

Myanmar: UN rights chief says violence in Rakhine state 'predictable and preventable'

29 August 2017 – Alarmed at renewed fighting and incitement in the wake of the attacks on Myanmar security forces in northern areas of Rakhine state, the top United Nations human rights official today urged all sides to renounce the use of violence and called on State authorities to ensure they abide by their obligations under international human rights law.

"This turn of events is deplorable. It was [predicted and could have been prevented](#)," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, noting that "decades of persistent and systematic human rights violations, including the very violent security responses to the attacks since October 2016, have almost certainly contributed to the nurturing of violent extremism, with everyone ultimately losing."

The High Commissioner called on the political leadership to condemn the inflammatory rhetoric and incitement to hatred that is proliferating, including on social media.

Mr. Zeid also expressed concern about claims by the State Counsellor's Office that international aid workers were complicit in or supporting the attacks.

"Such statements are irresponsible and only serve to increase fears and the potential for further violence," he said. "I am extremely concerned that the unsupported allegations against international aid organizations place their staff in danger and may make it impossible for them to deliver essential aid."

Mr. Zeid said the perpetrators of the attacks on security personnel must be brought to justice, as must those who have been attacking the civilian population.

State authorities should issue clear instructions to security forces to refrain from using disproportionate force, minimize damage and injuries and respect the right to life, he said.

"The State has a duty to protect those within its territory without discrimination," stated Mr. Zeid.

"I call on the Government of Myanmar to follow the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, headed by Kofi Annan, for an integrated and calibrated response to the situation in Rakhine state, to address rather than sacrifice human rights concerns in the interests of maintaining peace and order," he said.

The High Commissioner also expressed concern about thousands of Rohingya having fled from Myanmar into Bangladesh since the attacks, adding to the

tens of thousands who have been arriving in Bangladesh since October 2016.

UN refugee agency urges open borders for people fleeing violence in Rakhine

Meanwhile, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) today [communicated](#) to the Government of Bangladesh its readiness to support the country in assisting refugees crossing the border.

As of Sunday, it was estimated that some 5,200 people had entered Bangladesh from Myanmar since Thursday. Several thousand were reported to be in locations along the Myanmar side of the border.

The agency is aware of several reported instances of people being prevented from entering Bangladesh. UNHCR believes it is of the utmost importance that Bangladesh, which has hosted refugees from Myanmar for decades, continues to allow Rohingya fleeing violence to seek safety there.

UNHCR also called on the international community to support Bangladesh in doing so, with all necessary aid and other help.

[UN chief Guterres condemns latest ballistic missile launch by DPRK](#)

29 August 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has condemned the latest ballistic missile launch by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), in violation of relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

“The launch undermines regional security and stability and efforts to create space for dialogue,” said a [statement](#) issued by UN spokesperson Eri Kaneko.

According to press reports, early Tuesday morning, the DPRK launched a ballistic missile that travelled some 2,700 kilometers, flying over Japan before crashing into the Pacific Ocean.

“The Secretary-General calls on the Government of the DPRK to fully comply with its international obligations and to work to re-open channels of communication,” the statement said, adding that Mr. Guterres remains in close contact with all parties concerned.

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council is scheduled to meet urgently on the issue this afternoon at the request of Japan, the United States and the Republic of Korea.

[UN chief urges all countries to join legally-binding treaty against nuclear tests](#)

29 August 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has urged all countries to sign and ratify a global treaty that bans nuclear explosions on the Earth's surface, in the atmosphere, underwater and underground.

More than 2,000 nuclear tests have been conducted over the past seven decades from the South Pacific to North America, from Central Asia to North Africa. They have harmed some of the world's most vulnerable peoples and pristine ecosystems, the Secretary-General [said](#) in his message for the International Day against Nuclear Tests.

To ensure that no country could conduct another test, he urged all countries to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty ([CTBT](#)).

To date, 183 countries have signed the CTBT and 166 have ratified it. For the treaty to enter into force, ratification is required from eight more of the so-called Annex 2 States. Of these, China, Egypt, Iran, Israel, and the United States, have yet to ratify it.

