

UN chief 'saddened' by latest devastating earthquake to hit Indonesian island of Lombok

Following the magnitude 7 earthquake that hit Indonesia's East Lombok on Sunday, the United Nations Secretary-General said he was "saddened by the devastating loss of life, injuries and damage caused", in a [statement](#) issued on Monday.

According to Indonesia's National Disaster Management Authority, at least 91 people have lost their lives, with more than 200 injured and thousands displaced. In addition, thousands of houses have been damaged, and according to news reports around 10,000 have been evacuated from the island.

This latest quake came just a week after a 6.4 magnitude earthquake in the same area, which left more than a dozen people dead, over 150 people injured, and thousands displaced.

"The Secretary-General extends his condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government and people of Indonesia, and wishes the injured a quick recovery," said the statement issued by his Spokesman, who added that "the United Nations stands ready to support ongoing rescue and relief efforts, if required".

According to a statement by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), "the earthquake caused widespread panic. Many people ran from their homes and have stayed by the roadsides overnight. Hundreds of people were treated for injuries, some of them in the open air to avoid the risk of further injury".

Search and rescue activities are ongoing: "As the earthquake happened in the evening and cut power and communications in the area, a full picture of people's needs is still emerging," said IFRC. "Some 132 aftershocks have been recorded in the area."

According to reports, the death toll is expected to rise, with one official telling reporters that 80 per cent of north Lombok has suffered damage.

Suicide attack killing dozens at

prayer in Afghan mosque 'may amount to war crimes,' says top UN official

A suicide attack that took place inside a Shia mosque in Afghanistan during Friday prayers, killing dozens and injuring more than 70, has been condemned by the head of the UN Mission in the country who said it "may amount to war crimes."

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)) denounced the attack in Gardez city, about 50 miles south of Kabul, when two suicide bombers detonated their explosive vests.

"This attack targeting civilians has [no possible justification](#)," said UNAMA chief, Tadamichi Yamamoto, who also serves as the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan. "Those who are responsible for enabling this attack must be brought to justice and held to account."

According to news reports, the Taliban has denied any links to the attack and there was no immediate claim of responsibility, but militants linked to the ISIL terrorist group, also known as Da'esh, have carried out similar attacks against Shiites in the past.

These brutal and senseless attacks against people at prayer are atrocities – *UNAMA chief Tadamichi Yamamoto*

"These brutal and senseless attacks against people at prayer are atrocities," said Mr. Yamamoto.

International humanitarian law prohibits deliberate attacks against civilians and civilian property, including places of worship. It also commits warring parties to allow religious leaders to serve their communities without fear of attack.

"Such attacks directed against congregations and places of worship are serious violations of international law that may amount to war crimes," he stressed.

UNAMA expressed its condolences to the loved ones of those killed and wished the injured a full and speedy recovery.

The latest terrorist assault comes on the heels of a suicide attack and hostage-taking at a government building on Wednesday, in the eastern city of Jalalabad.

According to mid-July [figures](#) from UNAMA, 1,692 civilians had been killed and another 3,430 injured in the first six months of the year. This sets a record high for the first six months of any year, despite an unprecedented days-long

ceasefire between the Government and Taliban extremists in mid-June.

India and the UN: Celebrating 70 years of invaluable service to the cause of peace

“UN peacekeeping operates in increasingly complex environments and we are grateful for steadfast partners like India, who have risen to new challenges and continue to participate meaningfully in our efforts to protect vulnerable civilians,” the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, [Jean-Pierre Lacroix](#), said in a recent interview with *UN News*.

Mr. Lacroix visited India in June as part of a wider trip to the sub-region during which he thanked the Government and people of India, as well as Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan, for their service and sacrifice in the name of peace. Together, troops and police from the four countries currently make up close to one-third of some 91,000 uniformed personnel across 14 UN peacekeeping operations.

UN peacekeeping operates in increasingly complex environments and we are grateful for steadfast partners like India – *UN Peacekeeping chief Lacroix*

Commencing with its participation in the UN operation in Korea in 1950, India has a long and distinguished history of service in UN peacekeeping, having contributed more personnel than any other country, as well as the first-ever all-female force that helped to bring peace to Liberia in the wake of that country's brutal civil war.

