

Recent killings in western Mosul indicative of rising atrocities against civilians – UN rights arm

8 June 2017 – Noting [credible](#) reports that Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) fighters killed more than 231 civilians, including women and children, attempting to flee western Mosul over the past two weeks, the United Nations human rights arm underscored that attacks on civilians could amount to war crimes.

In a news release today, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) which has been documenting alleged human rights violations and abuses since the start of the military operations to retake Mosul said that [recent reports suggest a significant escalation in atrocities](#) against civilians.

Shooting children as they try to run to safety with their families there are no words of condemnation strong enough for such despicable acts, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in the release.

I call on the Iraqi authorities to ensure that those who are responsible for these horrors are held accountable and brought to justice in line with international human rights laws and standards.

In the most gruesome incident, last Thursday (1 June), ISIL reportedly shot and killed at least 163 civilians, including women, men and children, next to a Pepsi factory in the in al-Shifa neighbourhood. Their bodies were reportedly left on the street for several days following the killings.

An undetermined number of civilians were also reported missing. Those killed and missing were fleeing clashes between ISIL and the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).

In the same neighbourhood, at least 27 people, including 14 women and five children were reportedly killed by ISIL on 26 May, and at least 41 others on 3 June.

Further in the release, referring to reports of civilian casualties due to recent air strikes in an ISIL-held area of western Mosul, OHCHR called on the ISF and their coalition partners to ensure that their operations comply fully with international humanitarian law and that all possible measures are taken to avoid the loss of civilian lives.

An air strike on 31 May in Zanjilly (an ISIL-held area of western Mosul) reportedly resulted between 50 and 80 civilian deaths, the news release added, noting that High Commissioner Zeid urged Iraqi authorities to ensure that any allegations of human rights violations committed by the ISF

are also fully investigated and those responsible held accountable.”

'Unite for the ocean we need, for the future we want,” UNESCO chief says on World Oceans Day

8 June 2017 – A healthy ocean requires robust global knowledge of ocean science, the head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) has said, marking World Oceans Day with a strong call to nurture, mobilize and harness the best scientific knowledge to protect our planet's vital oceans.

“We cannot manage what we cannot measure, and no single country is able to measure the myriad changes taking place in the ocean. From Fiji to Sweden, from Namibia to the Arctic, [all Governments and partners](#) must share knowledge to craft common science-based policies,” UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova said in her message commemorating the Day.

According to UNESCO, oceans give humankind the keys to its survival, from oxygen to a well-functioning climate, to key elements of our natural and human heritage.

“For this, we must nurture, mobilize and harness the best scientific knowledge,” Ms. Bokova stressed.

This year, [World Oceans Day](#) is being celebrated alongside the first-ever [The Ocean Conference](#), which aims to strengthen commitments to Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), particularly [Goal 14](#) – to conserve and viably use the ocean.

Ms. Bokova pointed to the [Global Ocean Science Report](#), which UNESCO launched at The Ocean Conference, calling scientific knowledge “the goal” of the report.

“[It] records for the first time where and how existing ocean science capacities are empowering society, sustaining the environment and generating knowledge to conserve ocean resources for all. Our message is clear – much has been done to promote and finance ocean science, but much more is required to fill the capacity gaps,” she explained.

Stressing that “business-as-usual” is not enough to deliver the future we want by 2030, she added: “Achieving SDG14 calls for new science-based solutions and their transformation into informed policies and decisions.”

For that reason, Ms. Bokova said that UNESCO and partners are calling for 2021-2030 to become the International Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development to provide Governments, the scientific community, civil society and all other actors with a framework for coordinating and consolidating the observations and research needed to achieve SDG14.

'We can ride the waves of change to a more positive outcome for the oceans'

Cristiana Pasca Palmer, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) said: "The future of the world's oceans is our future. Yet the present state of the oceans is troubling. Indeed, people she has met this week at The Ocean Conference, from places as far flung as Sweden, Fiji, and Costa Rica, told stories of how the ocean they see today is [a shadow of its former self](#).

"Populations of fish, corals and other living creatures have suffered, and there is a great deal more plastic in our oceans. Ocean acidification, marine pollution, and damaging fisheries practices they are all the result of human activities," she said, but added: "Humans can also make a difference. And they are."

Noting that earlier this week, she had reported that as far as marine protected areas coverage is concerned, the world is on track to achieve the global [Aichi Biodiversity Target](#) of 10 per cent conservation of coastal and marine areas by 2020. The world can now take the steps to ensure that these areas are effectively managed, representative, and support equitable and inclusive sustainable development.

Ms. Pasca Palmer said that here in New York, she sensed the same enthusiasm, energy and political will that was seen during the negotiations for the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change.

