

[Attack on Yemeni city could overwhelm humanitarian capacity, warns UN migration agency](#)

12 May 2017 – Warning of the disastrous impact of an imminent attack on a western city and port and Yemen, the United Nations migration agency has called on all actors to use dialogue and talks rather than military force, which will put more civilians in danger.

According to the UN International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)), there are grave fears that humanitarian capacity would be overwhelmed once Al Hudaydah port and city are attacked and relief agencies could be forced into a situation to prioritize their efforts in the war-torn country where every single person should be a priority.

A minimum of 400,000 people will flee the city eastwards, once Al Hudaydah is under attack [adding to] the already desperate situation of more than two million displaced people and their conflict-affected host communities, said Mohammed Abdiker, the Director of Operations and Emergencies at IOM, in a [news release](#) today.

In addition to that number, the attack will also severely hamper the UN agency's efforts to evacuate vulnerable migrants through Al Hudaydah Port.

Even without the attack, emergency response in Yemen has been facing immense challenges relating to access, financial resources and the sheer scale of humanitarian need nearly 19 million people require assistance, more than half of them depend on it for their lives.

The conflict, now into its third year, has pushed the country to the brink of famine with more than eight million facing acute shortages of clean water and sanitation. Healthcare system has virtually collapsed over half of the health facilities not functioning.

Underscoring that humanitarian action, by itself, can never bring peace, IOM has been advocating that violence will only deepen the suffering of Yemeni people.

If all parties to the conflict do not come around the negotiation table to prevent further military escalation and end violence, humanitarian workers will not be able to continue to respond to increased needs, while helping those already greatly affected by the conflict, noted Mr. Abdiker.

No contingency plan will ever be able to fully respond to the scale of needs IOM

The news release also noted the worsening humanitarian situation across the country, coupled with the unending ground fighting and air strikes, are causing major issues in reaching the most vulnerable people.

Expressing concern that with the scarce resources it has received so far to help the two million displaced people and hundreds of thousands of stranded migrants, IOM warned that no contingency plan will ever be able to fully respond to the scale of needs induced by escalated and even continued fighting.

At the same time, additional financial support is needed to cope with the current and projected needs.

At the recent High-Level Pledging Event on Yemen, the [international community pledged \\$1.1 billion to support the humanitarian response](#). But this just over half of the [\\$2.1 billion needed for 2017](#).

Syria: Agreement on 'de-escalation zones' could lift UN-facilitated political talks

11 May 2017 – The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, said today that next week's UN-facilitated talks in Geneva will benefit from the dynamics of the negotiations which began in Astana, Kazakhstan, earlier this month, which saw an agreement between Russia, Iran and Turkey on 'de-escalation zones' in war-torn Syria.

"It is necessary to beat the iron while it is hot," Mr. de Mistura told reporters Thursday in Geneva, where he confirmed that a new round of [intra-Syrian talks](#) is set to run from 16 to 19 May. The idea is also to bring together the Syrian belligerents before the beginning of the month of Ramadan, which begins at the end of May.

He said the new round "will be a rather business-like, rather short comparing to other meetings" and "with more intimate meetings in smaller rooms, in which we can look each other in the eyes."

The UN mediator admitted that under current conditions, "one can advance more with discussions of proximity than with a formal meeting with all the parties in the same room. Of course, we intend to find a time when we can return to this format," he said.

In any case, "the priority now is to consolidate a cessation of hostilities." According to the Mr. de Mistura, the agreement reached in Astana is a step in the right direction as it pushes towards "a concrete de-escalation in four zones, in addition to the ceasefire."

He went on to say the UN is in discussions with Iran, Russia and Turkey over the control of safe areas in Syria. He recalled that the UN has "a lot of

experience” in monitoring, referring to the implementation of the de-escalation zones. He added that it was important that de-escalation in the four zones be followed by much greater humanitarian access.

In accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2254 on these inter-Syrian discussions, the parties will continue to negotiate on four issues, including governance (political transition), a new constitution, Elections and the fight against terrorism.

Panama’s financial reform agenda must prioritize combating tax evasion – UN expert

11 May 2017 – Following last year’s leak of confidential financial documents from a Panama law firm, a United Nations rights expert yesterday called on the countries’ authorities to continue to impose greater due diligence on financial and banking institutions.

Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky [said](#) that such reforms would enable parties to prevent and denounce tax fraud, rather than facilitating or taking advantage of them.

“The main component of illicit cash flows at the global level is tax fraud. These funds, which circulate and are deposited in the shadows of the financial and corporate systems, consolidate poverty and inequality in the world,” the UN Independent Expert on foreign debt and human rights stressed.

Asked by *UN News* if this lack of regulations on taxes is what made Panama appear to some as a “fiscal paradise,” Mr. Bohoslavsky noted that the tax component is the most important when companies and wealthy people choose to do business in one country or another, or when simply transferring their funds between countries.

Previously revealed documents, which popularly have been associated with the ‘Panama Papers,’ have shown how corporations, wealthy individuals and politically exposed persons have systematically hidden assets in more than 21 offshore jurisdictions.

