

Rights of refugees and migrants with disabilities must be priority in new global action plan – UN experts

12 April 2017 – Accessible social and health services, with dedicated human and financial resources must be addressed and made available for persons with disabilities in the new global framework on [refugees and migrants](#), a group of United Nations human rights experts have urged, as UN-led intergovernmental talks on the issue are set to launch consultation in 2018.

The framework, entitled [Global Compact for Migration](#) will set out a range of principles and commitments among governments to enhance coordination on international migration and is due to be adopted in 2018. The Compact is one of the key outcomes of last year's UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants.

“The new Global Compact is a [unique opportunity](#) to address the shortcomings of a migration and refugee system built on policies that lack consideration for persons with disabilities, said Theresia Degener, the Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Dedicated human and financial resources, she stressed, should be included in the new framework to identify persons with disabilities in reception and detention centres and to provide adequate standards of living and healthcare, including psycho-social support.

However, “we are deeply concerned about the precarious situation of persons with disabilities in the current migration crisis,” said Catalina Devandas Aguilar, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

She added that many countries lack formal procedures to identify migrants and refugees with disabilities and, consequently, fail to provide them with protection and essential services, such as shelter and medical care that are accessible and responsive to their needs.

Persons with disabilities face exclusion and discrimination due to a lack of accessibility, including with respect to humanitarian assistance, and denial of reasonable accommodation, according to a joint statement on “Addressing disabilities in large-scale movements of refugees and Migrants”, issued by the Committee on Migrant Workers and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The joint statement further called on Member States to realize the rights of migrants and refugees with disabilities in accordance with their international human rights treaty obligations.

“We need to be sure that, when world leaders commit to saving the lives of refugees and migrants [...] they don't forget about persons with disabilities,” said Jose Brillantes, the Chair of the UN Committee on the Protection of the

Rights of All Migrant Workers and members of Their Families.

On 6 April, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the modalities for negotiations for the next 12 months in the run-up to the adoption of the Global Compact on Migration.

[UN chief announces senior appointments; sets up independent panel on Human Settlements Programme](#)

12 April 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today announced the appointment of senior officials as his envoys dealing with prevention of sexual violence in conflict and for protection of children during such crisis, respectively.

He also appointed a new High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and Small Island Developing States, and an independent panel to strengthen effectiveness of UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).

According to statements issued today by the UN chief's spokesperson, Virginia Gamba of Argentina – currently the head of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) on the use of chemicals as weapons in Syria – [has been appointed](#) the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Similarly, Pramila Patten of Mauritius, who as practicing Barrister at Law served, since 2003, as a Member of the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, [has been designated](#) the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

For the position of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, the Secretary-General [appointed](#) Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu of Tonga. She is currently the Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Tourism of Tonga.

In the statements, Mr. Guterres expressed that he was grateful to the outgoing senior leaders who have served with distinction and true commitment to UN ideals.

Also today, Mr. Guterres [appointed an independent panel](#) to assess and enhance effectiveness of UN-Habitat after the adoption of the [New Urban Agenda](#) – the outcome of the Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (popularly known as [Habitat III](#)) – held in Quito, Ecuador, last October.

The independent assessment is a part of the follow-up and review of the Habitat III outcome and it will contain recommendations on enhancing the effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and oversight of UN-Habitat.

The assessment report will also serve as an input to a two-day High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly, to be convened by the President of the General Assembly during the 71st session in September this year, to discuss the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the positioning of UN-Habitat in that regard.

The panel includes architect Peter Calthorpe; Ambassador Dian Triansyah Djani, the Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the UN; Anne Hidalgo, Mayor of the French capital, Paris; Sheela Patel, Founder and Director of the Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centres; Rosario Robles, Secretary of Agrarian, Territorial and Urban Development of Mexico; Ambassador František Ružicka, Permanent Representative of the Slovak Republic to the UN; Ponsto S.M. Sekatle, Minister of Health and Social Welfare of Lesotho; and Mpho Parks Tau, President of United Cities and Local Governments and South African Local Governments Association.

Russia blocks Security Council action on reported use of chemical weapons in Syria's Khan Shaykhun

12 April 2017 – With a ‘no’ vote from permanent member Russia, the United Nations Security Council today failed to adopt a resolution that would have condemned the reported use of chemical weapons in Syria and called on the Government to cooperate with an investigation into the incident.

While 10 of the Council's 15 members voted in favour, Russia rejected the text, as permanent member China, as well as non-permanent members Ethiopia and Kazakhstan abstained. A negative vote – or veto – from one of the Council's five permanent members means a resolution cannot be adopted.

The proposed measure – drafted by France, the United Kingdom and the United States, the Council's other permanent members – would have strongly condemned “the reported use of chemical weapons in the [Syria], in particular the attack on Khan Shaykhun,” the site of last week's incident that has drawn increasing global attention.

The measure would also have called on the Syrian Government to comply with relevant recommendations of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact Finding Mission (FFM) and the [OPCW-UN](#) Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM).

In February, Russia and China vetoed a measure that would have imposed sanctions on a number of individuals and entities linked to the use of chemical weapons in cases where responsibility was [established](#) by the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM).

