

Security Council holds emergency meeting on Syria airstrikes

In an address to an emergency meeting of the Security Council on Saturday, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres cautioned against the crisis in Syria ["spiraling out of control."](#)

The meeting was held following overnight airstrikes in Syria launched by the United States, with support from France and the United Kingdom, which targeted installations connected to the country's chemical weapons capabilities.

In a televised address on Friday, US President Donald Trump announced the airstrikes, which were in response to last week's suspected chemical attack in the Syrian city of Douma.

They were reportedly limited to three military locations, but Mr Guterres stated the UN is unable to verify this information or if there were any casualties.

"As Secretary-General of the United Nations, it is my duty to remind Member States that there is an obligation, particularly when dealing with matters of peace and security, to act consistently with the Charter of the United Nations and with international law in general," he told the Council, echoing a statement issued in the wake of the airstrikes.

The UN chief called on the 15 ambassadors to unite and exercise their collective role in maintaining international peace and security.

"I urge all Member States to show restraint in these dangerous circumstances and to avoid any acts that could escalate matters and worsen the suffering of the Syrian people," he further stated.

"As I did yesterday, I stress the need to avoid the situation from spiraling out of control."

Mr. Guterres called the Syrian crisis, now in its eighth year, "the most serious threat to international peace and security."

"In Syria, we see confrontations and proxy wars involving several national armies, a number of armed opposition groups, many national and international militia, foreign fighters from everywhere in the world, and various terrorist organizations," he said.

The Secretary-General reiterated that there is no military solution to the crisis, only a political one.

—More to follow—

UN chief warns against escalation over Syria

António Guterres made the appeal late on Friday evening just hours after the United States, France and Britain launched air strikes targeting sites associated with the country's chemical weapons capabilities.

"There's an obligation, particularly when dealing with matters of peace and security, to act consistently with the Charter of the United Nations and with international law in general. The [UN Charter](#) is very clear on these issues," Mr Guterres said in a statement issued by his spokesperson.

"The Security Council has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. I call on the members of the Security Council to unite and exercise that responsibility. I urge all Member States to show restraint in these dangerous circumstances and to avoid any acts that could escalate the situation and worsen the suffering of the Syrian people."

The joint operation by the US and its allies was in response to a suspected chemical attack in the city of Douma last week.

UN partner the [Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons \(OPCW\)](#) has deployed a fact-finding mission to the area.

Mr. Guterres deplored the use of chemical weapons, which he described as "abhorrent."

Earlier on Friday, the Secretary-General had called on the [Security Council](#) to create an independent body to determine who had used chemical weapons in Syria.

Last October, the Council failed to renew the mandate of a UN-OPCW body, known as the Joint Inspection Mechanism, which was established three years ago.

"I have repeatedly expressed my deep disappointment that the Security Council failed to agree on a dedicated mechanism for effective accountability for the use of chemical weapons in Syria," his statement said.

"I urge the Security Council to assume its responsibilities and fill this gap."

UN envoy tells Somali refugees in Kenya 'things are gradually getting better' back home

Meeting residents of the world's largest camp for Somali refugees – sprawling Dadaab, located in north-eastern Kenya – the top United Nations official for Somalia expressed his solidarity with their situation and highlighted the gradual progress made in their home country.

“In my opinion – as the mother of a family that is about to return just told me – things are gradually [getting better](#) in Somalia,” the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, Michael Keating, said Thursday at the end of his visit to the refugee complex.

“There is now a stronger State, a federal structure, there are big efforts to try and improve security – yes, Al-Shabaab remains a potent threat – but economic activity is picking up and things are, in a non-linear way, getting better,” he added.

He stressed that returns are voluntary, but sometimes the news emphasizes the negative, including stories about violence and drought.

Dadaab currently has a population of 226,472 registered refugees and asylum seekers. Somalis account for some 96 per cent of the residents of the four camps that make up the complex.

The first camp was established in 1991, when refugees fleeing the civil war in Somalia started to cross the border into neighbouring Kenya. A second influx occurred in 2011, when some 130,000 refugees arrived, fleeing drought and famine in southern Somalia.

While more than 80 per cent of the people who have returned to Somalia are from that second group, Mr. Keating said that some have been at the camp for 27 years, some of them second- and even third-generation refugees.



UN Photo

The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, Michael Keating interacts with refugees outside their houses at the IFO camp in Dadaab, located in Kenya, on 12 April 2018.

"Their links with extended family and communities are much weaker, and so it's a much harder decision for them to leave the relative security of a refugee camp," he said.

Mr. Keating, who also heads up the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), emphasized that his visit was a two-way exchange, and that what he heard was useful for his work and engagement with authorities in Somalia.

While many believed that things are slowly improving back home, "they're still worried about security, job opportunities and education," he said of the feelings of some of the people he had met.

"Like parents everywhere, those I met want the best possible education for their children – and they just don't think that's available inside Somalia. Some of the students I met said the same," Mr. Keating said.

