

Fisherwomen of Lake Chad show optimism in face of multiple challenges

It's eight o'clock in the morning and fifty-year-old Falmata Mboh Ali paddles her small dugout canoe to the shores of a tributary of Lake Chad in Bol, a small town 100 miles north of the capital of Chad, N'Djamena.

In her nets she has perhaps fifty fish, a good enough catch, given she started fishing just five hours earlier. But, it is not sufficient to feed her eleven children.

"I can sell this fish and use that money to buy grain to feed my family," she said, "but the grain doesn't go far. I have been fishing for twenty years and it is becoming more difficult to catch fish."

Fishing has traditionally sustained communities in the Lake Chad Basin area, supporting nearly 30 million people living along its shores in Chad, but also Cameroon, Nigeria and Niger.

However, the once huge lake which covered 250,000 km² has now shrunk to one tenth of its original size, largely due to unsustainable water management and the corrosive effects of climate change.

With fish now more scarce, and fishermen needing to travel further to find them, the United Nations Development Programme ([UNDP](#)) has stepped in to offer support.

"We have been helped by a project which has supplied new nets, so my catch is increasing," said Falmata Mboh Ali, "so I am hopeful that my family's life can improve."

The precarious situation local people now find themselves in has been compounded by insecurity related to the activities of the Islamist Boko Haram terrorist group, across the whole Lake Chad region.

The insurgency the group has mounted in north-eastern Nigeria and neighbouring countries has displaced more than 2 million people and led to humanitarian crisis. The UN estimates that around four million people don't have enough to eat.

And if more refugees flee into Chad from the conflict in the Central African Republic, the food and nutrition crisis is likely to worsen.

Perhaps not surprisingly the Lake Chad region is amongst the poorest in the world, where access to food, health services and education is extremely low.



UN News/Dan Dickinson

More women are involved in catching and preparing fish for sale in the Lake Chad Basin region of central Africa.

Fisherwomen including Falmata Mboh Ali, explained the challenges they face to a high-level joint United Nations-African Union delegation, visiting Bol on Thursday; a visit which also included the Foreign Minister of Sweden, Margot Wallström.

The African Union Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security, Bineta Diop who was part of the mission said: “The challenges are great but we can act. Gender roles are changing, women now go out to fish, when before it was men, so they are playing a bigger role in society.”

The steps being taken by fisherwomen are small but significant, according to the UN [Deputy Secretary-General](#), Amina Mohammed, who is leading the delegation to Chad.

“Women’s economic empowerment is a critical tool for their access to leadership and decision-making positions,” she said. “I encourage the women to take part in all political, peace, security and development processes that will sustain their communities.”

The UN and the wider international community is supporting efforts by countries in the Lake Chad Basin to regenerate the region.

Ultimately, it’s hoped that Lake Chad itself could be given new life with rising water levels, allowing fisherfolk to carry out their traditional activities of years gone by, while providing them with a more secure and stable economic and political future.

Millions denied citizenship due to ideas of national, ethnic or racial 'purity': UN rights expert

Ideologies which define nationality as being determined by ethnicity or bloodline are denying millions of people of their right to citizenship, a UN expert has charged.

E. Tendayi Achiume, Special Rapporteur on racism, focused on the issue of ethno-nationalism in her first [report](#) to the Human Rights Council in Geneva, whose current session ends on Friday.

In it, she highlighted the plight of millions of stateless people worldwide—often members of minority groups—who are victims of long-standing discrimination which sees them as “foreign”, even though they have been resident in a country for generations or even centuries.

Meanwhile, several countries continue to enforce “patriarchal laws” which make it impossible for women to pass down citizenship status to their children or foreign-born spouse.

This is gender-based discrimination often deployed by States to preserve notions of national, ethnic and racial ‘purity’ – *Special Rapporteur Tendayi Achiume*

In some cases, women are even stripped of their nationality upon marrying a foreigner and cannot regain it if the marriage ends.

“This is gender-based discrimination often deployed by States to preserve notions of national, ethnic and racial ‘purity,’” she said.

