

In Baghdad, UN chief Guterres pledges solidarity with Iraqi government and people

30 March 2017 – On what he called a “visit of solidarity” with Iraq, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today welcomed the commitment of the country’s leaders to civilian protection and national dialogue, and pledged the ongoing support of the United Nations as the Government seeks to bolster aid delivery to needy populations and rebuild Iraq institutions.

“This is a [visit of solidarity](#) with the Iraqi people; solidarity with Iraqi Government and institutions; solidarity in what I believe is an historic moment for Iraq,” the Secretary-General said during a press encounter in Baghdad, with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi.

Noting that Iraq is in the final stages of its fight against terrorism, Mr. Guterres said the UN is “strongly hopeful” that the liberation of Mosul from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/D’aesh) will soon be complete.

“At the same time, I was extremely encouraged by the commitment expressed by the Prime Minister, both in relation to the protection of civilians, in the conduct of the operations and the full respect of international humanitarian law,” said the UN chief.

He said he was also encouraged by the Iraqi leader’s commitment to a national dialogue and an effective process of reconciliation. This, he said, would allow after the liberation of Mosul for Iraq to progressively create the conditions for, “a normal life of a State; a State in which all communities can feel they belong; a State in which all communities respect each other and reconciliation becomes something natural.”



Secretary-General António Guterres receives a bouquet of flowers on his arrival in Erbil, Iraq. UN Photo

Mr. Guterres went on to express the total support of the UN to the Iraqi Government’s efforts in humanitarian aid to the populations that have been affected by terrorism. At the same time, he appealed to the international community to support Iraq both in relation to the relief to the victims but also in relation to the stabilization, reconstruction and build-up of national institutions.

As for his talks with the Prime Minister, the Secretary-General said the two felt it was important that the Da’esh is held accountable for the crimes committed by the terrorist group.

“Those crimes need to be well known, need to be punished,” he said, stressing

that it is important that the international community is fully of the terrible sacrifices of all the populations of Iraq –Sunni and Shia, Muslims and Christians – that were victims of the cruelty of Da'esh. "This is something that needs to be known and that needs to find the adequate mechanism of effective accountability."

The UN chief said the world's young people must understand that "terrorism is not the way to express their anger [...] even if in some moments they might be angry or anxious in relation to the events that take place." Indeed, the fight against terrorism must be accompanied by the fight to tackle its root causes, and by making it very clear the horrendous nature of the crimes committed by organizations like Da'esh.

Finally, the Secretary-General expressed to the Prime Minister, his "total solidarity, and our total commitment to work together with your Government." Iraq's leaders have a very important task ahead with the full liberation of the country and with the full reconciliation of Iraqis "for a future of democracy and prosperity."

While in Baghdad, he also met with the Iraqi President, Foreign Minister and Speaker of the Parliament, before heading later in the day to Erbil. Mr. Guterres has been in the region since Monday, when he began his visit in Jordan. Yesterday, he addressed the Summit of the League of Arab States.

[Press release: National Lottery backs plan to save 20 species from extinction](#)

In one of the most ambitious conservation projects ever undertaken, 20 UK species facing extinction will be brought back from the brink thanks to £4.6 million from the National Lottery.

The Back from the Brink programme will address the needs of threatened species in 150 key habitats and landscapes across England from the Yorkshire Dales to Cornwall. It will focus on saving some very rare and elusive species from extinction, including the shrill carder bee, chequered skipper butterfly, ladybird spider and northern dune tiger beetle.

The funding will also help a further 200 species that are under threat including the grey long-eared bat, pine martin, willow tit, large garden bumblebee, lesser butterfly orchid and hedgehog. Back from the Brink is the first nationwide coordinated effort to bring a wide range of leading charities and conservation bodies together to save threatened species. Natural England, the government's wildlife advisory body, will work in partnership with Amphibian and Reptile Trust, Bat Conservation Trust,

Buglife, Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation, Plantlife and RSPB. They will pool expertise, develop new ways of working and inspire people across the country to discover, value and act for threatened animals, plants and fungi.

This ground-breaking programme will:

- safeguard 20 species from extinction
- directly improve the conservation prospects of a further 200
- recruit and teach more than 5,500 volunteers new skills to study, identify and care for threatened species
- engage with landowners and communities to deliver conservation at 150 different locations across England

Natural England's Chairman, Andrew Sells said:

Back from the Brink represents a groundbreaking approach to nature conservation and we are extremely grateful to HLF for having the vision and generosity to support it.

This is a dynamic partnership which draws on people-power to help save some of our most important species. Natural England strongly supports this approach and is delighted to be part of it.

