

EU migration deal welcomed by UN agencies

UN humanitarian agencies on Friday broadly welcomed a freshly-inked deal on migration by European Union leaders which calls for more Member States to take responsibility within their borders for those in need of protection, amid a hardening stance by some since 2015.

In a joint statement, the UN Migration Agency ([IOM](#)) and the UN Refugee Agency ([UNCHR](#)) said that while the finer detail of the accord needs to be examined, they “stand ready to support a common approach”.

Echoing those sentiments, [UN Children’s Fund](#) ([UNICEF](#)) cautioned that more details were needed regarding the detention of minors and the processing of asylum claims for youngsters.

Speaking in Geneva, UNHCR spokesperson Charlie Yaxley noted that the development comes at a time when more than 1,000 people have died trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe for the fifth year in a row.

He noted the “disproportionate responsibility” that has been placed on “a small handful of States” by the long-running migration crisis – which peaked in 2015 – leading to search-and-rescue boats being denied the chance to disembark hundreds of individuals picked up at sea.

What was needed, the UNHCR spokesperson added, was “a unified approach that moves away from some of the more recent actions where we have seen States unilaterally seeking to harden or strengthen borders or restrict access to the asylum space”.

A crucial part of the EU deal reportedly involves the creation of additional “regional disembarkation points” and “disembarkation centres” for new arrivals.

Children should not be detained based on their migration status, that is never in their best interest and deeply harmful – *Sarah Crowe (UNICEF)*

IOM’s spokesperson Leonard Doyle said that “the majority” of these “should be in Europe”, although these could be “potentially elsewhere”, the agency said in a statement.

“We are not talking about external processing centres,” Doyle added, noting a “specific agreement to share the responsibility and have it not just in the so-called frontline states: Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Greece, et cetera.”

Currently, Libya is a major transit point for migrants and refugees heading

to Europe, but the UN has repeatedly warned about rights violations linked to detention centres there – including slavery – and by human traffickers.

Responding to a question about Libya's role in the EU deal, the IOM spokesperson said that any centres operating outside the EU would be subject to "rigorous international standards and monitoring", adding that it was "quite a high bar".

UNHCR's Charlie Yaxley also noted said that the agency "wouldn't want to see an increase in the number of people being taken to Libya" amid a "general climate of lawlessness and insecurity" that still prevails there.

Asked about how youngsters would be treated under the terms of the deal, Sarah Crowe from the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) said that the "detention issue" needed clarifying.

"Children should not be detained based on their migration status, that is never in their best interest and deeply harmful", she said.

Ahead of the EU agreement, the UN agency maintained that a "well-managed and predictable European disembarkation mechanism could save children's lives", in addition to speeding up asylum procedures and improving access to legal aid.

Ms Crowe welcomed the potential for quicker asylum processing for children as a "good step". "Children really need to have a timely action, so that their claims and their future are swiftly decided," she added.

Approximately 40,000 refugees and migrants have arrived in Europe via maritime routes so far this year, according to IOM.

This is almost six times less than in 2016 over the same period, following a peak in arrivals in 2015, and approximately 30 per cent of those arriving on European shores needed international protection.

De-escalation of fighting in Hodeida is key to 'long-overdue' restart of Yemen peace talks: UN envoy

"Events on the battlefield" are the main spoiler to the peace process in Yemen, but political negotiations are the top overall priority for resolving the conflict, according to the UN's envoy for the country.

As Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths had sought to avoid a military confrontation in the port city of Hodeida in the past few weeks, which has

been racked by fighting between Houthi rebels and government forces backed by a Saudi-led military coalition.

However, in an exclusive interview with UN News, he pointed out that his “principal and over-riding responsibility” was to bring about negotiations to end the war. “Hodeida is an extraordinary and important issue,” he said, “but it is not more important than the issue of an overall political solution.”

Confirming that avoiding an attack on Hodeida is one of his top priorities, Mr. Griffiths said that it was clear from discussions with all parties that the solution to the Hodeida crisis was “tied up intrinsically with a restart of political negotiations”.

