

'Warehouses emptying' amid growing humanitarian needs in south-west Syria

More than 180,000 people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance in south-west Syria after weeks of escalating hostilities that have restricted aid access to the area, the UN said on Friday.

At a briefing in Geneva, Jens Laerke, spokesperson for the [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#), said that there were particular concerns for an estimated 55,000 civilians whose movements have been restricted by the extremist group Jaysh Khaled Bin Walid (JKBW).

"We are, of course, very concerned about this particular group's policy of restricting freedom of movement for civilians who are trying to flee the area and only a very limited number of civilians had been able to escape," Mr. Laerke told journalists.

The ISIL-linked terrorist affiliate's area of control, spans around 200-square kilometres of Syrian territory near the Jordanian border, OCHA said in a statement, noting that the development follows five weeks of territorial gains by Syrian Government forces against opposition armed groups in the south-western governorates of Dara'a, Quneitra and Sweida.

Several thousand people have nonetheless managed to seek safety from JKBW, but those who remain "are now subject to increasing hostilities", the OCHA official said, adding that between 21 and 23 July, "intense air strikes" were reported in the so-called Yarmouk Basin of Dara'a Province.

The targets included al-Shajra, Hayt, Tasil, Jellin, Sahm al-Golan, Adwan and Tal al-Jumou', OCHA said in a statement.

Reports suggest that at least 32 civilians were killed in these attacks, including 11 children and three women.

On Wednesday 25 July, a multiple suicide attack by ISIL in Sweida city also resulted in more than 240 casualties and injured at least 170 people.

United Nations [Secretary-General António Guterres strongly condemned](#) the incident, which came as UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura briefed the UN Security Council on efforts to end the more than seven-year Syrian war.

According to OCHA, one other area remains in opposition hands in south-west Syria, near the Golan Heights.

There, civilians face ongoing violence and cross-border humanitarian actors report that they only have limited supplies left.

"Our humanitarian partners who have operated across borders from Jordan are highly restricted," Laerke said. "In fact, it's over a month since there has

been a cross-border convoy from Jordan into the area.”

According to OCHA, the last cross-border convoy from neighbouring Jordan was dispatched on 25 June, in line with UN Security Council resolutions.

The delivery of humanitarian aid from within Syria also continues to be hampered, OCHA said, as aid partners in Damascus “still (have) not been granted the necessary approvals” to reach communities in Quneitra.

The restrictions mean that significant unmet needs continue to increase dramatically, and the situation has been made worse by the fact that many local aid partners have also been forced to flee the fighting, leading to a significant scale-down of some assistance.

“More warehouses are now empty or emptying, which mean that we are very concerned about the continued delivery of lifesaving assistance to those many thousands of affected people,” Laerke said.

Cambodia: Before crucial vote on Sunday, UN chief calls for ‘pluralistic political process’

As Cambodians prepare to vote in general elections on Sunday, the United Nations Secretary-General issued a statement on Friday calling for “an inclusive and pluralistic political process” saying that it “remains essential for safeguarding the progress made by Cambodia in consolidating peace.”

Through his spokesperson, Stéphane Dujarric, he called on all political actors “to reduce tensions and political polarization.”

Prime Minister and leader of the Cambodian People’s Party, Hun Sen, has ruled the country for more than 30 years, and last November the rival Cambodia National Rescue Party was dissolved, by court edict, according to reports.

The UN independent expert appointed to monitor human rights in Cambodia, Rhona Smith, said at the end of April that there could be no “genuine” election process “if the main opposition party is barred from taking part.”

The UN chief on Friday called on the Cambodian government “to uphold international human rights standards and in particular to ensure guarantees for civil society actors and political parties to exercise their democratic rights.”

“He reiterates the continued commitment of the United Nations to support a

peaceful and democratic Cambodia that fully respects the human rights of all its citizens,” concluded Mr. Dujarric.

[New ECOSOC president to revive 'deliberative function' of forum](#)

The newly-elected President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council ([ECOSOC](#)) Ronda King, of the Caribbean island nation of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, said on Thursday that she intended to make the year ahead “a defining” one for the body that leads the UN’s ambitious drive for sustainable economic, social and environmental development.

“It promises to be [a defining year](#), which could help set a new course for the work of the Council and the High Level Political Forum ([HLPF](#)) held under its auspices,” said Ms. King, after being voted in as the 74th president.

Calling it an honour to serve, she thanked the Council members and asked for their help moving forward so that ECOSOC and the HLPF could live up to expectations.

She paid special tribute to the current president, Marie Chatardova, “whose leadership and vision” Ms. King said she would continue to rely and build on, with its emphasis on inclusion and participation.

She listed a revived ECOSOC as one of her main priorities. “You heard me correctly,” she said, “with your committed participation, we will revive the ECOSOC using in full, the hard-won innovations introduced by the General Assembly.”

