

International cooperation key to keeping WMDs away from terrorists, Security Council told

28 June 2017 – The United Nations disarmament chief today called for stronger international cooperation to prevent terrorists from accessing and using weapons of mass destruction, warning that technological advances – such as unmanned aerial vehicles, 3-D printers and the Dark Web – make it easier for terrorist groups to effectively use such weapons.

“The possibility of non-State actors, including terrorists, acquiring weapons of mass destruction remains [a significant threat to global security](#), and the international community must step up its efforts to ensure that the disastrous scenario of WMD terrorism is avoided,” Izumi Nakamitsu, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, told the Security Council in an open date on the topic.

She cautioned that while globalization fosters new opportunities for economic growth and development, it also allows for greater mobility of materials and technologies, as well as scientific discoveries and personnel with “relevant expertise to use and exploit them with malicious intent.”

Ms. Nakamitsu also underlined the importance of both international dialogue, between governments and industry, as well as greater coordination and information-sharing among security agencies within each country.

When weapons are used, the senior UN official urged the international community to seek accountability.

“The international community must uphold the norms that have been established in this area, and to prosecute those responsible for committing or supporting such acts,” she said.

In addition to dozens of representatives from UN Member States, the Security Council also heard today from Joseph Ballard, Senior Officer from the Office of Strategy and Policy at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

The OPCW – which is an independent, autonomous international organization with a membership of 192 member States – has a working relationship with the UN. Its main function is to implement the Chemical Weapons Convention, which entered into force in 1997.

Mr. Ballard echoed Ms. Nakamitsu’s concerns about the dual-use of materials and technologies, and underlined the need for greater collaboration and transparency in ensuring that toxic chemicals do not fall in the wrong hands.

The use of chemical weapons by non-State actors, Mr. Ballard said, “is no longer a threat but a chilling reality.”

Today’s debate in the Security Council focused on practical measures that the 15-member body, Member States and international organisations can adopt to prevent non-State actors from acquiring or using nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

According to a [note](#) from the Security Council ahead of the debate, discussions are anchored by resolution 1540 (2004), which is considered the overarching legal instrument on preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Representatives are also discussing aspects of resolution 2325 (2016), which notes the need for more attention to “enforcement measures; measures relating to biological, chemical and nuclear weapons; proliferation finance measures; accounting for and securing related materials; and national export and transshipment controls.”

Civilians must not be sacrificed for military victories – UN rights chief, as thousands trapped in Raqqa

28 June 2017 – Voicing grave concern over the fate of as many as 100,000 civilians effectively trapped in Syria’s Raqqa governorate amid the ongoing offensive against Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) fighters, the top United Nations rights official urged all parties to the conflict to enact measures to allow civilians who wish to flee the fighting to do so in safety.

The intense bombardment of Al-Raqqa over the past three weeks has reportedly left civilians terrified and confused about where they can seek refuge as they are caught between ISIL’s monstrosities and the fierce battle to defeat it, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, said today in a news release issued by his Office ([OHCHR](#)).

[Civilians must not be sacrificed for the sake of rapid military victories](#), he underscored, calling on all forces battling ISIL in the city, including international forces, to review their operations to ensure full compliance with international law and taking all feasible precautions to save civilian lives.

High Commissioner Zeid also underscored the need to promptly and effectively investigate reports of civilian casualties.

According to OHCHR data, conservative estimates indicate that at least 173 civilians have been killed in air and ground strikes since 1 June.

Furthermore, reports of civilian deaths continue to mount and escape routes are increasingly sealed off.

The news release also noted that while some did manage to leave after paying large sums of money to smugglers, including traffickers affiliated with ISIL, allegations continue to emerge of ISIL preventing civilians from fleeing.

There are also worrying reports of violations and abuses by the armed group, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), in areas under its control, such as Tabqa city – located west of Raqqa city – including of looting, abductions, arbitrary detentions during screening processes as well as the recruitment of children, the release added.

[Investing in poor children saves more lives per dollar spent, UNICEF study finds](#)

28 June 2017 – Investing in the health and survival of the most deprived children and communities provides more value for money than investing in less deprived groups, saving almost twice as many lives for every \$1 million spent, according to a new study by the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)).

“The evidence is compelling: Investing in the poorest children is not only right in principle, it is also right in practice – saving more lives for every dollar spent,” [said](#) UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake in a press release on the study, titled Narrowing the Gaps.

The study backs up an unconventional prediction UNICEF made in 2010: the higher cost of reaching the poorest children would be outweighed by greater results.

“This is critical news for governments working to end all preventable child deaths at a time when every dollar counts,” Mr. Lake said, noting that investing equitably in children’s health also helps break intergenerational cycles of poverty and gives them a better chance of learning more in school and earning more as an adult.

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The study analysed new data from the 51 countries where around 80 per cent of

all newborn and under-five deaths occur. It assessed access to six high-impact maternal, newborn and child health interventions: the use of insecticide-treated bed nets, early initiation of breastfeeding, antenatal care, full vaccination, the presence of a skilled birth attendant during delivery, and seeking care for children with diarrhea, fever or pneumonia.

Findings show that improvements in coverage of life-saving interventions among poor groups helped decrease child mortality in these countries nearly three times faster than among non-poor groups. Also, interventions in poor groups proved 1.8 times more cost-effective in terms of lives saved.

The study also found that since birth rates were higher among the poor than the non-poor, the reduction in the under-five mortality rate in poor communities translated into 4.2 times more lives saved for every million people.

Further, it found that of the 1.1 million lives saved across the 51 countries during the final year studied for each country, nearly 85 per cent were among the poor.

Focus on poor children made a difference in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Malawi

The study lists Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Malawi as some of the countries with high rates of under-five mortality where focus on the most deprived has made a difference for children. Between 1990 and 2015, under-five mortality decreased by half in Afghanistan and by 74 per cent in Bangladesh and Malawi.

The findings come at a critical time, as governments continue their work towards achieving the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), which set a target of ending all preventable deaths among newborns and children under the age of five by 2030. Unless progress on reducing child mortality accelerates, by 2030 almost 70 million children will die before reaching their fifth birthday.

The study calls on countries to take practical steps to reduce inequities, including: disaggregating data to identify the children being left behind; investing more in proven interventions to prevent and treat the biggest killers of children; strengthening health systems to make quality care more widely available; innovating to find new ways of reaching the unreached; and monitoring equity gaps using household surveys and national information systems.

[UN envoy maps out 'ideal trajectory' to next round of intra-Syrian talks in](#)

Geneva

27 June 2017 – The United Nations mediator for the conflict in Syria today mapped out what needs to happen in the next two weeks before the next round of intra-Syrian peace talks begins on 10 July in Geneva, Switzerland.

“We are at a time of testing whether the political will exists for real de-escalation and more meaningful political talks and move beyond preparatory talks,” Staffan de Mistura, UN Special Envoy for Syria, told the Security Council via videoconference from Geneva.

His briefing focused on the latest developments and some of the possible future steps ahead to create a conducive environment to bring the six-year war to an end.

He said that “the ideal trajectory” over the coming two weeks would be progress in the next round of the Astana talks on 4 and 5 July.

The process taking place in the Kazakh capital is led by Russia, Turkey and Iran and produced agreement on a ceasefire between warring parties in Syria in late December 2016. Five months later, a deal was struck to set up “de-escalation zones” in Syria to prevent incidents and military confrontation between the warring parties. These zones are expected to also give greater humanitarian access to the 6.3 million people still living in the country today.

“Let’s give de-escalation efforts a fair chance to succeed because that is what people are asking in order to bring the violence further down and enabling confidence-building,” Mr. de Mistura said.

Since the three guarantor States signed the de-escalation memorandum on 4 May in Astana, violence is clearly down, he said, noting that hundreds of Syrian lives continue to be spared every week, and many towns have returned to some degree of normalcy. But in some areas, the fight and violence has been continuing and in fact intensified.

And the overall improvement of the security situation has regrettably not yielded equally significant progress on humanitarian access to areas where the needs are the greatest, he added.

“With every week that passes, we know it, without a final arrangement for the de-escalation zones being indeed finalized, the fragility of the ceasefire regime and the risk posed by the fragility increases,” warned Mr. de Mistura.

Next, Astana talks would be followed by a further set of joint technical expert meetings with the opposition groups in the same week, and then a continued discussion and dialogue among international stakeholders, including at the G20 Summit in Hamburg on 7 and 8 July, in which Syria cannot be avoided as a subject, he said.

I hope that a combination of these elements would help shape an environment conducive for the next round of [intra-Syrian talks](#) in Geneva in the months to come," the UN envoy said, noting that it "would bring us one step forward on the journey towards our shared goal of implementing the resolutions of this Council, in particular [resolution 2254 \(2015\)](#), which laid out the pathway to peace.

[UN welcomes major partnership initiative with tech giants to counter terrorism online](#)

27 June 2017 – A senior United Nations official has called for sustained joint efforts to combat terrorism and welcomed a partnership initiative with tech giants Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube to counter terrorism and violent extremism online.

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A senior United Nations official has called for sustained joint efforts to combat terrorism and welcomed a partnership initiative with tech giants Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube to counter terrorism and violent extremism online.

"I welcome this major initiative, which elevates our existing private-public partnership with these and other companies," said Jean-Paul Laborde, UN Assistant Secretary-General and the Executive Director of the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate.

"The [UN remains committed to addressing the scourge of terrorism](#), and we look forward to remaining a key partner to the private sector," he added.

The four tech giants have already developed and have put in place policies and removal practices to take a hard line against terrorist or violent extremist content on their hosted consumer services.

The *Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism* partnership will help further strengthen these "counter-speech" protections through research- and evidence-based efforts and technical and policy decisions around the removal of terrorist content, noted a news release issued by the Executive Directorate.

By working together, and through the sharing of the best technological and operational elements of their individual efforts, they believe they can have

a greater impact on the threat of terrorist content online, it added.

The new forum builds on initiatives, such as the European Union (EU) Internet Forum and the Shared Industry Hash Database as well as discussions with governments and the outcomes of recent G7 and European Council meetings.

It will also help strengthen existing and build future areas of collaboration between these companies, including with smaller tech enterprises, civil society groups and academics, as well as with governments, and intergovernmental bodies like the EU and the UN.

The companies will also be hosting a series of learning workshops in partnership with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the ICT4Peace Foundation in Silicon Valley (which is home to many of the world's largest high-tech corporations) and around the world to drive these areas of collaboration.

Within the UN system, the Security Council continues to closely follow efforts to combat terrorism as well as other issues that represent serious threats to international peace and security.

Last month, it [unanimously adopted a resolution](#) which, among others, provides a comprehensive international framework to counter terrorist narratives and amplifies positive and credible alternatives to audiences vulnerable to extremist messages, especially those on social media.