

Major UN push for peace to end Yemen's 'hot war' begins in Geneva

Efforts are under way to bring a “flicker of hope” to war-weary civilians in Yemen with UN-organised consultations between the Government and the Houthi opposition in Geneva set to begin, the [UN's Special Envoy Martin Griffiths](#), said on Wednesday.

“The time has come to begin a new process, to relaunch a process which will lead to a resolution to this conflict, which has so tragically marked the life of so many Yemenis and continues to do so,” he told journalists.

Speaking at UN Headquarters in the Swiss city, the veteran diplomat noted that it had been “two years; two years too long” since the belligerents had last met to discuss a peaceful end to the brutal conflict, whose roots date back to uprisings in 2011.

Yemenis need to resolve their differences in order to build their nation – *Martin Griffiths, UN Special Envoy*

“This is quite a hot war, as you well know better than me, and a lot of bad things happen in a hot war and that's not been absent in the last weeks,” Mr Griffiths said. “So, to come to the table and to talk to your opponents, requires quite a lot of courage and quite a lot of confidence that it is worth it.”

Fighting in Yemen escalated in March 2015, when an international coalition led by Saudi Arabia intervened militarily at the request of Yemen's President against “Houthi-Saleh” opposition forces – a reference to the now deceased former Yemeni President, Ali Abdallah Saleh.

Since then, thousands of civilians have died and around eight million are on the brink of famine, UN humanitarian agencies report. According to [UN Children's Fund, UNICEF](#), 76 youngsters have been killed in the war-torn country in July and August alone.

Martin Griffiths, UN Special Envoy for Yemen briefs the press on the Geneva Consultations on Yemen, Palais des Nations. 5 September 2018. □□□□□ UN Geneva/Violaine Martin

Although he was reluctant to share details of the agenda for the Geneva Consultations on Yemen, the Special Envoy explained that the aim of these meetings was “to lay the groundwork” for formal negotiations to be held at a future date. He added that the initial focus should be on building confidence between the parties.

By way of an example, Mr. Griffiths explained that the mass cholera vaccination programme carried out in Hudaydah governorate in recent weeks, had been shown to deliver “tangible benefits” to the people of Yemen.

Other trust-building measures will be explored in coming days, he added, including the issue of prisoner release “at scale” – something that both sides had been keen to see happen.

“What I think we can do this week, for example, assuming that the parties would agree to this, is agree on a way to do it together...Exchanges of prisoners obviously depends on cooperation, but it’s been remarkable how strongly the feeling has been conveyed to me that this must happen, and this must happen at scale.”

Asked about possible interference in the consultative process by other regional powers, Mr. Griffiths said he was guided by UN Security Council resolutions on Yemen.

Earlier in the day in New York, the UN Security Council members expressed their “full support” for the consultations to bring about a political settlement.

“There can only be a political solution to the conflict in Yemen,” the members of the Council said in [a Press Statement](#), which reiterated their call for full implementation of Security Council resolutions and statements, including [Resolution 2216](#) of 2015.

Back in Geneva, the UN Special Envoy insisted that the politics of Yemen was a matter for the Yemenis and the Council’s resolutions all pointed “in the direction of the reconstitution of the Yemeni state, based on an inclusive political settlement”.

“These are Yemeni-Yemeni discussions,” he said. “Yemenis need to resolve their differences in order to build their nation. It’s not for other countries to determine for them, their future.”

[Security Council takes up Nicaragua crisis, with some reservations](#)

Political turmoil in Nicaragua could pose a threat to the security of countries across Central America, the UN Security Council heard on Wednesday.

The 15 ambassadors met to discuss ongoing unrest in the country, where more than 300 people have been killed and over 2,000 injured in the wake of anti-government protests that began in April.

Gonzalo Koncke of the Organization of American States (OAS) briefed the Council on its efforts to promote peace, rule of law and justice there. He said that Nicaragua was at “a critical juncture that could have been avoided. And it could have been avoided because the Inter-American system does have tools in place that have been made available to the Nicaraguans to find solutions.”

“We see crises of human rights and democracy in the Americas. We have the migratory crisis in Venezuela which should be a cautionary tale for us. Nicaragua cannot continue to have an upsurge in its political and economic life...and we can only see an increase in the migratory crisis if this continues. And this is a threat to regional security”, added the Chief of Staff to the head of the OAS.

The violence and insecurity in Nicaragua has already pushed tens of thousands into Costa Rica, Honduras and other neighbouring states.

Last week, the authorities [expelled](#) a UN human rights team from the country just one day after it published a report detailing alleged abuses.

Felix Maradiaga, a civil society activist, spoke of the horrors he has seen or experienced at the hands of the police and paramilitary groups. He said he has received “hundreds” of death threats in addition to being shot at, beaten, and accused of fomenting terrorism.