"We are at a point where we can change the tide on the oceans. The discussions this week are about working rowing together, connecting our actions, and learning from each other. We can ride the waves of change to a more positive outcome for the oceans, and the future we want," she stated.

FEATURE: Relationship with ocean vital part of Trinidad and Tobago culture

7 June 2017 – Oceans comprise roughly three-quarters of the Earth's surface and play an essential role in human well-being, producing half the oxygen necessary for life on the planet. They also serve as the backdrop for another important component of a well-rounded life: recreation.

The multiple benefits provided by the world's oceans, seas and marine resources are the focus of the first-ever [Ocean Conference](#) taking place this week at UN Headquarters in New York.

The Conference seeks to achieve the targets laid out under [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) 14](#), including galvanizing action on ocean-related issues such as protecting coral reefs, reducing plastic pollution, and addressing the impact of climate change.

Spending time beside, in, or on the ocean is a major reason why millions of people escape to destinations such as Trinidad and Tobago, an island nation in the southern Caribbean.

The diversity of its people – mainly descendants of enslaved Africans and indentured workers from India, though indigenous Caribs, Syrians, Lebanese, Chinese and a smattering of other nationalities have added to the gene pool – is reflected in the marine and coastal environments, home to fish, sharks, turtles, manatees, mangrove, sea grasses, coral reefs and numerous invertebrates and other marine organisms.

VIDEO: The ocean is seen as a major tourist attraction in the Caribbean. Supported by the UN, various initiatives are unfolding in the region with the aim of growing sustainable tourism, and better preserving the marine environment.

Neila Bobb Prescott with the Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) is the Chief Technical Advisor for a project that supports improved management of the nation's forests and other protected areas, some of which are linked to the sea. She summarized the significance of the ocean to "Trinis," as citizens proudly call themselves.

"Oceans are part of what it means to be Trinidadian," she told *UN News*. "We have rituals when your baby is born. There's a specific time when you take them to the beach to dip their feet in the saltwater to kind of bring them to the age. When you're ailing and there's something wrong with you, you go to the sea for a specific purpose, and then you drink some of the salt water, too, if you have troubles with your stomach. So the sea is part of us in terms of our culture...it's just part of us."

Naturally, going to the beach to unwind is also part of the culture, and citizens and visitors swarm spots such as Maracas Bay in Trinidad, famous for stands selling "bake and shark," a fried fish sandwich that can be seasoned with an endless array of toppings. But for serious relaxation, people head for the sister island of Tobago, a 20-minute flight from the high-octane capital, Port of Spain.

Tourism is the island's mainstay, employing more than half the roughly 60,000 residents. John Arnold, Senior Tourism Coordinator in the Tobago House of Assembly, the local government, said ocean conservation is a given for a destination billed as being "clean, green, safe, serene."

While the UN reports that some 20 per cent of the world's coral reef has been lost and another 20 per cent degraded, those in Tobago are still "fairly intact," according to coral reef ecologist Neil Cook with the Environmental Research Institute Charlotteville (ERIC), recipient of a small grant administered through the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)).



A marina in Chaguaramas, Trinidad and Tobago. Children taking lessons at the nearby Trinidad and Tobago Sailing Association learn how caring for the ocean has an impact on their sport. Head coach Earl Tobias said he instructs his students to pick up any garbage found floating in the water. Photo: UN/Lulu Gao

World-class diving draws people to the sleepy village of Speyside, where Sean Robinson opened the first dive shop some 30 years ago. On a recent Saturday afternoon he was fresh from taking SCUBA enthusiasts into the emerald waters of a location known as the Cathedral, where they were greeted by "a beautiful eagle ray" along with barracudas and stingrays.

"We here have been fairly lucky that the quality of the reefs has just about remained the same, but the challenges that we are getting now here in the environment is with this whole concept of global warming," he said. "We are now getting a problem with something that is very strange, which is sargassum."

No doubt islanders will not soon forget the carpet of reddish-brown sargassum seaweed which fouled the Atlantic shoreline in 2015 and cost millions to clean up.

Sargassum originates in a swirling section of the North Atlantic near Bermuda known as the Sargasso Sea, first identified by 15th century Portuguese mariners. It has affected other parts of the Caribbean, which is the most tourism-dependent region in the world, according to the UN Economic and Social Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean ([ECLAC](#)).

Helping governments in 33 of the region's countries to address seaweed infestations, and other challenges, is Julio Orozco, Director of Sustainable Tourism with the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), a UN partner.

