

As tensions on Korean Peninsula grow, UN chief urges world to 'dial up' diplomacy

16 August 2017 – Addressing the growing tensions on the Korean Peninsula, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today said it was important to dial down rhetoric and dial up diplomacy.

Speaking to the press at the UN Headquarters in New York, the Secretary-General stressed that the solution to the crisis must be political, and reiterated that his good offices – meaning the prestige and weight that his title and the UN represent to the world community – are always available.

"I will remain in close contact with all concerned parties and stand ready to assist in any way," said Mr. Guterres.

The message echoes what Mr. Guterres said he had told yesterday's meeting of the representatives of the Six-Party Talks, who include China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, and the United States.

Earlier this month, the UN Security Council strengthened sanctions against DPRK's exports. Unanimously adopting resolution 2371 (2017), the Council imposed a full ban on the export of coal, iron and iron ore from the north-east Asian country. Previously these items could be exported for livelihood purposes, for a limited amount.

Mr. Guterres today said that consist with that resolution, "the international community must send a clear, coherent message to the leadership of the DPRK: fully comply with international obligations, work towards reopening communication channels and support efforts to deescalate the situation."

He noted that the resolution sends "an unambiguous message regarding the peace and security obligations" of DPRK, while also representing "an opportunity to solve this crisis through diplomatic engagement and renewed dialogue."

Speaking to journalists, Mr. Guterres welcomed the "continued critical engagement" by Member States and supported "the call of the Republic of Korea to the DPRK to engage in credible and meaningful dialogue." These include steps such as confidence-building measures to defuse tension and efforts to de-nuclearize the Peninsula.

The tensions related to the crisis in the region "are at levels not seen in decades," Mr. Guterres said.

He noted that more than three million people died in the Korean War, which

ravaged the Peninsula from 1950 to 1953.

“We need to heed the lessons of history not to repeat the mistakes,” he said.

He noted also that the potential consequences of military action are too horrific to even contemplate.

[UN observers conclude FARC-EP arms removal process in Colombia](#)

16 August 2017 – More than 8,000 weapons and over one million burned cartridges were transported to a central warehouse in Colombia as the United Nations political mission in the country concluded the process of the laying down of individual weapons of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) combatants.

To date, August 15, [the UN] [concluded the process](#) of extracting all the armament and scrap ammunition in the 26 camps of the FARC-EP, as well as the collected from the arms caches until now,” began Jean Arnault, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the [UN Mission in Colombia](#) in a press statement.

In addition to the operation that is being carried out in Pongore, extraction operations are currently underway in four areas: La Reforma, Yari, La Guajira and La Variante. The material transported in the containers consists of 8,112 guns and almost 1,300,000 incinerated cartridges,” he added.

Mr. Arnault emphasized that the extraction process included 16 aerial-ground movements and 10 terrestrial movements, which accounted for more than 50 flight hours from three UN mission helicopters and almost 11,000 kilometres travelled.

All unstable material found in the 26 camps, including anti-personnel mines, grenades, homemade explosives and gunpowder was also destroyed.

Turning to arms caches operations, he said “to date there is information about 873 of which 510 arms caches have been successfully executed.”

As the result of the extraction of arms caches operations, the UN Mission in the field counted, to date, 795 weapons; 293,803 ammunitions of different calibre of small arms; 22,077 kilograms of various explosives; 25,216 meters of detonating cord and slow wick; 3,957 hand grenades and 40 mm grenades; 1,846 antipersonnel mines; 27,282 starters; and 1,130 mortar rounds, of which 81 mm, 60 mm and rockets are identified.

The mission head stressed the importance of this process and what it means for the future of Colombia.

“I consider this is an important figure, which shows that there has definitely been an exhaustive process of the abandonment of weapons, not only a process of abandoning individual arms, but also an exhaustive process of abandoning everything contained in the FARC-EP target teams and as President Juan Manuel Santos said, this leads the country to a new stage,” underscored Mr. Arnault.

According to a unanimously adopted resolution, on 26 September the UN Verification Mission in Colombia will replace the current mission.

[Landmark UN-backed treaty on mercury takes effect](#)

16 August 2017 – A ground-breaking global convention on mercury today goes into effect, the United Nations environment wing said, protecting millions of children and infants from possible neurological and health damage.

Governments that are party to the Convention are now legally bound to take a range of measures [to protect human health and the environment](#) by addressing mercury throughout its lifecycle, the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) said in a statement.

The [Minamata Convention](#) commits Governments to specific measures, which include banning new mercury mines, phasing-out existing ones, regulating artisanal and small-scale gold mining, and reducing emissions and mercury use. Since the element is indestructible, the Convention also stipulates conditions for interim storage and disposal of mercury waste.

The Convention is the first new global convention related to the environment and health in close to a decade entered force today, 90 days after the fiftieth party ratified it on 18 May. There are now 74 parties to the Convention and 128 countries have signed it.

The Minamata Convention shows that our global work to protect our planet and its people can continue to bring nations together. We did it for the Ozone layer and now we’re doing it for mercury, just as we need to do it for climate change – a cause that the Minamata Convention will also serve. Together, we can clean up our act,” said Erik Solheim, head of UNEP.