Bringing these species back from the brink cannot be achieved by one group alone. But by pooling resources and developing new ideas, this project will add vital momentum to all our efforts.

Chief Executive of the Heritage Lottery Fund Ros Kerslake said:

I am delighted we are able to fund this important and groundbreaking project. We're all ultimately dependent on our ecosystem and these creatures are like canaries in the mine. Thanks to a combination of National Lottery funding and expertise from across multiple agencies and conservation charities, we can make a positive and lasting change before it is too late.

Mike Clarke the RSPB's chief executive said:

Our natural world is in trouble, last year's State of Nature report revealed that the population of over half of UK species are in decline, but we believe it is not too late to take action. Today's announcement by the National Lottery will make a big difference to some of our most threatened species that, without action, may soon be lost forever. The Back from the Brink project is bringing

together specialists from many of our biggest and most effective conservation organisations to support the governments of the UK in meeting our obligations to the UN and international community to protect our most threatened species from extinction. This funding will be invaluable in our efforts to ensure future generations inherit a thriving and diverse natural environment.

Dr Tony Gent CEO at Amphibian & Reptile Conservation Trust said:

Different areas of our country are characterised by different habitats and these in turn are made unique by the combination of animal and plant species that live within them. However many of these species are at risk; losing them will change the character of an area and make these areas less special for wildlife and for the people who appreciate them. Conserving these species can be challenging and this Heritage Lottery Fund grant will allow a unique partnership of national conservation bodies, local people and land owners to pool their expertise, enthusiasm and commitment to make some massive gains for our wildlife across England.

Julie Williams, CEO of Butterfly Conservation said:

We are delighted that National Lottery have recognised and rewarded this multi-organisational partnership to deliver something special for our threatened species. The whole really is greater than the sum of its parts and we look forward to working with our partners to demonstrate that and make an even bigger difference.

Matt Shardlow, Chief Executive of Buglife said:

Bugs, beetles, ants, spiders and other invertebrates make up the majority of species on the brink of extinction. It is fantastic that this pathfinding partnership project will pull back so many species that could otherwise disappear forever. Our natural environment has never been more imperiled; dedicated work to rescue endangered plants and animals is a cornerstone of any sensible broader strategy to restore a thriving country.

Marian Spain, CEO of Plantlife said:

We are delighted to be joining forces with other leading conservation organisations to save some of our very rarest and most threatened wildlife. The dramatically declining lesser butterfly orchid and Cornish path moss, which is now found at only two sites in the world, are an important part of our heritage and it is

incumbent on us to preserve them for future generations. They are teetering on the brink of extinction and we must not allow them to fall away.

People are at the heart of this programme and they are vital to its success. We want people to be inspired by their precious local wildlife and, just as importantly, have great fun in the process. Get mud on your boots, pick a few wildflowers, learn the names of lichens, count birds and butterflies, take stunning wildlife photographs and make new friends. Back from the Brink offers endless possibilities for both people and nature. It's very exciting.

Julia Hanmer, Joint CEO of Bat Conservation Trust said:

The scale of delivery and the degree of collaboration makes Back from the Brink an exciting project which offers real hope of creating a world where wildlife and people thrive together. Thank you to National Lottery for sharing our vision.

David Hodd, Programme Manager of the Back from the Brink programme concluded by saying:

This is a once in a lifetime opportunity and is a game changing approach to nature conservation that will have a lasting legacy. It will inspire new working partnerships, and help people to adopt new ways of working. England's species provide us with a rich source of enjoyment, inspiration and creativity. Our collective endeavour to bring our threatened species back from the brink will provide many people with just that. We are living in the last chance saloon for many of these species, but each and every one of them plays a crucial role within our fragile ecosystem. We are all ultimately dependent on them all – they are like the canaries in the mine and our understanding of them is the result of enormous human endeavour.

[UN agriculture agency takes step to help rice farmers bolster production](#)

30 March 2017 – Concerned about global rice production and eradicating hunger

around the world, the United Nations agricultural agency today announced that it has teamed up with an international research institute to enhance rice farming and make it more adaptable to climate change.

“With over [three billion people across the globe eating rice](#) every day, rice is critical to global food security,” said Maria Helena Semedo, Deputy Director-General of Climate and Natural Resources at the UN Food and Agricultural Organization ([FAO](#)).

The UN agency announced that it will work with the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) to support sustainable rice production in developing countries to improve food security and livelihoods, while also safeguarding natural resources.

According to FAO, the two organizations will work together to assist rice producing countries to “adopt improved and adapted rice varieties, enhance availability of certified seeds and also the transfer of knowledge,” including to control pests and through farmer field schools.

