

## UN calls for urgent access to reach some 400,000 civilians trapped in Syria's Ghouta

11 April 2017 – Voicing concern over the impact of deteriorating security and humanitarian situation on the lives some 400,000 people trapped in eastern Ghouta in Syria, a United Nations spokesperson today underlined the need to ensure that humanitarians have unrestricted access to the affected areas.

“There have been continued reports of heavy aerial bombardment and artillery shelling which have resulted in civilian deaths and injuries,” Stéphane Dujarric, the Spokesman for the Secretary-General, [told](#) the regular daily briefing at UN Headquarters in New York.

According to reports, Government forces have prevented commercial trucks from entering the town, located in rural Damascus, since late March.

Lack of supplies have resulted in price hikes of basic staples and closures of many bakeries due to lack of flour and much higher prices for fuel and gas.

“It is critical that the UN and partners be given access to the area before the conditions deteriorate further,” Mr. Dujarric underscored.

The last UN humanitarian delivery to any of the besieged areas of eastern Ghouta was nearly six months ago, in October last year, with other areas not having been accessed since last June.

“We also remind all parties of their obligation to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure as required by international humanitarian and human rights law,” said the UN spokesperson.

Last week, Jan Egeland, UN Senior Adviser on Syria had also [underlined](#) the plight of the civilians trapped in the town and called for an urgent ceasefire to enable safe delivery of desperately needed relief and medical supplies.

He had also stressed that special arrangements needed to be made for hospitals and that medical facilities must not be targets for attack and urged that a “notification system” be established to ensure the safety of medical premises.

“We cannot have a situation where armed actors do not, cannot or will not guarantee that medical facilities will not be attacked,” said Mr. Egeland, adding:

“We will urge now again such notification system to be established and I have hope that this year it will for the first time be established and will work.”

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# UN announces first-ever World Ocean Festival

11 April 2017 – With global leaders heading to the United Nations for a major conference in June on the protection and sustainable use of the planet's oceans, the UN today announced that the inaugural World Ocean Festival will kick off the week-long event, with activists and enthusiasts taking to the streets – and waterways – of New York City to raise their voices to reverse the declining health of our oceans.

At a joint press briefing at UN Headquarters today, Penny Abeywardena, the Commissioner of the (New York City) Mayor's Office for International Affairs, joined Peter Thomson, President of the UN General Assembly, to announce the first ever Festival which will be held on Sunday, 4 June, the day before the opening of [The Ocean Conference](#), which will run from 5 to 9 June.

The Festival, organized by the Global Brian Foundation, will galvanize people across the world to bring public attention to the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), specifically [Goal 14](#), on conservation and sustainable use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, "right here in New York City, a premier coastal city," said Ms. Abeywardena.

"Through these gatherings, people will come together to catalyze specific steps we can take as a community to preserve our oceans and engage our citizens and in particular, our young people," she said, adding that, with 520 miles (about 835 kilometres) of coastline, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio's administration recognizes the need for cities to lead on protecting the planet from degradation through sustainable consumption and effective management of the world's natural resources and mitigating the worst impacts of climate change.

For his part, Assembly President Thomson said New York City is a model not only in the United States but around the world of what cities can do in integrating the [SDGs](#) with their urban development planning, drawing attention to Mayor de Blasio's 'One NYC' initiative.

***An opportunity to address major woes humanity has put upon the ocean***

As for the Conference, he said "the ocean is in deep trouble," facing threats from marine pollution; fishery subsidies at a time when fish stocks are collapsing; and degraded coastal ecosystems planet-wide. "The Ocean Conference is [a timely opportunity] to address these major woes humanity has put upon the ocean," he continued, adding that also will provide an opportunity to think about the impacts of climate change.

"With ocean acidification, we're already seeing the effects of this; its serious business in Oregon and Washington state and its spreading around the

world and is also serious business for the tropics, where because of rising temperatures life is leaving our waters because it is too hot,” explained Mr. Thomson, noting that 40 per cent of the cause of rising sea levels is due to the fact that oceans are heating up.

And yet “all human problems have human solutions and that’s what the Ocean Conference is about, working to find what the solutions are” he emphasized, noting that UN Member States are currently making good progress on the ‘call to action’ that would be agreed by the Conference. Further, in addition to a plenary, the Conference would also feature seven partnership dialogues focused on SDG 14.

Mr. Thomson went on to highlight the [registry of voluntary commitments](#), which the UN was promoting all stakeholders and “everybody who gives a hoot about the ocean” register between now and the Conference “so that you stand and be counted in our call to action to reverse the cycle of decline in which the ocean has been caught.” The roll of the media is important in all this, to get the word out about the state of the planet’s oceans “but also that we’re doing something about it.”

