

Ukraine: 200,000 children forced to learn in bullet-riddled classrooms

Some 200,000 girls and boys in eastern Ukraine are commuting to schools whose classroom walls are often riddled with bullets, and playgrounds scattered with metal remnants of war.

That's according to the [United Nations Children's Fund](#), UNICEF, in a statement released on Friday.

"Children are learning in schools with [bullet holes in the walls](#) and sandbags in windows, bomb shelters in the basements and shrapnel in school yards," said UNICEF's Ukraine Representative, Giovanna Barberis.

"The education system in eastern Ukraine has been in the crossfire for more than four years. All sides of the conflict must respect international humanitarian law and ensure that schools are safe places for children to learn."

More than four years of conflict in eastern Ukraine between government forces and separatists has taken a devastating toll on the education system. At least 45 schools have been damaged or destroyed over the last 16 months; in addition to the more than 700 schools affected overall since the conflict began.

The children are extremely nervous of shelling and teachers try to calm them down, but it's hard for them – *Principal Elena Mihatskaya*

Many schools and kindergartens are located along both sides of eastern Ukraine's so-called "contact line" that divides government and non-government-controlled areas. This means that classrooms are often close to military bases and security check points, increasing the risk that they may step on unexploded weapons of war, or be caught in crossfire.

"The children are extremely nervous of shelling and teachers try to calm them down, but it's hard for them," said Principal Elena Mihatskaya, whose secondary school in the town of Krasnohorivka has been shut down since last May due to massive damage caused by a shell. "It's hard for kids to cope because they are nervous and stressed."

UNICEF helps provide psychosocial support and mine-risk education to hundreds of thousands of children, youth and caregivers. The agency also supports repairs to damaged schools and kindergartens and distributes vital education supplies such as learning kits, furniture sets and sports equipment.

This year, UNICEF has appealed for \$23.6 million to provide urgent humanitarian assistance to children and families affected by the conflict in

eastern Ukraine. To date, less than 15 per cent of this appeal has been met.

[‘Bad’ fats targeted in new global health guidelines](#)

People everywhere need to cut down on their consumption of artery-clogging fatty foods, the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) is urging, in a new report released on Friday.

The initiative is a bid to prevent some of the 17 million deaths caused every year by cardiovascular diseases, which have been linked to food containing saturated fats and trans-fats.

Saturated fats are commonly found in butter, salmon, egg yolks and cows’ milk.

WHO wants adults and children to reduce their intake of these fats to just 10 per cent of total daily energy needs.

And the UN health agency wants trans-fats – which are found in baked and fried foods and cooking oil – to account for just one per cent of daily calorie intake.

“Producers can use another fat with the same property and you can have your wonderful croissant that does not contain any trans-fats.” – *Dr. Francesco Branca, WHO*

The good news is that there are healthier alternatives to food laden with “bad” saturated and trans-fats which are often labelled as “hydrogenated”– an indication that hydrogen has been added, making them easier to use.

“If we really want to get rid of the dangers of the excess trans-fat then there must be a very strong, energetic action from governments to ensure that manufactured products do not use hydrogenated vegetable oil,” said Dr. Francesco Branca, WHO’s nutrition director.

“The removal of trans-fat which has been done in many countries is not even noticed by the consumer,” he added, “so the producers can use another fat with the same property and you can have your wonderful croissant that does not contain any trans-fats.”

Before WHO publishes its draft guidelines officially later this year, it intends to hold public consultations around the world to ensure that they best meet regional needs.

Dr Branca highlighted that since the UN agency first issued advice on saturated and trans-fats in 2002, there has been significant progress in raising awareness about the threat they pose – particularly in richer nations.

But although Western Europe has “almost eliminated” industrial trans-fat use today and Denmark has banned it altogether, Dr Branca cautioned that poorer regions faced major challenges in tackling the threat.

These include several countries in Eastern Europe, as well as India, Pakistan, Iran, many African states and Argentina.

In some cases Dr Branca warned that trans-fat levels in some popular street foods are as much as 200 times the recommended daily intake.

[Children's suffering worsening as violence escalates in Gaza – UNICEF](#)

Highlighting the devastating impact of the humanitarian crisis and increasing violence on children in Gaza, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has called on all parties with influence on the ground to ensure that children are protected.

“The escalating violence in Gaza has [exacerbated the suffering of children](#) whose lives have already been unbearably difficult for several years,” Geert Cappelaere, the Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa at UNICEF, said in a statement Friday.

Mr. Cappelaere underscored that in addition to the physical injuries, children are showing signs of severe distress and trauma.

“Yesterday, our UNICEF Special Representative visited a 14-year-old boy who suffered a gunshot wound, causing a severe injury close to his heart. He is now home recovering after being in hospital for two weeks. It is hard for him to be optimistic through the pain, but when he gets better, he wants to be a doctor, like the ones who helped him survive,” he said.

According to the UN agency, over the past five weeks, five children were killed and hundreds more injured in largely peaceful protests. In all, half of the region's children depend humanitarian assistance, and one in four needs psychosocial care.

In addition, power cuts and shortages in fuel in Gaza have disrupted water and sanitation services, with reports that nine out of 10 families do not have regular access to safe water. Medicines and health equipment are also in

short supply, straining an already fragile health system.

Against this dire background, Mr. Cappelaere reiterated the call on all parties to protect children and keep them out of harm's way.

"Children belong in schools, homes and playgrounds – they should never be targeted or encouraged to participate in violence."

