

South Sudan suffering on 'almost unimaginable scale', warns UN relief chief

People are suffering "on an almost unimaginable scale" in South Sudan, the United Nations emergency relief chief said on Monday, adding that he welcomed the announcement by the United States that it is to review the amount of assistance it provides to the war-torn country.

Speaking in Geneva, Mark Lowcock, who is also UN Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), said that five years of civil war had left 7.1 million people, or more than half the country's population, in need of humanitarian aid.

Repeated negotiations have broken down to resolve fighting between troops loyal to President Salva Kiir and his former deputy Riek Machar, including recent peace talks in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, held under the auspices of the African regional forum, [IGAD](#).

"Things are still getting worse", Mr. Lowcock told reporters in Geneva, highlighting "scorched earth tactics" by belligerents.

This had rendered formerly fertile areas of the country barren, amid murder, rape and other grave human rights violations, the UN official said.

He noted "another round of failed talks" in Ethiopia and declarations of ceasefires which were "a fiction because the fighting continues".

On the issue of international funding, Mr. Lowcock said that he believed that there was no question of cutting aid, although donors wanted to be sure that the funds were not "instrumentalized" as he put it, by the warring parties.

"I really welcome the announcement made by the White House a couple of weeks ago that the US is going to conduct a review of its assistance to South Sudan" – *Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock*

Foreign Governments, including the combined countries of the European Union, are also seeking to improve safety for humanitarian workers and get the "men with guns to behave differently", the UN official said, adding that despite the insecurity, aid workers still managed to reach "about 2 million people" in the last month.

Without this assistance, the situation "would be much worse", Mr. Lowcock said, adding that South Sudan remains "the most dangerous place to be an aid worker", having claimed the lives of 100 humanitarians since fighting began

in 2013.

While visiting South Sudan in recent weeks, the Emergency Relief Coordinator said that many high-level country representatives had told him that “things can’t go on like this”.

Above all, Mr. Lowcock noted, there needed to be a change “in the way that belligerents are behaving”, before adding “I really welcome the announcement made by the White House a couple of weeks ago that the US is going to conduct a review of its assistance to South Sudan”.

Asked which measures might encourage the warring parties to negotiate or at least curtail the destructive activities of armed groups, Mr. Lowcock noted that an arms embargo would be a matter for the UN Security Council, where he had been told “informally” that some members were considering it.

Some Governments also had mechanisms to investigate the private wealth of political appointees, the UN official continued, adding that visa bans and financial sanctions have been used to apply pressure on those suspected of using natural resources for personal gain.

Famine was declared briefly last year in Unity State where tens of thousands of civilians were under siege, Mr. Lowcock said, adding that humanitarians had managed to get aid to those who needed it.

The situation isn’t as dire as that yet, he added, but a lot of places are “on the cusp” of passing into severe vulnerability.

Outside South Sudan, refugees have fled settled in South Kordofan in neighbouring Sudan and to Kukum camp in north-west Kenya, and Mr. Lowcock appealed to the international community to help support these host countries “as they have their own problems to deal with”.

To date, the UN’s \$1.7 billion humanitarian response plan for South Sudan is less than a quarter funded.

[UN agency ready to play ‘essential role’ in verifying DPRK nuclear programme](#)

The International Atomic Energy Agency ([IAEA](#)) remains ready to play “[an essential role](#)” in verifying the status of North Korea’s nuclear programme as international talks aimed at denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula continue, the agency’s chief said on Monday.

Yukiya Amano, Director General of the UN agency, was addressing its Board of Governors meeting in Vienna.

“The Agency is closely following developments related to the nuclear programme of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. We continue to enhance our readiness to play an essential role in verifying the DPRK’s nuclear programme if a political agreement is reached among countries concerned,” he said.

In September last year, the IAEA established a team in its Department of Safeguards, to enhance its ability to monitor the country’s nuclear programme.

