

World needs to move beyond 'conceptual debate' and improve protection from atrocities, urges Guterres

6 September 2017 – Highlighting increased atrocity crimes – genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity – in many parts of the world, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today called for concrete action to protect the vulnerable and to reverse such negative trends.

“All of us are well aware of the grim human reality that lies behind the words, ‘war crimes’, ‘crimes against humanity’, ‘ethnic cleansing’, and ‘genocide’,” Mr. Guterres said at a dialogue held at UN Headquarters on the responsibility to protect, commonly referred to as ‘R2P’.

[“It is time to move beyond the conceptual debate towards improved protection of people from atrocity crimes.”](#)

Referring to his [report on responsibility to protect](#), the UN chief also stressed that the Organization must give far greater attention to address the challenges before they spiral out of control.

In particular, he underscored the need for practical steps, noting that his report includes options that can be taken in a relatively short time, without major operational or institutional requirements.

He also urged the [Human Rights Council](#) (the highest UN intergovernmental forum on human rights) as well as the Security Council to further strengthen their capacity to address the risks of atrocity crimes and other violations of the responsibility to protect, and called for improving the use of all three UN pillars – peace and security, development, and human rights – for better early warning and prevention, as envisaged in the Human Rights Up Front action plan.

Noting that the responsibility to protect agenda generates some discomfort for a number of UN Member States, with the primary concern that it will be used to “impose” international approaches that may harm national sovereignty, Mr. Guterres said that the success of the UN implementing its mandates depended on national actors being able to deliver on their sovereign responsibilities.

“Our shared challenge is to use the principle of the responsibility to protect to achieve the goals that were originally envisaged. I am convinced that open and constructive discussion among concerned States can overcome any remaining differences,” he added.

Further, the Secretary-General recalled the outcome document of the 2005 World Summit, which was adopted unanimously and which reinforced that States have the primary responsibility to protect their populations from atrocity

crimes as well as assist States if they do not possess the necessary capacity to prevent crimes in their territory.

“But should national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, then we must be prepared to take collective action, in accordance with the Charter, including Chapter VII, on a case-by-case basis,” he stated.

[Syria: UN probe documents use of chemical weapons and other crimes against civilians](#)

6 September 2017 – Despite reduced violence in some places in Syria, warring parties continued to perpetrate unthinkable crimes against civilians, including the use of chemical weapons by Government forces, a group of United Nations investigators said today as they released a new report.

“It underscores once more how Syrian men, women, and children throughout the country remain the primary victims of violence perpetrated by the pro-Government forces, anti-Government armed groups, terrorist organisations and their affiliates,” Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Chair of the [UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria](#), told a press conference in Geneva, launching the report.

In its fourteenth report to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council, covering the period between March and July this year, the Commission noted that the Syrian air force used sarin in opposition-held Khan Shaykhun on 4 April, killing over 80 people, most of whom were women and children.

A [press release](#) issued by the Commission noted that such attacks constitute clear violations of international humanitarian law and the Convention on Chemical Weapons, which Syria ratified in 2013 following a previous sarin attack.

“Reporting on such heinous crimes and violations is the core of our work,” said the Commission Chair, adding that the panel has a duty to attribute responsibility accordingly, regardless of the perpetrator.

Mr. Pinheiro said that most incidents in which civilians are killed and maimed involve the unlawful use of conventional weapons, such as cluster munitions and explosive weapons in civilian populated areas.

The report also examined local truces. The so-called “Four Towns Agreement” incorporated evacuation agreements which resulted in the forced displacement of civilians, a war crime.

“Civilians did not leave these locations voluntarily,” Mr. Pinheiro said, explaining that most were never consulted and they felt they had no other choice, fearing such reprisals as arrests and forced conscription if they stayed.

The report also documented several incidents perpetrated by the terrorist groups Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra) and ISIL, and by armed group fighters.

Terrorist and other armed groups targeted religious minorities through car and suicide bombings, the use of snipers and hostage-taking, including in areas controlled by the Syrian Government. In al-Rashidin (Aleppo), a single car bombing killed 96 people, including 68 internally displaced children, from previously besieged Fu’ah and Kafraya (Idlib).

The report also found that US forces failed to take all feasible precautions to protect civilians and civilian objects when attacking alleged terrorists and destroying part of a mosque complex in al-Jinah, Aleppo, in March, in violation of international humanitarian law.

Investigations are ongoing into allegations that international coalition airstrikes, carried out as part of the ongoing offensive to repel ISIL from Raqqa, have resulted in increasingly alarming numbers of civilian casualties.

The Commission is gravely concerned that this offensive has led to the internal displacement of some 190,000 people, with the fate of some 20,000 others precarious as they remain trapped in Raqqa.

Investigations also continue into allegations that before fleeing Syria, ISIL fighters are trying to sell enslaved Yazidi women and girls – victims of the ongoing and largely unaddressed genocide, according to the Commission.

