

End 'cycle of violence' in Gaza, UN deputy chief tells forum on Palestine

The "cycle of violence" in Gaza serves no one and it must end, the United Nations deputy chief said on Thursday, calling on everyone with a stake in Middle East peace, to exercise utmost restraint to avoid further deaths, especially the lives of children.

Deputy Secretary-General, Amina Mohammed, speaking at the UN [Forum on the Question of Palestine](#) on behalf of [Secretary-General António Guterres](#), urged both Israeli forces – as well as organizers from Hamas, and other leaders of demonstrations against Israel's decade-long blockade of the Gaza Strip – to prevent all violent actions.

["Today is an occasion to reflect on the costs and consequences](#) of the 1948 War – which resulted in the mass displacement and dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes," said Ms. Mohammad, referring to what Palestinians call "Al Naqba", or catastrophe.

She said that apart from addressing the history of the decades-long conflict, it also provided an opportunity to look ahead at what must be done to cement a lasting peace.

"This year we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The principles and standards enshrined in the Universal Declaration should guide the search for a durable solution to the question of Palestine", said Ms. Mohammed, adding that a solution had to be found "that must be based on international law, the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians and Israelis, as well as dialogue for reconciliation and for accountability."

In her remarks, Ms. Mohammad also cautioned against the establishment and expansion of more Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, noting that it displaced more Palestinians and was a major impediment to talks towards a two-state solution.

"We must strive for a future where Israel and Palestine thrive as states in which all are equally respected, and where civil society is able to play its constructive role," she said.

"The UN will continue to support Israelis and Palestinians on the road to peace, by helping them to take the historic steps to achieve a solution of two states living side by side in peace and within secure and recognized borders with Jerusalem as the capital of both. Over the course of the next two days, I urge you all to reflect on how we can turn this vision into a reality," she said.

The two-day Forum marks the anniversary of the 1948 War and mass displacement of Palestinians, convened by the UN [Committee on the Exercise of the](#)

Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

It brings together Palestinian, Israeli and international experts, as well as representatives of the diplomatic community and civil society, to discuss how a lasting settlement can be brought about.

Celebrate love, strengthen partnerships to end AIDS epidemic by 2030 says UN agency

Marking the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, the United Nations is calling for strengthened partnerships to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people and their families.

“Stigma, discrimination and social and physical violence against sexual and gender minorities prevent them from accessing health services,” Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS ([UNAIDS](#)), said in a message for the Day, which goes by the acronym IDAHOT.

“[Everyone has the right to health](#), no matter their gender or sexual orientation,” he added.

The IDAHOT celebration of sexual and gender diversity, is commemorated globally each year on 17 May. This year’s theme is alliances for solidarity to bring respect for LGBTI people and their families

According to UNAIDS, men who have sex with men and transgender women are among the communities most affected by HIV worldwide.

More than 40 per cent of countries criminalize same-sex sexual relationships, driving gays and lesbians underground, and blocking access to health and social services, which leaves LGBTI people vulnerable to poor health and homelessness.

To end AIDS, it is essential to ensure that people can access HIV prevention technologies free from discrimination – including condoms, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), and quality HIV treatment and care.

[UN Women](#), the [UN Development Programme](#) and UNAIDS are working with the Global Network of People Living with HIV to end all forms of HIV-related stigma and discrimination.

Requiring support across the board, and civil society leadership, the initiative will contribute to achieving the UN Member States’ commitment to

end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

Increasing political commitment and investments for the health and well-being of some of the most vulnerable people in society, will help to ensure that no one is left behind: “We need zero discrimination for everyone, everywhere,” stressed Mr. Sidibé.

Emergency meeting called as Ebola moves to Congolese city – UN health agency

The World Health Organization (WHO) is convening an emergency meeting on Friday to “consider the international risks” of the latest outbreak of the deadly disease Ebola, which has now moved to an urban area of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

One new case of Ebola virus disease has been confirmed in Mbandaka, a city with a population of about 1.2 million, WHO confirmed on Thursday, raising fears that despite a rapid response by authorities, the outbreak has not been contained.

So far, 23 have reportedly died. Until Thursday, the more than 40 confirmed cases were all located in the area around Bikoro, close to the Congo River, and around 150 kilometres (about 95 miles) from the provincial capital Mbandaka, which is a busy port city.

[“This is a concerning development](#), but we now have better tools than ever before to combat Ebola,” said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of WHO.

“WHO and our partners are taking decisive action to stop further spread of the virus,” he added.

“The arrival of Ebola in an urban area is very concerning and [WHO and partners are working together to rapidly scale up](#) the search for all contacts of the confirmed case in the Mbandaka area,” WHO Regional Director for Africa, Matshidiso Moeti, said in a statement.

This is a concerning development, but we now have better tools than ever before to combat Ebola – *WHO Director-General Tedros*

The meeting of the Emergency Committee will decide whether to declare an official public health emergency, which would trigger more international

involvement and free up more resources to deal with the outbreak.

Apart from WHO and other UN agencies, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), as other humanitarian organizations, have teams on the ground, working to contain the outbreak.

