

Dramatic funding shortages a 'severe catastrophe' for people of Gaza: UN Humanitarian Coordinator

The UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory, Jamie McGoldrick, has been describing how ordinary Gazans are scraping by on just four hours of electricity per day due to fuel shortages, putting many in "a terrible situation" as the winter months approach.

In an interview with UN News, he recounted that on a visit to a local children's hospital, he witnessed power shut down during an emergency operation, leaving patients and doctors in the dark for nearly a full minute before a generator powered on.

"In that time the doctors had to hand pump the oxygen into the lungs of children on life support machines," he recalled. "And that's not one day. That's everyday like that."

Funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine ([UNRWA](#)) was cut by the United States at the beginning of this year, which despite a major fundraising drive, has resulted in a critical shortage of services for the local population.

UNRWA reports that three-quarters of the 1.9 million people living in the enclave of the Gaza Strip, controlled since 2006 by militant group Hamas, are Palestine refugees. The steady decline in socio-economic conditions from decades of conflict and displacement, has seen unemployment rates soar to 53 percent, one of the highest in the world, with 80 percent of the population dependent on foreign aid.

'While the money stays the same or goes down, the needs go up'—UN's McGoldrick

"We're not able to save the lives of people we should... while the money stays the same or goes down, the needs go up," he stressed.

Mr. McGoldrick said humanitarians are having trouble keeping up with this "severe catastrophe."

The expert added that the future of the crises does not look promising, due to the unstable funding climate and a geopolitical reality that "could even be worse" next year.

Pointing toward solutions, Mr. McGoldrick implored politicians from different Palestinian factions and parties, as well as Israel, to come up with answers, as it is "the only option" for the people of Gaza to regain independence, otherwise, there is "no hope," he said.

[Feeding families remains complex task in war-torn Syria – UN relief agency](#)

Nearly a million Syrians have headed home amid improving security, only to find houses destroyed and livelihoods lost said the United Nations emergency food relief agency on Tuesday, leaving many civilians still reliant on aid.

According to the World Food Programme (WFP), while Syrian food prices have fallen due to easier transportation links, erratic weather patterns have severely damaged cereal production, resulting in the lowest wheat crop in almost three decades.

“It is likely that everyone in Syria will, in some way, be affected by the abysmal wheat crop – people would either have less wheat or pay more for it,” WFP spokesperson Hervé Verhoosel told journalists at a news briefing in Geneva on Tuesday.

“Continued food assistance at scale is vital,” he continued, noting also that Syrians returning home “need active markets, jobs and support.”

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In response, WFP is supporting food production and income generation projects in areas that are secure and have functioning markets, as well as prioritizing longer-term recovery. However, its efforts are constrained by a severe lack of resources.

Between now and March next year, the UN agency needs about \$136 million for Syria operations, explained Mr. Verhoosel, necessitating “reliable and predictable funding, to plan and maintain the vital lifeline of food assistance on which millions of vulnerable Syrians depend.”

Across Syria, over 13 million people continue to depend on humanitarian assistance, of which more than 6 million are food-insecure IDPs.

WFP chief in Syria ‘to gain better understanding of situation on the ground’

Meanwhile, the UN agency’s Executive Director, David Beasley is in Syria, visiting the previously besieged enclaves of eastern Ghouta and Rural Damascus.

There, he visited a school meals site where WFP is delivering date bars for

schoolchildren, a food distribution point, and residents of Zamalka who benefit from WFPs food assistance.

“The purpose of the visit,” said Mr. Verhoosel, “is to gain a better understanding of the situation on the ground, especially given the wheat crop,” he added.

On Wednesday, Mr. Beasely will travel to Lebanon, which is hosting nearly a million Syrian refugees, 700,000 of whom are dependent on WFP food assistance.

[‘Reasons to hope’ for sustainable peace in Central African Republic – UN Mission chief](#)

The top United Nations official in the Central African Republic (CAR), said on Tuesday he is “hopeful that the necessary foundations to build sustainable peace” have been established and that long-lasting stability will depend on the will of its people, and support from the international community.

[Parfait Onanga-Anyanga](#), who also heads the UN stabilization mission in the country, [MINUSCA](#), told the UN Security Council that, since the mission was established, “much progress” has been made to “extinguish the flames of the devastating inter-communal conflict.”

Civil conflict between Christian and the Muslims communities in CAR broke out in 2013 and, after a short respite in 2015, intensified again the following year, throwing the country into a new spiral of violence.

MINUSCA was deployed in 2014 with a mandate to protect civilians, support the political transition, assist with the delivery of humanitarian assistance and promote the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process.

“The Mission is preventing atrocities daily and continues to preserve the State’s territorial integrity,” the head of MINUSCA said.

Among other “reasons to hope” that the Special Representative cited are the overall improvement in the security situation, the democratic elections held in 2015 and 2016, and the restoration of constitutional order across the country, as civilian authorities have been redeployed nationwide.

In addition, six non-state armed groups have agreed to participate in the DDR process which is to start by the end of the year.

“Our work is of course not finished,” he acknowledged, explaining that “the

country is still facing numerous challenges. The drivers of conflict remain and attacks against civilians continue to take place, causing mass displacements of people.”

The UN office which coordinates humanitarian affairs (OCHA), estimates that close to 615,000 people are currently displaced in CAR and up to [2.5 million people](#) are in need of life-saving aid.