While the expert said the focus of the Panamanian authorities should be on the fight against tax evasion, he also acknowledged their efforts to promote financial and corporate transparency and to strengthen the financial regulatory system, adding that Panama now has a more robust system than it did a few years ago.

As for his eight-day Panama visit, he said: “The most onerous tax evasions must be severely punished within the framework of a comprehensive strategy

covering all dimensions of tax fraud.” He added that financial and non-financial intermediaries have the ‘duty of knowing the client’ and should have the obligation to report suspicious transactions.

In the briefing the expert further advocated for the adoption of clear legislation “to prevent conflicts of interest of public officials and to ensure the autonomy of regulatory agencies.”

He added that such evasion consolidate poverty and inequality because it deprives social programs and services of resources, and does not allow public investment in productive infrastructures that drive development.

In this regard Mr. Bohoslavsky recalled that reducing illicit financial flows is clearly linked to reducing poverty and social inequality and will advance the [2030 Agenda](#) and the corresponding Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

Curbing such flows was also agreed to at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development held in July 2015 in Addis Ababa. The outcome, referred to as the [Addis Ababa Action Agenda](#) calls for strengthening support for the work of the [UN Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters](#) to improve its effectiveness and operational capacity, and engagement with the UN Economic and Social Council.

Independent experts or special rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

[Security Council welcomes commitment of Colombian Government and FARC-EP to carry out peace process](#)

11 May 2017 – The opposition in Colombia has begun to lay down arms, a move welcomed today by the United Nations Security Council which recently visited the country to see the peace efforts first-hand.

In a statement to the press, the 15-member Council today welcomed “the [peaceful arrival](#) of almost 7,000 members of the FARC-EP [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army] in the agreed zones and points.” The Council welcomed also the “continued commitment of the parties to work together to enable FARC to lay down their individual weapons” by 29 May, which marks 180 days after the final peace agreement came into force.

Observers from the [UN Mission in Colombia](#), are actively involved in the process of laying down arms by registering and identifying all the weapons

present in FARC-EP camps within all 26 war zones, storing and then neutralizing and extracting the arms. The weapons include munition, mines and explosives.

The Council visited Colombia from 3 to 5 May, to witness first-hand implementation of the peace agreement between the Colombian Government and FARC-EP, and to observe the progress as well as the challenges to the agreement that ended the 50-year old conflict.

The visit included meetings with President Juan Manuel Santos and senior representatives from the Government, as well as leaders of the FARC-EP and members of various representatives in Congress.

The Council Members, led by Ambassador Elbio Rosselli of Uruguay – which holds the Council's presidency during the month of May – also met with members of civil society and local communities.

In today's press statement, the Council also paid tribute to the courage of Colombians who have embarked on "the path of peace." They noted that violence is at its lowest level in over 40 years and underlined the significant benefits that a lasting peace could bring to the entire country.

Colombia's peace process has the potential "to be a positive example to the rest of the world," the Council said.

In early October 2016, Colombian voters narrowly rejected the historic peace accord between the FARC-EP. That deal was the culmination of four years of talks hosted in Havana, Cuba, between the parties, and which led to a cessation of hostilities and agreements on key issues such as political participation, land rights, illicit drugs and victims' rights and transitional justice. The two sides signed a new agreement in late November 2016.

[The 'cycle of revenge' in South Sudan will hurt everyone – UN envoy](#)

11 May 2017 – Deteriorating security in parts of South Sudan coupled with increased displacement could worsen the humanitarian suffering in the country through outbreaks of diseases such as diarrhoea and even cholera, the United Nations envoy for the country has warned.

The situation in Bor-Pibor area is particularly concerning with fears of violent clashes between youths from the Dinka Bor and Murle communities, David Shearer, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for South Sudan, [told](#) journalists at a press conference today.

“We are worried that might spark more widespread fighting between those two communities [and] hence the reason we are providing support to the peace efforts on the ground,” he added, noting also the work that is being done with the Government to ease the situation.

“The important thing is that we de-escalate tensions and provide an opportunity to talk rather than to fight because fighting only will result in a greater cycle of revenge [that] will be of no benefit to [anyone].”

In his remarks, Mr. Shearer, also the head of the UN Mission in South Sudan ([UNMISS](#)), spoke of violence in various regions of the country, including attacks on peacekeepers and relief personnel, which have severely constricted the humanitarian operating space, and underscored the Mission’s resolve to do everything it can to ensure that assistance reaches those in need.

“The attacks have a direct consequence on humanitarian activities and the assistance that can be provided to people who desperately need it,” he said, terming such violence as an “extraordinarily selfish thing to do”.

SEE ALSO: [UN appalled at killing of aid workers in South Sudan](#)

The senior UN official also praised the work of journalists in the country as well as humanitarian actors on the ground who, despite considerable challenges, are reaching thousands across the country with much needed assistance.

“I think we owe them a real debt of gratitude,” he expressed.