At the time, North Korea, officially known as DPRK, had just launched its sixth and largest nuclear test since its programme began in 2006.

Last month, the DPRK announced it had dismantled and closed its nuclear test site at Punggye-ri, a move that was [welcomed](#) by the UN Secretary-General.

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This followed an historic summit held in April between the country’s leader Kim Jong Un and his South Korean counterpart, Moon Jae-in, during which they signed a declaration covering several issues, including the goal of realizing the “complete denuclearization” of the Korean Peninsula.

In another first, the North Korean leader and United States President Donald Trump are due to meet in Singapore next week where the nuclear issue is expected to be on the agenda.

“The DPRK Team in the Safeguards Department and my Executive Group, both of which were formed last year, have intensified their efforts to ensure that the Agency will be ready to promptly undertake any activities that we may be requested to conduct, subject to authorization by the Board of Governors,” Mr. Amano said.

Turning to Iran, the IAEA chief reported that the agency continues to verify and monitor the country’s implementation of commitments under a 2015 agreement.

Known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the Iran nuclear deal provides the IAEA with [wider access to information](#) about the country’s nuclear programme.

The agreement includes an Additional Protocol that enables IAEA inspectors to access any location in Iran.

“The Agency has conducted complementary accesses under the Additional Protocol to all the sites and locations in Iran which we needed to visit,”

Mr. Amano stated.

“Timely and proactive cooperation by Iran in providing such access would facilitate implementation of the Additional Protocol and enhance confidence.”

He also noted that the United States, one of six countries party to the agreement, had announced its withdrawal from the JCPOA in May.

[UN agencies express outrage over killing of Palestinian volunteer medic in Gaza](#)

United Nations officials have expressed their outrage over Friday’s killing by Israeli security forces of a 21-year-old Palestinian volunteer medic who was helping the injured along the Gaza border.

“Healthcare workers must be allowed to perform their duties without fear of death or injury,” said the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, Jamie McGoldrick.

He added that it is difficult to see how the killing “squares with Israel’s obligation as occupying power to ensure the welfare of the population of Gaza” – the Palestinian enclave occupied by Israel.

According to media reports, Razan An Najjar, a member of the Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS), was hit by live ammunition fired by Israeli forces while trying, with other first responders, to reach those injured during Friday’s demonstrations against Israeli policies in Gaza, dubbed the ‘the Great March of Return’.

Ms. An Najjar was taken to the European Gaza Hospital after being reportedly shot in the chest, but died shortly afterwards. Three others in her team were also injured.

The protests, still ongoing, were initially organized to take place from 30 March to 15 May to mark “al-Nakba” or “the Catastrophe,” by which Palestinians remember their mass displacement during the 1948-1949 war.

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have marched along the border of the Gaza Strip – the Palestinian enclave occupied by Israel.

Fuelled by United States recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and the official opening of its embassy there on 14 May, the demonstrations peaked that day and clashes at the border fence resulted in the killing of at least 60 Palestinians by Israel security forces.

The latest incident comes on top of “an already-staggering number of attacks on healthcare personnel” reported since the end of March, said a statement released by UN agencies on Saturday; 245 health workers and 40 ambulance crews have been caught up in the attacks, according to data provided by the Palestinian Ministry of Health, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, PMRS and the Union of Health Work Committees.

Attacks on medical teams in Gaza not only risk the life and health of staff and patients, but also undermine the overall capacity of Gaza’s chronically underfunded health system.

“Such attacks on health care must not happen, and we need to enhance our efforts to ensure the protection of our frontline health workers. There are clear obligations to safeguard healthcare under international law and these must be respected,” said Gerald Rockenschaub, Head of the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) office in the occupied Palestinian territory, or oPt.

Under international human rights law, lethal force may only be used as a last resort when there is an imminent threat of death or serious injury.

“It is very difficult to see how Razan posed such a threat to heavily-armed, well-protected Israeli forces in defensive positions on the other side of the fence,” James Heenan, Head of Office, [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt).