The other Commission members are Karen AbuZayd and Carla Del Ponte.

[Mali: UN chief condemns latest attack on peacekeepers](#)

6 September 2017 – [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has condemned an attack against a United Nations convoy in the Kidal region of Mali that left two peacekeepers dead and two others seriously injured.

In a [statement](#) issued last night, the Secretary-General extended his condolences to the families and loved ones of the victims and wished a speedy recovery for the injured personnel serving with the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali ([MINUSMA](#)).

“The Secretary-General recalls that attacks against peacekeepers may constitute war crimes under international law,” the statement added.

Established by the Security Council in April 2013, MINUSMA supports the political process in Mali and carries out a number of security-related stabilization tasks, including protecting civilians, human rights monitoring, and the creation of conditions for the provision of humanitarian assistance.

[Ahead of Hurricane Irma, UNICEF preparing supplies and communication lines to youth](#)

6 September 2017 – If Irma stays on its current track as a category 5 hurricane, it will bring devastating damage within hours to parts of the Caribbean, affecting the lives of hundreds of thousands of children, the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) today cautioned.

“Although it is still early to know the full impact that Irma will have in the region, the main concerns of UNICEF centre around the supply of drinking water and food, and the health and protection of children and adolescents,” the UN agency said in a statement.

UNICEF’s office in the region has activated its emergency protocols and is working with Government officials in Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, St. Maarten, St. Kitts and Nevis, and the Virgin Islands, as well as the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Cuba, which the hurricane is projected to hit next.

Supplies of drinking water, unperishable food and medicines, and emergency kits are pre-positioned and ready for distribution in the most affected communities, UNICEF said.

The agency also activated its U-Report platform, which allows it to send urgent messages via Facebook and other social media platforms to young people who subscribed.

“Considering the possible magnitude that Irma represents, it is both hugely urgent and necessary to be prepared, informed and vigilant so that we try to avoid the impact on the most vulnerable, that is to say children,” said Marita Perceval, Regional Director of UNICEF in Latin America and the Caribbean.

According to recent information, Irma has become “the most dangerous natural phenomenon” in the region this year.

Its impact will likely surpass Hurricane Matthew, which was a category 4 hurricane on a five-point scale and affected 3.2 million people last October – of whom 1.3 million were children.

Since last fall, UNICEF said it has been working with Government officials in the area to help create better access to clean water and hygiene, education, protection, nutrition and health, and respond to the spread of cholera.

Conflict, widespread poverty stall progress on education rates over past decade – UNICEF

6 September 2017 – Pervasive levels of poverty, protracted conflicts and complex humanitarian emergencies have led to stagnation in reducing the global out-of-school rate over the past decade, prompting the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) to call for more investments.

With 11.5 per cent of school-age children – or 123 million missing school today, compared to 12.8 per cent – or 135 million – in 2007, the percentage of out-of-school 6-15 year olds has barely decreased in the last decade, according to UNICEF.

Investments aimed at increasing the number of schools and teachers to match population growth are not enough, said UNICEF Chief of Education Jo Bourne.

This business-as-usual approach will not get the most vulnerable children into school and help them reach their full potential if they continue to be trapped in poverty, deprivation and insecurity, she added.

Children living in the world’s poorest countries and in conflict zones are disproportionately affected. Of the 123 million children missing out on school, 40 per cent live in the least developed countries and 20 per cent live in conflict zones.

UNICEF points out that war continues to threaten and reverse education gains.

The conflicts in Iraq and Syria have resulted in an additional 3.4 million children missing out on education, bringing the number of out-of-school children across the Middle East and North Africa back to 2007’s level of approximately 16 million.

With their high levels of poverty, rapidly increasing populations and

recurring emergencies, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia account for 75 per cent of the global out-of-school primary- and lower-secondary school age population.

“Governments and the global community must target their investments at eliminating the factors preventing these children from going to school in the first place, including by making schools safe and improving teaching and learning,” she continued.

However, some progress has been achieved.

Ethiopia and Niger, among the world’s poorest countries, have made the most enrolment rate progress in primary-school-age children with an increase of more than 15 per cent and around 19 per cent, respectively.

Emergency funding shortfalls for education affect access for children in conflict to attend school.

On average, less than 2.7 per cent of global humanitarian appeals are dedicated to education.

Six-months into 2017, UNICEF had only received 12 per cent of the funding required to provide education for children caught up in crises. More funds are urgently required to address the increasing number and complexity of crises and to give children the stability and opportunities they deserve.

“Learning provides relief for children affected by emergencies in the short-term, but is also a critical investment in the future development of societies in the long-term,” underscored Ms. Bourne.

“Yet investment in education does not respond to the realities of a volatile world. To address this, we must secure greater and more predictable funding for education in unpredictable emergencies,” she concluded.