

# Fears of 'severe deterioration' of humanitarian crisis in eastern Ukraine, warns UN official

8 November 2017 – Recent escalation of fighting in close proximity of critical infrastructure and services in Donetsk, eastern Ukraine, could endanger over a million lives, the top United Nations official in the country has warned.

“As we enter winter, any disruption of essential services, such as water and heating amid freezing temperatures [could have grave consequences](#),” said Neal Walker, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Ukraine, in a statement Wednesday.

“I remind all parties to the conflict of their obligation to respect civilian infrastructure and to protect civilians. Any intentional disruption of access to quality water supply or critical heating systems is a clear violation of International Humanitarian Law,” he underscored.

In the past six days, the Donetsk Filter Station has been shelled for three consecutive nights. Another station, the Verkhniokalmiuska Filter Station, was hit more than a dozen times in a single night.

Stations such as these provide clean water to some 1.1 million people on both sides of the 459-kilometre ‘contact line’ dividing eastern Ukraine. Furthermore, these stations are also essential to keep heating systems functioning.

“Without sustained water supply, heating systems will stop and health conditions will deteriorate. Children, the elderly, women and people with disabilities may flee their homes in search of heat and shelter,” noted Mr. Walker.

Such an escalation, so close to critical infrastructure, risks prompting a severe deterioration of the ongoing humanitarian crisis on Europe’s doorstep  
Neal Walker, UN Humanitarian Coordinator

At the same time, the fighting has also prompted concerns over the possible release of hazardous chlorine gas stored at the two filter stations.

If a single 900-kilogram gas container is hit, anyone within 200 meters might receive fatal dose of the poisonous gas.

The conflict, now in its fourth year, continues to take a toll on civilians, denying the most vulnerable of their basic needs as well as their safety and protection.

“In this protracted crisis, millions of families trapped in active hostilities and people displaced are losing hope for a future,” said the UN official, calling on parties to uphold their responsibility to facilitate the access of humanitarian organizations to provide critical services for the most vulnerable Ukrainians affected by the conflict.