He cited as an achievement towards the political solution, an offer to give the United Nations a lead role in managing the Hodeida port. Both the Government of Yemen and the Ansar Allah leadership of the Houthi rebels have accepted this provision, dependent on an overall ceasefire in the governorate, he said.

Regarding a timeline for the negotiations, Mr. Griffiths said he would like to get the parties together within the next few weeks. The restart of negotiations were “long overdue” and the Yemeni people expect it to happen as soon as possible, he said, adding that he hoped the Security Council would meet in the coming week.

He also highlighted the importance of establishing a government of national unity as a priority for the ordinary people of Yemen, “all of whom cry out for peace”.

Reiterating that all parties were called on to de-escalate the violence as part of their negotiations, he recalled his earlier statement to the Security Council that “it is the war that will stop us bringing the parties together”.

Listen to our exclusive interview below.

South Sudan ‘revitalized’ peace deal must be inclusive, Security Council hears

Although recent engagement between the main political rivals in South Sudan is a welcome development, ending the country’s long-standing conflict will only be achieved by addressing its root causes and ensuring women, youth and other sectors contribute to peace efforts.

That was the key message a senior United Nations official delivered to the Security Council in New York on Thursday.

Bintou Keita, Assistant Secretary-General in the UN's [Department of Peacekeeping Operations](#), updated ambassadors on the ongoing process to end nearly five years of fighting in the world's youngest nation, including mediation efforts by the African regional body IGAD.

The organization facilitated meetings this month between South Sudan President Salva Kiir and opposition leader Riek Machar, his former deputy, leading to the signing on Wednesday of a declaration announcing a "permanent ceasefire" across the country.

Ms. Keita said these "positive developments" must be supported.

"However, peace in South Sudan will not be achieved or sustained merely on the basis of a bilateral deal between the two leaders," she told the Council.

"While the outcome of regional and international efforts to deliver a political settlement is yet unclear, I must reiterate that peace will only be sustained if the revitalized agreement is inclusive, fair, addresses the root causes of the conflict and engages all stakeholders, including women and youth."

Akuei Bona Malwal, South Sudan's Ambassador to the UN, urged the international community to support IGAD's efforts.

"We would like to appeal to this Council and to other international actors and entities concerned with the situation in South Sudan to give the IGAD peace process that is currently and earnestly underway in Khartoum, full support. This Council must be seen as fully supporting the peace process for South Sudan, not just eager to dole out blame and punishment whenever there is a setback in the process of peace-making," he said.

South Sudan gained independence in July 2011 but descended into violence in December 2013, following a political impasse between the two leaders. A peace deal signed two years later fell apart.

Since the start of the conflict, thousands have been killed, nearly two million have been displaced, and untold human rights violations have been committed, including rape, abductions and pillaging.

The violence has further added to humanitarian challenges the new nation already was facing due to the legacy of civil war from when it was part of Sudan.

Ms. Keita reported on various "security incidents" this month so far, including deadly attacks on villages.

She said the continued fighting has a direct impact on the humanitarian situation and people's access to food. Moreover, 30 aid workers have been killed since the start of the conflict – seven this year alone – while a UN peacekeeper from Bangladesh died this week after his convoy came under

attack.

With hunger and malnutrition reaching record levels as the peak hunger season approaches, Ms. Keita warned that more than seven million people could be affected.

“More than a million children under age five are forecast to be malnourished in 2018. This is a heavy and unfair price being paid by the most vulnerable of society due to no fault of their own,” she said.

[Iran: UN rights chief ‘deeply disturbed’ by continuing executions of juvenile offenders](#)

Following the execution of a 15-year-old in Iran on Wednesday – the fourth juvenile to be put to death in the country this year – the United Nations rights chief condemned the practice, citing the strict prohibition of such executions under international law.

“I am deeply disturbed that Iran continues to implement the death penalty against juvenile offenders, with some 85 others reportedly on [death row](#),” UN [High Commissioner](#) for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said on Thursday.

Fifteen-year-old Abolfazi Chezani Sharahi was executed after being found guilty of fatally stabbing a man. A total of five juvenile offenders were executed in the country during 2017.

