

Libya: UN chief urges all sides to restore calm in aftermath of deadly attack on southern airbase

20 May 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres is deeply concerned about the military escalation at the Brak al-Shati air base in southern Libya and calls on all parties to exercise restraint and restore calm, the UN chief's spokesman said today.

[The Secretary-General] is particularly disturbed by the high number of fatalities as well as reports of summary executions of civilians, which, if confirmed, may constitute war crimes," said a statement from Stéphane Dujarric, which [added](#) that the continued insecurity in Libya is a reminder that there is no military solution.

News reports suggest that perhaps more than 100 people have died as a result of Thursday's attack on the airbase, mostly soldiers but also civilians. This is the latest flare-up of violence in the North African nation since the civilian uprising in 2011 led to the ouster of long-time Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

The UN Spokesman said Mr. Guterres urges all key Libyan stakeholders to re-commit to the political dialogue and engage constructively towards that goal.

The Secretary-General appreciates the efforts of a number of regional and neighbouring countries for their contributions aimed at strengthening the dialogue between key stakeholders in support of the overall UN-led process," the statement concluded.

In the aftermath of the attack Martin Kobler, the top UN official in Libya and the Head of the UN Support Mission known as UNSMIL, strongly condemned the deadly incident as a "vicious attack [that] undermines political efforts."

"I am outraged by reports of significant numbers of fatalities, including civilians and by reports that summary executions may have taken place. Summary executions and targeting civilians constitute a war crime, which may be prosecuted by the International Criminal court (ICC)," Mr. Kobler said.

The Special Representative stressed that this vicious attack must not lead to further, serious conflict. There is no military solution to Libya's problems. "I call upon all parties to condemn this attack and not to allow it to undermine intense efforts to find peaceful political solutions." he added.

Peru: UN agency supports recovery of some 7,000 farmers from El Niño floods, landslides

19 May 2017 – In the wake of the heavy rains, floods and landslides that hit Peru earlier this year, the United Nations agriculture agency said today that it is working with the Government to assist some 7,000 mostly small-scale farmers to restore their capacity to produce crops and feed their families.

Citing preliminary estimates, the Food and Agricultural Organization ([FAO](#)) said that adverse conditions caused by the coastal [El Niño](#) phenomenon from January to March had affected about 445,000 people in Peru's worst-hit northern coastal areas – 59 per cent of affected households.

“According to Peru's Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, more than 60,000 hectares of crops have been severely or partially affected and 18,000 hectares were left completely unusable,” FAO reported.

To [address the situation](#), the Government approved the Agrarian Reactivation Plan with an investment of \$76 million. FAO seeks to complement this by requesting some \$3.1 million from the international community to support activities aimed at restoring family agriculture in the remote areas of Piura, Lambayeque and La Libertad.

“The FAO recovery project will provide the necessary inputs to establish orchards, recover irrigation infrastructure and provide technical assistance in animal health,” the UN agency explained.

FAO stated that these activities will be implemented directly, with affected farmers receiving cash-for-work transfers for household income generation, access to food and mitigating migration to cities.

“In Piura, Lambayeque and La Libertad, FAO will support the rehabilitation of local supply markets, to ensure that farmers and fisher folk can quickly reinsert themselves into these marketing channels so that they obtain direct sources of income,” the agency added.

As climate disasters are the emergencies that most impact food security and agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean, FAO is calling on the international community to support the recovery of the livelihoods of the affected farmers and farmers, coordinated with the national government and subnational governments.

According to FAO, addressing these challenges requires adequate risk governance, early warning and monitoring systems, implementation of good practices and risk prevention and mitigation technologies in the agricultural sector, to ensure a rapid response focused on saving lives and livelihoods.

FAO, together with the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction ([UNISDR](#)), is

supporting countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to develop a Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Management in the agricultural sector and food and nutritional security, in response to a request by the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Intra-Syrian talks end with 'incremental progress;' possible resumption in June – UN negotiator

19 May 2017 – United Nations-facilitated talks to help resolve the Syrian conflict have ended on schedule in Geneva, where UN negotiator Staffan de Mistura said he was satisfied that some progress had been made, and that there had been “less rhetoric” on all sides.

