

Panda dies after being released into the wild

Hesheng, a captive-bred panda, died in September 2016, two months after being released into the wild in southwest China's Sichuan Province, Chengdu Research Base for Giant Panda Breeding announced Friday.

The male panda, born in 2013, had undergone training at Liziping Nature Reserve from March 2016 and was released into the wild in July.

On Sept. 11, Hesheng was spotted safe and well some 3.5 km away from where he was released. Just weeks later, however, on Sept. 27, his GPS collar sent an alarm, prompting an overnight search for Hesheng.

When researchers found his limp body they noticed injuries on his right shoulder, right ear and right hind limb. An autopsy confirmed Hesheng died of septicemia due to a bacterial infection after being attacked by unknown animals.

Giant pandas are among the world's most vulnerable and rare animals, with a known population of only 1,600, mostly in China.

PLA's THAAD opposition 'more than words'



Senior Colonel Wu Qian, spokesperson of China's Ministry of National Defense (MOD), responds to media questions at a routine press conference on March 30, 2017. [Photo by Chen Boyuan/China.org.cn]

The Chinese military once again expressed its firm opposition to the deployment of the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) system in South Korea, stressing its opposition "will never be just in words."

Senior Colonel Wu Qian, Ministry of National Defense (MOD) spokesperson, speaking at a routine press conference on March 30, said China was serious about opposing THAAD.

"The deployment of THAAD will never make South Korea any safer. The Chinese military's opposition against THAAD will never be just in words," he insisted.

The MOD's strong stance came after two THAAD launchers, along with support equipment, were delivered to a U.S. base in South Korea, according to South Korea's Yonhap News Agency. Analysts said that THAAD might be fully operational in April.

Former South Korean President Park Geun-hye, recently impeached on corruption charges, agreed to the THAAD deployment on the grounds of the nuclear threat from North Korea.

Sr. Col. Wu refuted this. He said that China opposes any country jeopardizing another state's safety, as well as regional stability, under the pretext of the ballistic missile threat from North Korea.

Apart from China, Russia also opposes THAAD, believing it disturbs the regional strategic equilibrium. On March 28, Chinese and Russia military

delegates held their second meeting on joint anti-ballistic missile issues in Geneva on the sidelines of the Conference on Disarmament.

Their first meeting was held last November during the 7th Xiangshan Forum in Beijing. Soon afterwards, they conducted a joint computerized anti-ballistic missile (ABM) test.

As to whether the next such test would involve a live firing, the MOD spokesperson responded only vaguely.

“The THAAD system deployed by the United States and South Korea far exceeds the defense needs of South Korea,” he said, citing a memo issued after the Geneva meeting. “We oppose any country deploying the military facilities whose capacities are beyond their own defense requirements.”

Recent American reports speculated that North Korea might conduct its sixth nuclear test shortly. Hence, both the United States and South Korea stepped up their vigilance, and were keen on knowing whether the PLA would strengthen its border defenses with North Korea in case of such a nuclear test.

The MOD spokesperson declined to respond to a “hypothetical question,” but emphasized that the Chinese military maintained normal combat readiness and training.

Colombia: UN receives 7,000 weapons from FARC-EP as hunt for hidden caches continues

30 March 2017 – The United Nations Mission in Colombia is set to register some 7,000 weapons this weekend, but the search for other caches of weapons hidden by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army (FARC-EP) continues, the Mission’s chief has said.

Jean Arnault, the head of the [Mission](#), said yesterday: “As for registration, [we are at 85 percent of the weapons](#) in the camps. This weekend we will reach a figure of approximately 7,000 registered weapons. On these weapons there are concerns: many are new and are short and long weapons, high calibre. It is a record that covers the range of FARC-EP weapons.”

The weapons hand over has been in place since the beginning of the month and the UN hopes to possess 60 per cent of all FARC-EP arms by April 1. However, in a press conference on the topic yesterday, Mr. Arnault said accessing hidden and hard to reach caches could delay the process.

A further 1,000 weapons are set to be received from FARC-EP members

participating in peace promotion or, *pedagogia de paz*, bringing the number of arms collected by the UN to 8,000.

It was also reported at the press conference that commitments made at the Cartagena meeting of the Follow up, Promotion and Implementation Commission (CSIVI) to make progress on preparation of registration zones and camps, security and legal guarantees and provision of health services would further accelerate the laydown of arms process.

In November last year, the Colombian Government and FARC-EP, the largest rebel group in the South American nation, signed a peace deal, ending a 50 year conflict.

Conflict now eroding food security in 'stable' areas of South Sudan – UN Mission

30 March 2017 – The ongoing conflict in South Sudan is affecting food security in some of the country's more 'stable' states, the head of United Nations peacekeeping operation there has said.

Dwindling provisions arriving in the town and skyrocketing food prices have meant that places like Aweil, which are generally peaceful, have suffered the effects of the conflict taking part in other parts of the country, [said](#) David Shearer, the head of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), during a visit to Aweil in the country's north.

It is [imperative that fighting stops](#), so the citizens of the world's newest nation can live in peace and enjoy the benefits of independence, he added.

The insecurity has directly affected the cost of goods in greater Aweil. Mr. Shearer heard from UN humanitarian agencies working in the region how many families had migrated north to Sudan because they could either not produce crops or could not afford the high price of staple foods in the market.

Those agencies have stepped in to provide emergency humanitarian aid in a region where the UN Food and Agriculture Agency (FAO) says 52 per cent of people are food insecure.