Ms. Achiume believes prejudice rooted in ethno-nationalism is behind racial discrimination, whether in citizenship or immigration laws.

She recalled that in the past, European colonial powers used the ideology to exclude local populations within colonies from gaining citizenship, while Jews and Roma were targeted on the same grounds, in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Today, she said, migrants are the target of political hate speech and intolerance, again often under the pretext of ethnic purity and religious, cultural or linguistic preservation.

“Countries that have long celebrated immigration as central to their national identity have taken steps to vilify and undermine immigration, with a disproportionate effect on certain racial, religious and national groups,”

Ms. Achiume pointed out.

“Islamophobic or anti-Semitic ethno-nationalism undermines the rights of Muslims and Jews irrespective of citizenship status...the case of the Rohingya Muslims offers a chilling example.”

The Rohingya are a mostly Muslim minority in Myanmar, which is a predominantly Buddhist nation.

Though resident there for centuries, Ms. Achiume said many Rohingya have been rendered stateless following a 1982 nationality law that discriminates on the basis of ethnicity.

Waves of violence and discrimination have driven scores of Rohingya to neighbouring Bangladesh. More than 700,000 have arrived in the past year alone in the wake of a violent military crackdown that began in late August.

[Act now to end violence, Zeid urges Nicaraguan authorities](#)

The Nicaraguan authorities should “take real steps” to prevent further loss of life in the country amid ongoing protests and violent repression by pro-Government “armed elements”, the UN’s top [human rights](#) official said on Thursday.

Noting in a [statement](#) that “approximately 250 people, many of them young persons”, had been killed since mid-April in demonstrations against President Daniel Ortega’s Government, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein highlighted a “climate of intimidation and insecurity” on the streets.

Thousands of people had also been injured in the violence and 12 police officers had also been killed, according to official sources, the High Commissioner said.

Although the “excessive use of force” by police officers against demonstrators had decreased, violence by “pro-Government elements has continued to escalate”, he insisted.

Those targeted include communities that have erected barricades or roadblocks, with “signs of selective repression” against demonstrators and their families, human rights defenders and members of the church.

I now urge the authorities to take real steps to recognize the seriousness of the situation – *High Commissioner Zeid*

More than 700 people are also reported to have been arbitrarily detained and some have been allegedly subjected to ill-treatment, while cases of disappearances have also been reported, according to Zeid's statement.

Amid an atmosphere of "widespread fear", the UN official urged the State to "recognize the seriousness of the situation" and adopt "appropriate measures to protect the population and prevent further deaths".

The High Commissioner's comments follow a visit to Nicaragua by a team from the UN Human Rights Office, OHCHR, from 26 June to 3 July.

Their mission was to carry out human rights monitoring and support the work of a State commission tasked with disarming "pro-Government elements" and encourage the dismantling of barricades.

"While I am grateful to the Nicaraguan Government for inviting the UN Human Rights Office to the country, I now urge the authorities to take real steps to recognize the seriousness of the situation," Zeid said.

In addition, Zeid called for "meaningful steps" to address impunity and guarantee justice for victims, noting that the "violence and repression" in Nicaragua were products of the "systematic erosion of human rights over the years".

"I call on the Government to cease State violence and to dismantle the pro-Government armed elements that have been increasingly responsible for repression and attacks," he said. "Those who have instigated or permitted such armed elements to act must also be held to account."

After urging the authorities to preserve any "evidence" that might be used in future investigations, the High Commissioner indicated that his office will stay in Nicaragua and coordinate its activities with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

[Yemen parties underscore 'strong desire' for peace, UN Envoy reports](#)

Warring parties in Yemen have expressed their "strong desire" to achieve peace, the [United Nations Envoy](#) for the country has reported.

Martin Griffiths was in the capital, Sana'a, this week for two days of talks with leaders and representatives of the Ansar Allah rebel movement and the rival General People's Congress, the party of the current and former President.

The rebels, also known as Houthis, and pro-Government forces, backed by a

Saudi-led coalition, have been battling for more than three years.