“We understand that the execution of at least one more juvenile offender, Mohammad Kalhori, is imminent and urge the authorities not to carry it out, but instead to commute the sentences of all juvenile offenders on death row,” urged Zeid.

Executing juvenile offenders is in violation of Iran’s obligations as a State party to the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#).

The youth was moved into solitary confinement four times before his eventual execution, further opening up the possibility that he suffered torture, or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The High Commissioner also expressed concern over the lack of transparency prior to implementing the death penalty.

When authorities fail to provide relatives with adequate information about the timing of executions, it not only imposes acute mental distress on the

convicted person, but also on their family.

Zeid also reiterated the UN Human Rights Office's willingness to assist Iran in complying with its international human rights obligations regarding juvenile justice.

Hostilities in Syria's southwest, mean cuts in vital aid across Jordanian border: Senior UN official

Escalating conflict in Syria's southwest has cut vital cross-border aid deliveries from neighbouring Jordan, a senior United Nations official said on Thursday, in an appeal to warring parties to halt the fighting immediately.

[Jan Egeland](#), Senior Adviser to the UN Special Envoy for Syria, was [speaking to journalists](#) in Geneva, where he detailed the "heart-wrenching" effect of the renewed violence in the governorates of Dera'a and neighbouring Quneitra.

"The reports from our colleagues are that, even the extremely effective lifeline across the border from Jordan has been discontinued due to the fighting in recent days," he said. "Humanitarian actors have pre-positioned supplies inside Dera'a and inside Quneitra, however, movement is very difficult and humanitarian operations are paralyzed in too many areas."

Even the extremely effective lifeline across the border from Jordan has been discontinued due to the fighting in recent days – *UN Senior Adviser, Jan Egeland*

Until recently, civilians in the area had been to some extent protected from fighting by a de-escalation agreement signed last year by Russia, Iran and Turkey.

This had provided a "rare area of sanctuary and protection", Egeland said, from the more than seven-year war that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and destroyed the country's infrastructure.

Already in response to an upsurge in hostilities amid a Government-backed assault on opposition-held areas in the southwest, an estimated 45,000 to 50,000 people have been displaced.

After emerging from a scheduled meeting of a humanitarian taskforce at the UN, Egeland stressed the dangers of all-out fighting in a region where there are an estimated 750,000 civilians.

Many had already been displaced by previous hostilities, he added, before making a direct plea to Jordan to continue assisting war-weary Syrians.

“Our appeal goes to Jordan, one of the most generous recipient of refugees on earth, that they keep borders open for people fleeing south,” he said. “There is no other place to go”.

Egeland also took the opportunity to emphasize the need for an immediate cessation of hostilities. “It would take too long to negotiate a ceasefire,” he explained, before calling on countries with “influence” on the situation to halt hostilities, as happened with a lifesaving ceasefire in 2017.

“We urge...again, the Russians, the Americans, the Jordanians were able to do it last July, they can do it again today,” Mr. Egeland added, insisting that there was “nothing inevitable about this escalation of fighting...There are many more babies than there are so-called terrorist fighters in the zone and the children have the right of protection against attacks”.

Highlighting the dangers faced by humanitarian workers in Syria, Egeland said that there had been more than 700 attacks on health facilities since the start of the war – “more than in any other war of our time”.

To prevent future attacks, he urged belligerents to respect international humanitarian law, while also explaining that the UN-coordinated “deconfliction” procedure had helped to protect well over 660 hospitals, schools, IDP camps and other humanitarian zones, including more than 50 in Dera’a.

“We cannot have more bombing of hospitals,” he said, noting that five had already been targeted in Dera’a that were not part of the deconfliction procedure and whose coordinates had not been passed to the belligerents.

Turning to Idlib in the northwest, Egeland described the situation as one of “extreme concern”.

Of the 900,000 people who have been displaced inside Syria since the start of the year, 500,000 have fled to Idlib, he added.

Delivering aid to the massive influx of people has been complicated by ongoing violence linked to armed groups who are vying for control, the UN Senior Adviser explained.

“All of these armed groups that have come there and who are in opposition to each other – and who also have been difficult to humanitarian actors – are exacerbating the problems of this being the largest collection of internal displacement camp on earth.”