Natalia Vega-Berry, founder of the Global Brain Foundation and Executive Producer of the World Ocean Festival said the event will aim to show world leaders gathering for the UN conference the urgency for taking action. “Our ocean is a connective tissue for the world’s entire population. It makes planet Earth and us all one, as we are surrounded by shores. At the same time, our ocean is at great risk of pollution, overfishing, climate change and more.”

While coastal cities and island nations feel the most pressing burden of such threats, she said that the Festival will aim to bring together all people who care deeply about the oceans’ future to “raise their voices in support of the ocean and call to world leaders to take action to save it.”

She said that while the Festival will be held in New York, other cities could also be inspired to organize their own events.

New York’s festival will feature a first-of-its kind grand “ocean march”, which will be a parade of sailing vessels around lower Manhattan and along 10 nautical miles of Manhattan and Brooklyn waterfront from the Hudson to the East River. The second main event will be the Ocean Village, which will be set up at Gentry State Park in Long Island City as a “hub for all things ocean,” and will celebrate art, innovation and exhibits on ocean and climate action.

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**[Lives still being lost to preventable](#)**

## diseases in Yemen's war-torn Taiz city, senior UN official warns

11 April 2017 – Despite long-standing humanitarian access restrictions in Yemen, the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in the country reported that he has been able to enter Taiz City where, amid some gains, he observed setbacks, particularly as regards the health sector.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), on 9 April, Jamie McGoldrick got a first-hand glimpse of the situation inside the city, which is located in the Yemeni highlands.

“Compared to the last time I was in the city, over nine months ago – and in spite of its current status as an active conflict zone – markets seemed busier with more people, more vehicles were on the roads and many more shops and restaurants were open,” he said in a [statement](#).

Mr. McGoldrick also cited local relief committee members and hospital managers in emphasizing that a recent reduction in fighting has allowed some semblance of normalcy to return to the hard-hit city, enabling some of the partially-functioning hospitals to conduct minor repairs.

“However,” he cautioned, “they also stressed that lives are being lost to preventable diseases. Hospitals and feeding centers struggle to cope due to problems with salary payments, insufficient essential supplies, and lack of medicines. Increasing malnutrition rates, particularly in children, are worsening the already difficult humanitarian situation.”

The UN humanitarian coordinator then called on parties to the conflict to build on the momentum of his recent visit by helping to establish a predictable and regular access mechanism to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need across Taiz.

“I further call on them to ensure that the mechanism does not only cover Taiz city but also helps to improve humanitarian access to the rural areas in the governorate, where the need is also great,” concluded Mr. McGoldrick.

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## INTERVIEW: In new UN role, Malala Yousafzai seeks to inspire girls to stand up, speak out for rights

11 April 2017 – In 2012, Malala Yousafzai made headlines all over the world

when she was shot by the Taliban for speaking out on the right of education for girls. But instead of silencing her, the brutal attack only served to embolden the Pakistani teenager, who has used her voice to promote the right of every child to safe, free and quality primary and secondary education.

Malala has received numerous accolades in recent years, including the United Nations Human Rights Prize and the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. In 2014, at the age of 17, she became the youngest person ever to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The student activist is taking on a new role, with [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres having designated her as the UN's youngest [Messenger of Peace](#), with a focus on girls' education. She sat down for an interview with *UN News* following her designation at UN Headquarters on 10 April to discuss what her new role means to her, what her advocacy efforts have taught her and what she thinks are some of the misconceptions people have about her.

**UN News: UN Messenger of Peace is an impressive title. How do you see yourself in this role?**

**Malala Yousafzai:** I'm really honoured to be given this title of Messenger of Peace, and to me it is more responsibility, which I have already had, which I was already taking, for girls' education – raising awareness, asking world leaders to invest more in education. And I will continue to do that. But UN Messenger of Peace, this has given me even more strength and it will keep me strong and also will give me a bigger platform with which I can spread my voice for education.

**UN News: And speaking of being an advocate for girls' education, what has been the biggest lesson that you've learnt in the years you've been advocating and been a role model for this issue?**

If we want to make our lives better, we have to invest in girls' education.

