

'Gaza is about to explode,' UN envoy warns Security Council

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is continuing with no prospects for a political resolution and "Gaza is about to explode," a senior United Nations official said Thursday, urging both sides to avoid further clashes along the enclave's border.

"Old wounds continue to bleed and deepen as we speak, [risking the outbreak of another war](#)," Nikolay Mladenov, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, told the Security Council during an open debate on the crises affecting the region.

While his briefing covered the situations in Syria, Yemen and Lebanon, it was largely focused on the unfolding crisis along the Gaza fence, which is at the tiny enclave's border with Israel.

For the last four weeks, tens of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza have converged on the fence to protest the long-standing blockade of the enclave.

The so-called 'Great March of Return' demonstrations are expected to continue and culminate around 15 May, and could spread to the West Bank and beyond, Mr. Mladenov said.

Since 30 March, during these demonstrations, 35 Palestinians have been killed and large numbers have been injured by Israeli security forces. No Israeli casualties have been reported, he added.

Israel has accused Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other militants of using the protests, women, children and the elderly, as a cover to infiltrate Israel and commit terrorist attacks.

The UN envoy urged Israel to calibrate its use of force and minimize the use of live fire, and called on Hamas – a Palestinian faction governing the enclave – and the leaders of the demonstrations to keep protestors away from the Gaza fence.

The combination of the security, development and humanitarian deterioration, coupled with the political impasse, makes Gaza "a powder keg," Mr. Mladenov said, calling for action to prevent another war in the enclave, which was shaken by seven weeks of clashes in the summer of 2014 between Israeli forces and Palestinian militants.

"People should not be destined to spend their lives surrounded by borders they are forbidden to cross, or waters they are forbidden to navigate," he said. "They should not be destined to live under the control of Hamas, which invests in militant activities at the expense of the population."

He urged stepped-up efforts to support the parties in advancing a sustainable

Israeli-Palestinian peace on the basis of the two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine co-existing peacefully as independent countries.

[Make every day a day for girls in ICT, says UN](#)

From Switzerland to Somalia girls are creating their own apps; they are programming the robots they build. On [Girls in Information and Communications Technologies](#) (ICT) Day, the United Nations is urging more girls to pursue careers in the fast-paced science and tech industry, generally regarded as a 'boys-only' club.

"Each time we introduce more women to the world of ICTs, not only do we take one more step towards achieving gender equality, but we accelerate socio-economic development for all," said Brahima Sanou, the Director of Telecommunication Development at the United Nations International Telecommunication Union ([ITU](#)).

"In many countries, we are starting to see International Girls in ICT Day initiatives moving from one-day events to sustained, on-going programmes to teach girls about ICTs throughout the year."

Held annually on the fourth Thursday in April, the International Day recognizes the importance of young women in science, technology, engineering and math, and to inform them of the vast potential in these fields.

Since its inception, over 300,000 girls and young women have taken part in more than 9,000 celebrations of International Day in 166 countries worldwide.

[Click here to see this year's commemorative events around the world.](#)

"The International Girls in ICT Day has become a global movement in which more girls and young women are learning about the wide range of fascinating opportunities ICT careers can offer," said Houlin Zhao, the Secretary-General of ITU.

"It is essential that the public and private sectors, as well as academia, and civil society seize the momentum created by the International Day to leapfrog the number of girls pursuing careers in technology."

Women's innovation, creativity take center stage on World Intellectual Property Day

The United Nations agency behind [World Intellectual Property Day](#) is calling for greater participation of women in the field of innovation and creativity to reap maximum benefits for society.

“At present, [humanity is not realizing its full innovative and creative potential](#),” said Francis Gurry, the Director-General of the UN World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

“I call on everyone, everywhere, to ensure that we each do everything in our power to increase the full participation of women in innovation and creativity.”

According to WIPO, the number of women taking up leadership and senior roles in science, technology, business and the arts has increased.

For instance, in 1995, only 17 percent of international patent applications filed under WIPO's Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) system included a woman among the inventors listed.