Although the Council came together on 19 December to [unanimously adopt](#) a resolution demanding that all parties to the Syrian conflict ensure immediate and unhindered access for the monitoring of evacuations from eastern Aleppo, over the past five years, Russia has vetoed eight Council texts on the Syrian conflict, while China has vetoed six of those eight.

As the [Syrian crisis](#) enters its seventh year, civilians continue to bear the brunt of a conflict marked by unparalleled suffering, destruction and disregard for human life. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), 13.5 million people require humanitarian assistance. Moreover, some 6.3 million have been internally displaced by violence.

The UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, has been facilitating the [intra-Syrian talks](#) in Geneva, the latest round of which wrapped up in late March. The discussions are guided by Security Council [resolution 2254 \(2015\)](#), focusing on matters of governance, including a new constitution for Syria and the holding of elections.

Briefing the Council in a meeting earlier today, Mr. de Mistura said the US and Russia [must find a way to work together](#) to stabilize the situation and support the political process. He said that last week's reported chemical weapons attack, the subsequent airstrikes by the US and intensified fighting on the ground have put the fragile peace process in "grave danger."

"This is a time for clear-thinking, strategy, imagination, cooperation," said Mr. de Mistura.

The meeting today comes as the US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is in Moscow meeting with top Russian officials.

[EU child refugee protection policy welcomed by UN agencies](#)

12 April 2017 – New policy guidance from the European Commission aimed at improving the protection of migrant and refugee children has been welcomed by the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) and the UN refugee agency.

"It is the first EU policy to address the situation and rights of all children in migration – refugee and migrant children, children alone and with their families – linking migration, asylum and child protection," Noala

Skinner, Director of UNICEF's Brussels Office said.

The guidelines include boosting child protection at all levels, improving data collection to ensure children are properly tracked and the appointment of guardians for children. The guidelines also encourage member States to refrain from invasive age assessments and to increase cooperation among states.

Dianne Goodman, Deputy Director of the Europe Bureau of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) said: "These important guidelines will help EU States better respond to the needs of refugee and migrant children. We strongly hope that these guidelines will contribute, in a very concrete manner, to the protection of the many children who arrive to Europe after having been forced to flee their homes due to violence, war and conflict. Many have suffered incredible hardship while on their journey and afterwards."

In a [joint press release](#), the two UN agencies stressed that children should never be detained, irrespective of their legal or migratory status, or that of their parents. They also welcomed the EU's policy commitment to prioritise national child protection systems for children displaced beyond European borders.

According to UNHCR, children make up over half of the world's refugee population. Both agencies are looking forward to the policy's implementation and an end to the violence and poverty that often precipitates displacement.

['Moment of crisis' in Syria calls for serious search for a political solution – UN envoy](#)

12 April 2017 – In the wake of yet another dire turn in the Syrian crisis, the United States and the Russian Federation "must find a way to work together" to stabilize the situation and support the political process, the United Nations envoy for the war-torn country told the Security Council today.

In his briefing, Staffan de Mistura, the UN Special Envoy for Syria added that last week's reported chemical weapons attack, the subsequent airstrikes by the US and intensified fighting on the ground have put the fragile peace process is in "grave danger."

"This is a time for clear-thinking, strategy, imagination, cooperation," said Mr. de Mistura.

“We must all resolve that the time has come where the [intra-Syrian talks](#) move beyond preparatory discussions and into the real heart of the matter, across all four baskets, to secure a meaningful negotiated transition package,” he added.

Prior to the [reported chemical attack in Khan Shaykhun area of Idlib](#), modest but incremental progress were made, the UN envoy noted, highlighting that though there no breakthroughs, there were also no breakdowns. The most recent round of talks, facilitated by the UN in Geneva, wrapped up two weeks ago>

However, the reported attack and subsequent events have placed the country between two paths: one leading more death, destruction and regional and international divisions; and the other of real de-escalation and ceasefire, added Mr. de Mistura.

He informed the 15-member Security Council of his appeals to Russia, Turkey and Iran – the guarantors of the Astana ceasefire – and urged all with influence over the parties to the conflict to restore the credibility of the ceasefire, and to ensure that the UN can reach the millions who are trapped in besieged and other hard to reach areas.

The Security Council briefing comes as the US Secretary of State Tillerson visits Moscow.

Hailing the visit and the discussions, Mr. de Mistura called on both the US and Russia – the co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) – to recognize their common interests and responsibilities and find a way to work together to stabilize the situation, in a deliberate, realistic and concerted way, in support of the political process.

The ISSG established respective taskforces on humanitarian aid delivery and a wider ceasefire that have been meeting separately since early 2016 on a way forward in the crisis. In addition to Russia and the US (the co-chairs of the taskforces), the ISSG also comprises the UN, the Arab League, the European Union and 16 other countries.

Concluding his briefing, the UN Special Envoy reiterated that there are no military solutions to the strife in the war-ravaged country.

“You have heard it countless times, but I will say it again: there can only be a political solution to this bloody conflict [...] regardless of what some say or believe,” he expressed, noting that this is what Syrians from all walks of life also say and something that the Security Council had agreed upon.

“So, let us use this moment of crisis – and it is a moment of crisis – as a watershed and an opportunity perhaps for a new level of seriousness in the search for a political solution.”