

Syria: UN chief 'deeply disturbed' by reports of alleged chemical attack; OPCW investigating

4 April 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today said that he is “deeply disturbed” by reports of alleged use of chemical weapons in an airstrike in the Khan Shaykhun area of southern Idlib, Syria.

In a statement from his spokesperson, the Secretary-General expressed [heartfelt condolences](#) to the victims of the incident and their families.

He noted that the UN Security Council affirmed that the use of chemical weapons “constitutes a serious violation of international law” and runs counter to resolutions passed by the 15-member body.

While the UN has said that it is not in a position to independently verify these reports, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is currently in the process of [gathering and analysing information](#) to confirm if chemical weapons were used.

The OPCW is the implementing body of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which aims to eliminate an entire category of weapons of mass destruction by prohibiting the development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, retention, transfer or use of chemical weapons by States Parties.

Meanwhile, the Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic has added its support for OPCW’s fact finding mission. Established by the UN Human Rights Council, the Commission works to investigate if human rights abuses occurred in Syria since March 2011 and who should be held responsible.

In statement, the Commission urged [“full support”](#) for the fact finding mission and the independent Joint Investigative Mechanism.

“It is imperative for perpetrators of such attacks to be identified and held accountable,” the Commission said, adding that it is also investigating the circumstances surrounding the attack.

Preliminary information indicates a number of civilian casualties, including children.

“Both the use of chemical weapons, as well as the deliberate targeting of medical facilities, would amount to war crimes and serious violations of human rights law,” the Commission said.

Weather, existing socio-economic factors compounded Colombian landslide tragedy – UN agency

4 April 2017 – Very heavy rainfall triggered the landslides that hit Colombia over the weekend, but “exceptional” level of rains were not the sole cause, the United Nations weather agency said today, noting that many other factors, such as loss of forest cover, added to the devastation.

“The weather was not the only cause of the tragedy, many other socio-economic factors, including deforestation, came into play,” Clare Nullis, a spokesperson for the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), [told the media](#) at a regular press briefing at the UN Office at Geneva (UNOG).

March is typically a rainy month in the country, but the quantities of rainfall seen in the past week have been exceptional, she explained, adding that the municipality of Mocoa, hardest-hit by the landslides, saw 129 millimetres of rainfall within 24 hours on 31 March.

Of that amount, 80 per cent of the precipitation fell in just three hours, explaining the size of the tragedy.

According to a Flash Update by the UN [Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(in Spanish\)](#), as of 2 April 254 people have been confirmed to have perished in the disaster, 262 have been injured and 441 are missing.

The casualty figures are approximate and are expected to rise.

Furthermore, as of 3 April, more than 500 municipalities are at the of risk of landslides in the country, and of those 182 had orange to red alerts, noted Ms. Nullis.

She added that while the national meteorological service is very strong and well-equipped, it faced considerable challenges.

“There are more than 700,000 rivers and bodies of water, and it is impossible to have monitoring stations at each one of them,” said the WMO spokesperson.

Further, clarifying that the cause of the disaster was not El Niño, crediting a senior official at the Colombian Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies, she said that climate variability and climate change would continue to produce rain and drought, and that prevention is the most important.

She also informed the briefing that in the short-term, Colombian Meteorological Agency weather forecasts indicate that there would be no or very light rainfall in the affected areas till 6 April.

The long-term predictions for the season were for above average rainfall in

the area.

[A 'different' Darfur has emerged since 2003; exit strategy for AU-UN mission being considered](#)

4 April 2017 – The African Union (AU) and the United Nations are actively discussing with the Government of Sudan how best to configure a strategy for AU-UN peacekeeping to eventually leave Darfur, the head of that operation said today.

“In view of the current circumstances in Darfur, a pragmatic reconfiguration of UNAMID [the AU-UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur] will become necessary and the AU and UN will have to focus on how best that could be done without compromising the gains thus far made,” the Joint Special Representative, Jeremiah Mamabolo, told the Security Council.

He said that from 5 to 17 March, UNAMID received an AU-UN strategic review team, which met with the Government of Sudan in Khartoum and Darfur, and travelled throughout the Darfur region. UNAMID awaits the outcome of these deliberations.

The three strategic priorities established by the Council in 2014 continue to provide a framework within which UNAMID implements its mandate to protect civilians, mitigate inter-communal conflicts and mediate between the Government and the non-signatory armed movements.

“The Darfur of today is a very different place from what this region was in 2003, when the armed conflict began, and from that of a year ago,” Mr. Mamabolo said, noting that fighting between Sudanese Government forces and the main three non-signatory armed movements has considerably diminished.

VIDEO: Briefing the Security Council, Joint Special Representative Jeremiah N. Mamabolo urges African Union and UN to focus on the best strategy for their joint mission without compromising the gains that have been made.

The past three months have also witnessed a continued reduction in the number of inter-communal security incidents, in particular as a result of the more effective involvement of the native administrations and the impact of security measures by State Governments, leading to an increased number of peace agreements.

Further, UNAMID has not seen any new displacement in 2017. Cooperation with

the Government has noticeably improved in terms of humanitarian access. UNAMID and the UN country team have repeatedly been able to visit previously off-limits areas in Jebel Marra while UN humanitarian partners are commencing regular helicopter flights to Golo.

However, efforts by the AU High-level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) to get warring parties to sign a cessation of hostilities agreement and start direct negotiations towards an inclusive peace agreement to end the conflict have remained inconclusive, Mr. Mamabolo said.

Although Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid al-Nur (SLA/AW) is no longer capable of mounting and sustaining significant military operations, it continues to refuse to join the peace process and seems to want to continue to fight, he explained.

“We would like to appeal to this Council and those with influence and leverage on him to persuade him to recognize the importance of a political settlement and desist from bringing more suffering to the very people that he professes to represent,” Mr. Mamabolo said.

As a ‘different’ Darfur has emerged since 2003, exit strategy for AU-UN mission being considered

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Health care goals in Indonesia can be reached only if challenges are addressed – UN expert

4 April 2017 – Indonesia is on track to develop a sustainable and equitable healthcare system, but problems related to access and quality of services persist, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to health,

Dainius Puras, said today.

“Despite commendable efforts, availability, access to and quality of health services remains a challenge in a country where population is spread throughout thousands of islands and remote areas,” he said.

Mr. Puras urged the Indonesian authorities to address such challenges “with the highest level of political commitment so that health system guarantees all core elements of the right to health.”

Concluding his [two-week visit](#) to the Southeast Asian country, Mr. Puras stressed: “Increased investments in healthcare only make sense if the system is efficient, transparent, accountable, and responsive to those who use it.” He urged the Government to increase investment in health.

He also pointed out barriers to the realization of sexual and reproductive health rights exist in the form of violence and discrimination against women and other key populations.

“I was discouraged to hear that planning and delivery of these services and sexuality education is being influenced by certain groups who continue to oppose policies, instruments and mechanisms for the promotion and protection of sexual and reproductive health rights,” he said.

While Indonesia has a relatively low prevalence of HIV/AIDS, new infections are on the rise and those affected face stigma and discrimination, including in healthcare settings. Ethnic Papuans are twice as likely to contract HIV/AIDS as the rest of the population.

He added that improvements in drug policy need to be made, as current policy undermined public health efforts and the right to health of people who use drugs. “Criminalization of drug use only fuels discrimination, violence and exclusion driving people away from the health services they need and seriously undermining public health efforts.”

The Special Rapporteur will present a comprehensive report on his visit to Indonesia to the UN Human Rights Council in June 2018.

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