

Military escalation will have 'serious consequences' for Yemeni civilians, warns UN Special Envoy

An attempt by a Saudi-led military coalition to take control of the Yemeni port of Hodeidah from opposition Houthi forces "will have serious consequences" on an already "dire" situation for millions of civilians, the UN [Special Envoy for Yemen](#) said on Wednesday.

In a statement issued amid reports that a major air and ground assault is now underway against the key Red Sea port city, Martin Griffiths also warned that it "will have an impact" on his efforts to bring the warring parties to the negotiating table.

Reiterating the UN's "strong commitment" to reaching a political solution to the conflict, the Special Envoy said that "every opportunity" was being employed to avoid a military confrontation.

He added that he and his team were in "constant contact with all the parties involved" to ensure that all of their concerns were addressed, on a political, humanitarian and security level.

"I call on the parties to engage constructively with our efforts to spare Hodeidah any military confrontation," Mr Griffiths' statement said. "I also call on the parties to exercise restraint and to give peace a chance."

Since fighting escalated in the Arabian peninsula State in March 2015, thousands of civilians have been killed and the vast majority of the population – some 22 million people – have become dependent on humanitarian assistance.

The attack on Hodeidah is significant since it is a key access point for aid and other everyday items for ordinary Yemen.

Speaking in Geneva in response to reports that fighting had intensified around Hodeidah, UN Refugee Agency chief [Filippo Grandi](#) said that it would make aid access "more difficult".

"It's not just the humanitarian access which has been on and off, but is also more important, access of goods through trade. Fuel, food, medicines, at least these three big areas. And I think that fighting will make it more difficult for that access to happen."

[UNHCR](#) had already taken the decision to pull out international staff ahead of the attack, Mr Grandi said, but not national staff, who he said were left "more exposed".

The UN refugee chief added that it was a "miracle" that more aid personnel

had not become victims of the violence that claimed the life of a Lebanese national from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the city of Taiz, south of Hodeida, in April.

Even before the current conflict, Yemen was one of the poorest countries in the world and imports provided almost all of its daily requirements.

Across the country, the fighting between forces loyal to President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi supported by the Saudi coalition and Houthi rebels has left fewer than half of the country's health facilities operational.

Basic medical needs cannot be met, leaving ordinary Yemenis vulnerable to preventable diseases, including cholera, which affected more than one million people last year.

UN chief welcomes formation of unity government in Madagascar

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has welcomed the formation on Monday of a government of national unity in Madagascar led by a non-partisan Prime Minister, as requested by the nation's leading constitutional court.

According to media reports, the court ordered President Hery Rajaonarimampianina to form a new government with a "consensus" prime minister at its helm, on 25 May. That decision triggered fierce debate between government and opposition figures over its interpretation, but led to the appointment by the President, of Christian Ntsay, a non-partisan technocrat, as Prime Minister, on 4 June.

The high-level political dispute, followed protests that took place initially against new electoral laws that the opposition said were barring candidates from taking part in elections scheduled for later this year, according to news reports.

The Secretary-General commended the President and Malagasy political actors for "reaching [a compromise](#) in the interest of the people of Madagascar", said a statement issued by UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric.

In the statement, the Secretary-General reiterated the commitment of the UN to support the holding of peaceful, credible and inclusive elections there this year and applauded the ongoing close coordination between the UN and international partners, including the African Union and the Southern African Development Community, in supporting "the Malagasy-led dialogue and reconciliation".

Prevention is key to 'breaking the cycle of HIV transmission', UN chief tells General Assembly

This year's United Nations annual debate over how best to battle HIV and AIDS heard that while progress had been made, it remains "uneven and fragile" with many hurdles still to come.

"The world is making good progress towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030," [United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres](#) told the General Assembly on Tuesday, citing the need for more accessible HIV testing, treatment and antiretroviral therapy.

"But progress is uneven and fragile," he added. "On all continents, key populations at higher risk of infection continue to be left further and further behind."

Where prevalence is high, young women remain vulnerable; and youth need to learn how to protect themselves.

"Prevention is the key to breaking the cycle of HIV transmission," he declared, pointing to the Prevention 2020 Road Map, which focuses explicitly on adolescent girls, young women and key populations at risk.

And the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development calls for an integrated approach in ending HIV, he added.

"Success will require us to strengthen links across these areas and build resilient and sustainable systems for health, underpinned by principles of human rights and equity," said Mr. Guterres.

The UN chief pointed to September High-Level Meetings of the General Assembly on Tuberculosis (TB) and Non-Communicable Diseases as key opportunities to "inform a new way of thinking and working that moves beyond the disease-specific silos of yesterday."

Looking ahead he also touted the 2019 High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Care as an occasion to build coherence across the global health landscape on financing, programming and accountability.

"At this pivotal moment, we must renew our focus and shared commitment to a world free of AIDS. The pandemic is not over, but it can be," he continued.

"Let us move forward in a bold new spirit of partnership to overcome the cycle of HIV transmission and deliver health and well-being for all," concluded the UN chief.

HIV: 'Still a huge challenge', General Assembly President

Noting that although there has been a 40 per cent decline in new infections between 2000 and 2016, President of the General Assembly, Miroslav Lajčák, [emphasized](#) that “we need to be clear: we cannot afford to slow down. HIV is, still, a huge challenge.”

“This virus still has a destructive – and deadly – impact on people around the world,” he added.

