

UN calls for restraint following violence in former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

28 April 2017 – The United Nations today called for restraint and calm in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia following violence directed at democratic institutions and elected officials.

“We are following developments unfolding in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with great concern and call for restraint and calm. Violence directed at democratic institutions and elected representatives of the people is unacceptable,” [said](#) a statement from the Spokesman for the Secretary-General.

“We urge all political forces to resolve their differences through democratic means, strictly adhering to the Constitution, in order to overcome the political impasse without further delay,” the statement said.

According to [the UN Department of Political Affairs](#), it provides backstopping support and guidance to the personal envoy of the UN Secretary-General for talks aimed at resolving the name dispute between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Negotiations on the name dispute began in 1993 and have been led since 1999 under the auspices of the envoy. While no solution has been reached so far, both parties have cooperated in the process and urged the continuation of the efforts of the Secretary-General and his envoy.

UN releases \$500,000 for fuel purchase to address power outages in Gaza Strip

28 April 2017 – The United Nations has approved the allocation of \$500,000 for the purchase of emergency fuel to maintain the delivery of essential services at hospitals and other emergency medical facilities in the Gaza Strip of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, following severe power outages.

“With power outages at 20 hours a day and emergency fuel supplies running out, basic services are grinding to a halt,” warned the UN Coordinator for Humanitarian Aid and Development Activities, Robert Piper, in a news release.

Concerned about the deteriorating energy situation in the Gaza Strip, he

called for swift action from Israeli and Palestinian authorities and members of the international community to protect the provision of critical basic services to Gaza's 1.9 million residents.

According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, fuel to power back-up generators at seven out of 13 hospitals in Gaza is expected to run out within three days. Already, residents of high-rise buildings no longer receive regular water supply, due to lack of power for pumps to reach higher levels, and some 110 million litres of raw or poorly treated sewage is flowing into the Mediterranean Sea every day due to lack of energy to treat it.

Syria: 'Glimmers of humanity' overshadowed by brutality of attacks on civilians, says UN aid chief

27 April 2017 – With fighting intensifying on numerous fronts in Syria over the past months, the top United Nations humanitarian official today urged consolidation of the nationwide ceasefire, most importantly a pause in fighting on the outskirts of Damascus, to enable the delivery of aid.

"The Secretary-General has said time and again that there will be no military end to this conflict. Yet, military might continues to be used against civilians in a way that defies all reason, let alone morality or the law," Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien told the Security Council.

He said that the use of "abhorrent chemical weapons" on 4 April in Khan Shaykhun was yet another horrific account of such brutality. "I wish I could say mindless brutality – but no, it was deliberate, planned, predetermined, by other humans against their own fellow human beings, sheer unbridled cruelty by leaders and commanders. And we await the investigation to confirm which ones."

"The humanitarian situation is deteriorating, if that were possible, and the need for active engagement by members of the [Security] Council is urgently needed," he said.

The core needs of the Syrian people from the international community remain largely unchanged, noting that they include the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure by all parties to the conflict; immediate, unimpeded and sustained access to all in need throughout Syria; an immediate lifting of all sieges; and a political solution to the conflict.

In besieged eastern Ghouta, outside Damascus, civilians remain trapped amid reports of relentless shelling, airstrikes, and ground fighting, he said,

noting that the last informal access routes have reportedly been closed further restricting movement for the some 400,000 people who live in the area, and who the UN has been unable to access since October last year.



Stephen O'Brien (shown on screen), Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, briefs the Security Council via video teleconference on the situation in Syria. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

As the noose has tightened around eastern Ghouta, some 30,000 people in the adjacent areas of Barza and Qaboun have also come under siege by the Government of Syria, he added.

"As it is already too late for the more than a quarter million Syrians who have died already in this atrocious war, so members of the Security Council it is action today that counts," O'Brien stressed, via video link from Geneva, Switzerland.

He also urged the lifting of arbitrary and bureaucratic impediments by all parties throughout Syria.

"I will not repeat again the bureaucratic delaying tactics used by the Government of Syria to thwart humanitarian assistance at every turn, beyond saying that it continues to bring untold human suffering," Mr. O'Brien said.

Only four convoys have deployed so far under the new two-monthly April-May plan, reaching 157,500 people. None of these convoys reached besieged areas, due to a lack of necessary authorizations, he said.

Although the overall number of those besieged has been reduced to just over 620,000 people due to evacuations, this process is not in line with humanitarian principles, and not conducted in consultation with the people affected.

"Let us not pretend that those who evacuate move to a location of safety. Many of those who displace to Idlib or northern Aleppo continue to live in areas where civilian structures, including hospitals, come under regular aerial bombardment, and their access to basic goods such as food and shelter is limited," he said.

AUDIO: Addressing the Security Council, Stephen O'Brien reiterates the UN's belief that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict.

Courageous Syrian swimmer named UN refugee agency Goodwill Ambassador

27 April 2017 – The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) today appointed Yusra Mardini – a Syrian refugee who together with her sister swam for three hours in the Mediterranean Sea off Turkey’s coast, pulling a capsizing boat of refugees to safety – as its new Goodwill Ambassador.

Her actions saved the lives of 20 refugees who were fleeing the Syrian capital, Damascus.

[Yusra](#) was also one of the 10 athletes who made up the historic Olympic Refugee Team and participated at the Rio Olympic Games last year. She has been a very powerful voice for the forcibly displaced across the world and an example of their resilience and determination to rebuild lives and positively contribute to host communities.

“The UN refugee agency does the most important and incredible work for refugees under extremely challenging circumstances, and I am proud to use my voice to support UNHCR,” [said](#) Ms. Mardini, accepting her new role.

“I am thrilled to join the UNHCR family and eager to continue spreading the message that refugees are just normal people living through traumatic and devastating circumstances, who are capable of extraordinary things if only given a chance.”

Since her participation at the Rio Olympics, Ms. Mardini has worked closely with the UN agency, drawing global attention to the plight of refugees, speaking at forums including the 2016 UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants (which adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants) and the 2017 World Economic Forum in Davos.

She has also advocated for the refugee cause during meetings with the Pope, world leaders, influential business figures and other world leaders.

“Yusra is a deeply inspiring young woman. Through her powerful personal story, she represents the hopes, the fears and the incredible potential of the more than ten million young refugees around the globe,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi, welcoming Ms. Mardini’s appointment.

Also welcoming the announcement, International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach added: “It is my hope that through her role as UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, Yusra will continue to inspire refugees, reminding us that anyone can contribute to society through their talent, skills and strength of the human spirit.”

SEE RELATED: [‘Show strength’, inspire the world, UN chief tells Olympic Refugee Team](#)

Ms. Mardini is currently a full time student in Germany and continues to train in the hope of competing at the next Olympic Games in the Japanese capital, Tokyo, in 2020.

UNHCR [Goodwill Ambassadors](#) are some of the most recognizable public faces the UN agency. They help take its work to every corner of the world through their influence, dedication and hard work.

[Syria: 'Glimmers of humanity' overshadowed by brutality of increasing attacks on civilians, says UN aid chief](#)

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