuela

Among other issues raised in his address today was the situation in Venezuela, where Mr. Zeid said that crimes against humanity may have been committed, and where tensions have the potential to escalate further.

He noted a report issued by OHCHR last month highlighting excessive use of force by security officers and multiple other human rights violations, and urged authorities in Venezuela – which is a member of the Geneva-based forum – “to uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights.”

Given the very real dangers to human rights in the country, he urged the Human Rights Council to establish an international investigation and called for the involvement of the international community.

Call for international probe into abuses in Yemen

Mr. Zeid also called for the establishment of an international and independent investigative body to probe the human rights situation in Yemen, which he called “extremely alarming.”

He noted that 62 international and Yemeni non-governmental organizations had submitted a letter to the Council requesting such an inquiry.

“The devastation of Yemen and the horrific suffering of its people will have immense and enduring repercussions across the region,” Mr. Zeid said. “I

appeal to the parties to the conflict to reach a negotiated and durable solution, and to adhere to their obligations under international law, including by facilitating the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian relief.”

[New mission in Colombia ready to boost confidence for stable peace, says UN envoy](#)

11 September 2017 – As the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia prepares to begin its activities, its chief expressed the hope today that, with the support of the Security Council, the new operation should be able to strengthen the country’s confidence for a stable peace.

“Over the past months, the peace process between the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) has slowly but steadily tipped the scales in favour of hope,” said the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Colombia, Jean Arnault, in his briefing to the Security Council.

He also told the 15-member Security Council that the formal transformation of the FARC-EP into a political party highlighted the momentous developments that have taken place over the past year in Colombia.

In his briefing, the UN envoy also informed the Council of the establishment at all levels – local, regional and national – of transitional teams with civilian personnel and observers, who began verification related to the new mission’s mandate.

“Reconnaissance visits are taking place to all prospective team sites and sub-offices, in particular with a view to identifying possible areas of co-location with the UN Country Team,” he added, noting also the other logistical and administrative tasks underway.

Recalling the recent visit by Pope Francis to the country and his strong message in favour of reconciliation, forgiveness and confidence in the future, Mr. Arnault said:

“We trust that the presence of the UN Mission, the work of the UN system, and the support of the Security Council can and should shore up further the confidence of the Colombian society in the stable peace to which its citizens so ardently aspire.”

Mr. Arnault reported that the temporary ceasefire agreed between the Government and the National Liberation Army (ENL) should be accompanied by a series of measures to improve the humanitarian situation of the communities

in conflict-affected areas. The agreement also provides that the UN would assist with the verification of the commitments made.

SEE ALSO: [Colombia: UN welcomes ceasefire pact between Government and ELN rebels](#)

“I met with both heads of delegations who have confirmed their interest in the UN involvement, and members of the Mission have engaged with the Technical Commission on the Ceasefire,” he said.

In July, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2366 to establish, at the request of the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP, the UN mission to verify the former combatants’ political, economic and social reintegration. The new mission will begin its activities on 26 September.

[UNICEF: Decades of progress for children at risk across Middle East and North Africa](#)

11 September 2017 – Nearly one-in-five children across the Middle East and North Africa – over 90 per cent of whom live in conflict-affected countries – need immediate humanitarian assistance, according to new analysis by the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)).

“Conflict continues to rob millions of girls and boys of their childhood,” said Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director, in a [press statement](#).

“Decades of progress are at risk of being reversed across the Middle East and North Africa,” he added.

UNICEF pointed out that children have been hit hardest by ongoing years of violence, displacement and lack of basic services. Civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, energy, water, sanitation and hygiene installations have often come under attack, exposing children to the risk of death and diseases.

Moreover, millions of families have been forced to flee their homes – some multiple times and under fire. Continued violence and displacement have increasingly made it difficult for children and families to cope.

“With no end in sight to these conflicts and with families’ dwindling financial resources, many have no choice but to send their children to work or marry their daughters early. The number of children affiliated with the fighting has more than doubled,” continued the UNICEF Director.

Children in the Middle East and North Africa region have undergone

unprecedented levels of violence and witnessed horrors that no one should witness Geert Cappelaere

According to the latest analysis, inside Syria and in refugee-hosting countries, almost 12 million Syrian children require humanitarian assistance – up from half a million in 2012.

Additionally, an estimated two million children who live in hard-to-reach or besieged areas in Syria have received limited humanitarian assistance over the years.

Turning to Yemen, the fighting has destroyed water and sanitation systems – sparking the world’s worst cholera and acute diarrhoea outbreak, with over 610,000 suspected cases to date.

More than half of Yemen’s health facilities are out of service and water systems have been destroyed, cutting off almost 15 million people from safe water and access to basic healthcare.

Across Iraq, more than 5 million children are in need of assistance as heavy fighting intensified, including in Mosul and recently in Tal Afar. They need water, food, shelter and education.

As for the Gaza Strip, an ongoing electricity crisis has reduced access to water by 30 per cent while diarrhoea cases among young children have doubled in just three months.

“Children in the Middle East and North Africa region have undergone unprecedented levels of violence and witnessed horrors that no one should witness. If violence and wars continue, the consequences – not only for the region but for the world as a whole – will be dire,” underscored Mr. Cappelaere.

“World leaders must do much more to put an end to violence for the sake of boys and girls and their future,” he concluded.

Further development of DPRK nuclear programme cause of grave concern – UN atomic energy chief

11 September 2017 – Noting signs suggesting that a nuclear plant in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) could be operating, the head of the United Nations atomic agency called on the country’s leadership to comply fully with its obligations under Security Council resolutions.

[“There were indications](#) at the Yongbyon Experimental Nuclear Power Plant suggesting that the reactor was being operated, [and] at the Yongbyon Nuclear Fuel Rod Fabrication Plant, there were indications consistent with the use of the reported centrifuge enrichment facility,” said Yukiya Amano, the Director General of the UN International Atomic Energy Agency ([IAEA](#)), at the agency’s Board of Governors meeting in Vienna.

“The continuation and further development of the nuclear programme of the DPRK are a cause for grave concern.”

Noting that the IAEA continues to closely follow developments in the country’s nuclear programme, the Director General said that the UN agency is enhancing its efforts to monitor and verify nuclear-related developments, including through ensuring the availability of appropriate verification technologies and equipment.

Turning to other areas, Mr. Amano said that the nuclear-related commitments undertaken by Iran under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action are being implemented and that the IAEA continues to verify the non-diversion of nuclear material declared by the country under its Safeguards Agreement.

“We will continue to implement the Additional Protocol in Iran, including carrying out complementary accesses to sites and other locations, as we do in other countries with additional protocols,” he noted.

On the implementation of the [Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons](#) (NPT) Safeguards Agreement in Syria, the IAEA Director General said that the agency’s assessment remains that it was “very likely” that the building destroyed at the Dair Alzour site in 2007 was a nuclear reactor that should have been declared as such by Syria under its Safeguards Agreement.

“I renew my call on Syria to cooperate fully with [IAEA] in connection with unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and other locations,” he urged.

Also in his statement, Mr. Amano spoke of the agency’s technical cooperation programme, including its work to contain the outbreak of the fruit fly pest in the Dominican Republic and efforts to conserve ground water and protect it from pollution in the Sahel region, as well as its work on nuclear applications, and on nuclear safety and security.

Citing increasing demand for assistance under the technical cooperation programme, the IAEA Director General also urged all countries to contribute funds, and welcomed support through extrabudgetary contributions, including government cost sharing.