“There is not enough time for me to tell you about the pain of seeing so many young people shot down by snipers. On 30 May, in the March of the Day of Mothers, I personally saw one youth’s brains spill before me,” he told the Council.

The Nicaragua meeting was convened by the United States whose Ambassador, Nikki Haley, saw parallels with the situations in Venezuela and Syria.

“The Security Council should not, it cannot, be a passive observer as Nicaragua continues to decline into a failed, corrupt and dictatorial state because we know where this path leads,” she said.

“The Syrian exodus has produced millions of refugees, sowing instability throughout the Middle East and Europe. The Venezuelan exodus has become the largest displacement of people in the history of Latin America. A Nicaraguan exodus would overwhelm its neighbours and create a surge of migrants and asylum-seekers in Central America. “

However, Council members were divided over what some ambassadors viewed as interference in the domestic affairs of a sovereign nation. Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia was firmly in the opposition camp.

“Does the Security Council mandate include exerting pressure on the authorities of a sovereign state to compel it to initiate certain changes, thereby conceding to anti-government forces?” he asked. “Following today’s discussion, polarization in Nicaragua will only worsen.”

Nicaragua’s Foreign Minister Denis Moncada Colindres also addressed the

chamber, where he said there was “consensus” that his homeland was not a threat to international peace and security.

He described the debate as “a clear interference in the internal affairs of Nicaragua, and a violation of the Charter of the United Nations and International Law.”

[In the eye of the Caribbean storm: one year on from Irma and Maria](#)

Primrose Thomas. UNDP/Michael Atwood

In September 2017, Primrose Thomas was at her home on Barbuda, when disaster struck: two Category 5 hurricanes, Irma and Maria, swept over the islands of the eastern Caribbean, wreaking chaos and destruction.

“The first time I came back, I didn’t know where to go. I couldn’t recognize anywhere. I had to ask for directions to my own house.”

Thousands of people in the region found themselves in the same situation as Primrose, and the UN played a major role in helping affected communities get back on their feet.

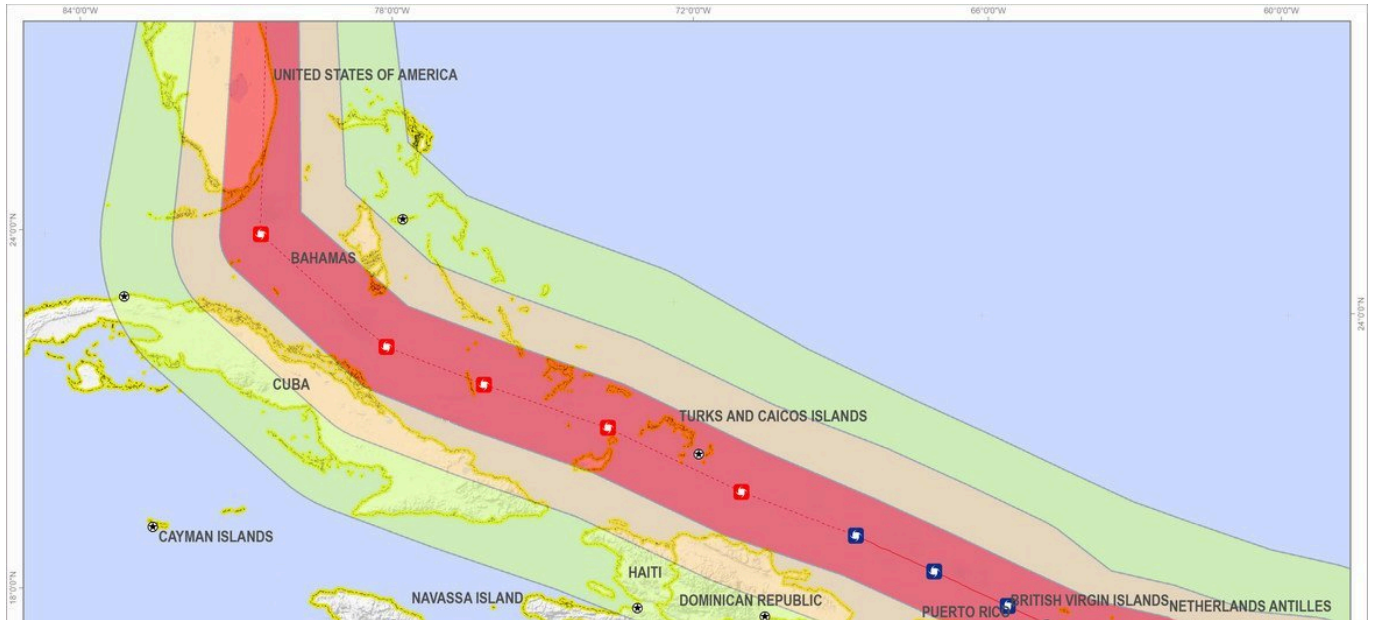
Click [here](#) for more first-hand accounts of the hurricane. UNDP November 2017

In this two-part report – one year on from the hurricanes – we look at the ways in which the Organisation provides aid to those in need and, in a world increasingly affected by the effects of climate change, is finding ways to make the region better able to withstand such events in the years to come.