"It's not my job to lecture refugees – I'm here more to listen to them and then take their messages back and factor them in, in terms of how we think about moving forward in Somalia," he stressed.

Winnie Mandela left an 'indelible mark

on the history of the 20th century,' says UN chief

"She was an international symbol of resistance who left an indelible mark on the history of the 20th century," he added.

Mr. Guterres said the outpouring of condolences since her passing shows what an enormous impact Ms. Mandela had not only on the people of South Africa and on the African continent, but for millions around the world.

"Faced with the most heinous of racist and discriminatory regimes, she helped lead the way in showing what it takes to overcome such tyranny – strength, defiance and courage," he said.

The UN chief outlined her personal sacrifices, such as enduring harassment, torture and imprisonment, while noting that her resistance inspired others to keep hope alive through the struggle's darkest periods.

"We are aware that the road before us is uphill, but we shall fight to the bitter end for justice," Mr. Guterres said, quoting Ms. Mandela's remarks following the Soweto uprising and student demonstrations in the mid 1970s.

Noting that while all her actions could not be condoned, the Secretary-General stressed Ms. Madikizela-Mandela's dedication as a strong, fearless woman, who "had to fight patriarchy's definitions of womanhood."

"The combination of patriarchy and racism together meant that black women confronted enormous obstacles from the cradle to the grave – making her own achievements all the more exceptional," he stressed.

In the decades-long fight against apartheid, Mr. Guterres said that the UN stood with Ms. Madikizela-Mandela and South Africa, as they faced unrelenting racism and discrimination.

"Today, as we remember her," he said, "the United Nations reaffirms its commitment to the ideals of equality, justice and humanity for all."

Miroslav Lajčák, President of the UN General Assembly, remarked that Ms. Madikizela-Mandela was willing to sacrifice everything to change the world around her.

"And, we owe [a great debt](#), to people like this," he said. "Their sacrifices benefit all of those who come after them. And [...] change the course of history."

Mr. Lajčák elaborated that in standing up to the political and social structures of her own country, she met strong resistance.

"She was taken away from her children. She was imprisoned. She was tortured," he maintained. "Yet, she continued to demand an end to injustice. And she

inspired many others to do the same – both within and outside the borders of South Africa.”

By refusing to accept the limits of patriarchy, Ms. Madikizela-Mandela also changed the role of women. Her activism led to women’s rights becoming enshrined in South Africa’s new constitution and also ensuring that the reconciliation process that followed was shaped by women.

“And, I believe there were ripple effects, on the international stage,” he argued, citing strengthened women’s roles in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes.

“Perhaps this is not something we immediately think of, when we pay tribute to Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. But her contribution cannot be overlooked,” he said.

[World ‘must nurture the courage to care – and the resolve to act,’ says UN chief, reflecting on 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda](#)

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on Friday urged the world to reflect on the suffering of those who perished, as well as survived, the Rwandan genocide and unite in renewing the resolve to prevent such atrocities from ever happening again.

Speaking at an event commemorating the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, he also expressed that reconciliation is possible, even after a tragedy of such monumental proportions.

“Rwanda has learned from the events of 1994. [So must the international community,](#)” said the Secretary-General.

In his remarks, Mr. Guterres also voiced concern over the rise of racism, hate speech and xenophobia around the world, such as the violence against the Rohingya community in Myanmar, unimaginable suffering in Syria, and the humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

“Today, people are being killed, displaced and abused in many parts of the world,” he noted, underscoring that States must uphold their fundamental responsibility to protect their people.

In parallel, preventing genocide, crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international law is a shared responsibility, he added.

“It is a core duty of the United Nations [and] our Human Rights Up Front strategy and several UN mechanisms aim to do just that – protect people’s lives and sound an early warning before abuses turn into atrocities,” said Mr. Guterres, urging countries to pay heed to the warnings and follow-up with preventative actions to save lives.



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Secretary-General António Guterres (centre) at the General Assembly event commemorating the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda.

Miroslav Lajčák, President of the General Assembly said: “There are many things to say today. But, I want to start with the simplest, and hardest, message of all. Which is, that we failed. We. Failed. We failed Rwanda. We failed to keep our promises. And, simply, we failed to do our jobs.”

“The United Nations cannot run from this. [We must face it – head-on](#),” he continued, stressing that not only do must the international community focus more on people, it must also work to prevent their suffering.

“This means stronger early warning systems. It means better mechanisms to flag – and respond to – early indicators of genocide, including human rights violations. And it means jumping into action – much sooner, and much faster, than we have in the past.”

Estimates of the number of people killed vary from 800,000 to more than one million. The latest General Assembly resolution designating 7 April as the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda cited more than a million people killed during the genocide, including Hutu and others who opposed it.

Also participating in today's commemoration were Issa Konfourou, Permanent Representative of Mali to the UN, in his capacity as Chair of the African Group; Consolee Nishimwe, author of 'Tested to the Limit: A Genocide Survivor's Story of Pain, Resilience and Hope'; and Valentine Rugwabiza, Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the UN. The event was moderated by Alison Smale, UN Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications.