

Syria: UNICEF warns 40,000 children in the line of fire in Raqqa

9 June 2017 – An estimated 40,000 children are trapped in extremely dangerous conditions in Raqqa as fighting intensifies in and around the Syrian city, the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) reported today, warning that many are caught in the crossfire.

Heavy violence in the city of Raqqa is threatening the lives of children, [said](#) Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director in the Middle East and North Africa Region, in a statement, which noted that at least 25 children were reportedly killed and scores injured in the city.

He explained that hospitals and schools have reportedly come under attack and that those attempting to flee are at danger of getting killed or injured. He emphasized that children are being deprived of the most basic and life-saving necessities and that little aid have reached Raqqa since 2013 due to violence and access restrictions.

He added that the conflict has resulted in massive displacements in and around the city, with some 80,000 children from Raqqa city now internally displaced and living in temporary shelters and camps.

RELATED: [As airstrikes hit Raqqa, UN sounds alarm over plight of civilians](#)

UNICEF called on all parties to protect children inside Raqqa, provide safe passage to those wishing to leave the city and grant a protected environment to civilians who fled the city.

Vaccine-derived polio virus detected in children

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) reported that a vaccine-derived polio virus has been detected recently in two children in Syria, who have been paralyzed as a result.

Speaking at the regular briefing in Geneva, WHO spokesperson Oliver Rosenbauer said a third child was also detected with the virus, but has not been paralyzed.

He said these strains of polio detected in these children are rare but can arrive. The area affected is Deir-Ez-Zor Governorate in eastern Syria, which in 2013-2014 had been affected by a wild polio outbreak.

WHO is preparing an outbreak response to stop the virus’ spread.

In New York, Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, told reporters that UN humanitarian workers are alarmed that no UN convoys have moved to besieged and hard-to-reach locations in Syria in over two weeks, with the last such convoy on 22 May.

He said that the UN continues its concern for the safety and well-being of some 4,000 people who have reportedly fled from the Tel Safuk area and surrounding villages along the Iraqi border to Markada town in Al-Hasakeh Governorate, due to ongoing fighting in the area.

Also, as fighting advances into Raqqa City, we have reports that over 95,000 people have already fled the city. We remind all parties to the fighting of their obligations to protect civilians under international humanitarian law, he said.

[Mali: Three UN peacekeepers killed in attack in Kidal](#)

9 June 2017 – Condemning yesterday's attacks against the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali ([MINUSMA](#)) in the city of Kidal, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres reiterated the Organization's support to help implement the peace agreement in the West African country.

In a statement issued by his spokesman, the UN chief reiterated that [attacks targeting UN peacekeepers may constitute war crimes](#) and called for the perpetrators to be swiftly brought to justice.

Mr. Guterres also expressed his condolences to the families of those the peacekeepers killed and a speedy recovery those injured.

According ([news release](#), in French) to MINUSMA, yesterday, its camp in Kidal was hit by intensive rocket and mortar fire. Initial information indicated that about a dozen shells of different calibres targeted the camp.

Shortly thereafter, peacekeepers situated outside the camp also came under attack.

The attacks follow a strengthening of patrols ([news release](#), in French) initiated by the Mission in Kidal in response to increased violence in the region as well as reported incidents of human rights abuses targeting specific communities.

[UN agencies explore nuclear](#)

applications to combat food fraud and contamination

9 June 2017 – Through a joint project, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) and the International Atomic Energy Agency ([IAEA](#)) are exploring mobile tools to combat food fraud and contamination, which result in global annual in the billions and pose a serious public health threat.

Traditional, professional laboratories have the ability to detect different types of fraud and contamination in food relatively quickly but such capacity is often limited in many countries and by their nature not very portable. The FAO-IAEA initiative is trying to fill this gap.

“The goal is [to make available low-cost devices and methods](#) for food authorities to use directly in the streets and markets, particularly in developing countries,” said Simon Kelly, a Food Safety Specialist at the Joint FAO/IAEA Division of Nuclear Techniques in Food and Agriculture, who leads the project.

The project seeks to build on the opportunities created by advances in field-deployable analytical equipment, such as adapting ion mobility spectrometry – a nuclear-based technology used by border police agencies to detect illicit drugs and explosives – to perform point-of-use screening tests to check for adulterants, contaminants and mould in food.

“The development of high performance hand-held computing devices, such as smart phones, has enabled a new generation of instruments that can be used outside the traditional laboratory environment,” added Iain Darby, head of the IAEA’s Nuclear Science and Instrumentation Laboratory.

VIDEO: Using Nuclear Science to Combat Food Fraud. *Source: IAEA*

The project will also develop methods to use such hand-held devices to test food authenticity given that labels and paperwork – which countries often depend on – can be easily forged.

“We need to rely on science to provide assurances,” said one of the project participants, Jose Almirall, Director of the International Forensic Research Institute at Florida International University, from the United States.

Syahidah Muhammad, Head of the Stable Isotope Laboratory at the Universiti Sains Malaysia, another participant pointed to the fact that many food fraud cases remain “hearsay” due to lack of proof.

