

# Security Council urges conditions that allow safe return of Rohingya refugees

After seeing for themselves the conditions facing Rohingya refugees in the camps of southern Bangladesh as well as homes they fled in Myanmar, Security Council members called on Tuesday for them to be allowed a safe return.

Speaking to the press at the end of a four-day visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh, Council members highlighted the need to establish conditions within Myanmar that allow the “safe, voluntary and dignified return” of refugees as well as accountability for the human rights violations that prompted the exodus.

“I think it’s impossible not to be deeply moved by what we heard in Cox’s Bazar [southern Bangladesh] and particularly the scale of it,” Karen Pierce, the United Kingdom’s Ambassador to the UN, told reporters at a press conference in Nay Pyi Taw, the capital of Myanmar.

“One can tell stories and those stories are very moving but in order to have accountability you need a proper investigation with evidentiary standards.”

Ms. Pierce added that during the Council’s meeting with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the State Counsellor urged all concerned to produce evidence that would help the country undertake a proper investigation.

Also speaking at the press conference, Mansour Ayyad Al-Otaibi, the Permanent Representative of Kuwait to the UN, called for the full implementation of the agreement between the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh concerning the return of refugees.

“We saw that the Government of Myanmar took many steps to implement the agreement but I think much more needs to be done,” he said. “What we really want is to speed up the process of the return of refugees in a safe and voluntary and dignified manner,” he added.

Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, the Permanent Representative of Peru, reiterated the need to ensure refugees’ security and recalled previous statements made by the Council on the crisis.

“Basically the message that we conveyed was that it was very important to improve the security conditions of the return of the refugees,” he said, recalling the visit.

Joanna Wronecka, Poland’s ambassador to the UN – which holds the Presidency of the Security Council for the month of May – said that the visit was vital for the Council to gain a good understanding of the situation on the ground.

“I would like to pay tribute to my colleagues who prepared this visit, especially the previous Presidency, Peru, and Kuwait, which initiated our

preparation as well as the UK for a very substantial contribution to this visit," she said.

Security Council members also urged the international community to continue supporting the work being undertaken by the UN and humanitarian agencies in southern Bangladesh, on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of vulnerable refugees living there.

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## [Afghanistan: UN expert condemns killing of journalists as 'attack on right to know'](#)

A United Nations human rights expert on Tuesday strongly condemned the killing of nine journalists in Afghanistan who were among the victims of Monday's terrorist attack in the country's capital.

The condemnation came just in advance of [World Press Freedom Day](#), annually observed on 3 May.

According to figures released by the UN Security Council, at least 41 people were killed and 45 injured; including women, children and emergency responders, as well as media workers.

"Yesterday's attack, like all such attacks on journalists, is an attack on Afghanistan's [free press](#) and the public's right to know," said the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, [David Kaye](#), who called on the Government to bring the perpetrators to justice.

According to media reports, after an initial suicide attack, another suicide bomber targeted journalists who had arrived on the scene, to cover the event. The terrorist group ISIL – also known as Da'esh – reportedly claimed responsibility for the bombings.

"These attacks serve to remind those who glibly demonize the press that journalists serve a crucial function in societies: the illumination of all matters of public interest," Mr. Kaye said. "The legacy of those killed is their reminder that serving the public's right to know, can be dangerous and deserves all of our respect and support."

On Monday, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) and his Special Representative for Afghanistan, Tadamichi Yamamoto, condemned the attacks.

In a Press Statement on Tuesday, the Security Council condemned the bombings as "heinous and cowardly terrorist attacks."

“The members of the Security Council expressed their deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government of Afghanistan” and they wished a speedy and full recovery to the injured, added the statement.

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## [‘Sharp escalation’ in fighting across Myanmar’s Kachin state, warns rights expert](#)

Raising alarm over a “sharp” escalation in hostilities in Myanmar’s Kachin province, a United Nations human rights expert has called on all parties to ensure greater protection for civilians.

The military have reportedly carried out aerial bombing and used artillery and heavy weapons in civilian areas close to the border with China.

[“Innocent civilians are being killed and injured](#), and hundreds of families are now fleeing for their lives,” Yanghee Lee, the UN [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar](#), said on Tuesday.

“What we are seeing in Kachin state over the past few weeks is wholly unacceptable, and must stop immediately.”

According to UN reports, more than 5,000 civilians have been displaced from villages near the Chinese border in the last three weeks. Children, pregnant women, the elderly and people with disabilities are among those who have been displaced.

In a press statement, the UN rights expert reiterated that all parties to the conflict had to abide by international humanitarian law, and take precautions not to harm civilians.

“Civilians must never be subjected to violence during the course of conflict. All parties must take all necessary measures to ensure their safety and security,” she said.

### **Civilians reportedly trapped in village**

Ms. Lee also raised concern over reports that more than 100 civilians have been trapped in the village of Man Wai for the past three weeks, with inadequate access to food or medical supplies.

A food convoy, organized by the Myanmar Red Cross, was reportedly prevented from entering the village last week.

“All parties to the conflict must allow the passage of humanitarian assistance,” said Ms. Lee. “Any wilful impediment of relief supplies may amount to war crimes under international law.”