This is how the UN Secretary-General, [António Guterres](#), described Barbuda in the aftermath of the storms: **“I have never seen anywhere else in the world a [forest completely decimated](#) without one single leaf on any tree...In every community, most of the buildings are destroyed or heavily damaged.”**

Irma and Maria were “Category 5” hurricanes, described by the US Government’s National Hurricane Center Website, as winds reaching 157 miles per hour or higher, during which “catastrophic damage will occur”. Irma reached record-breaking sustained speeds of over 183 mph, longer than any other Atlantic hurricane on record.

The most severely affected nations were the two-island State of Antigua and Barbuda, and Dominica; but many other Caribbean islands suffered damage, including Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, The Bahamas, and Turks and Caicos Islands.



UNITAR/UNOSAT

Two category 5 hurricanes swept east to west across the Caribbean in September 2017. The most intense wind speeds were found in the red-highlighted zone.

Haiti and St. Kitts and Nevis; St. Maarten as well as Cuba; the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, were also impacted.

On 6 September 2017, Antigua and Barbuda was battered by Irma, the first of the two mammoth Atlantic hurricanes tearing westward along Hurricane Alley, the name for the body of warm water that stretches from the west coast of northern Africa to the east coast of Central America and the Gulf Coast of the United States.

For the first time in its history, the entire population of Barbuda, some 1,600 people, was evacuated to the larger island of Antigua. Ninety per cent of homes and buildings in Barbuda were affected, 40 per cent of the roads were damaged, and the entire energy distribution network was destroyed.

Dominica also saw 90 per cent of buildings destroyed by the storms, affecting over 70,000 people.

In the aftermath of Irma and Maria, a UN-wide Crisis Management Unit sent waste management and debris removal experts into the affected areas, opening up roads, collecting garbage, and restoring the water and power networks. Emergency work programmes created temporary jobs and training for affected women and men, quickly injecting cash into communities.

Small businesses were given grants to help them to recover: On the Turks and Caicos Islands, the large majority of MSMEs (Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises) were severely impacted by the hurricanes, and the UN supported a wide range of businesses, from pest controllers and farmers, to taxi drivers

and people renting out holiday homes.

Like 70 per cent of the inhabitants of South Caicos, Henry Handfield relies on fishing for a living. One of the 40 MSME owners selected for a hurricane relief grant, he says that the \$550 received made an impact: "(My boat) was flipped upside down and one portion of it was broken off. The top of the engine was smashed up, the roof was destroyed...all I had was the hull of this boat." Handfield recalls. "The help I got from [UNDP](#) (the UN Development Programme) was very helpful. I was able to take that and put with some other monies to remodel this boat."

Many families in Dominica were given cash handouts to help them through the period after the hurricanes. UNDP/PLAC

Financial support also came in the form of an innovative direct cash transfer scheme, which puts money directly in the hands of affected families. Run by the Government of Dominica, the programme is supported by UNICEF and the [World Food Programme](#) and funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. Between December and February 2017, it provided 8,000 of the most vulnerable families affected by Maria with monthly payments ranging between \$90 and \$239, depending on the number of children in the household.

Yvonne Hill Williams lives in Roseau, Dominica. A shopkeeper and foster carer who also looks after her five grandchildren, Yvonne lost all of her merchandise when the nearby river overflowed during Hurricane Maria. She found that the cash initiative came in handy during a difficult time: "We bought clothes, shoes, and a little shopping and groceries. You feel that you can buy certain things in town. It's a good feeling...I appreciate it very much."

In Dominica, the priority for women farmers was to be able to get back on their feet as soon as possible. [UN Women](#) facilitated this by providing seeds, labour and equipment to bring their farms back into production as soon as possible.

Eileen Lloyd, of the Bellevue Chopin Farmers Group in Dominica, is one of the beneficiaries. She described the support provided by UN Women as a blessing: "After Maria, it was very difficult to get seeds, and then we were promised some seeds and tools from UN Women and we appreciate them handing them over to us," she said.

The organisation also worked closely with the [UN Population Fund](#) to provide displaced Barbudan women and girls with sanitary items not easily found in relief packages. They distributed "dignity kits", containing basic health and hygiene products such as soap and sanitary towels.

Women in Dominica were given additional support, including access to cash-for-work programmes, following the devastation caused by the 2017 hurricane season. UNDP/Zaimis Olmos

One year on, the most vulnerable people affected – those with no income or insurance, single people and those with disabilities – risk getting lost in the system. The [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#), has focused on helping the most at-risk communities.