Portable tools and standard operating procedures will allow authorities to respond faster at critical checkpoints, and protect the food supply chain

from being inundated with tainted products, she said.

The project will initially focus on devising methods to quickly analyse milk powder and vegetable oil, two commodities that are particularly vulnerable to adulteration. In many countries, gutter oil – the waste cooking vegetable oil recovered and recycled back into the food chain – has raised alarm.

The FAO-IAEA project – part of the two organizations' efforts to help their member states with nuclear and related techniques for science-based solutions to improve global food security and sustainable agricultural development – kicked off with a meeting in the Austrian capital, Vienna, last month and the first results are expected within the next two years.

The countries participating in the endeavour include Austria, Belgium, China, India, Malaysia, Morocco, Russian Federation, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Sweden, United Kingdom, Uganda and the United States. The project has been supported through contributions from Germany.

[Conflict and drought deepen food insecurity in Africa, Middle East – UN agency](#)

9 June 2017 – Protracted fighting and unrest are swelling the ranks of displaced and hungry in some parts of the world, even as large agricultural harvests in some regions are buoying global food supply conditions, according to a new report by the United Nations agriculture agency.

Civil conflict continues to be a [main driver of food insecurity](#), having triggered famine conditions in South Sudan and put populations in Yemen and northern Nigeria at high risk of localized famine, said the UN Food and Agriculture Organization on today's release of its [Crop Prospects and Food Situation](#) report.

FAO also notes that adverse weather conditions are exacerbating the threat of famine in Somalia. Refugees from civil strife in countries such as Iraq, Syria and Central African Republic are putting additional pressure on local food supplies in host communities.

It also points out that some 5.5 million people are estimated to be severely food insecure in South Sudan, where maize and sorghum prices are now four times higher than in April 2016. In Somalia, about 3.2 million people need food and agricultural emergency assistance, while in Yemen the figure is as high as 17 million.

In northern Nigeria, disruption caused by conflict has left 7.1 million people facing acute food insecurity in the affected areas, with even more deemed to be in less dire but still “stressed” conditions, according to the report.

According to FAO, 37 countries require external assistance for food, namely Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Haiti, Iraq, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Swaziland, Syria, Uganda, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

Southern Africa rebounds, East Africa is parched

While worldwide cereal output is near record levels, production outcomes are mixed across the globe.

According to the report, South America is expected to post strong increases, led by Brazil and Argentina.

Regional production in Southern Africa is expected to jump by almost 45 per cent compared to 2016 when crops were affected by El Niño, with record maize harvests forecast in South Africa and Zambia. This should help to reduce food insecurity in countries, such as Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

After two consecutive years of bumper crops, the report notes that the overall food supply situation in the Sahel region is satisfactory.

However, at the start of the 2017 season, East Africa has suffered insufficient rainfall, armyworm infestations and local conflicts, leaving in the sub-region a record 26.5 million people in need humanitarian assistance.

The report warns that the situation could be aggravated further as the lean season peaks, saying, “An estimated 7.8 million people are food insecure in Ethiopia, where drought has dented crop and pasture output in southern regions.”

Moreover, cereal domestic prices reached exceptionally high levels in May, with the local cost of maize jumping by as much as 65 per cent this year in parts of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

The report also notes that a severe drought in Sri Lanka, followed by heavy rains and local flooding in late May, will likely reduce the country's paddy production by nearly a third, compared to the average.

Inclusive development 'best form of preventing conflict,' UN chief tells Central Asia summit

9 June 2017 – [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today stressed the importance of partnership between the United Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in achieving global development goals and combating some of today's key threats to peace and security, such as terrorism.

Looking ahead, the United Nations will continue to be your strong partner, Mr. Guterres [told](#) the SCO's Council of Heads of State being held in Astana, Kazakhstan.

The Eurasian political, economic and security union was founded in 1996 in the Chinese city of Shanghai by Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan. It added Uzbekistan in 2001 and India and Pakistan today as its full members.

The UN chief said that the SCO plays a valuable role in promoting mutual understanding, dialogue, stability and development across much of Eurasia, and its members are working together to combat some of today's key threats to peace and security, including terrorism, violent extremism, drug trafficking and organized crime.

Ultimately, inclusive and sustainable development is the best form of preventing armed conflict and violent extremism, Mr. Guterres said, asking the SCO members to show leadership in efforts to implement the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change and commitment to fight terrorism and address its root causes.

At a [press conference](#) on the same day, Mr. Guterres highlighted the important role of Kazakhstan at the regional and international level.

He said Kazakhstan can play a leading role in promoting cooperation among Central Asian countries toward peace and prosperity of the region, including ways to share water resources, combat terrorism more effectively and create a stronger solidarity in achieving sustainable development.

The Secretary-General said Kazakhstan has been a symbol of dialogue, a symbol of peace, a symbol of the promotion of contacts between cultures, religions and civilizations.

The country is serving on the Security Council and is playing an extremely important mediation role in conflict.

In its capital, Kazakhstan has been hosting the so-named Astana talks on Syria led by Russia, Turkey and Iran.