

In DR Congo, UN Security Council says December polls are 'historic opportunity' for country

The [United Nations Security Council](#) wrapped up on Saturday a two-day mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where the body's 15 members pledged to support the process in the run-up to long-delayed elections, set for late December, and called for the polls to be credible and peaceful.

"The Security Council must put all its weight [behind] our priority objective: elections by 23 December, which are credible, transparent, and held in a calm climate," François Delattre, the Permanent Representative of France to the UN and leader of the Council mission, said on Friday evening during a press briefing in Kinshasa, the Congolese capital.

The DRC is scheduled to hold long-delayed elections on December 23, 2018. President Joseph Kabila has declared he will not stand for the polls, in line with the country's Constitution.

On Saturday, the Security Council delegation had a "significant and in-depth" meeting with President Kabila, which Ambassador Delattre described as the "high point of the Council's mission in Kinshasa."

"We have signaled the Council's willingness to accompany the DRC on the road to peace, stability and prosperity," Mr. Delattre stated, adding: "The 23 December election mark a historic opportunity on this path. They are paving the way for the country's first democratic and peaceful transition."

Arriving in Kinshasa Friday afternoon, the Security Council delegation held a two-hour "working session" discussing the progress and challenges of the electoral process with the office of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI).

The President of the CENI, Corneille Nangaa, thanked the Council for the considerable support of the UN to the elections process. "Today we have more than 130 international [MONUSCO](#) experts who are our advisers," Nangaa told reporters, referring to acronym for the UN stabilization mission in the country.

He also made clear that the DRC Government had decided "not to solicit other financial and logistical support from partners".

Mr. Nangaa went on to stress the need to reconcile a critical double imperative: the credibility of polls and their holding on 23 December.

The Security Council also met on Saturday with the National Episcopal Conference of the Congo (CENCO), which facilitated the signing by the Government and the opposition of the so-called 'New Year's Eve agreement' on

December 31, 2016, by which elections were to be held before the end of 2017. After a postponement, [marked by violent protests](#), the polls were finally announced for late December 2018.

For CENCO, the meeting with the Council delegation was an opportunity to express “the fears, difficulties and worries” related to the electoral process, but also to emphasize that “the process is moving forward”.

“CENCO has been inviting political and social actors to seek consensus around the problems that divide them,” Fr André Masinganda, the First Deputy Secretary-General of CENCO, told *Radio Okapi*, citing, among others, problems related to the electoral register and the voting machine.

[Nigeria: Top UN officials say more support needed to ease humanitarian crisis and rebuild lives in conflict-ravaged north-east](#)

The top United Nations relief and development officials on Saturday called for national and international partners to step up support for humanitarian efforts in [north-eastern Nigeria](#) and help millions of people rebuild their lives in the region that has been ravaged by Boko Haram’s near decade-long insurgency.

UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)) Administrator Achim Steiner and UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock made this call as they [wrapped up a two-day official visit](#) to Nigeria to rally support for the Government-led efforts on the ground, especially in the conflict-torn northeastern Nigerian states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe.

“We are committed to Nigeria and to the people of Nigeria,” said Mr. Lowcock, who heads up the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)).

Humanitarian aid can only be a temporary solution, he said and was pleased to visit the region alongside the UNDP Administrator to help join up humanitarian and development efforts “to save lives, help stabilize the situation, rebuild lives and communities for the future.”

“We must do everything we can to prevent this crisis from continuing for years,” Mr. Lowcock told reporters in Maiduguri, at the end of the visit, which also included meetings with Minister of Finance Zeinab Ahmad, government ministers and high-level officials.

They visited projects in Bama town and Ngwom community in Borno, the state most affected by the 10-year conflict, where humanitarian and development workers are providing life-saving assistance and implementing development programmes. The two officials heard first-hand testimonies from people affected by the Lake Chad Basin crisis who are trying to rebuild their lives.

“We have a unique opportunity to make a real difference to communities across the north-east of Nigeria,” said Mr. Steiner. “Helping people affected by the crisis requires us to work together – humanitarian and development organizations alike – to tackle immediate humanitarian needs and the root causes of the crisis.”