“Half of the country needs humanitarian assistance, and the delivery of this assistance is becoming more and more difficult, especially because of violent attacks against peacekeepers and aid workers,” regretted Special Representative Onanga-Anyanga.

[According to](#) the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, Najat Rochdi, 2018 has been particularly deadly for aid workers: so far, this year alone, the number of attacks against aid workers and against humanitarian convoys or goods, nears 200. Since January, at least, six aid workers lost their lives. This general insecurity has led to temporary suspensions of life-saving activities in various localities.

“The path towards peace and reconciliation will not be an easy one,” declared Mr. Onanga-Anyanga. “Together with the Central Africans, we must now help move the country from a phase of containment, to one of transformation, where the dividends of peace can be felt by all communities and all citizens,” he told the Security Council, calling for the international community to “work with the Government of the Central African Republic to ensure that this peace process is people-centered and does not fail”.

“While the current situation remains unpredictable and precarious, I believe that progress achieved in various areas and the foundations laid are essential ingredients,” he concluded, listing various conditions needed for sustainable peace to be achieved, including the buy-in of the people of CAR, an adequate security backdrop, and sustained international support.

[UN expert calls for international investigation into ‘evident murder’ of Jamal Khashoggi](#)

The UN independent expert on freedom of opinion and expression, has said he’s “very disappointed” that Member States have so far failed to back calls for an independent international investigation into the “evident murder” of dissident Saudi journalist, Jamal Khashoggi.

In an exclusive interview with UN News on Monday, Special Rapporteur [David](#)

[Kaye](#), urged all governments to respond at a time when journalists are under attack, whether it's through the Security Council, Human Rights Council, or by persuading the UN Secretary-General to launch such an investigation.

Regarding the form of the investigation, the Special Rapporteur suggested an independent body made up of five people at the most, who could "evaluate the information that the Turkish authorities have been sharing with the press surreptitiously over the last couple of weeks."

This, said Mr. Kaye, would provide the international community with a credible report of what happened and, whilst it would not answer every question, it could identify who was responsible: the international community would then have to decide what to do with that information.

If such an investigation does not take place, he added, the facts will constantly be disputed.

The death of Jamal Khashoggi, said Mr. Kaye, is emblematic of a broad kind of attack on freedom of information and journalistic reporting, one that is "encapsulated" by US President Donald Trump describing the press as the "enemy of the people."

He expressed concern about the "rise in pressure on journalists and just what that suggests about our ability to sustain democratic institutions when we have such pressure on those people who are simply trying to report what they see as facts."

Mr. Kaye also noted that, in his next report to the UN, he will focus on the abusive use of commercial technology to spy on journalists, activists and ordinary citizens, which raises questions about the rules for the use of such tools, and whether or not their export should be restricted.

The interview at UN headquarters in New York took place a week before the [International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists](#), on 2 November, when [UNESCO](#), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, will launch a new campaign, Truth Never Dies to raise awareness of the dangers they face: every four days, a journalist somewhere around the world is killed.

[French full-body veil ban, violated women's freedom of religion: UN Human Rights Committee](#)

Following complaints by two French Muslim women, fined for wearing a full-body veil or niqab, a UN Committee of independent human rights experts [ruled](#)

[in their favour](#) on Tuesday, stating that their freedom to practice their religion had been infringed.

The Committee, mandated with monitoring the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, received the two complaints in 2016.

The women had been prosecuted, convicted and fined in 2012 for wearing the niqab, based on a 2010 French law which stipulates that “no one may, in a public space, wear any article of clothing intended to conceal the face.” The law has the effect of banning the wearing of the full Islamic veil in public, which covers the whole body, leaving only a narrow slit for the eyes.

The Committee of 18 independent experts from around the world, stated in two rulings, that the right to practice one’s religion includes the wearing of distinctive clothing and head coverings.

“The State has not demonstrated how the full veil presents a threat in itself for public security to justify this absolute ban,” the decision read, adding that the French Government had not adequately explained why hiding one’s face is forbidden for religious reasons, while it is authorized in other contexts such as sports, or artistic settings.

The experts also concluded that the ban, rather than protecting fully veiled women, could have the effect of confining them to their homes, impeding their access to public services and marginalizing them.

The Committee acknowledged that Governments’ law enforcement entities must be able “in some circumstances” to demand that individuals show their faces, meaning they would have to uncover them in specific and “concrete situations”, where public security was at stake, or for formal identification purposes.

Committee members noted, however, that the scope of the French law was not limited to such specific contexts and that it prevents people from hiding their faces in public spaces “at all times”.

“The decisions are not directed against the notion of secularity, nor are they an endorsement of a custom which many on the Committee, including myself, regard as a form of oppression of women,” said Yuval Shany, Chair of the Committee.

He explained that the decisions reflected the position that a general criminal ban did not allow for a reasonable balance between public interests and individual rights.

Anyone can bring an alleged violation of human rights to the attention of the United Nations committees tasked with monitoring the realization of various international human rights treaties, and thousands of people around the world do so every year. Once a case has been deemed admissible and a decision has been made, there is no possibility to appeal against the committees’ decisions, as they are final.

If a committee concludes that a violation of a treaty has taken place, the decisions – which are not legally-binding – offer recommendations for the State involved in the case, which then has 180 days to provide information on the steps it has taken to implement those recommendations.

In these two specific cases, recommendations include a compensation of the two petitioners, and measures to prevent similar violations in the future, including a review of the 2010 law.