[UN chief 'optimistic' over peace efforts to denuclearize Korean Peninsula](#)

The UN chief expressed optimism on Thursday that the full denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula could become a reality, following last week's historic joint declaration from the leaders of the north and south, which eased months of rising tension over North Korea's nuclear programme.

In an interview with the BBC's flagship morning radio show, the Today programme, during his current visit to London, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#), said that after talking to South Korea's President Moon Jae-in on Monday that "things are on track for a meaningful negotiation and I believe it's in everyone's interest."

The Republic of Korea's leader, met his counterpart in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Kim Jong Un, at a historic summit on the border between the two countries last Friday, in which they agreed to work towards a lasting peace and strengthen inter-Korean ties.

Mr. Guterres was also asked if he was worried that the United States is reportedly considering withdrawing from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), involving Iran and the five Permanent Members of the Security Council plus Germany and the European Union,

The JCPOA, signed in 2015, limits Iran nuclear development programme, in exchange for the lifting of sanctions, and the UN chief described it as "an important achievement".

"The JCPOA was an important diplomatic victory and I think it will be important to preserve it," he said. "But I also believe that there are areas in which it will be very important to have a meaning dialogue because I see the region in a very dangerous position."

"If one day there is a better agreement to replace it it's fine, but we should not scrap it unless we have a good alternative," said the Secretary-

General.

“I don’t see how Syria can be reconstructed with the support of the international community if there is no political solution in which all groups of Syrian society feel represented” – UN Secretary General António Guterres

On Syria, the UN chief said that there was a “risk of fragmentation” of the entire country after more than seven years of brutal civil conflict.

“I don’t think that anybody can win the war...On the other hand, I don’t see how Syria can be reconstructed with the support of the international community if there is no political solution in which all groups of Syrian society feel represented,” he said.

“We need to have a political solution that all Syrians feel comfortable with, and that requires a level of dialogue that until now has not been possible,” he said, adding that “we have not yet had the leverage to create the conditions for that to happen.”

He said that he had “not given up” on making warring parties in Syria accountable for their use of chemical weapons.

“I still believe that we need to insist, and we are looking for avenues that might allow, to create a mechanism of attribution agreed by the Security Council, that will be able to define who’s responsible for any chemical attack, creating the conditions for accountability.”

He added that “the re-establishment of a mechanism of accountability in Syria is very important and I will not give up on that.”

[‘Standing up for our right to truth,’ UN celebrates press freedom](#)

With journalism under increasing attack worldwide, top United Nations officials on Thursday joined a growing chorus of calls for the better protection of media workers.

Marking [World Press Freedom Day](#) via video message, UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) described “how journalists and media workers shine a light on local and global challenges and tell the stories that need to be told,” and said: “Their service to the public is invaluable.”

“Laws that protect independent journalism, freedom of expression and the

right to information need to be adopted, implemented and enforced. Crimes against journalists must be prosecuted," he stressed, calling on governments to strengthen press freedom, and to protect journalists in the vital work they do.

"Promoting a free press is standing up for our right to truth," he added.

Only 10 per cent of the 930 cases of killings of journalists between 2006-2016 have been officially resolved, according to the most recent [World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development Report](#), published by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and its partners.

During last year, 79 journalists were assassinated worldwide while going about their work.

Earlier this week, nine journalists were among those killed in a terrorist attack in Afghanistan. Following an initial terrorist blast in the capital Kabul, that killed many civilians, a second explosion targeted media workers arriving on the scene to cover the attack. In a separate incident on the same day, another Afghan journalist was killed.

This brings the total number of journalists murdered so far this year to 32 – with nearly eight months remaining.

UNESCO's chief, Audrey Azoulay, pledged – in her message for the Day – that her agency was "committed to defending the safety of journalists and fighting against impunity for crimes committed against them."

"The ideal of a State under the rule of law calls for well-informed citizens, transparent political decisions, public debates on topics of common interest and a plurality of viewpoints that shapes opinions and undermines official truths and dogmatism," she said. "This shaping and informative power, mainly falls to the press and the media in general, under all their guises and through various mediums."

Around the world, World Press Freedom Day, established by the UN General Assembly in 1993, is being observed to champion free and accurate reporting.

"We cannot become complacent to these kinds of attacks. They cannot become the new normal," Assembly President Miroslav Lajčák told an event held at UN Headquarters in New York.

This year's theme for the Day is "Keeping Power in Check: Media, Justice and The Rule of Law." It highlights the importance of having laws that safeguard press freedom, and gives special attention to the role of an independent judiciary to guarantee press freedom and prosecute crimes against journalists.

UNESCO has partnered with 40 news organizations to launch a campaign that encourages readers to look beyond their usual outlets, and actively engage with alternative news sources. The campaign slogan – "Read more. Listen more. Understand more. It all starts with a free press" – featured strongly during

the official global celebration of the Day, in the Ghanaian capital, Accra.

In Afghanistan, Tadamichi Yamamoto, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative, has this message to mark the day.

"The United Nations recognizes that Afghanistan is one of the most dangerous places for journalists to work," he said, "and we reiterate our determination to protect journalist safety and to fight against impunity."

In Somalia, UN Special Representative Michael Keating, commended the courage and dedication of the country's journalists who operate in one of the world's most dangerous environments for media workers.

"I salute the hundreds of Somali journalists who risk their lives on a regular basis to do their job," said Mr. Keating. "A truly free and independent news media is indispensable in all democratic societies, an essential means to hold the powerful to account."

He added that it was "an essential component for the media to do its job is ending the culture of impunity that, unfortunately, prevails for crimes committed against journalists."