The Government of Nigeria has launched recovery initiatives and efforts in north-east Nigeria aimed at rapid stabilization. Early recovery and livelihood activities implemented by UN agencies and international and local NGOs seek to address the underlying causes of the conflict, lay the foundations for sustainable development and prevent aid dependency.

The humanitarian crisis in Nigeria’s north-east has spilled over into the Lake Chad region. It remains one of the most severe in the world today with 7.7 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in the worst-affected states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe alone.

According to OCHA, food security and the nutrition situation remains extremely fragile across the north-east, particularly given the high levels of aid dependency, compounded by the lack of access to land or other livelihood opportunities. Up to three million people are estimated to suffer from critical food insecurity. Almost a million children aged from six months to five years are acutely malnourished, with 440,000 facing Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM).

The visit follows an [international donor conference](#) held in Berlin in early September during which some \$2.5 billion was pledged for humanitarian, stabilization and recovery projects in the Lake Chad region.

Concern rising over fate of Rohingya refugees, detained and sent home by India: UNHCR

The United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) has voiced ‘great concern’ for the safety and security of seven Rohingya men who have been sent home by Indian authorities, after reportedly being denied access to lawyers, or full consideration of their asylum applications.

“[We] continue to seek clarification from the authorities on the circumstances under which these individuals were returned to Myanmar,” Andrej Mahecic, a spokesperson for UNHCR [told](#) journalists at the UN Office at Geneva on Friday.

Prior to their return, the men were moved from Silchar prison in Assam province, near the border with Bangladesh – where they had been in detention since 2012 – to the province of Manipur, bordering Myanmar.

“On learning of their detention and the planned return, and based on credible reports that the seven men are Rohingya, UNHCR requested the Indian authorities to grant access to this group, to assess their need for international refugee protection,” said Mr. Mahecic.

According to the UNHCR spokesperson, the UN agency did not receive a response to its request and was unable to secure access for a lawyer from a state legal service.

Beginning in August last year, widespread ethnic violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine province forced some 720,000 members of the country’s minority Muslim Rohingya community to flee their homes and seek refuge across the border in Bangladesh – joining several thousands more who fled Myanmar in years prior – sparking one of the largest and most complex refugee crises in the world.

Former UN human rights chief, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, described the violence against the Myanmar as “[textbook example of ethnic cleansing](#)”.

An [independent international fact-finding mission](#), established by the UN Human Rights Council to look into the violence, found patterns of gross violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, committed by Myanmar’s military, the Tatmadaw.

It also documented mass killings, the scorching of Rohingya settlements and large-scale gang rape and other sexual violence by Myanmar soldiers.

About 18,000 registered Rohingya refugees and asylum-seekers in India – UNHCR

In addition, there are some 18,000 Rohingya refugees and asylum-seekers, living in different locations, who have registered with the UNHCR office in India, said Mr. Mahecic.

UNHCR issues identity cards to the registered refugees and documents to asylum-seekers, helping prevent arbitrary arrests, detention and deportation. It works with the state legal services, authorities and a network of partners to provide legal support to persons of concern in detention in India.

Execution of juvenile offender in Iran 'deeply distressing' – UN rights chief

Denouncing the execution of a juvenile offender in Iran, whose trial was also reportedly marred by irregularities, the top United Nations human rights official has called on the country to end the use of the death penalty for those under-18, in line with its obligations under international law.

Zeinab Sekaanvand Lokran was convicted of murdering her husband in 2012, when she was 17-years-old. She was executed this week, despite a number of appeals from UN Special Rapporteurs.

“The sheer injustice in the case of Zeinab Sekaanvand Lokran is deeply distressing,” Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in a news release on Friday.

“The serious question marks over her conviction appear not to have been adequately addressed before she was executed. The bottom line is that she was a juvenile at the time the offence was committed, and international law clearly prohibits the execution of juvenile offenders.”

According to the High Commissioner’s office ([OHCHR](#)), Ms. Sekaanvand’s detention and trial were also marred by reports that she was beaten by police officers following her arrest, forced to make a false confession, and denied access to a lawyer until her final trial session, where she recanted her confession.

In addition, claims that Ms. Sekaanvand had been a victim of domestic violence were reportedly not adequately examined during the judicial process. She was executed on 2 October, and her family was given just one day’s notice, for a final visit.

