

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."

[Idea of 'homogenous' Polish culture is a myth: UN human rights expert](#)

An independent UN rights expert has accused the Polish Government of

disseminating the “myth” of a “homogenous” Polish culture, in a statement released on Friday.

The UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, [Karima Bennoune](#), speaking at the end of a 12-day visit to the country, said it was a view that needed to be challenged.

Ms. Bennoune said Poland was currently experiencing political and cultural polarization, with a Government trying to promote cultural expressions which reflect its worldview. She described the effort as “regressive cultural engineering” and criticised the use of the term “anti-Polish”, where it was being applied to those whose viewpoints differ from that of the Government.

The Special Rapporteur testified to the vibrant and diverse cultural life she experienced during her visit, adding that “Polish identity does not belong to any one group, or any one opinion bloc alone, but to all the citizens of Poland.”

Some far-right nationalist groups, Christian fundamentalist groups and media outlets, she said, are becoming increasingly prominent and aggressive: she also expressed concern about the apparent normalization of these views, with some government officials expressing them without suffering any consequences.

The statement noted survey data indicating that an increase in hate speech of an open and public nature, in particular of an anti-semitic nature, may be attributed to amendments to Poland’s Law on the Institute of National Remembrance, in February 2018.

“In view of the upcoming 100th anniversary of Polish independence in November 2018, an event about which many Poles have understandably strong feelings of pride, I call on the Government to take steps to ensure that this significant event is marked in ways that include, rather than exclude, and that do not equate discrimination with patriotism,” Bennoune said.

Other areas of concern noted by the Special Rapporteur were, she said, the reaffirmation of “stereotypical cultural attitudes” towards women seen during the national debate over changing the abortion law, and the lack of specific legal protection for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender persons (LGBT).

Although Poland has a strong record of ratifying international human rights and culture accords, she said, more needs to be done to effectively implement such standards in practice.

Ms. Bennoune is to present a comprehensive report, and recommendations, to a future session of the [UN Human Rights Council](#).

UNODC Goodwill Ambassador Nadia Murad and Dr. Denis Mukwege awarded Nobel Peace Prize

Nadia Murad, a Yazidi rights activist and the first Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and Denis Mukwege, a gynecologist helping victims of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) won the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize on Friday.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee on Friday announced their decision to award the Nobel Peace Prize for 2018 to Ms. Murad and Dr. Mukwege for their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict.



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Denis Mukwege, Director and Founder of Panzi General Referral Hospital in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

More to follow...

UN chief urges peaceful, free and fair

[elections in Cameroon](#)

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has called for a peaceful, credible and inclusive elections in Cameroon, as the country prepares to hold presidential elections this coming Sunday.

In a [statement](#) from his spokesperson, the [UN chief](#) also called on all stakeholders to “exercise restraint before, during and after the election.”

He also urged all Cameroonians to exercise their democratic rights, urging all candidates “to address any complaints related to the electoral process through established legal and constitutional channels.”

Nine candidates are contesting the elections to the country’s highest body, according to media reports.

Further in the statement, the Secretary-General condemned all threats of violence or acts of intimidation by any group and reiterated that all grievances should be addressed through inclusive dialogue.

“The United Nations stands ready to provide support in this regard,” added the statement.

Insecurity is a concern in Cameroon in the country’s north, as a result of activities of the Boko Haram terrorist group, and [according](#) to the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA), there are some 160,000 persons displaced across the country – a majority of them in the south-west.

[Syria: UN Humanitarian Coordinator calls for unimpeded access from within the country](#)

Highlighting the “complexities of the situation in Syria” with close to 13 million people in need of life-saving assistance, the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in the country called on warring parties to allow access to all areas from within the country, so aid can reach those in need “fast and efficiently”.

Ali Al Za’atari, who is also Resident Coordinator in Syria, said that was especially necessary in the north-west cities of Idlib and Afrin.

“Syria is still undergoing a serious humanitarian crisis and this

humanitarian crisis affects about 13 million Syrian citizens and refugees as well," he told the UN News Arabic service.

During a briefing to the press at UN Headquarters in New York, he noted that given the scale of the needs remaining across all sectors – food, health care, education, economic recovery and reconstruction – and the continued movements of population, the crisis is likely to continue for years.

"There are no longer armed clashes and shells falling on the roofs and on people in many cities and Syrian territories, but in other areas this threat still exists and people are still scared and insecure," he stressed.

Noting that donors have been "generous", he warned that the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan was in need of nearly \$3.4 billion in total – but only 46 per cent funded so far. "This puts limits on our work in Syria," he said, adding that he is confident more funding will be received by the end of the year.

Although 14 UN agencies are based in the country, humanitarian access for assessments and aid delivery remains challenging, especially in the cities of Idlib and Afrin as "the region is out of government control" and "it could be a very long and complicated process to get access."

On the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York last week, Mr. Al Za'atari said that a plan had been agreed between UN humanitarian and the Syrian government delegation "that would allow for greater and faster access, as well as various assessments of the situation of those in need".

"If things continue well, as agreed, we expect to have an agreed response plan by March 2019," he told UN News.