From 2007-2016, there were nine rotations of all-female police units from India, whose primary responsibilities were to provide 24-hour guard duty, public order management and conduct night patrols in and around the capital, Monrovia, while assisting to build the capacity of local security institutions.

Hailed as role models, these female officers not only played a vital role in restoring security in the West African nation but also contributed to an increase in the number of women in the country's security sector.

“The contribution you have made to inspiring Liberian women, to imparting in them the spirit of professionalism, to encourage them to join those entities, those operations that protect the nation, for that we will always be grateful,” then President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf stated when the last all-

female unit departed Liberia in February 2016.

Making a lasting impact in the communities in which they serve

In addition to their security role, the members of the female Indian Formed Police Unit also distinguished themselves through humanitarian service, including organizing medical camps for Liberians, many of whom have limited access to health care services.

Medical care is among the many services Indian peacekeepers provide to the communities in which they serve on behalf of the Organization. They also perform specialized tasks such as veterinary support and engineering services.

Indian veterinarians serving with the [UN Mission in South Sudan \(UNMISS\)](#), for example, stepped up to help cattle herders who were losing much of their stock to malnutrition and disease in the war-torn nation.

In South Sudan, cattle are not only a valuable source of food but also a commodity for bartering.

The Indian veterinarians ran a mobile clinic earlier this year, travelling across the Upper Nile region, including to remote and dangerous locations, to treat sick cattle and educate their owners about disease prevention.

"Wherever I went I was being welcomed by people. They were very happy because there was no one, no one to look after them and whatever little we could contribute as a veterinarian and part of UNMISS, it is beneficial for them and for the animals," said Indian peacekeeper and veterinarian Prashant Tripathi.

The Indian contingent in the Upper Nile region includes the Indian Battalion, the Horizontal Mechanical Engineering Company, the Level II hospital, the Petroleum Platoon and the Force Signal Unit. They have all received UN medals of honour for their dedication and service in peacekeeping.

The Indian contingent in South Sudan has gone the extra mile by providing vocational training and life-saving medical assistance, as well as carrying out significant road repair work.

It is the nature of the Indian Army to step in any time when there is a need when we are on peacekeeping missions – *Colonel Gaurav Bhatra, UNMISS battalion chief*

Colonel Gaurav Bhatra, who commands the 850-strong Indian battalion, considers such efforts "a normal part of Indian culture."

"Even in our country, we are sometimes called upon to assist in areas where it is extremely difficult to alleviate the suffering of the people. It is the nature of the Indian Army to step in any time when there is a need when we are on peacekeeping missions."

More than 200,000 Indians have served in 49 of the 71 peacekeeping missions established around the world since 1948. Currently, there are around 6,700 uniformed peacekeepers from India, the vast majority of them in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in South Sudan.

India has also provided 15 Force Commanders to various missions, and was the first country to contribute to the Trust Fund on sexual exploitation and abuse, which was set up in 2016.

India's longstanding service has not come without cost; as of 30 June 2018, over 160 Indian peacekeepers have paid the ultimate price while serving with the United Nations.

"India has lost more peacekeepers than any other Member State. We grieve with the families and the people and Government of India for these losses," noted Under-Secretary-General Lacroix.

"India's continued commitment to UN peace operations and to global peace and security – even through these difficult periods – is invaluable."

Ethiopia: humanitarians scale up life-saving aid to over 1 million forcibly displaced by violence in the south-west

To address the urgent needs of more than a million displaced by inter-communal violence in southwestern Ethiopia over the past four months, UN humanitarian agencies and their partners are ramping up their efforts, providing among other things shelter, household items, water and sanitation, and food to the most vulnerable.

"Those who fled described witnessing extreme violence during village raids, including indiscriminate killings, rape, livestock slaughter and houses being burnt to the ground," [said](#) the spokesperson for the UN Refugee Agency ([UNHCR](#)), Andrej Mahecic, during a press briefing in Geneva on Friday. "Most report fleeing with nothing but their lives".