"Right now, we are trying to support projects that are taking care of all these problems that we experience in the whole Caribbean Basin like sargassum, like coastal erosion, which has been a very difficult problem with climate change," Mr. Orozco said. "Since 2001, the Association has been promoting the Declaration of the Sustainable Tourism Zone in order that the countries, through specific destinations, can implement indicators of sustainability in order to protect their different resources: not only the sea, of course, but also fauna, flora and cultural resources."



Las Cuevas Beach, located a short drive from Port of Spain, the capital of

Trinidad and Tobago, is one of 17 beaches across the island nation where leatherback turtles lay their eggs between March and August. For the past five years, forest wardens have set up camp there during Easter week to educate the public about the need to protect the species. Photo: UN/Lulu Gao

Back on Trinidad's north-eastern coast, Stephen McClatchie has been calling for action to counter a problem affecting his village, Toco, situated at the part of the island that is physically closest to Tobago.

As head of the group Stakeholders Against Destruction, or S.A.D., for Toco, he lamented the long weekend and holiday hordes who come to Salybia Bay to hang out, or "lime," to use the local expression.

"Imagine hundreds of people in a beautiful bathing area with no established facility for human needs," he said. "When collectively that kind of behavior is taking place in an area like that, you understand the dangers to health, the damage to the environment, and for years, for decades, we have been pleading with the powers that be to do something about it, but very little or nothing is being done."

Weekend "limes" also sour the serenity of Las Cuevas Beach on the other side of Trinidad, which has received certification for its water quality from Denmark-based environmental group Blue Flag. It is among 17 beaches in Trinidad and Tobago where leatherback turtles, an environmentally sensitive species, come to nest.



Surf instructor Jonathan Torry (right) spends practically every day at Las Cuevas Beach on the north coast of Trinidad. He has seen stingrays, manta rays and a pod of dolphins while out surfing. Photo: UN/Lulu Gao

Despite the accolades, veteran surf instructor Jonathan Torry, who is at the beach practically every day, still has to fish the odd beer bottle or other garbage from the sand.

He believes surfers are just naturally environmentally conscious and protective of the ocean.

"As surfers, we look forward to being on the ocean all the time. To us, it's like heaven," he said, the wind and waves drowning his words. "We cannot exist without the ocean. If we didn't have the ocean and we didn't keep it clean, to us, life would be very simple, very blah."

In March of this year, the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) launched the [#CleanSeas](#) campaign to combat marine litter by reducing plastic production and use. It warned that unless people stop dumping bottles, bags, cups, straws and other plastic items, by 2050 there could be more plastic in the oceans than fish.

Ocean stewardship is also a byproduct of sailing lessons at the Trinidad and

Tobago Sailing Association, which uses Hart's Cut Bay in Chaguaramas as a classroom. Students like Luke Frankland, 11, have already grasped the main message of [SDG 14](#): life on land affects life below water.

"I think we need to start recycling more and being more mindful of where we put our garbage when we're done with it," he said. "Some people just throw it on the floor when they're done with it. They should put it in a bin, or, even better, recycle it. Almost always it ends up in the ocean. It harms us in some ways, but it harms the sea creatures more."



The Healing with Horses Foundation in Tobago provides a form of alternative therapy for children with disabilities, or who come from troubled homes. The children interact with horses in a "magical park" decorated with affirmative messages, a homemade dream catcher and seesaws crafted from discarded dining chairs. Best of all, they get to ride the horses into the cool waters of Buccoo Bay. Photo: UN/Dianne Penn

Life lessons of a different kind are also being learned in the waters at Buccoo Point, Tobago, home to the Healing with Horses Foundation.

There, children with disabilities, or who come from troubled homes, develop confidence and leadership skills by interacting with 11 rescued ponies, some of whom have challenges of their own.

The therapy also involves riding bareback in nearby Buccoo Bay.

"When we are with the horse in the ocean, the child feels not only carried by the horse but also carried by the water," said German native Veronika Danzer-La Fortune, who runs the foundation alongside her Trinidadian husband, Lennox. "The water has a very soothing, calming effect. The water also helps the children to relax their muscles."

Healing with Horses Foundation has found a friend in the UN Information Centre ([UNIC](#)) for the Caribbean Area, based in Trinidad and Tobago's capital, Port of Spain.

In addition to participating in a summer camp in 2016, the UN office has supplied the organization with information about UN priority areas such as human rights, the rights of people with disabilities, autism awareness and, of course, the [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

[Water is 'catalyst' for cooperation,](#)

not conflict, UN chief tells Security Council

6 June 2017 – Stressing the importance of diplomacy to prevent and resolve trans-boundary disputes over water resources, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today told the United Nations Security Council that water serves as “a catalyst” for cooperation among nations, even those that are not on good terms.

