

UN Chief commends Mauritania for peaceful election process

UN Secretary-General [Antonió Guterres](#) has welcomed the “peaceful conduct” of the Mauritanian elections that took place on 1 September.

Voting took place at a parliamentary, regional and municipal level, with some 98 political parties contesting seats, significantly more than in the last ballot, held five years ago.

When that poll was held, in 2013, it was boycotted by opposition groups: this time there has reportedly been broad participation with, for the first time, the election of regional councils which will replace the upper house of parliament, the Senate. New Presidential elections are due to take place in 2019.

In a statement issued by his Spokesman, Mr. Guterres, who has closely followed developments in the Northwest African nation, encouraged “all parties to continue to act in a peaceful manner, during and after the announcement of the results.”

“He further calls on political leaders and electoral contestants to resolve disputes through dialogue and in accordance with the law”, the statement concluded.

Inactivity puts physical and mental health of more than 1.4 billion adults at risk, says WHO

Insufficient physical activity is a leading risk factor for non-communicable disease, negatively impacting mental health and overall quality of life, according to a newly released United Nations health agency study.

Published in The Lancet Global Health journal on Wednesday, the study highlights the well-established benefits of being physically active, including a lower risk of cardiovascular disease, hypertension and diabetes, as well as breast and colon cancer. Additionally, physical activity has positive effects on mental health, can delay the onset of dementia, and help people maintain a healthy weight.

“Unlike other major global health risks, levels of insufficient physical activity are not falling worldwide, on average, and over a quarter of all adults are not reaching the recommended levels of physical activity for good health,” warns the study’s lead author, Regina Guthold, of the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) in Switzerland.

The study details the levels of insufficient physical activity in different countries and estimates global and regional trends. Findings reveal that there has been no improvement in global levels of physical activity since 2001 and that some one-in-three women and one-in-four men globally are not active enough to stay healthy.

Unlike other major global health risks, levels of insufficient physical activity are not falling worldwide – Regina Guthold, lead author

Moreover, levels of insufficient physical activity are more than twice as great in high-income countries as compared to that of low-income nations, with a five per cent increase in higher income countries between 2001 and 2016.

There has been little progress in improving physical activity levels during that 15-year period, with data projecting that if these trends continue, the 2025 global activity target of a 10 per cent relative reduction in insufficient physical activity, will not be met.

Other main findings showed that by the end of 2016:

- In 55 of 168 countries, more than one-third of the population was insufficiently physically active.
- More than half of all adults in Kuwait, American Samoa, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq were insufficiently active, while inadequate levels elsewhere of 40 per cent appeared in the United States, 36 per cent in the United Kingdom and 14 per cent in China.
- Only six per cent of adults in Uganda and Mozambique were insufficiently active – the lowest levels of all countries.
- The greatest levels of insufficient activity comparing women and men appeared in South Asia (43 versus 24 per cent), Central Asia, Middle East and north Africa (40 vs. 26 per cent), and high-income Western countries (42 vs. 31 per cent).
- Around one-in-three women and one-in-four men worldwide did not reach the recommended 150 minutes of moderate intensity, or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity per week.

Across regions, many individual countries recorded large differences in insufficient activity between women and men, such as 40 vs 16 per cent in Bangladesh, 31 vs. 14 per cent in Eritrea, 44 vs. 25 per cent in India, 48 vs. 32 per cent in the US and 40 vs. 32 per cent in the UK.

“Addressing these inequalities in physical activity levels between men and women will be critical to achieving global activity targets and will require

interventions to promote and improve women's access to opportunities that are safe, affordable and culturally acceptable," said WHO co-author Fiona Bull.

The study is based on self-reported activity levels – including at work, home, and in transit, as well as during leisure time – for those aged 18 and above, from 358 population-based surveys in 168 countries, consisting of around 1.9 million people.

[Africa's Lake Chad Basin: Over \\$2.1 billion pledged, to provide comprehensive crisis response](#)

A United Nations-backed humanitarian conference to raise much needed resources for relief, development and peacebuilding programmes in Africa's Lake Chad Basin concluded on Tuesday, raising some \$2.17 billion in support and about \$467 million in concessional loans for the crisis-ridden region.

