

[Mauritania: UN chief urges peaceful, credible elections](#)

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has called on all parties in Mauritania to ensure peaceful and credible elections as the country holds legislative, regional and municipal polls on Saturday.

In a [statement](#) issued by his spokesperson, Mr. Guterres said he is “closely following” developments in the West African nation as it prepares to go to polls.

“[The Secretary-General] urges all parties to ensure the holding of elections that are peaceful and credible and allow for the participation of all interested stakeholders,” read the statement.

“He calls on all parties to ensure respect of the rule of law and that the human rights of all Mauritians are upheld.”

According to reports, some 98 political parties are participating in the elections this year, a marked increase over the last time polls were held.

[UN urges countries to step up assistance for Palestine refugees](#)

“We regret the United States’ decision to provide no further funding to UNRWA, which provides essential services to Palestine refugees and contributes to stability in the region,” Stéphane Dujarric, the spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, said in a [statement](#) Friday.

“The Secretary-General calls on other countries to help fill the remaining financial gap, so that UNRWA can continue to provide this vital assistance, as well as a sense of hope to this vulnerable population.”

In the statement, Mr. Dujarric also noted that the US has traditionally been the largest single contributor to UNRWA and that the Organization appreciates its support over the years.

He added that UNRWA enjoys the full confidence of the Secretary-General and that the agency’s head, Commissioner General Pierre Krahenbuhl, has led a rapid, innovative and tireless effort to overcome the unexpected financial crisis it has faced this year.

The agency has expanded the donor base, raised considerable new funding, and

explored new avenues of support, said Mr. Dujarric, noting also that UNRWA took extraordinary internal management measures to increase efficiencies and reduce costs.

“UNRWA has a strong record of providing high-quality education, health and other essential services, often in extremely difficult circumstances, to Palestine refugees who are in great need,” he said.

UNRWA was [established](#) by the General Assembly in 1949 to provide assistance and protection to a population of some five million registered Palestine refugees in various countries throughout the Middle East. Its services include education, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, health care and emergency assistance.

[Civilians continue bear brunt of cluster munitions' indiscriminate devastation, UN-backed report reveals](#)

Though 2017 saw a sharp decline in casualties as a result of the use of cluster munitions compared to the previous year, two conflicts – in Syria and Yemen – accounted for the vast majority of the victims, a new United Nations-backed civil society report has found.

According to the 2018 Cluster Munition Monitor [report](#), released Thursday at the UN Office at Geneva, civilians accounted for 99 per cent of all casualties recorded in 2017.

This figure is “consistent with statistics on cluster munition casualties for all time, and due to the indiscriminate and inhumane nature of the weapon,” [said](#) the Cluster Munition Coalition, the organization authoring the report.

In 2017, a total of 289 new cluster munition casualties were recorded. Syria (187) and Yemen (54) saw the highest numbers, other countries and regions recording casualties include Cambodia, Iraq, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Serbia, and Viet Nam, as well as Nagorno-Karabakh and Western Sahara.

The [previous year](#), 2016, also saw Syria recording the highest number of cluster. That year, the overall total was 971.

Cluster munitions have been used in Syria by Syrian Government forces with Russia's support, and in Yemen, by a Saudi Arabia-led coalition, [noted](#) the report.

In addition, it noted that the Cluster Munition Monitor could not conclusively confirm allegations of new cluster munition use in Egypt and Libya.

“There was a significant drop in the number of reported cluster munition attacks in Syria and Yemen, but many attacks likely went unrecorded,” it added.

[Cluster munitions](#) are air-dropped or ground-launched explosives weapons that release or eject smaller submunitions, designed to kill personnel or destroy vehicles. However, the indiscriminate nature of the dispersal and the large numbers of submunitions that fail to explode as intended often result in large numbers of civilian casualties.

Convention on Cluster Munitions

In order to protect civilians and limit the use of such weapons, an international conference held in Dublin in 2008 adopted the [Convention on Cluster Munitions](#), prohibiting all use, stockpiling, production and transfer of those weapons.

Since then, a total of 120 countries have signed or acceded to the Convention, of which 103 are States Parties legally bound by all of the Convention’s provisions.

[Development gains unsustainable without cyber-diplomacy, UN official says](#)

Hacking, child sexual exploitation and other cybercrimes could keep countries from reaching their development goals, warns a United Nations official who is urging Governments and private sectors to rethink how they work together.

“Keeping people safer online makes society safer,” said Neil Walsh, Chief of Cybercrime and Anti-Money Laundering Section at the UN drug and crime agency (UNODC) told *UN News*.

He noted that countering cybercrime creates stronger banking and stronger financial institutions, which leads to better economic prosperity. It also makes the world a bit safer women and girls – who consistently are at a higher risk for sexual exploitation online – and promotes gender equality.

These are essential targets of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are guiding efforts to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure

prosperity for all.

Mr. Walsh said that by keeping people from the age of three all the way through their lives safe online, “you actually help business to function properly, you keep power grids and power safe, you create an element of behavior that allows people to bring all the benefits of the internet, open free and prosperous Internet to keeping them safe.”

That, he says, is what cyber-diplomacy is all about.

With recent concerns about hacking and ‘fake news’ impacting elections, and computer viruses knocking out servers, it is possible that cyber-diplomacy will be discussed at the upcoming session of the UN General Assembly.

In 2013, a group of UN experts [said](#) cyberspace could only become stable and secure through international cooperation, and that “the foundation of this cooperation must be international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.”

[Secretary-General António Guterres](#) in February [said](#) it was “high time” to have a discussion about the international legal framework in which cyberwarfare takes place, and he urged the General Assembly to take it up.

“I don’t intend that the United Nations has a leadership role in this, but I can guarantee that the United Nations would be ready to be a platform in which different actors could come together and discuss the way forward,” Mr. Guterres said.

[Food, security and peace desperately needed in Mali – UN relief chief](#)

A senior United Nations relief official has called for greater international attention to the plight of millions in Africa’s Mali, where worsening intercommunal violence and armed group attacks are complicating an already complex humanitarian emergency.

UN Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ursula Mueller – who just wrapped up a [four-day mission to Mali](#) – underscored that food, security, protection and peace are of paramount importance.

“Violence and intercommunal clashes have gotten worse here this year [...] and this has huge implications, including humanitarian organizations not able to access areas and people in need of assistance,” she said, in Mopti (central Mali), where nearly a million people desperately await protection and humanitarian assistance.

According to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the number of internally displaced persons in Mali has sharply increased since the beginning of the year to over 75,000 by the end of July. In all, some 5.2 million people are estimated to be in dire need of assistance across the country, the number represents one in four Malians.

In Mali, Ms. Mueller also met with humanitarian organizations to better understand the challenges they face in providing life-saving and protection assistance and with local authorities, stressing the need to scale up conflict resolution efforts, access to basic social services and protection.

“Despite huge challenges – security, access, funding and administrative impediments – they are continuing their critical work and reaching those who most need humanitarian assistance,” she said, praising the work of relief organizations.

During a [wrap-up press conference](#) in the Malian capital, Bamako, Ms. Mueller said she had been encouraged by the initiatives and the planning being made by the Government, development and aid actors to work together in ensuring that the immediate needs are addressed as well as helping restore and build livelihoods.

“This is essential to ensure our work today helps make communities more resilient and better able to survive future crises,” she said.

At a time, when the level of need is higher than at any point since the crisis erupted in 2012, the response has been hampered by a severe lack of resources. According to latest figures, only 31 per cent of the \$330 million sought by the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan has been received.