“Water, peace and security are inextricably linked,” said Mr. Guterres during a meeting on preventive diplomacy and trans-boundary waters, which was chaired by Evo Morales, President of Bolivia, which holds the Council’s presidency for the month.

“I commend this Security Council meeting for highlighting how water is and should remain a reason for cooperation not conflict,” Mr. Guterres added.

With climate change having a growing impact, water scarcity is a growing concern, he pointed out, noting that by 2050 at least one in four people will live in a country where the lack of fresh water is chronic or recurrent.

Three-quarters of UN Member States share rivers or lake basins with their neighbours. There are more than 270 internationally shared river basins, which serve as the primary source of fresh water for approximately 40 per cent of the world’s population, including the Nile, the Indus, the Ganges, the Euphrates-Tigris, and the Mekong.

“That is why it is essential that nations cooperate to ensure water is shared equitably and used sustainably,” he said.

In the second half of the 20th century alone, some 287 international water agreements were signed.

In South America, Lake Titicaca, the largest freshwater lake on the continent, has long been a source of cooperation between Bolivia and Peru. The 1960 Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan has survived three wars between the two countries.

The Albufeira Convention, agreed when Mr. Guterres was Prime Minister of Portugal, continues to promote good relations on water management between his country and Spain.

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes became open for all UN Member States as of March last year, offering the opportunity to create a global framework for preventive diplomacy for dealing with transboundary water issues.

“Let us commit to investing in water security to ensure durable peace and security for all communities and nations,” he concluded.

Syria: As airstrikes hit Raqqa, UN sounds alarm over plight of civilians

6 June 2017 – The United Nations humanitarian wing today said it is deeply concerned for the safety and protection of more than 400,000 civilians in Syria's war-torn Raqqa Governorate, who continue to be exposed to daily fighting and airstrikes.

The humanitarian situation in Al-Raqqa governorate remains dire, with the majority of the population reportedly facing critical problems in meeting their immediate needs, Alessandra Vellucci, Director of the UN Nations Information Service in Geneva on behalf of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)) told reporters at today's regular press briefing.

She also reiterated the UN's call for unconditional, unimpeded and sustained access to those affected by the fighting in Raqqa, and more broadly to the 4.5 million who are still in hard-to-reach areas across the war-torn country.

Turning to the internally displaced (IDPs), she pointed out that more than 160,000 people have been displaced since 1 May with the situation on the ground remaining fluid. There are some 87,200 in the Ar-Raqqa governorate; nearly 37,000 in Aleppo; over 33,400 in Idlib; and smaller numbers in Hama, Deir-ez-Zor and Homs.

On 3 June, three internally displaced people, including a pregnant woman, had been reportedly killed by a landmine. On 4 June, airstrikes on the al-Mashlab neighbourhood in Raqqa city had reportedly resulted in the destruction of two schools while mortar shelling in the vicinity of another school injured several people, she said.

Ms. Vellucci stated that since March, UN agencies continued to provide multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance through their local partners such as food, medical treatment and vaccinations throughout Raqqa, including IDPs in camps.

Some 60,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon in Jordan could lose assistance

For its part, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) sounded the alarm that humanitarian programmes supporting Syrian refugees and their host communities are quickly running out of resources.

Citing critical gaps in Lebanon and Jordan, UNHCR spokesperson Andrej Mahecic [told](#) journalists in Geneva that vital parts of its response to Syrian refugees were critically underfunded.

Despite generous pledges, humanitarian programmes in support of Syrian

refugee and communities hosting them are quickly running out of resources. The situation is most dramatic in Lebanon and Jordan where a number of direct cash assistance activities could dry up in less than four weeks," he said.

Those who fled to Jordan face stark challenges.

"Refugees tell our staff that UNHCR monthly cash support means a meal a day, a better roof, their dignity. Now they fear losing everything. Many say would prefer to go back to Syria to die if they stop receiving this assistance," continued Mr. Mahecic.

In Lebanon, where UNHCR urgently needs \$116 million, direct cash assistance programmes for refugees will be affected first.

"These include a lifeline of multi-purpose cash for 30,000 Syrian refugee families, a winter cash assistance for two months for another 174,000 families and protection cash assistance for 1,500 refugee households to help them overcome periods of hardship," he continued.

"The funding gap also jeopardises 65,000 life-saving secondary health care interventions and support to UNHCR's and the Lebanese Authorities' capacity to issue and renew documentation for refugees, following a recent decision to waive the residency renewal fees which most refugees could not afford," Mr. Mahecic added.

Mid-way through this year, the \$4.6 billion inter-agency appeal to meet the immediate humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees across the Middle East and North Africa is only 18 per cent funded.