Response scaled up

The UN health agency is deploying around 30 experts to conduct surveillance in Mbandaka and is working with the DRC's Ministry of Health advising communities on prevention, treatment and reporting of new cases.

WHO-partner, MSF, has also deployed its teams and is working with UN agencies to strengthen health capacity to treat Ebola patients.

Isolation zones have been set up in Mbandaka's main hospital, and in Bikoro. Special Ebola treatment centers are also being established in Mbandaka and Bikoro, which will have capacity to treat 20 patients each.

In the next few days, MSF plans delivery of several tons of supplies, including medical kits; protection and disinfection kits; logistic and hygiene kits; and palliative drugs to Mbandaka.

Ninth outbreak in the country

This is the ninth outbreak, since the discovery of the Ebola virus in the country in 1976.

The virus is endemic to DRC, and causes an acute, serious illness, which is often fatal if untreated. The virus is transmitted to human through contact with wild animals and can then be passed from person to person. Ebola is fatal in about 50 per cent of cases.

An outbreak in West Africa that began in 2014 left more than 11,000 dead across six countries, and was not declared officially over by WHO until the beginning of 2016.

[First symptoms](#) generally include the sudden onset of fever, fatigue, muscle pain, headache and sore throat. This is followed by vomiting, diarrhoea.

Obese people more likely to smoke, says new gene research: WHO

New research indicates that people who are genetically prone to being overweight have a higher risk of taking up smoking – and they are likely to

smoke more than average – UN scientists said on Wednesday.

According to Dr. Paul Brennan from [IARC](#), the International Agency for Research on Cancer, around 70 genes have been identified for the first time that could explain this behaviour. IARC is a [World Health Organization](#) ([WHO](#)) agency, mandated to conduct research on the causes of cancer, and its prevention.

The study, which is being published on Thursday in the *British Medical Journal*, and funded by Cancer Research UK, found that increased body mass index (BMI), body fat percentage and even waist circumference, were associated with “a higher risk of being a smoker, and with greater smoking intensity, measured by the number of cigarettes smoked per day”.

“Based on genetic markers of obesity, the study allows us to better understand the complex relationship between obesity and important smoking habits,” said Dr. Brennan, a genetic epidemiology expert with IARC, and one of the authors of the study.

He added that the study showing the relationship between body mass and smoking, also suggested that there was possibly a “common biological basis for addictive behaviours, such as nicotine addiction and higher energy intake”.

Dr. Brennan also noted that in understanding the link better, it could also be useful as a tool in helping people to stop smoking – a habit that kills more than 7 million people each year, according to WHO.

It is well established that smokers have a lower body weight on average than non-smokers, possibly due to reduced appetite, but that many gain weight after they stop smoking.

“However, among smokers, those who smoke more intensively, tend to weigh more,” said IARC.

IARC Director, Dr. Christopher Wild, said that “prevention of smoking is key to reducing the global burden of cancer and other chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes”.

He added that obesity was among the most important preventable causes of those chronic illnesses. “These new results provide intriguing insights into the potential benefits of jointly addressing these risk factors.”

[Leading Palestinian legislator calls](#)

for 'new international engagement' in two-state solution

Describing a viable two-state solution to end the Palestine-Israel conflict as "very much in doubt", a leading Palestinian legislator called on Wednesday for "new international engagement" to move the process forward.

In an interview with *UN News*, Hanan Ashrawi, an Executive Committee Member of the Palestine Liberation Organization, described the deaths and injuries of Palestinians at the Gaza border on Monday as a "massacre", adding that Palestinians everywhere were one people, who "share the same pain, the same sorrows, the same aspirations, the same hopes".

The veteran peace negotiator and legislator, is at UN Headquarters in New York, to take part in a forum organized by the [UN Committee](#) on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Following the United States decision to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem this week – and act which she described as "becoming complicit in the occupation" – she said Palestinians "want a new multilateral mechanism; we want a new international engagement."

She said that peace negotiations with Israel since the early 1990s, brokered by the US, had not worked: "The US certainly has joined Israel as a partner in crime. It has joined Israel in violating international law and the resolutions of the Security Council on Jerusalem and so on. So, what we need to do is to bypass these obstacles...and to find a sort of global forum for the solution," she said.

Asked if a two-state solution with both countries living side-by-side in peace, was still possible, Ms. Ashrawi said: "This is very much in doubt, it's very questionable. Unless there is the will to engage, to intervene effectively – not just to end settlement activities but to begin to dismantle settlements – Israel will have succeeded in super-imposing Greater Israel on all of historical Palestine."

Asked for her view on calls from senior UN officials for Hamas in Gaza to stop inciting any violence at the border, she said the militant group was being used as a "convenient scapegoat" to deflect blame and accountability away from Israel.

"It is not Hamas who is responsible for the killing fields that Israel has carried out in Gaza. The people who are on this march to return; these unarmed civilian protests against the moving of the American embassy – against the moving of American embassy...these are expressions of will by the Palestinian people, who are protesting, demonstrating on their own lands, she said, adding that "they are sending a message not just to Israel but to the rest of the world that we are a people who are alive and we want to live, and

we want our freedom and we want our rights. This is not a sort of incitement or instigation by Hamas.”