**Malala Yousafzai:** I've been fighting for girls' education since I was 10 or 11, when in Swat Valley, in Pakistan, terrorism started and girls couldn't go to school. And I have learnt so much in my 20 years of life – from seeing terrorism, extremism, to then being attacked at the age of 15 and now at the global stage fighting for girls' education. And what I have learned is that the future generation, they need education, they need quality education. And if we want to see our future bright, developed, if we want to make our lives better, we have to invest in girls' education. That is crucial. We cannot ignore it. And I just sometimes wonder, why have our world leaders ignored it for so long? The thing that I have realised from my experience in 19 years, they haven't learnt yet in their 50, 60+ years. So that is my message, to make sure that they realise that their investment in education can change the whole world.

**VIDEO:** Speaking to UN News, newly appointed UN Messenger of Peace Malala

Yousafzai called for greater investment in girls' education. *Credit: UN News*

**UN News: Your father is here with you today and he was very instrumental in seeing that you went to school. What can men and boys do to ensure that girls and women get an education?**

**Malala Yousafzai:** I started speaking out but I wouldn't have been able to go forward and speak out without my father, without my parents. There were so many other girls who also wanted to speak out but their parents, their brothers, did not allow them. So that is the role of men that is crucial at this stage because if men stop women from speaking out, women aren't able to go forward. So it is important for men to allow women to follow their dreams, to achieve their dreams. As my father said, you don't need to do something extra for women – just don't clip their wings, and let them fly. Let them go forward. So men need to come forward, be proud feminists, stand up for women, and when you empower women, when you help women, you empower the whole society. There are economic benefits, there are social benefits...the benefits you see are countless.

**UN News: You've been advocating for years about girls' education and your accomplishments are incredible: Nobel Laureate and now UN Messenger of Peace. Everybody knows your story and I think people feel like they 'know' you. But as you mentioned, you're still 19. What do you think is one of the misconceptions that people have about you?**

**Malala Yousafzai:** Often people think that I'm quite big but I'm actually very, very short and I'm very small, like only five-foot something, and then I wear high heels to make myself taller but it still doesn't work. So I'm very short. And the second thing is that people often think that I would be, I don't know, very good at studies and things like that but they don't know that I also go through difficult times in my school. I have exams; I also get C's and D's; I also have to work hard for my college. I'm not given admission free of any tests or anything. I had to go through tests. I had to get three A's in my final exams to go into university. So, I'm going through the same things that all students go through. So, I'm quite normal. Nobel Peace Prize and Messenger of Peace – these things don't really help you much.



In 2010, at the age of 13, Malala chairs a session of the UNICEF-supported Child Assembly, that was held at the Khpal Kor Model School and Orphanage, in the city of Mingora, Pakistan. Photo: UNICEF/Ahmed



Two years later, the courageous campaigner for girls' education was shot by the Taliban while on a bus heading home after school. UNICEF reported that Malala kept a diary for the BBC, documenting how the Taliban took over her town and closed all girls' schools three years prior. Photo: Facebook /UNICEF Pakistan



A month after Malala was shot UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova co-hosted a high-level advocacy event in Paris called “Stand up for Malala – Stand up for girls’ right to education.” The event, which coincided with Human Rights Day, was designed to generate political will and accelerate action in favour of every girl’s right to go to school. UNESCO/Landry Rukingamubiri



While still recovering from the attack on her life, Malala told then Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon “I can walk. I can talk. I can do anything!” In return he said that she is “a symbol of hope, a daughter of the United Nations. The UN will always be with you and the many people like you.” Photo: UN Photo/Rick Bajornas



On 12 July, 2013, her sixteenth birthday, Malala addressed hundreds of young people at the UN, urging them to use education to fight extremism. “Let us pick up our books and our pens. They are our most powerful weapons. One teacher, one book, one pen, can change the world,” she said. Also pictured are her father and younger brother. Photo: UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe



During a visit to School No. 2 in the Za’atari camp for Syrian refugees in Jordan, Malala speaks with Mozoun, a peer educator and student. Mozoun advocates for education in the camp, going from household to household to encourage families to send their children to school. Photo: UNICEF/ El Querchefani



Malala addressed the 2015 Global Citizen Festival in New York City, which took place on the margins of the UN Sustainable Development Summit at which world leaders adopted an ambitious new plan to end poverty and promote prosperity by 2030. Malala is pictured here with then Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (right) and musician and activist Bono (second from left) of the band U2. Photo: UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe



Following her designation on 10 April 2017 as the UN’s youngest Messenger of Peace, Malala and Secretary-General António Guterres engaged in a conversation with hundreds of youth representatives from around the world on the theme of girls’ education. Photo: UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

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**UN News: Speaking of education, you mention that you have to study just like everybody else. What’s next with regard to your own education?**

**Malala Yousafzai:** At university level, or as you call it ‘college’ in

America, I want to study PPE which is Philosophy, Politics and Economics. And I have applied to a few universities but it all depends on my final grades which will come in August which university I will go to. And I'm just working hard on that. And then after that, I'm not sure what kind of career I want to go for. One thing I'm very sure about is that I will stay focused on girls' education. Through the Malala Fund, I will continue to focus on girls' secondary education and inspire more young girls like me to speak out and stand with me so we can amplify the voices of young girls.