“Reports indicate that Razan was assisting injured demonstrators and wearing her first responder clothing, clearly distinguishing her as a healthcare worker, even from a distance,” he added.

[Walk, cycle, dance and play – UN health agency recommends new action plan for good health](#)

One-in-five adults and 80 per cent of adolescents worldwide are not getting enough exercise, according to the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), which on Monday launched a new action plan to tackle the situation and promote good health.

“Being active is [critical for health](#). But in our modern world, this is becoming more and more of a challenge, largely because our cities and communities aren’t designed in the right ways,” said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General on Monday, launching the *WHO Global action plan on physical activity and health 2018-2030: More active people for a*

healthier world, alongside Portuguese Prime Minister, António Costa.

Girls, women, older adults, poorer people, people with disabilities, the chronically-ill, and indigenous people on the margins of society, have even fewer opportunities to be active.

“We need leaders at all levels to help people to take the healthier step. This works best at city level, where most responsibility lies for creating healthier spaces,” he added.

According to WHO, regular physical activity is key to preventing and treating heart disease, stroke, diabetes and other noncommunicable diseases, which are responsible for 71 per cent of all deaths globally, including some 15 million annually, for those aged 30 to 70.

The action plan maps out how countries can reduce physical inactivity in adults and adolescents by 15 per cent up to 2030, and recommends a set of 20 policy areas, which combined would improve opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to do more walking, cycling, dancing, sport and active recreation.

It also supports more training for healthcare workers and other professionals, stronger data systems and better use of digital technologies.

“You don’t need to be a professional athlete to choose to be active. Taking the stairs instead of the elevator makes a difference. Or walking or using the bike instead of driving to your neighborhood bakery,” Mr. Tedros stressed.

Viva a atividade física

WHO’s new advocacy campaign *Let’s Be Active: Everyone, Everywhere, Everyday*; promotes physical activity on a national level.

The new drive, launched at the Portuguese Football Association’s iconic Cidade do Futebol, aims to encourage governments and city authorities to help people to be more physically active and healthier.

In line with WHO’s drive to promote physical activity, Portugal launched its own national media campaign to promote physical health.

“The Portuguese Government is highly committed to implement a systemic approach to promote physical activity” said Mr. Costa, adding that he was honoured to host the launch of the and is honoured to receive the launch of the *Global Action Plan*.

'Favour dialogue' over violence, UN chief urges all parties following clashes in Mali's capital

The [United Nations Secretary-General](#) António Guterres called for “calm and restraint” on Saturday, following violent clashes between demonstrators and riot police in Mali's capital Bamako.

According to news reports, police used tear gas to break up opposition supporters who had planned to march through the capital, calling for more transparency, ahead of presidential elections due to take place next month.

The UN chief was in Mali earlier in the week for a two-day visit, to recognize the determination and sacrifice of [UN peacekeepers](#) in what is currently the most dangerous mission to serve as a 'blue helmet'.

In that light, Mr. Guterres said in a statement issued via his Spokesperson that he was encouraged “by the progress registered in the implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation. He wishes for this positive dynamic to continue with the holding of elections in a peaceful climate.”

The Secretary-General expressed regret at the fact that Mali's government had imposed a ban on demonstrations by opposition parties, stressing that “inclusive political dialogue” was essential, as was the “protection of fundamental human rights and freedom of expression to peaceful demonstrations, including in the context of the ongoing state of emergency.”

Mali declared a state of emergency in 2015 after a terrorist attack in the capital, and fighting between rival armed groups, government forces, and extremists that carried out a failed coup in 2012, have destabilized much of the north and east of the country.

Following his successful visit to Mali this week, which included a meeting with parties to the fragile ceasefire agreement signed three years ago, the UN chief said that the UN stood ready “to support a peaceful resolution of all the parties' grievances.”