Achim Steiner, the Administrator for the UN Development Programme (UNDP) said that the promised funds amounted to a "strong endorsement" of the Organization's work, to address both urgent humanitarian needs and the root causes of the crisis.

"In this way, our [response to a crisis is also an opportunity to invest in a future](#) where crises are less likely and nations are more resilient," he said.

The [two day](#) High-Level Conference on the Lake Chad Region, was [organized](#) in Berlin, by UNDP and the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA), together with the governments of Germany, Norway and Nigeria.

It brought together more than 70 countries, regional organizations, international financial institutions and humanitarian organizations to discuss immediate relief needs, crisis prevention and stabilization, as well as development, to chart a way forward for a comprehensive and inclusive response.

In this way, our response to a crisis is also an opportunity to invest in a future where crises are less likely and nations are more resilient – *Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator*

According to OCHA, the conference also provided an "excellent opportunity" for in-depth deliberations on issues emerging from last February's [Oslo humanitarian conference](#) on the region, that raised some \$650 million in pledges for humanitarian programmes in 2017 and beyond.

“Participants agreed that a coherent, multi-year approach is needed, that integrates all available instruments to tackle the protection crisis and the root causes of the conflict,” said the organizers in a news release.

“This is needed to pave the way for sustainable and resilient development of the region, and thus contribute to a better future for the affected people.”

The conference also highlighted the regional dimension of the Lake Chad crisis, and the crucial role of local actors, cross-border cooperation and ownership at all levels.

More than 17 million people across the four Lake Chad Basin countries – Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger – [remain mired in a complex crisis](#) driven by extreme poverty, climate change and violent conflict.

As a result, more than 2.4 million are displaced and over 10 million people need more assistance to meet their basic protection and humanitarian needs.

[Major increase in Europe’s refugee and migrant death rate: UNHCR](#)

The number of refugees and migrants reaching the European continent is going down, but the rate of fatalities has gone up dramatically, according to a new [report](#) from the UN refugee agency, [UNHCR](#)

The “Desperate Journeys” report states that 40 per cent fewer of those on the move, entered Europe via the Mediterranean this year, compared with 2017. An overall increase in those arriving in Spain and Greece was more than offset by significantly lower arrivals in Italy.

The drop in numbers successfully reaching Europe, has been attributed to increased support for the Libyan Coast Guard to prevent sea crossings, and further restrictions on NGOs involved in search and rescue missions.

The three European entry countries for those crossing the Mediterranean were Spain, Italy and Greece and, by the end of July, Spain had become the primary entry point to the continent. The majority of refugees and migrants for each respective entry country came from Guinea, Tunisia and Syria (during the same period in 2017, the top three nationalities were Nigerians, Guineans and Ivoirians).

This is no longer a test of whether Europe can manage the numbers, but whether Europe can muster the humanity to save lives – *UNHCR Europe Chief, Pascale Moreau*

Libya, the principal country of departure, has received support in establishing its own search and rescue region, which has resulted in more people being intercepted or rescued at sea by the Libyan Coast Guard and returned to Libya.

NGOs and others conducting rescues in the central Mediterranean Sea are facing increasing difficulties finding safe European ports for disembarkation: Italy has refused to allow the disembarkation of several NGO vessels carrying rescued refugees and migrants, since early June.

These measures have been accompanied by a sharp rise in the rate of deaths. In the Central Mediterranean, one in 18 of those who crossed to Europe between January and July 2018 went missing. The rate last year was one in 42 of those attempting the crossing.

This year has already seen ten incidents in which 50 or more people died, seven of which occurred since June. 300 people have died attempting to reach Spain from North Africa; a third more than 2017.

On land, there have been more than 78 recorded deaths of refugees and migrants in Europe or at Europe's borders, compared to 45 during the same period last year. Here, police and border authorities are alleged to have pushed back refugees and migrants to a neighbouring territory, using violence in some instances, often denying them access to asylum procedures.

"This report once again confirms the Mediterranean as one of the world's deadliest sea crossings," said UNHCR's Europe Chief, Pascale Moreau. "With the number of people arriving on European shores falling, this is no longer a test of whether Europe can manage the numbers, but whether Europe can muster the humanity to save lives."

