

Agreement over buffer zone to spare civilians in Syria's Idlib welcomed by top UN officials

The agreement between Turkey and Russia to create a demilitarized buffer zone protecting civilians living in Idlib, Syria, has been welcomed by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres and the world body's humanitarian chief, who called on all warring parties and countries supporting them to make it effective.

In a [statement](#), Mr. Guterres also urged all parties in Syria to ensure safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all areas of the country, where a brutal civil conflict has raged for more than seven years.

"The [Secretary-General](#) stresses the need for swift action to address the root causes of the conflict and forge, at long last, a durable political solution in line with Security Council resolution 2254", noted the statement, released by his Spokesperson.

The agreement, reached between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday, aims to avert a full-scale military operation that the UN chief warned last week, could turn the region into a "bloodbath". The last rebel-held Governorate in Syria, half of Idlib's population of nearly three million, are internally-displaced civilians, and a million are children.

According to media reports, a 15-20-kilometre-wide de-escalation zone – to be patrolled by Russian and Turkish troops – will be established by 15 October, to separate Government forces from rebel fighters based there.

Military action will only exacerbate a complex situation – UN envoy

The agreement is also a welcome development amid "worrying escalation" in other parts of the country, Staffan De Mistura, the UN Special Envoy for Syria, told the Security Council on Tuesday, citing reports of fresh airstrikes in Damascus and the downing of a Russian military aircraft on Monday night, which left 15 servicemen dead.

Russia has blamed Israel for the incident. Israel on the other hand, said that its fighter aircraft were targeting a weapons shipment to Lebanon, threatening its security. The Israeli Defense Forces issued a statement on Twitter "expressing sorrow" for the deaths and blamed the Syrian military for the Russian aircraft being shot down. Israel also said that it will share all the relevant information concerning the incident with the Russian Government.

Now that we have this deal, there is no reason not to move forward expeditiously with the political process – *UN envoy De Mistura*

At the Security Council, UN envoy De Mistura, urged all parties to refrain from military action, reiterating that it would “only exacerbate a complex situation” in war-ravaged Syria.

Turning to the agreement itself, Mr. De Mistura said that there is now “no reason not to move forward expeditiously” on the political process, guided by Security Council resolution 2254, that lays out a roadmap for a political settlement in the country.

“We need an inclusive political process, and the UN is here to facilitate that process, starting with a constitutional committee getting to work,” he said, noting that the process must be credible, “because only then can the UN invest it with the legitimacy it needs.”

“I ask all concerned to give the UN facilitation in the next weeks, their full support,” he said.

Humanitarian challenges persist – UN relief chief

[Speaking alongside](#) Mr. De Mistura, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock said that UN agencies and humanitarian organizations continue to deliver life-saving assistance to some two million people in north-west Syria through cross-border convoys from Turkey.

However, delivering supplies remains difficult in other parts of the country, he said, noting in particular the situation in Rukban where lack of security is hampering aid operations.

He also spoke of “significant concerns” for the safety of civilians in Deir-*ez-Zor*, in eastern Syria, as well for displaced families returning home to Raqqa, the former stronghold of the ISIL terrorist group, despite the area remaining highly contaminated by explosive hazards.

“Efforts have been made to scale-up the mine action response... However, much more needs to be done before the city is safe and conducive for returns,” said Mr. Lowcock.

[UN Tuberculosis summit ‘historic opportunity’ to put response ‘back on](#)

track': new WHO report

Countries are not doing enough to end tuberculosis – the world's deadliest infectious disease – by 2030, warned the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) on Tuesday, at the release of the latest Global Tuberculosis Report.

The report shows that worldwide, tuberculosis (TB) cases are falling too slowly to meet the targets set by WHO's [End TB Strategy](#).

The deadly disease, which usually infects the lungs and is transmitted through the air, remains one of the top 10 causes of worldwide deaths, and is the leading cause of death from a single infectious agent, above HIV/AIDS. This is despite the fact that global efforts have averted an estimated 54 million TB deaths since 2000.

It is unacceptable that millions lose their lives, and many more suffer daily from this preventable and curable disease. –

Dr. Teresa Kasaeva, WHO Global TB Programme Director

The report shows that almost a quarter of the world's population, some 1.3 billion people, are at risk of developing TB during their lifetime, and around 10 million people are estimated to have caught the disease during 2017.

The geographical disparity in cases is stark, with 500 cases per 100,000 in some countries including Mozambique, the Philippines and South Africa; and fewer than 10 per 100,000, in high-income countries.

Drug-resistant TB remains a public health crisis, with more than 500,000 believed to have contracted TB resistant to rifampicin, the most effective frontline drug.

The report was launched in the lead up to the first-ever [General Assembly](#) high-level [meeting](#) on TB at UN Headquarters in New York on 26 September, under the theme "United to end TB: An Urgent Global Response to a Global Epidemic".



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A child is vaccinated against TB and other diseases in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in March 2017.

This high-level meeting comes in the wake of the Global Ministerial Conference on Ending TB, which took place in Moscow in November 2017, resulting in high-level commitments from nearly 120 countries to accelerate the response to eradicating TB.

UN chief [António Guterres](#), speaking in [June](#) at a preparatory civil society hearing held at United Nations Headquarters, said that, to win the fight against tuberculosis, it is necessary to tackle the “social drivers” of the disease – in particular poverty and inequality – head on, making greater efforts to provide universal health coverage and combat the growing threat of anti-microbial resistance.

“We have never seen such high-level political attention and understanding of what the world needs to do to end TB and drug-resistant TB”, said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. “We must capitalize on this new momentum and act together to end this terrible disease.”

Whilst under-reporting and under-diagnosis are mentioned as major challenges in the fight against TB, the most urgent stumbling block is funding.