In March, as the world’s attention was focused on the situation in Rakhine state and the Rohingya refugee crisis, the Special Rapporteur had raised alarm over deteriorating situation in Kachin, Shan and other conflict affected areas of Myanmar.

“In Kachin state, where sporadic violence and intermittent killings have been the norm in recent years, there has been an increase in the frequency and intensity of clashes between the Tatmadaw [Myanmar’s armed forces] and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) since October 2017, resulting in deaths and the displacement of the civilian population,” Ms. Lee said in her [report](#) to the Human Rights Council.

UN Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation, without drawing any UN salary for their work.

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## [Iraqi political candidates have ‘real appetite’ to work together – UN official](#)

Politicians in Iraq are working constructively with each other ahead of this month’s parliamentary elections, a senior United Nations official said.

“Elections by their nature are adversarial,” Alice Walpole, one of the top officials at the UN mission in Iraq, told *UN News*. “One of the challenges in a place like Iraq is to avoid falling back to sectarian hostilities in the run-up to the elections.”

The more than 6,000 candidates vying for some 300 seats in the Parliament have been asked to sign and abide by a code of conduct. The two-page document stipulates that politicians and their parties will avoid hate speech and incitement to violence, and contribute to a peaceful atmosphere.

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The positive engagement among politicians is one of the key differences that

Ms. Walpole, a [Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Iraq](#), sees between now and when she first began working in Iraq in 2009.

"I detect among politicians a real appetite to move forward and to work for Iraq and to work constructively," she said.

The elections will be the first held since the Government declared victory over the Islamic State or Daesh. In a televised address in December, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced that more than three years of combat operations drove out the extremists from the territory they once held, and that Iraqi forces were in full control of the country's border.

The Government has focused on returning thousands of the two million people displaced since the start of the 2014 crisis back home before the polls.

This is particularly important, she noted, for all the people who lived under Daesh for a few years, whose voices were completely lost.

"I think it's really important to enfranchise them so that they get the chance now to say what they want, and people are very conscious that the Government they vote in now will shape the future of the country."

Ms. Walpole disagrees with those who say that holding elections in present-day Iraq is not possible and have called for a delay.

She points to an officially approved timeframe for the Parliament to end and a new one to begin: "It is possible to hold elections when you have a large proportion of your population displaced but you have to put other measures in place."

Those include reaching as many of the displaced Iraqis to encourage them to register to vote.

The voting group includes a high number of youth. Since the last elections in 2014, about four million young Iraqis reached the voting age.

Getting them registered and voting is one of the aims of the Deputy Special Representative and the UN mission in Iraq ([UNAMI](#)), which is providing technical advice to the Government and the Independent Electoral Commission overseeing the elections.

"I think if you encourage people to vote when they're young and they get into the habit of doing it, then they vote all through their lives," Ms. Walpole said.

She noted that the UN has a credibility and a legitimacy in Iraq that it does not enjoy in all countries.

"We're not doing the elections; the Electoral Commission is, and we're advising and supporting. But the fact that we're identified with the elections is giving them credibility and giving people confidence to engage."

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## Almost half-million affected as devastating floods inundate central Somalia – UN mission

United Nations agencies in Somalia have stepped up their response in the wake of devastating flash floods across large parts of the country that have impacted nearly 500,000 people and displaced close to 175,000 from their homes.

According to the UN [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO), current floods are some of the worst the region has seen in recent times and the current water level [exceeds](#) a 50-year return period in most locations.

[“Internally displaced people remain the most vulnerable to the impact of the flooding with many camps located in low-lying areas,”](#) Stéphane Dujarric, the spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, said at a regular news briefing in New York on Monday.

“Humanitarian partners on the ground have prioritized water, sanitation, hygiene, [health,] shelter and food response in their interventions.”

The heavy rains and flash floods come only months after a devastating drought left over six million people in need of humanitarian assistance last year.

### **Floods worse than anticipated**

The magnitude of rainfall has been much worse than anticipated, said Yngvil Foss, the deputy head at the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA) in Somalia.

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– *Yngvil Foss, UN aid official*

“Initially, [all humanitarian actors started responding with the means and assets they had available](#),” she said, noting that UN relief agencies have been able to raise some money over the past week to scale up critical interventions.

The UN [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), for instance, delivered 4.5 million metric tons of medicines and other medical supplies to Belet Weyne, the capital of the hard hit HirShabelle province, on 29 April.

Peacekeeping troops from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) also

evacuated more than 10,000 residents of Belet Weyne from inundated parts of the city as well as provided tarps and water to the flood affected.

### **More funding urgently needed**

However, [more funds are urgently needed](#) to cater to the increasing numbers of internally displaced persons.

Yesterday, Somalia's President, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmajo" visited flood affected areas and [appealed](#) to the international community for urgent humanitarian assistance.

Somalia's Humanitarian Response Plan for 2018, totalling \$1.5 billion (before the floods), is only 19 per cent funded. Launched by UN agencies and humanitarian partners, the Plan aim to reach some 5.4 million people with assistance.