Speaking to journalists after his meetings with delegations from the Syrian Government and opposition, as well as representatives from Russia and the United States, the UN Special Envoy said that he would look to hold further [intra-Syrian talks](#) “sometime in June.”

Mr. de Mistura underlined that the purpose of this short round of discussions was to address “constitutional and legal issues” which could provide a “strong, legal and constitutional basis” for any future negotiated political process.

The mechanism for this was a series of high-level meetings in Geneva – which the Special Envoy explained were meant to complement the existing intra-Syrian talks.

But only the Syrian people – and not the UN – would be in charge of writing their own constitution, he insisted: “We are not planning or aiming through this to draft a new constitution for Syria; this has to be done by the Syrians. We are rather trying, and we intend to pursue trying to lay the ground for the Syrians to do exactly that, in the context of an overall political solution that is in the context as you know, of [UN Security Council] [resolution 2254 \(2015\)](#).”

As well as a new constitution for Syria, the UN-facilitated process remains focused on three other main issues: free and fair elections, combating terrorism and governance.

UN-backed treaty on mercury to enter into force; 'pivotal moment' in combat against harmful chemicals

19 May 2017 – The world took an historic step forward in the fight against mercury poisoning as the European Union and seven of its member States ratified the first new global convention related to the environment and health in close to a decade, according to the United Nations.

“The Minamata Convention demonstrates a global commitment to protecting human health and the environment.” said Secretary General, António Guterres in a press [statement](#). “Today’s action shows how problems that affect us all can also bring us together for the common good.”

Having been signed by 128 countries, the [Minamata Convention on Mercury](#) will come into force in 90 days – on 16 August 2017 – after being ratified by Bulgaria, Denmark, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania and Sweden.

According to the UN Environmental Programme ([UNEP](#)), the Convention commits governments to specific measures to control the entire “lifecycle” of man-made mercury pollution, one of the world’s top ten chemical threats to health.

This includes 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.

UNEP also pointed out that there are no safe levels of exposure to mercury and everyone is at risk because the dangerous heavy metal has spread to the remotest parts of the earth and can be found in everyday products, including cosmetics, lightbulbs, batteries and teeth fillings.

Children, newborn and unborn babies are most vulnerable, along with populations who eat contaminated fish, those who use mercury at work, and people who live near of a source of mercury pollution or in colder climates where the dangerous heavy metal tends to accumulate.

“Who wants to live in a world where putting on makeup, powering our phones and even buying a wedding ring depends on exposing millions of people to the [risk of mercury poisoning](#)?” said UN Environment chief Erik Solheim.

“But with mercury we have solutions that are as obvious as the problem itself. There are alternatives to all of mercury’s current applications, such as newer, safer industrial processes. Big and small countries can all play a role – as can the man and woman in the street, just by changing what they buy and use,” he added.

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 jewellery.

Taking 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.

[Venezuela: UN human rights chief regrets opposition leader being blocked to travel](#)

19 May 2017 – Amid rising violence in Venezuela, the United Nations human rights chief has expressed regret that the Latin American country's opposition leader was allegedly blocked from leaving the country for New York, where they were planning to meet.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein has said on Twitter that he regrets that Henrique Capriles was unable to travel and hoped that the incident is not a reprisal linked to the planned meeting with him in New York today, Mr. Zeid's spokesperson, Rupert Colville, told reporters in Geneva.

The spokesperson said that the High Commissioner would go ahead with a meeting this afternoon in New York with Mr. Capriles' lawyer who would share a report prepared by Mr. Capriles.

"We find the rising tensions in Venezuela very alarming, and incidents like that involving Mr. Capriles yesterday are unlikely to help reduce tensions," the spokesperson said.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) also regrets the continued loss of lives during the political unrest, he said. According to the latest figure, 42 deaths were confirmed in the context of the protests.

OHCHR is monitoring the situation from outside the country, but it would be good to be able to visit the country as the situation is very worrying, the spokesperson said.

He expressed concerns about allegations of excessive use of force by security forces, reports of violence by armed groups, as well as reports that people detained during the protests are being brought before military tribunals, not civilian courts.

OHCHR also urges demonstrators to protest peacefully.