

UN signs host country agreement with South Africa ahead of world racism conference

Putting the final touches in preparation for the upcoming world anti-racism conference, the United Nations today signed an accord with the host country, South Africa, to outline legal responsibilities for the event.

The host country agreement for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination Xenophobia and Related Intolerance was signed in Geneva by South African Foreign Minister Dlamini Zuma and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, who is the Secretary-General of the Conference. The forum will take place in Durban from 31 August to 7 September 2001.

The host country contract, which defines the responsibilities related to the holding of the conference, was the last official requirement before participants arrive for the largest international anti-racism congress ever.

Hudaydah 'one airstrike away from unstoppable epidemic': UN humanitarian chief in Yemen

The crucial Yemeni port city of Hudaydah, which has been living under fire from pro-Government forces for weeks now, could be just "one airstrike away from an unstoppable epidemic", said the United Nations [Humanitarian Coordinator](#) in the country on Sunday.

Lise Grande said in a statement from the capital Sana'a, that "for weeks, we've been doing everything possible to help hundreds of thousands of people living in and near Hudaydah", however, "these airstrikes are putting innocent civilians at extreme risk."

The port is the primary gateway for food and humanitarian supplies into the war-stricken country, and together with the city overall, it has been in the hands of Houthi rebels since the end of 2014, who have been battling government forces aided by a Saudi-led coalition, which has been deploying war planes since fighting escalated in 2015.

Overall, 22 million people – or 75 per cent of the Yemeni population –

require some form of humanitarian help or protection, including nearly 8.5 million who do not know where their next meal is coming from.

Coalition forces moved on Hudaydah in the middle of last month, but diplomatic moves led by the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, have helped to prevent an all-out military invasion of the city, while the warring parties negotiate a potential deal that could allow fighters to leave.

Nevertheless, local health facilities reported in mid-July that around 328 had been injured and nearly 50 killed during fighting to that point.

“Since the start of the recent military offensive,” said Ms. Grande, “humanitarian partners have been providing food, water, emergency kits, cash and healthcare.” She added that 80 per cent of those displaced by fighting had received some form of help.

Airstrikes earlier this week near a reproductive health centre and public laboratory in Hudaydah, also hit and damaged a sanitation facility and water station in the Zabid neighbourhood, she said. That water station “supplies the majority of the water” to the whole city she stressed.

As one of the epicentres of the large cholera outbreak which began last year across Yemen, she said that the deadly water-borne disease “is already present in neighbourhoods across the city and governorate. Damage to sanitation, water and health facilities jeopardizes everything that we are trying to do...We could be one airstrike away from an unstoppable epidemic.”

[Government and opposition must ‘respect the rule of law and human rights’ in Comoros, as referendum looms: Guterres](#)

The infringement of democratic rights and civil liberties in the Indian Ocean archipelago of the Comoros, ahead of a vote on constitutional reform, are a source of concern said [United Nations chief](#) António Guterres on Sunday.

[In a statement](#) issued by his Deputy Spokesperson in New York, the Secretary-General expressed his concern over “persisting restrictions of civil liberties and democratic rights in the run-up to the 30 July constitutional referendum in the Comoros.”

Monday’s vote on key constitutional changes proposed by President Azali

Assoumani, who took office two years ago limited to a single-term in office, has been criticized by political opponents as an effort primarily to run again in 2021, according to news reports.

Under the current constitution, power rotates every five years between the three main islands of the Comoros, as a means of balancing power after years of instability. Reports say that three vice-presidencies would be scrapped if the referendum passes, consolidating presidential authority further.

In June this year, the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union, which has been helping to stabilize the electoral process in the Comoros, called for “the broadest possible consensus” on institutional changes across the Archipelago.

On Sunday, the UN chief urged the Government of the Comoros “political parties and all other relevant stakeholders to do their utmost to respect the rule of law and human rights” and said he was “echoing the recent decision of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government” with his call on “Comorian stakeholders to engage in a dialogue to ensure an inclusive consultation on constitutional reforms under the auspices of the African Union.”