DPRK, India and Pakistan are among the 13 countries that have not signed the CTBT.

I urge all countries yet to join the CTBT to do so as soon as possible, Mr. Guterres said. For almost 20 years, a global norm has existed against nuclear testing based on voluntarily unilateral moratoriums. I applaud this restraint, but it is not enough.

He noted that continued nuclear tests by DPRK demonstrate that even the strongest norm is no substitute for a legally-binding prohibition.

Overnight, DPRK fired a ballistic missile in violation of Security Council resolutions, Mr. Guterres said in a separate [statement](#) condemning the event and urging DPRK to fully comply with its international obligations.

The comments come on the [International Day against Nuclear Tests](#), which is observed annually on 29 August, following the declaration of that day in a resolution unanimously adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2009.

The resolution called for increasing awareness and education about the effects of nuclear weapon test explosions or any other nuclear explosions and the need for their cessation as one of the means of achieving the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world. The resolution's adoption also commemorated the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site in Kazakhstan in 1991.

[In crisis-torn countries, children's access to safe water and sanitation is a right, not a privilege – UNICEF](#)

29 August 2017 – In countries beset by violence, displacement, conflict and instability, children's most basic means of survival – water – must be a priority, the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) said today, warning that children living in fragile situations are four times more likely to lack access to drinking water.

“Children's access to safe water and sanitation, especially in conflicts and emergencies, is a right, not a privilege,” said Sanjay Wijesekera, UNICEF's global chief of water, sanitation and hygiene, who warned, as [World Water Week](#) gets underway, that more than 180 million people in crisis-torn countries have no access to drinking water.

UNICEF said that in Yemen, a country reeling from the impact of over two years of conflict, water supply networks that serve the country's largest cities are at imminent risk of collapse due to war-inflicted damage and disrepair. Around 15 million people in the country have been cut off from regular access to water and sanitation.

As for Syria, where the conflict is well into its seventh year, around 15 million people are in need of safe water, including an estimated 6.4 million children. Water has frequently been used as a weapon of war: In 2016 alone, there were at least 30 deliberate water cuts – including in Aleppo, Damascus, Hama, Raqqa and Dara, with pumps destroyed and water sources contaminated.

In conflict-affected areas in northeast Nigeria, 75 per cent of water and sanitation infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed, leaving 3.6 million people without even basic water services. The UN agency adds that in South Sudan, where fighting has raged for over three years, almost half the water points across the country have been damaged or completely destroyed.

“In far too many cases, water and sanitation systems have been attacked, damaged or left in disrepair to the point of collapse. When children have no safe water to drink, and when health systems are left in ruins, malnutrition and potentially fatal diseases like cholera will inevitably follow,” said Mr. Wijesekera.

In Yemen, for example, children make up more than 53 per cent of the over half a million cases of suspected cholera and acute watery diarrhoea reported so far. Somalia is suffering from the largest outbreak of cholera in the last five years, with nearly 77,000 cases of suspected cholera/acute watery diarrhoea. And in South Sudan, the cholera outbreak is the most severe the

country has ever experienced, with more than 19,000 cases since June 2016, said UNICEF.

In famine-threatened north-east Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, nearly 30 million people, including 14.6 million children, are in urgent need of safe water. More than five million children are estimated to be malnourished this year, with 1.4 million severely so.

[INTERVIEW: Preventing conflict key to relieving suffering, stresses outgoing UN humanitarian chief](#)

28 August 2017 – Preventing conflicts from breaking out in the first place, and holding perpetrators accountable for their actions once they do, is vital to relieving the suffering seen in many parts of the world, according to the top United Nations humanitarian official, Stephen O'Brien.

"That's the issue about conflict, it's man-made, and, therefore, it's capable of being unmade by man and the humanitarian suffering that is brought about by it can be reduced and eliminated over time," Mr. O'Brien, who has served for over two years as Under-Secretary-General and UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, said in an interview with *UN News*.