FAO and IRRI will also work to help women farmers participate in “viable, safe and dignified” entrepreneurial opportunities in the rice value chain, the UN agency said.

Meanwhile, FAO has developed the [Regional Rice Initiative for Asia and Pacific](#) which promotes enhanced crop resilience while increasing efficiency and farmers’ income. In Africa and in Latin America the UN agency is engaged in scientific and technical cooperation including the sharing of technologies and best practices to increase production and productivity, including reduction of post-harvest losses and improved grain quality.

For its part, IRRI is engaged in strengthening capacities of all rice sector actors through its capacity development activities, including IRRI Education and the Sustainable Rice Platform, a global alliance to promote resource efficiency and sustainability in trade flows, production and consumption operations, and supply chains in the global rice sector.

[As famine looms, malnutrition and disease rise sharply among Somali children – UNICEF](#)

30 March 2017 – As the spectre of famine hangs once again over Somalia, early numbers show an increasing number of children suffering from severe acute malnutrition and cholera or acute watery diarrhoea – a combination that killed many children in the famine of 2011, the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) said today.

["Children are dying](#) from malnutrition, hunger, thirst and disease. During the 2011 famine, around 130,000 young children died, about half of them before famine was declared. We are working with partners around the clock to make sure that doesn't happen again," said Leila Pakkala, UNICEF Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa.

More than 35,400 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition were treated with life-saving therapeutic food at hundreds of nutrition centres across Somalia in January and February, a 58 per cent increase over the same period in 2016.

As of 28 March, more than 18,400 cases of cholera/acute watery diarrhoea had been reported since the beginning of the year, far surpassing the 15,600 cases reported in all of 2016. The majority of the cases are among young children.

"These numbers are a wake-up call," said Ms. Pakkala, after speaking with displaced families and patients at a cholera treatment centre in Baidoa, Somalia.

There are no precise figures currently available for the number of children who have died due to hunger or malnutrition, in part because many succumb to disease and infection. But children suffering from SAM are nine times more likely to die of disease than a well-nourished child. During the 2011 famine, the biggest killers were diarrhoea and measles.



Nur Ismail, 3, is treated for acute watery diarrhoea at the cholera treatment centre in Bay Regional Hospital, Baidoa, Bay region of Somalia. His father, Hassan Ismail, is by his side. Photo: UNICEF/Athanas Makundi

Six years since famine was declared in parts of south-central Somalia, the country is once again on the brink of catastrophe. This time, the drought is more widespread, affecting Somaliland, Puntland and the country's pastoral areas, in addition to the centre and southern parts of Somalia, which were hardest-hit in 2011.

In February, UNICEF projected that 944,000 children would be acutely malnourished in 2017, including 185,000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition who would need urgent, lifesaving support. That number could shoot up, even if the next rains due to start in April come on time, and in full.

UNICEF Somalia has raised its 2017 funding requirement from \$66 million to \$147 million, with a funding gap of 54 per cent as of mid-March.

"In 2011, funding poured in after the official declaration of famine in July," said Ms. Pakkala. "This year, many donors have come forward early. But the worst may still be ahead of us. We have a small window to prevent a massive loss of life."

UN refugee agency stresses importance of search missions after latest shipwreck in Europe

30 March 2017 – With nearly 150 people dead or missing in another shipwreck off the Mediterranean coast, the United Nations refugee agency today stressed the importance of saving lives at sea.

This latest tragedy comes as a stark reminder of the vital importance of robust search and rescue capacities, said Volker Türk, UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection.

A 16-year old boy is believed to be the [only survivor](#) of the boat that sunk with 147 passengers, including five children and several pregnant women, UNHCR said.

The 16-year old survivor said their boat left two days ago from Sabratha, in Libya, and started taking on water after a few hours of navigation, the UN agency said after interviewing the boy in Lampedusa.

He survived the shipwreck by hanging to a fuel tank, until he was rescued by a Spanish ship operating under Operation Sophia, UNHCR noted in reference to the European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED) operations launched after the April 2015 Libya migrant shipwrecks.

In the statement, Mr. Türk expressed deep sadness at the news of the deaths.

He commended the action of the Italian Coast Guard in coordination with Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

The senior UN official also noted the importance of non-governmental organizations, which provide additional and much needed rescue capacity. According to UNHCR figures, NGOs performed 26 per cent of rescue operations in the central Mediterranean in 2016.

Saving lives at sea must remain the key priority for all, Mr. Türk said.

In September 2016, when Member States adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, Governments committed to intensifying international cooperation on strengthening search and rescue.