[Make Sunday ‘an important celebration of democracy’ UN chief urges voters in Mali](#)

On the eve of Mali’s crucial presidential election, the [United Nations Secretary-General](#) said that despite clear security challenges, voters in the arid African nation of around 18 million, needed to ensure that the key poll was first and foremost “an important celebration of democracy”.

The UN Stabilization Mission in the country, [MINUSMA](#), has been busy providing logistical support to the Government of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, especially in the restive north and centre, where an alliance of militant Islamists and Tuareg rebels have been launching attacks with increasing frequency and ferocity against government troops and UN peacekeepers.

When the current President was elected in 2013, his administration replaced a transitional government which had wrested back control – with international support – of the outlying regions following a failed coup, that saw the iconic and ancient city of Timbuktu occupied by militants. Dozens of UN peacekeepers have made the ultimate sacrifice defending Mali’s fragile recovery in recent years.

In [a statement](#) issued by his Deputy Spokesperson on Saturday in New York, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#), said that he was “closely following developments” this weekend.

Maintain the peaceful course, thereby ensuring that Sunday’s elections serve as an important celebration of democracy – *UN chief Guterres*

“On the eve of these polls, which are important for peace and reconciliation in Mali, the Secretary-General is encouraged by the overall peaceful climate that has characterized the electoral campaign to date, despite continued security challenges in the north and center of the country”, said the statement.

Mr. Guterres – who made [a landmark visit](#) to the country two months ago – called on “all Malians to maintain the peaceful course, thereby ensuring that Sunday’s elections serve as an important celebration of democracy.”

He urged all of the candidates and other political actors “to commit to making this poll a peaceful, free and transparent process, and to resolve any possible dispute through the appropriate institutions in accordance with the law.”

On Friday, the head of MINUSMA, Mahamat Saleh Annadif told the mission’s Radio Mikado that although tensions are high and the threat of attacks persist, the result had to be respected if democratic rule was to be viewed as “irreversible”.

The mission has been providing transportation to candidates, training and support for officials involved in the democratic process, and distributed 200 tonnes of electoral material, mainly to remote areas where the political process is most vulnerable to abuse, and voters are most likely to feel intimidated going to the polls.

“The Secretary-General stresses that peace and reconciliation for all Malian citizens must prevail, irrespective of the electoral outcome” said the statement, reiterating the UN’s commitment overall, to keep supporting the electoral process in the weeks and months ahead.

[Mali: Any dispute over key Sunday vote must be resolved peacefully, says UN](#)

envoy

With key presidential elections in Mali just two days away, the top United Nations official there on Friday stressed that candidates must accept the results and ensure that the democratic process in Mali is “irreversible”.

“It is necessary that everybody goes to vote in a peaceful way and that the actors competing in this election accept the ballot box results”, said Mahamat Saleh Annadif, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for the African country, in an interview with the UN Mission’s radio network, *Mikado FM*.

He said that security conditions, although fragile, were adequate for a successful round of voting on Sunday. Any dispute must be resolved through arbitration by the Malian institutions in charge, he stressed.

As the 2013 elections restored constitutional order, the 2018 elections must reassure that the democratic process in Mali is “irreversible”, he said.

The UN mission, known by its French acronym [MINUSMA](#), headed by Mr. Annadif, is providing technical assistance to the Malian authorities, and helping to create conditions conducive for the holding of credible and peaceful elections.

This includes the preparation and distribution of electoral materials; back-up security support; as well as helping to transport and train electoral officials. The mission has also made transportation available for all candidates to reach remote northern and central parts of the country, for campaigning purposes.

MINUSMA said it had transported 200 tons of electoral material and distributed it in all the northern regions; and flown 300 different people related to the whole electoral process – including the Independent National Electoral Commission delegates, Constitutional Court delegates, as well as international and national observers. including those from the African Union, the European Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Speaking to journalists at UN Headquarters on Friday, Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesman for the Secretary-General, said that the security situation remains volatile, with local intercommunal tensions still high, heightening the risk of criminal and terrorist actions in the north and the centre.

“So far, however, there have been no major incidents related to the electoral process,” he said.

The Spokesman said that Mr. Annadif is proactively seeking to ensure that any electoral-related dispute is resolved peacefully and in accordance with the law.