For the past two years, the British national has witnessed some of that suffering first hand, meeting some of the millions affected by conflict and crises in, among others, Iraq, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

As he prepares to wrap up his assignment with the UN, Mr. O'Brien discussed what he will remember most about being the UN humanitarian chief, some of his frustrations, UN reform efforts and how to avoid a sense of hopelessness from setting in given the numerous crises around the world and the ever increasing needs.

UN News: When you look back at the past two years, what is the one encounter that will stay with you the most, that encapsulates what the job's been about for you?

Stephen O'Brien: In Yemen, when I visited a school that was occupied by internally displaced persons (IDPs) – there are millions in Yemen because of the terrible conflict – there was a girl called Marie, who was looking after eight of her siblings in the absence of any parents and they were struggling to get food. They had at last become registered so they were getting supplies from the very brave aid workers, from the UN and other NGO partners. But it was not possible as yet to give them schooling so they brought home to me more than anything else, that they should not be victims in other people's

wars, and also that the international community was doing an amazing job in giving them the lifesaving as well as the protection they needed.

VIDEO: Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien hails the extraordinary work of aid workers around the world and urges the international community to do a better job to prevent conflict and relieve the suffering of people. Credit: UN News

UN News: Where do you think you have been most effective in the job, and what has been your biggest frustration?

Stephen O'Brien: I look at the extraordinary work of all of these humanitarian workers around the world in these very tough spots in the two years that I've been in the post and I've been really inspired by the courage, persistence and determination of these people who want to make sure that the people affected by the crisis, through no fault of their own, are given the lifesaving and protection that they need.

The frustration is that we are simply not able to raise our ability to respond at the same pace that the needs are arising.

While that has been rewarding, the job itself is extraordinarily challenging because the rise in humanitarian needs around the world has been exponential, and notwithstanding that we have managed to secure record amounts of funding in that period, the gap has grown wider.

The frustration is that we are simply not able to raise our ability to respond at the same pace that the needs are arising. And in that period, we haven't had – thank goodness, but it's not to say that we will not have in the future – a very large humanitarian need as a result of natural hazards, so our primary focus has been on the humanitarian needs out of conflict.

UN News: Your time in office has been dominated by some of the worst conflicts and humanitarian crises of the modern era. Is there any more that the UN could be doing in Syria, or is it really all up to the Security Council to act, as you've often said in your briefings?

Stephen O'Brien: One of the great privileges that the Emergency Relief Coordinator has is that here in New York you get to speak to the Security Council on a fairly regular basis about the challenges that are arising as a result of conflict and other disasters and emergencies. It has been very clear to me that it is a duty, an obligation and, indeed, expected by General Assembly resolution 46/182, that I raise very difficult issues and often speak truth to power.



USG O'Brien during a visit to Homs, Syria, in August 2015. He has repeatedly called on the Security Council to do more to ensure humanitarian access,

allowing aid agencies to reach those in need in the strife-torn nation.
Photo: OCHA/Emmanuel BARGUES

It can be a little uncomfortable, it can be challenging, but it is very important that the facts are before all of the Member States, here at the United Nations, the highest body in the world, which has the capacity, diplomatically and politically, to find a resolution and to prevent conflicts that result in producing humanitarian needs, which could be avoided.

That's the issue about conflict, it's man-made, and, therefore, it's capable of being unmade by man and the humanitarian suffering that is brought about by it can be reduced and eliminated over time.

UN News: As Syria and Yemen stand out, do you worry that some of these complex conflicts will prove to be unsolvable?

Stephen O'Brien: I never accept that these are unsolvable because with a will, when people come together, when we put our fellow human beings around the planet first, rather than [focusing on] the dispute for power or competition for resources...the issues can be solved. As long as we put a huge premium on our ability to talk through our differences. At the same time, we must recognize that we have the highest possible public duty internationally to relieve the suffering of our fellow human beings, wherever that arises, be that for their protection in conflicts where innocent civilians are put at risk, or for their lifesaving in natural hazards and the terrible risks that happen because of that.



Briefing the Security Council in May 2017, USG O'Brien said the people of Yemen are being subjected to deprivation, disease and death as the world watches. He added that this a direct consequence of actions of the parties, and is also "a result of inaction – whether due to inability or indifference – by the international community". UN Photo/Evan Schneider

UN News: What will you miss most about being UN relief chief?