The Convention takes its name from the most severe mercury poisoning disaster in history. In 1956, local villages suffered convulsions, psychosis, loss of consciousness and coma from eating the fish in Minamata Bay, Japan, in which

industrial wastewaters had been dumped since the 1930s. Thousands of people were certified as having directly suffered from mercury poisoning, now known as Minamata disease.

According to UNEP, up to 8,900 metric tonnes of mercury are emitted each year. It can be released naturally through the weathering of mercury-containing rocks, forest fires and volcanic eruptions, but significant emissions also come from human processes, particularly coal burning and artisanal and small-scale gold mining. Mining alone exposes up to 15 million workers in 70 different countries to mercury poisoning, including child labourers.

Other man-made sources of mercury pollution include the production of chlorine and some plastics, waste incineration and use of mercury in laboratories, pharmaceuticals, preservatives, paints and jewelry.

There is no safe level of exposure to mercury nor are there cures for mercury poisoning, which at high levels causes irreversible neurological and health damage, UNEP said, particularly among unborn children and infants.

The first meeting of the parties to the Convention will be held 24 to 29 September in Geneva.

[Emergency food distributions launched to assist thousands displaced by conflict in DR Congo – UN agency](#)

16 August 2017 – Food assistance will be provided to food insecure people displaced by conflict in the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), says the United Nations food agency.

The World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) and its partner World Vision have launched an emergency operation to provide food assistance to 42,000 food insecure people who, due to conflict, have fled their villages in the country's Kasai and Kasai Central provinces.

We launched this emergency response as soon as funds became available, [said](#) Claude Jibidar, WFP Representative and Country Director in DRC, in a press statement.

We targeted the most vulnerable among the vulnerable, and our access to these displaced people also depend on security conditions. However, with nearly one and a half million displaced people in the Kasai region, additional donor support is essential for WFP to scale up our operations and

reach more vulnerable displaced people,” he added.

WFP plans to assist 25,000 displaced persons in Kasai Central and 17,000 people in the Kasai province in the coming days, the statement elaborated. However, WFP urgently requires \$17.3 million to support the operations scale-up from September to December 2017.

“Food distributions have started in the town of Tshilumba with further distributions scheduled this month. As part of this effort and where safe access is possible, WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) continue to identify the most vulnerable displaced people in areas identified with high levels of food insecurity, as determined in a recent food security study,” said WFP.

According to its recent [food security assessment](#), WFP said that in the last year, the number of people in need of urgent humanitarian food assistance in the DRC rose by 1.8 million – from 5.9 million to 7.7 million.

“In conflict-ridden areas, more than 1.5 million people are facing 'emergency' levels of food insecurity, leaving many with no option but to sell everything they have while skipping or reducing their meals,” the statement outlined.

In addition to food distributions, WFP is leading the Logistics Cluster, which provides technical and logistical support to humanitarian organizations and has been operational in the Kasai region since June.

“Mobile warehouses have been built to store food and non-food items, while several trucks have been sent to Kasai and Kasai Central to transport food and supplies,” said the statement.

To meet the huge needs of displaced people in hard-to-reach areas, since June the WFP-led UN Humanitarian Air Service has expanded its support, positioning an aircraft in Kananga in Kasai Central on a permanent basis and flying three times weekly to Tshikapa, Kasai – making those most in need more accessible to humanitarian organizations.

Scores of people have fled their villages due to the conflict that broke out in the Kasai region in August 2016.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), there are some 1.4 million internally displaced people across the Kasai provinces. Additionally, more than 31,000 have fled into neighbouring Angola.

“With up to 3.8 million people displaced in total, the DRC is home to the largest population of internally displaced people in Africa,” underscored the statement.

The sharp deterioration in people's food security is mainly attributable to displacement caused by an upsurge in conflict and pest infestation in crops across the country. WFP continues to coordinate with FAO and other partners to serve the most vulnerable people in the Kasai region, as well as in other

parts of the country.

[UN chief condemns deadly terrorist attacks in Borno State, Nigeria](#)

16 August 2017 – Condemning a series of terrorist attacks in north-eastern Nigeria, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has called for those responsible for these [repeated heinous acts](#) to be brought to justice.

In a statement from his spokesman late Tuesday, the Secretary-General extended his deep condolences to the Government and people of Nigeria, and wished those injured a speedy recovery.

He calls for those responsible for these [repeated heinous acts](#) in Nigeria and neighbouring countries to be swiftly brought to justice, according to the statement.

Mr. Guterres reiterated the UN's solidarity and support to the Government in its fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

The Secretary-General also renews the commitment of the United Nations to support efforts within the framework of the counter-terrorism initiatives of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the spokesman said referring to an intergovernmental organization comprised of the eight countries near Lake Chad.

The Security Council met yesterday to discuss the African-led force on terrorism that has been set up in the Sahel by the so-called Group of Five (G5), which includes Nigeria, along with Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Mauritania. The joint task force is operational, but faces a number of challenges, including funding.