The Governor of Aweil state, Ronald Ruay Deng, told Mr. Shearer that his administration was doing all it could to 'move our people from dependency on emergency food aid to a more resilient rural agricultural model of production, including the piloting of a new community farming approach to feed the most vulnerable people.'



David Shearer, head of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), meeting residents of Kuajok, the capital of Gogrial state. Photo: UNMISS/Isaac Billy

Mr. Shearer also heard about the efforts under way to build peaceful understanding between communities, particularly pastoral communities who arrive on a seasonal basis from Sudan to share water and grazing land with the residents of greater Aweil.

UNMISS is facilitating improved inter-communal understanding through dialogue.

Meanwhile, the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) today began to move food assistance to reach famine-hit and food-insecure people in South Sudan by using a newly opened humanitarian corridor announced by the Government of Sudan earlier this week.

This new route will allow WFP to regularly reach famine-affected people in South Sudan with food assistance and help to avert the consequences of starvation, [said](#) WFP Sudan Representative and Country Director Matthew Hollingworth.

Today, the first convoy of 27 trucks carrying an initial 1,200 metric tons of sorghum started moving from El Obeid in central Sudan towards Bentiu in South Sudan. The convoys will take at least five days to complete the 500 kilometre journey.

In the next few weeks, WFP plans to deliver 11,000 metric tons of sorghum including 1,000 metric tons donated by the Government of Sudan in seven convoys of 30 to 40 trucks. This is enough food to feed 300,000 people for three months.

[More must be done to place Syrian refugees; conflict sees worst violence in months – UN](#)

30 March 2017 – The world's attention has moved away from Syria following the battle for Aleppo, despite the fact that the last few months have been "some of the worst" for civilians, the United Nations humanitarian chief today told the Security Council, reiterating calls for an end to the six year conflict.

"Violence continues to rear its ugly head in various parts of the country, even if it largely disappeared from the world's TV screens since the evacuation of East Aleppo," Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs

and Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien told the Council.

"The last months have been some of the worst yet for civilians inside Syria," he added. "For Syria, that is saying something."

Today's humanitarian discussions in the Security Council come as political discussions are underway in Geneva, assisted by UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura. The latest discussions started on 23 March and will last through the week.

In today's comments, Mr. O'Brien reiterated the importance of the [intra-Syrian talks](#) saying he "cannot emphasize enough how high the stakes are," and voicing support for Mr. de Mistura.

Civilians threatened in Raqqa and Ghouta

As the conflict enters its seventh year, hundreds of civilians are believed to have been killed in the past weeks alone, with tens of thousands displaced and continued attacks on medical facilities and schools.

Mr. O'Brien expressed deep concern about the safety and protection of more than 400,000 civilians threatened by military operations in Raqqa governorate, which includes the de facto capital of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh).

As the fighting moves closer to Raqqa city, "concerns about the fate of civilians will only grow," Mr. O'Brien said.

"I urge all parties to do everything in their power to protect and spare civilians from the effects of the hostilities as required, not just requested, under international humanitarian law."

The UN and partners have been prepositioning stocks to enable a rapid response "access permitting."

In addition, Mr. O'Brien also said he was extremely worried about the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in the besieged parts of eastern Ghouta in Rural Damascus, where some 400,000 people are trapped by Government forces.

The tightening of the siege has started a time bomb for the people of eastern Ghouta

No UN humanitarian convoy was allowed access since October 2016 to eastern Ghouta, with some areas cut off since June prior.

In the past 10 days, Government forces have also reportedly prevented commercial trucks from entering, hiking up prices of staples and cutting informal trade.

"This tightening of the siege has started a time bomb for the people of

eastern Ghouta,” Mr. O’Brien said, calling for immediate access.

Delivery of humanitarian aid has been difficult throughout the country, the senior UN official lamented. He said that despite hopes that 2017 would lead to greater entry to besieged and hard-to-reach areas, “the bottom line is, however, that with a quarter of the year gone, our current levels of access are no better than this time last year.”

His comments come just days before an international pledging conference is due to be held in Brussels on 5 April. Entitled “Supporting the future of Syria and the region”, the conference is co-chaired by the UN.

Mr. O’Brien thanked donors for going “above and beyond” this year, but stressed the critical needs in Syria and the neighbouring countries.

The UN and its humanitarian partners have released the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan for Syria which outlines requirements of some \$3.4 billion to undertake a comprehensive humanitarian response in Syria, including saving lives, enhancing protection and building people’s resilience.

AUDIO: The UN Refugee Agency, wants more countries to fulfill their pledges on resettling those fleeing the conflict in Syria, which is now in its seventh year.

Urging Governments to make good on promises of homes

Meanwhile, new figures show that fewer Syrian refugees were resettled in the past year than originally planned, even as the total number of people fleeing the violence surpasses five million.

“Despite the call during that meeting in Geneva on 30 March 2016 to resettle and facilitate pathways for 500,000 refugees, to date 250,000 places have been made available,” said Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. His remarks reference the High-level Meeting on Syria, held in March 2016, where participating Governments agreed to resettle 10 per cent of all Syrian refugees by 2018.

UNHCR, the agency that Mr. Grandi heads, said that while 250,000 locations have been pledged, some have not yet been made available for the people who need them.

Mr. Grandi called on Governments to make good on their promises to find new homes for the most vulnerable refugees: “We still have a long road to travel in [expanding resettlement](#) and the number and range of complementary pathways available for refugees.”