UNHCR, together with the UN Migration Agency, [IOM](#), is calling for a predictable, regional approach for the rescue and disembarkation of people in distress in the Mediterranean Sea. The Agency is urging European States to grant those seeking international protection readily-available access to asylum procedures and increase access to safe and legal pathways for refugees to enter the continent. It also appeals to States to do more to protect people with specific needs, in particular children travelling alone.

It's time to apply maximum 'moral pressure' to save lives in Syria's Idlib: UN negotiator

All countries with influence over the grinding conflict in Syria should use all the "moral pressure" they can to avoid a full-scale military attack on

Idlib, particularly Russia and Turkey, the United Nations top negotiator Staffan de Mistura said on Tuesday.

Appealing directly to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, and President Vladimir Putin, the [UN Special Envoy for Syria](#) explained to journalists in Geneva, that the two leaders had spoken to each other about the protection of civilians in 2016 after the fall of Aleppo to Syrian Government forces, and appealed for them to do so again now.

“You were the ones who actually were able to talk to each other, to make a telephone call, organize a formula that allowed the end of that horrible period not to be the worst,” he said.

“A telephone call would make a big difference even before Tehran,” he told reporters, in reference to the leaders’ upcoming meeting in the Iranian capital on Friday.

Welcoming US President Donald Trump’s earlier statement cautioning against a Government of Syria attack on Idlib, lest it lead to a “potential humanitarian tragedy”, Mr. de Mistura said that he was sure that the Turkish and Russian leaders could find a “soft solution” to the problem if talks went beyond technical discussions.

“We all continue to wish, to ask, to hope to avoid the battle for Idlib,” the UN Special Envoy said, noting that the north-west province had been hit by six airstrikes earlier on Tuesday.

The need to secure the protection of some 2.9 million civilians in Idlib is urgent, the UN official explained, amid reports that a 10 September deadline had been set for an attack.

Key objectives include preparing protection for routes to be used for the voluntary evacuation of those living and sheltering in Idlib, which is the last rebel stronghold in the country.

These could be in the “east, south and north”, Mr de Mistura said, adding that the “whole principle can be that they, the people, can decide where to go”, before calling for UN humanitarian access.

“We therefore ask more time to be given for negotiations especially between Russia and Turkey who are the main indirect stakeholders,” he said, who “while we are talking, have been talking since this morning and who do hold in my opinion the key for a soft solution to the Idlib issue.”

Speaking after a scheduled meeting of a humanitarian taskforce at the UN, Mr. de Mistura noted that 10,000 Al Nusra fighters remain in Idlib.

They have been classified as terrorists by the UN Security Council, he explained, before adding that the priority was protecting civilians – the “men, women, teachers, health workers...children, squeezed in the anguish of not knowing what will happen”.

Also in Geneva, Senior Adviser to the Special Envoy, Jan Egeland, appealed to Russia, Turkey and Iran to give “hope” to the people of Idlib, in their capacity as guarantors of a deal to prevent fighting from escalating there.

The US, Western countries and the Gulf countries should also do all they can “so that men with guns and power for once put civilians first”, he said, noting that there were “many more babies than there are terrorists in Idlib – there are a million children”.

“If it succeeds we will have hundreds of thousands of lives spared, if it fails in the next days and hours we could see a battle more cruel than any previous battle in the cruelest war of our generation,” added Mr. Egeland.

Earlier in the day Mr. de Mistura said that upcoming Syria constitutional consultations in Geneva on 10 and 11 September “could potentially, revive or give a chance of reviving, a credible political process” to end years of fighting across the war-ravaged country.

The goal of the consultations – with Turkey, Russia and Iran – remained consistent with UN Security Council resolution 2254: the establishment of an “inclusive, Syrian-led, Syrian-owned” future, he said.

Mr de Mistura also confirmed that he had received the names of individuals who could represent the Government of Syria and the opposition over a new, negotiated constitutional framework.

“The constitutional committee can be and should be now the entry point for what we call a credible political process as long as the constitutional committee is credible as well,” the Special Envoy said.

A UN Security Council meeting planned for 20th September, will review his report on progress towards the committee’s formation.