“There has been some dissatisfaction with the functioning of ECOSOC over the recent few years. But in the coming 12 months, let us work together to restore the ‘deliberative function’ of ECOSOC,” she underscored

She also cited the HLPF as “the centerpiece” of her priorities, saying that when it meets in the General Assembly, Heads of State and Government will review the entire [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development.

“We will have to think of ways to strengthen the conduct of the next cycle of reviews” while looking towards the early 2030 Sustainable Development Goal targets, that are set for 2020, she said.

Ms. King argued against focusing solely on what does not work, and urged members to tone down criticism and avoid skipping meetings. “Let us focus on what does work well and why. Let us reflect on how we can make ECOSOC deliver fully,” she stressed.

For her part, outgoing President Chatardova recapped the “unprecedented engagement” of many groups during her year in office, calling it “very encouraging” towards achieving the 2030 Agenda.

She recalled 240 side events and special events, focused on partnerships, education, business, SDG Learning and Training, and local and regional government. Additionally, a film festival and a number of exhibitions enriched the official meetings, added Ms. Chatardova.

“I am sure when next year HLPF also meets under the auspices of the General Assembly, it will reaffirm the political will at the highest level to continue implementing the 2030 Agenda and lifting the obstacles,” she said.

[Guterres sounds alarm over worst cashflow crunch in years](#)

The United Nations is at risk of running out of cash, the UN chief has warned, urging Member States to pay their mandatory contributions on time and in full, so that the world body can continue to deliver on its key mandates.

In a letter to UN staff, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) stated that he had “written to Member States regarding the troubling financial situation facing the United Nations”.

“Caused primarily by the delayed contributions of Member States to the Regular Budget, this new cash shortfall is unlike those we have experienced previously”, he wrote. “Our cash flow has never been this low so early in the calendar year, and the broader trend is also concerning: we are running out of cash sooner and staying in the red longer”.

At the end of June this year, the amount of [money paid by Member States](#) for the 2018 assessment stood at around \$1.49 billion. At the same time last year, the amount paid to the regular budget was just over \$1.70 billion.

So far this month, Iraq, Moldova, Japan, Lithuania and Mexico have paid their contributions, leaving the outstanding amount owed for 2018, at nearly \$810 million, with 81 States yet to pay.

“I have appealed to Member States to pay their assessments on time and in full, and highlighted the risk the current situation poses to the delivery of mandates and to the reputation of our Organization,” Mr. Guterres wrote in the letter.

Speaking to journalists at UN Headquarters, his Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric

said that the UN fully understands that some Member States operate on different fiscal timetables, but unlike in previous years, the cash flow has never been this low, so early in the calendar year.

He also said the UN does not have much financial flexibility and relies on Member States to pay their dues on time and in full.

Mr. Dujarric added that the UN Secretariat would now be looking into ways of reducing expenses, with a focus on non-staff costs.

[Despite challenges and 'unfinished business', Colombia celebrates progress towards lasting peace, Security Council hears](#)

Amid a long series of challenges, the implementation of the peace process in Colombia is moving forward and has achieved important milestones in recent months, according to a [new report by the United Nations Secretary-General](#) presented to the Security Council on Thursday.

On 20 July – Colombia's Independence Day – as a new Congress was inaugurated, including representatives from the political party that has sprung out of the former FARC rebel movement, which waged a revolutionary struggle with government forces for more than 50 years, before signing a peace deal in 2016.

"The presence of the political party FARC fulfills one of the core objectives of the final Peace Agreement, and this Congress is among the more diverse, plural and representative in the country's legislative history," said Jean Arnault, Head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia, which was [set up nearly two years ago](#), to monitor and support implementation of the peace deal.

He added however that "while participation of FARC representatives in the Congress is a major step, reintegration into civilian life of former FARC-EP members is very much unfinished business," noting that successful reintegration will "no doubt require dedication and resources".

According to the report, "the fundamental goal of providing income-generating opportunities for 14,000 former combatants is far from being realized". However, the Government made "the welcome decision" to extend food assistance to the territorial areas for training and reintegration until the end of 2018.

In addition to the fear and frustration expressed by some former combatants regarding a peace process they feel has not lived up to expectations, the report lays out other issues which President-elect Iván Duque, set to take office on 7 August, will have to address in order to bridge the divisions among the Colombian people: the proliferation of new illegal groups; the continued growth of the coca economy; and the ongoing violence in certain areas, especially against community leaders and human rights advocates.

In his briefing, the Head of the Verification Mission recognised the importance of the national “Pact of repudiation of violence against social leaders” signed by President Santos and President-elect Duque. “It is the first time that violence against social leaders is received with such a strong sense of outrage, expressed in the streets of Colombia and cities abroad, in the halls of national institutions and across the political spectrum,” he said, calling this national consensus against attacks on local figureheads “significant”.

Mr. Arnault reiterated that the newly elected authorities can count on the support of the Verification Mission and stressed that “supporting institutions in their efforts to curb the violence in the territories will remain a top priority”.