**UN News: As you travel the world in your new role as UN Messenger of Peace, how will you go about inspiring young people, particularly those in areas where they feel they have no hope, that there's no point in going to school?**

Your voice is important; your voice can change the world

**Malala Yousafzai:** I visited many countries like Lebanon and Jordan. I have met Syrian refugee girls; I met girls in Nigeria. I will continue to do that through this role of Messenger of Peace and I will visit different countries, meet amazing and inspiring girls throughout the world, and make sure that I tell them that your voice is important; your voice can change the world. And I spoke out in Swat Valley and you can see how a child's voice was more powerful than the terrorists' guns. And that is what they need to realize, all children, that your voice is important for our world. And you don't need to grow up to bring change; you can bring change now.

**UN News: Any final message?**

**Malala Yousafzai:** I will just say that believe in yourself, stay confident, stay hopeful about the future. There will be bad things happening but if we are united, if we stay together, we will be stronger, we can make our world better, we can bring change, so let's stay positive and hopeful.

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## [Lake Chad Basin crisis is both humanitarian and ecological; agriculture cannot be an 'afterthought' – UN agency](#)

11 April 2017 – Critical investments in agriculture and climate change relief are needed to address the crisis in Africa's strife-torn Lake Chad Basin, where hunger, poverty and a lack of rural development prevail, the United Nations food security agency said today.



“This is not only a humanitarian crisis, but it is also an ecological one,” José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), [said](#) at a media briefing in Rome following his visit last week to some of the worst affected areas in Chad and north-eastern Nigeria.

He underscored that the crisis is rooted in decades of neglect, lack of rural development and the impact of climate change, and the only way to ensure a lasting solution is to address these including through investments in sustainable agriculture.

“This conflict cannot be solved only with arms. This is a war against hunger and poverty in the rural areas of the Lake Chad Basin,” stressed the FAO Director-General.

“Peace is a prerequisite” to resolve the crisis in the region, but this is not enough, Mr. Graziano da Silva said. “Agriculture, including livestock and fisheries, can no longer be an afterthought. It is what produces food and what sustains the livelihoods of about 90 per cent of the region’s population.”

Some seven million people risk suffering from severe hunger in the Lake Chad Basin, which incorporates parts of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and north-eastern Nigeria. In the latter, some 50,000 people are facing famine.



FAO has developed a three-year strategy for the Lake Chad Basin crisis to improve food security and nutrition, focusing on women and youth. Photo: FAO/Pius Utomi Ekpei

While fighting and violence have caused much of the suffering, the impact of environmental degradation and climate change – including repeated droughts – is exacerbating the situation, continued the FAO Director-General.

He noted that since 1963, Lake Chad has lost some 90 per cent of its water mass with devastating consequences on food security and the livelihoods of people depending on fishing and irrigation-based agricultural activities. Furthermore, while Lake Chad has been shrinking, the population has been growing, including millions displaced from conflict areas.

#### ***Food assistance and long-term investment production***

FAO and its partners, including other UN agencies, are calling on the international community for urgent support – a combination of immediate food assistance and food production support – to make assuage hunger in the region.

Mr. Graziano da Silva reiterated that should farmers miss the coming May/June planting season, no substantial harvests will be seen until 2018, leading to more widespread, severe hunger and prolonged dependency on external assistance.

He recalled FAO's [Response Strategy \(2017-2019\)](#) for the crisis, which includes distributing cereal seeds and animal feed and providing cash transfers and veterinary care to enable displaced farmers and voluntary returnees to get a substantial harvest, replenish their food stocks and prevent animal losses among vulnerable herders.

The FAO Director-General warned that the situation reflects the threats facing other African countries where a combination of ethnic or religious tensions fuelled by rural poverty and unemployment could escalate to full-scale crises.

In the Lake Chad Basin region, FAO is working with farmers and displaced people to assist with producing food and selling surplus in the markets, which includes distributing cash vouchers that help stimulate markets for agricultural products.

Additionally, the agency, together with its partners, is exploring the possibility of introducing irrigation techniques to save water, and then helping to train farmers in using them.