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Mothers at the maternity health center in the village of Nassian, in the north-east of Côte d'Ivoire wait to have their children vaccinated against tuberculosis and other diseases. (file March 2017)

In 2018, investments in TB prevention and care in low- and middle-income countries fell \$3.5 billion short of what is needed. Without an increase, the funding gap will rise to over \$6 billion by 2022.

The report describes the 26 September high-level meeting as a “historic opportunity to put the TB response back on track”.

Doctor Teresa Kasaeva, Director of the WHO's [Global TB Programme](#), said that “it is unacceptable that millions lose their lives, and many more suffer daily from this preventable and curable disease. We need to join forces to root out this disease that has a devastating social and economic impact on those who are ‘left behind’, whose human rights and dignity are limited, and those who struggle to access care”, she said, adding that: “The time for action is now.”

[Kenya makes progress in supporting people with albinism, but ‘much remains to be done’ says UN expert](#)

At the end of her mission to the country, [Ikponwosa Ero](#), UN Independent

Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, issued a statement on Monday welcoming Kenya's "unique achievements", saying that the country was set to become a regional leader on the issue.

People with Albinism are born with lighter than normal skin, hair and eye colour, making them sensitive to the sun and bright light.

"Kenya's successes include the allocation of a substantial annual budget geared toward [specific measures](#) for persons with albinism, who had historically been left behind in the key sectors of health and education and had fallen prey to ritual attacks and the consequent insecurities," she said.

"However," she continued, "much remains to be done including access to justice and judicial remedies for victims of attack as well as socio-economic support for victims and their families to help restore their lives."



OHCHR/Christine Wambaa

Ms. Ero also pointed to the need for protection measures in border areas like Migori and Taita Taveta counties, "where fear of attack remains high."

She emphasized the need for a country-wide campaign to raise awareness, particularly in rural communities, to confront the falsehoods that lead to attacks "in the first place."

"There is also a need for reasonable accommodation to help persons with albinism," stressed the UN expert, such as providing support such as special eye-wear, for those with low-vision, which often occurs with albinism.

"The provision of such devices would help break down significant barriers to education and finding indoor employment," she elaborated, suggesting also

that hospitals dispense sunscreen, which is frequently unavailable “because of poverty and distance.”

Ms. Ero welcomed the Government’s plans to remedy these barriers and strongly encouraged producing sunscreen locally, to help persons with albinism integrate more easily into the workplace.

“I also urge Kenya to create a brief but comprehensive national action plan, in line with the [Regional Action Plan](#), to end violence and violations against persons with albinism as recommended by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights,” she added.

She recalled that the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) pledged to leave no one behind.

“I am convinced that Kenya is exemplifying this key principle. With improvements and continuity in its current positive trajectories, it will show the world some of the best practices for bringing those who are marginalized out of the fringes,” concluded the UN expert.

Ms. Ero will present a comprehensive report of her visit to the [Human Rights Council](#), next March.

Independent Experts address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world; they are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

[UN chief welcomes meeting between Leaders of Djibouti and Eritrea](#)

The United Nations Secretary-General, [António Guterres](#), has [welcomed](#) the meeting between the Presidents of Djibouti and Eritrea, held on Monday in Saudi Arabia, as “yet another step in the consolidation of recent peace and security gains in the Horn of Africa region”.

Mr. Guterres said in a statement from his Spokesperson that he hopes the encounter in Jeddah between President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh of Djibouti, and Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki, will “initiate a process to settle all pending issues between the two countries and lead to greater peace, stability and development in the region”, and expressed appreciation to the leadership of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for its efforts in facilitating this dialogue.

The simmering conflict between the two countries started over 10 years ago and stems from a border dispute over the status of Dumeira Mountain and Dumeira Island, off the coast of both Djibouti and Eritrea, which have been

claimed by both nations.

The meeting in Jeddah follows a request made in July by Djibouti's ambassador to the UN, Mohamed Siad Doualeh, for help in settling the dispute with Eritrea.

On Sunday, the UN chief applauded [another major step](#) for peace in the region with the signing of the peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which ended decades of hostilities over a disputed border area.

[Somewhere, every five seconds, a child under-15 dies: new UN report](#)

Around 6.3 million children under the age of 15, died from mostly preventable causes last year, the equivalent to 1 child dying every 5 seconds, according to a new report compiled by a group of United Nations agencies. Newborn babies account for half of the deaths.

The new [mortality estimates](#) study, was released on Monday by the [UN Children's Fund](#), together with UN Children's Fund [UNICEF](#), the [World Health Organization WHO](#), the [UN Population Division](#) and the [World Bank](#).

According to [Laurence Chandy](#), UNICEF Research Director, major progress in reducing child mortality has been made in the last quarter century, with the toll dropping by more than half since 1990, but "millions are still dying because of who they are, and where they are born."

Children from Sub-Saharan African are disproportionately affected, with half all deaths of under-fives, taking place in the region. One third are in Southern Asia.

He added that, without urgent action, 56 million children under-five will die between now and 2030, and half of them will be new-borns but that, "with simple solutions like medicines, clean water, electricity and vaccines, we can change that reality for every child."

Most deaths of children aged 5 and under are due to preventable or treatable causes such as pneumonia, malaria or complications during birth.

For older children, between the ages of 5 and 15, injuries become a more prominent cause of death, particularly road accidents and drownings.

Even within countries, wide disparities are found, with under-five mortality rates on average 50 per cent higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Education is also a factor, with those born to uneducated mothers more than twice as likely to die before turning five than those born to mothers with a

secondary or higher education.

Reacting to the study, [Tim Evans](#), Senior Director of Health Nutrition and Population at the World Bank, said . “Ending preventable deaths and investing in the health of young people is a basic foundation for building countries’ human capital, which will drive their future growth and prosperity.”