A deficit in the participation of women means that the current levels of innovation and creativity are suboptimal, said Mr. Gurry, adding “we are simply not reaping the full benefits that flow from innovation and creativity.”

Better use of the potential offered by the full breadth of the society – including women and men – will help humanity address the radical challenges it confronts such as climate change, clean energy, food security and health, stressed the WIPO chief.

Marked annually on 26 April, World Intellectual Property Day highlights the role of intellectual property rights, such as patents, trademarks, industrial designs, and copyright, in spurring innovation and creativity.

Established in 1967, WIPO is a [self-funding specialized UN agency](#) that works for the development of a balanced and effective international intellectual property system and to enable innovation and creativity for the benefit of all.

It currently has 191 member States and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.

FEATURE: Young Afghans call for new focus on 'local peace' in a city surrounded by war

Sitting for green tea with Habiba Gulustani and her fellow activists provides a lesson in peace, conflict and patience. With her anxious six-year-old daughter spinning on her lap, she has the added disquiet of knowing that her city – Kunduz – was overrun in 2015 and again briefly in 2016 by insurgents, who still encircle the city. The few small airplanes that land here make a classic “corkscrew” landing – from a high altitude and quickly looping down – as a special precaution against potential ground fire.

“In the last five years, our hopes for peace have been dashed by war,” said Habiba, 32. “Earlier we had some optimism because of the dialogue established between local elders and insurgents. But right now, there is less talk of peace and not nearly enough security for making peace.”

Even with that, Habiba and a group of fellow activists in Kunduz say they are willing to continue to work for peace at a local level in a city often described by residents as a “Mini-Afghanistan” because of its diverse ethnic mix of Pashtun, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Hazara, Arab, Uzbek, and Turkmen, among others. It is a city today that is at the centre of an incessant war, but one that is collectively searching for peace on every street corner.

In February, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani made an unprecedented and direct offer of peace talks with the largest anti-government force, the Taliban, who ruled the country until 2001. The offer – put forth at the “Kabul Process II” conference and discussed further by regional and international parties in Tashkent – raised hopes that peace has become not only a global concern, but also a top national priority, particularly in regions that have experienced the brunt of the conflict.

Peace activists and common citizens in Kunduz city, however, see the nation’s hopes for peace less on a national level and more through a local prism, including through their own steady efforts to reconcile and make peace from day to day.



UNAMA/PS

Habiba Gulustani and her daughter are anxious for peace.

Habiba recently spent several weeks with her group “Equality for Peace and Democracy,” interviewing “reconciled insurgents” who took up past offers to drop their armed struggle and return to their families and government-controlled territory.

“Local peace for them is essential, but I must say that most of the families we spoke to this past year, including to former insurgents, remain disappointed by the process thus far. They require more help with transitioning and also need to know they are safe from reprisals after they turn in their arms.”

For Habiba, the interviews she conducted highlighted the longer-term reconciliation needs that will have to be addressed as an Afghan peace deal with international backing takes shape. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)) has advocated for peace and reconciliation through events and media forums, including in Kunduz. More recently, President Ghani welcomed the UN role in future peace efforts, and 2018 is a year flush with fresh initiatives for peace.

In the last five years, our hopes for peace have been dashed by war – *Habiba Gulustani*

Residents here in Kunduz distinguish between “political peace,” which they see as a national priority, and a “social peace,” on a local level, which can address issues like women’s participation, long-term justice, and broader

reunification efforts after years of conflict.

“Seven years ago, when I first took a seat on the provincial peace committee, we worked on harmonizing peace on our own, and there wasn’t much international interest at all,” said Wahidullah Rahmani, 32, an activist, who this year launched a new peace initiative called the Kunduz Rescue Movement.

“During my work with the provincial peace committee, we helped take 500 fighters off the battlefield, but the whole effort fell apart over time. Our overall security in Kunduz has suffered as fighters have returned to the battle. Because Kunduz has been at the centre of the struggle, we fear that – if work for peace is not done now – we’ll be facing a much greater conflict in a year or two.”

Outside the city centre the conflict grinds on: Insurgents sustain themselves by taxing electricity lines and taking a cut from civil servant salaries, according to residents and local officials.