IOM has helped hundreds in Dominica by reconstructing their homes. Wyzell Philogene, a single mother, spent almost a month sharing a space at a friend's house, along with around 15 others. Her roof was ripped off, and she lost nearly all her belongings. Wyzelle qualified for IOM humanitarian assistance and, a week later, a brand-new roof was erected at no cost to her. She is now able to focus on making a living, through a landscaping job made available through the National Employment Programme, and she is making sure that she is prepared for the next hurricane season.

Wyzell is not alone in thinking about how to survive in the future: the UN's longer-term planning and development teams have been working closely with emergency humanitarian workers from the very beginning of the crisis.

In part 2 of this special report, we will look more closely at the efforts underway to make the region more resilient, in the face of climate change and the likelihood of more frequent, and more extreme, natural disasters.

[Burundi: 'They're hiding the bodies' after summary executions, say UN investigators](#)

Serious rights violations are continuing in Burundi, including summary executions and hate speech at the highest level of government, UN-appointed investigators said on Wednesday.

In their second report on the deteriorating human rights situation in the Great Lakes country, the Commission of Inquiry notes that in some cases, the abuses constitute crimes against humanity.

We know that the form of executions has changed so they're hiding the bodies...there is every reason to believe that in a large number of cases, they are ending up dead," said Françoise Hampson, a member of the UN panel. "But we can't say that a body has been found. So, we can't say that summary executions are diminishing. We can say that there are fewer bodies found."

In addition to concerns over these and other grave rights violations including torture, sexual violence and arbitrary arrests, the UN panel

highlights the growing influence of the Imbonerakure – the youth wing of the ruling party in government.

They're hiding the bodies...there is every reason to believe that in a large number of cases, they are ending up dead – *Françoise Hampson, Commission of Inquiry on Burundi*

Ms. Hampson said that “the Imbonerakure has control and intimidates the population”, adding that some members of the group “have become increasingly important in the repression”, operating “with near-total impunity”.

According to the UN report, in the past 18 months the number of people in need of humanitarian aid in Burundi has risen threefold, to more than three million people; roughly a third of the population.

Despite their dire situation, the people of Burundi deserve huge credit for refusing to accept the Government's attempts to portray the crisis as an ethnic problem, Ms. Hampson said – a key concern, given the repeated cycles of intense violence and mass killing that have marred the country's recent past, since independence.

The authorities were the “main source” of hate speech, Ms. Hampson insisted, noting that the UN panel had found examples “that have gone up right as far as the President”, Pierre Nkurunziza.

On the issue of Mr. Nkurunziza's bid for re-election in 2020, Commission of Inquiry President, Doudou Diène, warned that it had led to “persecution, threats and intimidation” of supposed Government opponents, as had a referendum held in May this year.

And in a sign that the crisis may be deepening, Mr. Diène noted that generals who had been “at the heart of power” had also left the country, amid the growing impoverishment of the population, increasing food insecurity and other social and cultural rights violations.

On the issue of tackling impunity, he added that the Commission of Inquiry had compiled a confidential list of names of those allegedly responsible for serious abuses in Burundi, which could be handed over to an appropriate tribunal at a later date.

The question of tackling impunity was central to the Commission of Inquiry's work, Mr Diène said, as “it reminds the principal actors in Burundi crisis, those in power... that the commission's mandate includes the identification of those responsible”.

“Our report is not an abstract poetic or literary exercise,” he added. “So, after detailing the violations, we attempt to identify those responsible. And that's what we have done.”

The Commission of Inquiry's full 250-page report will be presented to the Human Rights Council on 17 September.

Guatemala bars UN anti-corruption investigator from re-entering country

Guatemalan authorities informed United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on Tuesday that they have barred Commissioner Ivan Velasquez, of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), from re-entering the country.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson, Stéphane Dujarric, the UN chief said that CICIG and its Commissioner play “a [pivotal role](#) in the fight against impunity in Guatemala.”

“The UN Secretariat has serious concerns about this decision, which it is currently reviewing and which does not appear to be consistent with the Agreement on the establishment of CICIG,” Mr. Dujarric spelled out.

According to his spokesperson, the Secretary-General has asked Mr. Velasquez to continue at the helm of CICIG from outside Guatemala until there is more clarity on the situation.

“The Secretary-General encourages the Government of Guatemala to continue to search for a solution through dialogue in the framework of article 12 of the Agreement establishing CICIG,” the statement concluded.

According to news reports, the agency’s mandate – due to expire next year – was revoked days after a long-running dispute between Mr. Velasquez and Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales escalated, which included corruption probes against the President and his family.

Mr. Morales reportedly had asked the UN chief to name a replacement for Mr. Velasquez, who is a Colombian citizen.