Stephen O'Brien: I'm certainly not shy of putting in a hard day's work, but what I will miss most is working with extraordinary people doing an extraordinary job. I mean that both within my own team in the [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) here and across about 40 countries. These are extraordinarily dedicated, skilled, committed and very brave people who are often serving in what we call non-family duty stations.

I shall be extremely sorry to miss the inspiring context of being able to do something about the suffering through the people we have here at the UN and through our partners in the international NGOs or through the many local people we work with to get that last mile.

I will also miss the relationships and the professional approach with Member States and their representatives here, in Geneva and across the world because

it's only by harnessing all these energies that we can make that difference and we can try and make the world a better place.

The protection of aid workers is paramount. People put themselves at great risk to reach people in need in some of the most dangerous environments in protracted crises around the world.

UN News: Is the problem that you can only do as much as the Security Council allows, in a way?

Stephen O'Brien: I don't think the Security Council is the complete constraint. I do think it is a very, very important part of the peace and security make-up, but the General Assembly, which includes all the 193 recognized Member States of the UN and some very important observers as well, engage in passing resolutions, which are intended to bind the world.

It really matters to all of us here, and certainly has mattered to me, that we do our very best to live out the values that are encapsulated in the Charter of the United Nations and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which are our founding documents that have stood the test of time for 72 years.

While yes, there are disputes around the world and there are things that are causing terrible humanitarian suffering that should be relieved, we are in a better place to meet the suffering of people when emergencies strike. Now we need to continue to commit to doing a better job to prevent conflict and relieve the suffering of people.

UN News: Looking back, is there anything that you would have done differently, any crisis that you might have handled in a different way?

Stephen O'Brien: We can always, with the benefit of hindsight, think of ways to improve. We can see by the massive and widening gap there is between the needs and the resources. The inefficiency of our response is something that hurts and is clearly part of our inability to be fully accountable to affected people. So in looking back, I wish I'd found a better way to raise more resources.



In South Sudan, in July 2015, USG O'Brien saw first-hand the devastating humanitarian consequences of the conflict as well as efforts by aid organizations to respond to escalating needs. UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

UN News: What advice do you have for your successor?

Stephen O'Brien: Above all, go out and meet the people to whom we are ultimately accountable, the people who need us most.

As I have sought to do, make sure all you do is rooted in the principles of

international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law.

Make sure that we call people to account so that there is a better deterrent to those causing humanitarian suffering today.

UN News: The Secretary-General has made UN reform a priority. Do you have any constructive advice as to how that can be managed in the humanitarian field?

Stephen O'Brien: The Secretary-General's emphasis on prevention as core to policy and the ability for the UN in the world that we face today, and looking ahead and particularly to be relevant to the vast number of younger generations. We need to make sure it is reformed to reflect that world.

If you leave humanitarian need or poverty unaddressed, it has the potential to be exploited by those of malign intent.

That needs much better resolution of conflict, prevention in the first place, a greater participation of stakeholders, recognizing that so many of the world's problems, particularly humanitarian, but also for enabling development and the equality of women's rights, all need to come together in a way that is relevant to today's generation.

The reforms that the Secretary-General is pushing are all to be welcomed and supported. I am pleased that in OCHA, we have been doing this over the last two years. We have somewhat blazed a trail with our own reforms and put us in a fitter and better position to make sure that we are strategically aligned, nimble and adaptable.

UN News: What is the key message you relayed for your last World Humanitarian Day?

Stephen O'Brien: We should make sure to put a real focus on how humanitarian aid workers around the world are #NotATarget. This was articulated at the 2016 [World Humanitarian Summit](#) in Istanbul. The protection of aid workers is paramount. People put themselves at great risk to reach people in need in some of the most dangerous environments in protracted crises around the world.

Humanitarian workers are operating across the world, often in countries for many years, despite insufferable difficulties. World Humanitarian Day is an opportunity for us to focus on protecting these humanitarian aid workers, particularly in the medical field.