The Kunduz Rescue Movement is concentrating its efforts now on work that needs to be done to secure a lasting peace. “We want security improvements but also development, including new links to the outside world – as in a new airport. Peace will be a ‘local reality’ when we help to reduce the distance between people and the government. We can do this on our own but we also want and need more international support.”



UNAMA/PS

Young activist Zabiulla Majidi talks about the prospects for peace in Afghanistan.

The running conflict and constant uncertainty about the future has led to growing social problems, including a rash of drug addiction among the city's youth, according to locals.

"For the last three years we have lived under the constant fear that the city's defenses will collapse again," said Zabihulla Majidi, who advocates for peace along with Mr. Rahmani. "Recently, the situation has improved a bit, but there are not many new jobs, and young people are confused about their future and they are longing for peace."

As Habiba holds her daughter, she nods in agreement. Many young men in the region have tried to avoid the inevitability of fighting by fleeing as refugees through expensive and perilous human smuggling rackets. For women, such an escape from the realities of war is rarely an option.

"For the most part, women and girls don't have the possibility to leave – and that is why we are seeking a greater role in the peace effort."

UNAMA has a mandate to support the Government of Afghanistan and its citizens in a shared goal of becoming a stable, open, and peaceful nation. This feature piece is meant to tell a human interest story related to how Afghanistan and the UN are working together to overcome the many challenges to achieving this goal.

[Visiting Ethiopia, UN human rights chief urges new Government to 'keep positive momentum going'](#)

The United Nations human rights chief on Thursday expressed hope that Ethiopia continues its economic development where human rights are respected and people can freely speak their minds about public policies.

"We all want to see an Ethiopia with continuous economic development where all people benefit, and where people express their views on public policies, unafraid," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein at the end of his official visit to Ethiopia.

His visit followed the country's recent transition of power from the Government led by Hailemariam Desalegn, who abruptly resigned as prime minister in March, to the new one led by Abiy Ahmed.

A country with one of the fastest-growing economies in world, Ethiopia has also been riven by human rights violations and oppression on protests by those demanding equality.

"Moments of transition are rarely ever smooth. Ethiopia has struggled with a heavy history, but it has the wisdom of a tolerant, vibrant, youthful population to harness," said Mr. Zeid, encouraging the authorities to keep the positive momentum going and to keep translating the inspiring words in the Prime Minister's inaugural address into action.

Mr. Zeid was referring to the Prime Minister's recognition that there is a "need to address existing inequities that led to recent unrest," that "democracy cannot be realised in the absence of rights – be it civil or economic rights" and that the "right of people to express opinions, rights of people to organise themselves and engage in effective dialogue and participate in the governance system is inherent in our humanity...not for any government to bestow...as it sees fit."

The UN rights chief also welcomed the release of a large number of people, including bloggers, political opponents and others who had been detained in relation to their participation in protests and their criticism of the Government.

"There was tremendous hope, but also anxiety," he said, citing the words of a former political detainee, who said: "we have repeatedly been victims of broken promises."

In this 70th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, when too many leaders risk reversing hard-won human rights gains, we look to Ethiopia to continue to give cause for optimism and hope – *UN rights chief*

During a visit to the Oromia region, Mr. Zeid met with the regional authorities and the traditional leaders, known as the Aba Gadas, who he said spoke about how they will continue to push for the truth to be told about what has happened over the past few years, including deaths during protests.

"They demanded investigations and accountability for excessive use of force by the authorities. They expressed their desire for justice and human rights for all Ethiopians and for their voices to be heard without fear of reprisal," Mr. Zeid said.

On Wednesday, the UN Human Rights Office for East Africa and the Ethiopian Government signed an agreement to strengthen the Office's ability to do human rights work in the country and the region.

The Office has already offered its assistance in revising the charities and societies proclamation, the anti-terrorism legislation and the mass media laws.

"In this 70th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, when too many leaders risk reversing hard-won human rights gains, we look to Ethiopia to continue to give cause for optimism and hope," Mr. Zeid said.