The news release also noted that dozens of other convicted juvenile offenders reportedly remain on death row in Iran, which has already executed at least five juvenile offenders so far this year. Executions are often carried out with little warning, and without proper scrutiny and transparency.

“As a State party to both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Iran has an obligation to abide by their provisions and to end the use of the death penalty against juvenile offenders,” expressed Ms. Bachelet.

The UN rights chief also called for an end to the death penalty in all circumstances, as no judiciary in any part of the world can fully avoid miscarriages of justice.

Article 6.5 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) states that death sentence “shall not be imposed for crimes committed by persons below eighteen years of age and shall not be carried out on pregnant

women.”

In addition, the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), requires all States Parties to ensure that no child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and “neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offences committed by persons below 18 years of age.”

[Access still an obstacle to reaching stricken communities on Indonesian island: UN agencies](#)

Aid is getting through to victims of last Friday’s deadly earthquake and tsunami, which struck the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, but stricken communities are still in dire need, UN aid agencies said on Friday.

According to the Government of Indonesia, the official death toll has reached nearly 1,600 people, amid unconfirmed reports that more than 1,000 people have been buried in a housing complex, in the city of Palu, which suffered the full-force of the deadly tsunami wave.

Drinking water has been identified as one of the most urgent needs in Donggala, one of the worst-affected districts on the island, along with shelter, healthcare and psychosocial support.

In other areas, electricity has been restored and markets have reopened. In the most badly affected places, however, access is still a significant obstacle, said Paul Dillon, spokesperson for the [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#): “Part of the problem is that the areas that are closest to the tsunami; where the tsunami hit hardest, are literally buried in mud.”

“You have people circling those areas trying to get in but it’s literally inaccessible”, he said, adding that even standing just 200 metres from the remains of buildings “you can’t actually get into those areas because the mud is thigh- or waist-deep.”

Help has now reached some of the worst-affected communities including in Sigi, Palu and Donggala districts. But needs remain critical according to rescuers, including in the town of Banawa, said a spokesperson for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies ([IFRC](#)).



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Five-month-old Asifa Humaira is given milk by her mother in an evacuation tent on the RRI office yard on Jalan Kartini, East Lolu, Palu City, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia (2 October).

“They’ve described this as the worst affected area,” said Matthew Cochrane. “All houses built along the coastline were swept away by the tsunami. Those who survived have sought shelter in the surrounding hills and their most urgent needs include emergency healthcare, shelter, blankets and diapers. There’s a lot of kids there apparently.”

In coordination with the Government of Indonesia, IOM is preparing to send an aid convoy from the south of the island to the north, where needs are greatest.

“Tomorrow morning, an 11-truck convoy will depart from Makassar carrying about 83,000 litres of water, in 19-litre plastic jugs that can be reused by the people in the area,” IOM spokesperson Paul Dillon said, adding the convoy was bound for Donggala.

Providing emergency healthcare is also challenging, according to the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA), which said that around 2,500 people have been seriously injured in the disaster.

“A lot of hospitals, clinics have been destroyed,” said spokesperson Jens Laerke. “So, if you are injured or wounded, you might have a lot of difficulty getting help there.”

The earthquake and subsequent tsunami that struck Palu, Central Sulawesi, on 28 September are estimated to have destroyed 10,000 houses and damaged a further 55,000.



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On 3 October 2018 in Indonesia, the ruins of buildings damaged by a tsunami following an earthquake in Loli Pesua Village, Donggala Regency, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Many thousands of people are still too afraid to stay in their houses, especially at night, owing to the ongoing aftershocks. To help them, \$15 million has already been released from the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund ([CERF](#)).

On Friday, [OCHA](#) announced the launch of a \$50.5 million appeal for immediate relief activities, to complement the Government response.

"The earthquake and tsunami effectively cut off much of Palu and Donggala for several days due to landslides and damage to infrastructure, and has created significant logistical and access challenges," UN Resident Coordinator in Indonesia, [Ms. Anita Nirody](#), said.

"The Response Plan outlines not only the immediate relief items that the international humanitarian community will prioritize, but also the logistics support needed to get aid to all those who need it."