Flagging that in 2016, one million people lost their lives to AIDS-related illnesses, and that only 53 per cent of people have access to antiretroviral therapy, he said “that is why we have committed to ending the epidemic of AIDS, by 2030.”

He suggested exploring further opportunities for action, such as the 26 September high-level meeting on TB.

“People infected with HIV are 20 to 30 times more likely to develop active tuberculosis,” he explained “Without proper treatment, nearly all HIV-positive people, with tuberculosis, will die,” stated Mr. Lajčák.

Finally, he drew attention to the context around HIV and AIDS and the need for universal healthcare.

“We are not on an even playing field,” he explained. “Universal healthcare can help to give everyone a chance. It can level the field.”

Healthcare is crucial to sustainable development, which is why it has its own goal: [SDG 3](#).

This will be on the General Assembly’s agenda, in 2019. And it could accelerate our drive, to eradicate AIDS, once and for all,” he said.

“Let’s speak up louder – in memory of those who have died, and in support of those who are living, with HIV and AIDS, today,” concluded the Assembly president.

[UN chief welcomes resolution to 27-year-old disagreement over renaming the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#)

The United Nations has welcomed Tuesday’s announcement by the leaders of

Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) that 27 years after the dispute began, they have reached a mutual agreement over a new name for the Republic.

Following the announcement by the two countries that the new name being envisaged is the Republic of North Macedonia, the UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) said in a statement released by his Spokesman that he commended the parties “for their determination to bring this long-standing dispute to an end, in a demonstration of leadership to the wider region and beyond.”

“He congratulates all who participated constructively in the efforts that led to the agreement,” said Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric, and paid tribute to his Personal Envoy, Matthew Nimetz, “who embodied the values of perseverance, patience and quiet diplomacy in facilitating this historic agreement over many years.”

Mr. Nimitz also congratulated the parties “for [reaching a successful conclusion](#) to the talks and for resolving the difference between them”.

Since FYROM declared its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, Greece has refused to recognise its constitutionally-chosen name, Macedonia, insisting that only the Greek northern region of the same name, should be called Macedonia. Greece has argued that the former Yugoslav republic’s use of the name was a challenge to Greek sovereignty.

Negotiations to resolve the name dispute began in 1993 and since 1999, have been led at the UN, by Mr. Nimetz.

“I have no doubt this agreement will lead to a period of enhanced relations between the two neighbouring countries and especially between their people”, he said.

“It has been an honour having the role of facilitator between the two parties and I want to pay tribute to the Secretary-General for his unwavering support and deep interest, and to other colleagues in the United Nations for their valuable contributions to the process”, he added.

The UN chief said it was now time for “all citizens in both countries to come together to move the process forward.”

He reiterated the continuing commitment of the UN to provide all necessary support, both through the involvement of Mr. Nimetz and “through the relevant UN agencies, funds and programmes.”

Mr. Guterres also said he was convinced that the resolution of the name issue, would have “positive repercussions” within Europe and hoped that other long running conflicts “may be inspired by this development to work towards negotiated settlements without further delay.”

Everyone has “a moral imperative” to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities, says UN chief

He was addressing a conference of signatories to the Convention at UN Headquarters in New York, describing it as one of the most widely-ratified international human rights treaties, which reaffirms that people with disabilities are entitled to the same treatment as everybody else.

“But signing and ratifying the Convention is not enough. Implementation is essential,” Mr. Guterres said. “Societies must be organized so that all people, including those with disabilities, can exercise their rights freely.”

The Secretary-General underscored that countries apply the Convention to their development policies, investments and legal systems, which is an important step “if we are to fulfil the central pledge of the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development: to leave no one behind.”

“We cannot afford to ignore or marginalize the contributions of 1.5 billion people,” he stated, pointing out that more had to be done for people with disabilities to fully participate in society.

People with disabilities still often face overt discrimination, stereotyping and lack of respect for their basic human rights – with women and girls disproportionately affected.

“Every minute, more than 30 women are seriously injured or disabled during childbirth,” elaborated the UN chief.

Moreover, women and girls with disabilities face multiple barriers to accessing education, health services and jobs.

“Without women’s empowerment and gender equality, millions of women will continue to suffer from double discrimination based on both their gender and their disability,” he added.

The Secretary-General spelled out the need for new approaches to work for and with people with disabilities, which include mainstreaming disability in national legislation and development strategies.

“It will also be crucial to continue and expand the work that United Nations agencies are doing to support Governments and develop their capacity on these issues,” he maintained, elaborating on the need to strengthen policy frameworks and laws on disability, in line with the Convention and the 2030 Agenda.

He concluded by noting that a comprehensive review would be looking at all aspects of how the Organization addresses disability, as well as informing a new UN Action Plan and an accountability framework “to help us aim higher and live up to our promises.”

Signing through an interpreter, Colin Allen, Chair of the international Disability Alliance, spotlighted the strength of working collectively to achieve true and meaningful change.

“For the people in this room, and for the more than one billion people we represent,” said Mr. Allen, “we are building a strong and solid platform that will propel us forward.”

Catalina Devandas Aguilar, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities noted that while progress has been made, it is not reaching everyone in the same way.

“There is a great demand for public interventions of better and higher quality,” she said, adding: “Only by working together will we fulfil our common goal of leaving no one behind.”

“Together, we can remove barriers and raise awareness, so that people with disabilities can play a full part in every sphere of society, around the world”, she said.