Since late April, inter-communal clashes have flared up in the border zones of Gedeo, in the Oromia Region, and West Guji in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' (SNNPR) Region. The recent violence came on the heels of more than a year-long crippling drought and tensions over dwindling resources.

In June, humanitarian organisations and the Government of Ethiopia issued a [joint appeal](#) for this crisis for \$118 million, to cover the most critical needs of some 820,000 people, and ensure the protection of those displaced.

According to the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#), to date, the response in Gedeo and West Guji has enabled the provision of safe drinking water and latrines, food, treatment for severe acute malnutrition, emergency shelter and basic health care. The assistance, says OCHA, is currently being scaled up mostly thanks to “diverted resources from life-saving responses to drought, flood and conflict-displacements” elsewhere in the country. Funding has [also been provided](#) by the UN’s Central Emergency Response Fund ([CERF](#)).

However, according to UNHCR’s Spokesperson, the situation on the ground remains extremely dire. “Many sleep on the cold ground in public facilities, keeping warm with only the little clothing they have on them. Others live in makeshift shelters that cannot keep out the heavy rains of the season, leaving them at risk of serious health problems such as pneumonia,” explained Mr. Mahecic, who added that “families have been separated and the overcrowded conditions are leading to serious protection risks,” especially for women and children.

On 28 July, traditional leaders from both sides of the conflict convened a peace and reconciliation conference to address the Gedeo-Guji conflict. The event – attended by officials from the Federal government of Ethiopia, the Oromia and SNNP regions, religious leaders and elders – enabled “a consensus to end the ongoing inter-communal violence and return displaced people to their places of origin by 8 August”, said OCHA.

[‘Economy is society’s servant, not its master,’ say UN rights experts, urging Brazil to put human rights before austerity](#)

Marginalized groups suffer unduly harsh consequences due to Brazil’s economic policies of austerity, prompting United Nations rights experts to urge the Government to instead prioritize human rights.

“People living in poverty, and other marginalized groups, are [disproportionately suffering](#) as a result of the stringent economic measures in a country once considered as an example of progressive policies to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion,” said a statement released by a group of seven UN human rights experts on Friday.

According to the experts, data recently made available, reveals a rise in child mortality rates for the first time in 26 years, attributable in part to the Zika disease virus epidemic and economic crisis of recent years.

This is a serious concern, especially considering public health system budgetary restrictions and other social policies that compromise the State's commitment to guarantee human rights for all, especially children and women, the experts elaborated.

"Some of the financial and fiscal decisions made in the last years affect the enjoyment of several rights, including to housing, food, water, sanitation, education, social security and health, and are worsening pre-existing inequalities," they added.

While the Government has underlined various measures to alleviate the adverse consequences, the experts find them largely insufficient.

"Women and children living in poverty are among those hit hardest, as are Brazilians of African descent, rural populations, and people living in informal settlements," said the experts. "We regret that efforts in relation to targeted policies addressing systemic discrimination against women have not been sustained."

Austerity measures should be taken only with the most careful analysis of their impact – *UN Human Rights Experts*

They stressed that austerity measures, which have been popular across the world since the 2008 economic crisis, should never be the only – or first – solution to tackling economic problems.

They explained that economic crises do not justify cuts to services and social rights.

"Austerity measures should be taken only with the most careful analysis of their impact, in particular as they would affect the most disenfranchised individuals and groups," they stressed. "They must be considered only after a comprehensive human rights impact assessment."

The experts added that such an assessment should consider less harmful policy alternatives, like raising taxes for the richest before placing bigger burdens on the poor: "Steps to reduce public debt and to regain not only financial but also social sustainability, should also be considered," the experts stressed.

Once a champion in the fight against hunger and malnutrition, Brazil, is dramatically reversing major policies on food security; cutting housing; and, according to 2018 forecasts, reducing water and sanitation. Moreover, public spending is expected to remain capped for 20 years, further underscoring the need to review economic policies with a human rights lens.