“I am reassured by the messages I have received, which have been positive and constructive. All parties have not only underscored their strong desire for peace, but have also engaged with me on concrete ideas for achieving peace,” Mr. Griffiths told journalists on Wednesday, adding that he will continue talks with the parties in the coming days.

The UN Envoy expressed thanks to rebel leader Abdel Malek al-Houthi, with whom he held a “fruitful discussion” in Sana’a.

All parties have not only underscored their strong desire for peace, but have also engaged with me on concrete ideas for achieving peace – *UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths*

He also expressed hopes of meeting soon with President Abed Rabboh Mansour Hadi, in a follow-up to talks held last week which he described as “positive”.

“I look forward to work with all the parties urgently to find a solution first that will restore security and stability in (Hodeida) but also create positive conditions for a rapid and urgent restart of political negotiations in the coming days,” he said, referring to the battle for the key port city.

Mr. Griffiths was at UN Headquarters on Thursday to brief the Security Council behind closed doors.

UN relief chief Mark Lowcock also addressed the 15 ambassadors on the humanitarian situation in Yemen, where more than 22 million people require some form of aid or protection assistance.

The crisis in Yemen has its genesis in the 2011 Arab Spring uprising, which swept across the country amid ongoing rebel insurgency.

Although anti-Government protests led to the ouster of the then President, the transfer of power to Mr. Hadi, his deputy, proved rocky.

The Office of the UN Special Envoy supports the return to a peaceful political transition in Yemen, engaging with all sides – as well as civil society, women, youth and others – in the process.

[Syria: Civilians caught in crossfire, UN refugee chief urges Jordan to open](#)

its border

The head of the United Nations Refugee Agency, [UNHCR](#), appealed on Thursday for Jordan to open its border with south-west Syria to help protect around 750,000 civilians who are “caught in the crossfire”, amidst airstrikes and heavy shelling.

“More than 320,000 people are now displaced and most are living in dire and [insecure conditions](#), including some 60,000 people camped at the Nasib/Jaber border crossing with Jordan,” [UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#), Filippo Grandi said, in a statement.

Although local communities in Syria have opened their doors to take in many of the displaced, most are forced to live in open spaces or in makeshift shelters that offer little safety and protection from the elements, he added.

“There are large numbers of women and children among the displaced, as well as elderly, injured and sick people and I am especially concerned about them,” he continued, adding that among the displaced are local humanitarian workers who have “selflessly served the civilian population throughout the duration of the conflict.”

Mr. Grande underscored the immediate priority of finding a political solution to the conflict to spare civilians further suffering. Fighting between pro-Syrian government forces and opposition militia, has been intensifying for weeks across Dara’a Governorate, close to the Jordanian border, as well as the Golan Heights border area with Israel.

*I call on all parties to redouble efforts to cease hostilities – UN
refugee chief*

He said that while the UN and partners are doing what they can to deliver life-saving aid to the people of south-west Syria – both from within the country and across the Jordanian border – the security situation is hindering efforts to reach many people in dire need.

“I call on all parties to redouble efforts to cease hostilities, to allow humanitarian actors to deliver life-saving assistance, shelter and evacuate the wounded,” Mr. Grande said, spelling out that civilian protection, safety and security along with that of humanitarian workers is of “utmost importance.”

It is “a core principle of international humanitarian law that needs to be guaranteed by all parties to the conflict and the international community at large,” he stressed.

“I commend Jordan for generously providing protection to hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees since the beginning of the crisis and for

providing and facilitating assistance to those in need inside Syria," he said.

But, "given the immediate dangers," added Mr. Grande, "I am advocating for granting temporary refuge in Jordan to those in need of safety and for the international community to provide immediate and substantive support to Jordan, in a spirit of solidarity and responsibility sharing."

Underscoring that UNHCR is prepared to immediately scale up its assistance inside Syria and to Jordan, the High Commissioner concluded: "Thousands of innocent lives are going to be lost, once again, if urgent action is not taken."