

UN rights experts urge France to provide essential services to migrants, asylum seekers

A group of United Nations human rights experts have called on the French Government to urgently provide water and sanitation services as well as emergency shelters for migrants and asylum seekers living in “inhumane situation” in areas along the country’s northern coast.

According to estimates, over 1,250 migrants and asylum-seekers are living in Calais, Grande-Synthe, Tatinghem, Dieppe and other sites along the coast without adequate shelter and access to drinking water, toilets or washing facilities.

“Migrants and asylum-seekers along the northern French coast [...] are facing an inhumane situation, with some living in tents without toilets and washing themselves in polluted rivers or lakes,” said Léo Heller, the UN [Special Rapporteur on the human rights to water and sanitation](#), in a news release on Wednesday.

“Some efforts have been made, but not enough,” he added.

Since last year, the Government has taken temporary steps to provide these services for some people, including contracting a local organization to provide water and shower facilities. It is also hosting up to 200 migrants at a sports centre in Grande-Synthe.

“[I am concerned that for every step forward, two steps are taken back,](#)” stated Mr. Heller, noting that the situation is emblematic of the need for much more attention from national and international authorities on this issue.

The experts also underscored that in the absence of valid alternatives in the provision of adequate housing, including in the Calais area, dismantling the camps was not a long-term solution.

“We are concerned about increasingly regressive migration policies and the inhumane and substandard conditions suffered by migrants,” said Felipe González Morales, the UN [Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants](#).

“Migrants, regardless of their status, are entitled to human rights without discrimination, including access to adequate housing, education, healthcare, water and sanitation as well as access to justice and remedies. By depriving them of their rights or making access increasingly difficult, France is violating its international human rights obligations,” he added.

In addition, the experts also voiced concern over harassment and intimidation of volunteers and members of non-governmental organizations providing

humanitarian aid to migrants and called on France to fulfil its obligations under international human rights law and promote the work of human rights defenders.

The UN rights expert making the call also included Michel Forst, the UN [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders](#).

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. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

[Mine action is 'concrete step towards peace,' says UN chief on International Mine Awareness Day](#)

On the day set aside to raise awareness about the threat of mines, unexploded grenades and other munitions that impede the return to normal life after conflict, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has urged Governments to provide political and financial support to keep up vital [mine action](#) work wherever it is needed.

“An unprecedented volume of landmines and unexploded weapons contaminates rural and urban war zones, maiming and [killing innocent civilians](#) long after conflict has ended,” Mr. Guterres said in his message on International [Mine Awareness Day](#), marked annually on 4 April.

Noting that roads cleared of explosive devices enable peacekeepers to patrol and protect civilians, he said: “Mine action is vital.”

“And when fields are cleared and schools and hospitals are made safe, normal life can resume,” he added.

According to the UN Mine Action Service, or [UNMAS](#), after nearly two decades of steadily diminishing casualty rates, the total number of people killed or injured by landmines and other explosive hazards in recent and current intense conflicts has leapt to its highest since 1999; the human suffering caused by mines, explosive remnants of war and other explosive hazards, including roadside bombs or booby traps, is devastating.

Mine action, including clearance, risk education and assistance to victims is critical for advancing protection, peace and development.

“In our turbulent world, mine action is a concrete step towards peace,”

stated the Secretary-General.

UNMAS says that Mine action entails more than removing landmines from the ground; it includes five types of actions:

- [Clearance](#): Removing and destroying landmines and marking/fencing off contaminated areas
- [Education](#): Helping people understand risks they face, learn how to stay out of harm's way
- [Victim Assistance](#): Providing medical assistance and rehabilitation services to victims
- [Advocacy](#): Advocating for a world free from the threat of landmines
- [Stockpile destruction](#): Helping countries destroy their stockpiles

'Equal opportunity killers'

Most places affected by armed conflicts are contaminated by a variety of explosive hazards, said Daniel Craig, the UN Global Advocate for the Elimination of Mines and Explosive Hazards.

Whether landmines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), artillery shells or cluster bombs, he said in his message on the Day: "They are equal opportunity killers."

"When triggered, they kill indiscriminately. Soldier or civilian. Male or female. Old or young," he continued, explaining that over time they can more and more easily be detonated to the point when "they can easily be triggered by a child jumping a rope."

Mr. Craig, best known for his role as '007' in the *James Bond* films, outlined how mines curtail freedom – the freedom to play, collect food and water, farm and even vote.

"Roadside bombs against United Nations personnel and humanitarian workers prevent them from accessing and helping those in need," he stressed, stating: "We the peoples of the United Nations must join forces to defeat these deadly devices and win the fight against fear and inhumane suffering."

"Join me. Join us. Let's win," said Mr. Craig.

Mine action: protection, peace and development

A series of events marking the Day began on Tuesday with documentarians who have filmed in Iraq and Afghanistan for UNMAS participating in a Facebook Live under the headline: "UNMAS Through the Lens."

On Wednesday at UN Headquarters in New York, an [event](#) hosted by Germany and UNMAS and based on the theme of this year's International Day, 'Mine Action: Advancing Protection, Peace and Development,' will focus on how mine action protects civilians and peacekeepers, and contributes to sustaining peace and development.

A live demonstration and discussion on the technical aspects and impacts of

IEDs will wrap up the commemoration on Thursday, 5 April.

[‘Blue helmet’ killed in Central African Republic; UN mission condemns attack](#)

One United Nations peacekeeper was killed and 11 others were wounded early Tuesday morning when the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic ([MINUSCA](#)) was attacked by rebel fighters.

“The Secretary-General extends his condolences to the family of the fallen peacekeeper and wishes a speedy recovery to the injured,” Stéphane Dujarric, spokesperson for the Secretary-General, told reporters at the regular press briefing in New York.

The temporary MINUSCA base in [Tagbara](#), a village 60km north-east of Bambari in Ouaka Prefecture, was violently attacked by anti-Balaka fighters. After several hours of exchanging gunfire, one blue helmet was killed and 11 others injured. More than 22 anti-Balaka attackers were killed, according to the UN.

In response to the attack, MINUSCA evacuated the wounded and the slain peacekeeper, and deployed reinforcements to Tagbara. Later that morning, they also discovered the bodies of 13 men, four women and four children near a church.

The evening before, MINUSCA peacefully recovered and sheltered 13 women, seven men and three children after the temporary Tagbara base was informed that ex-Seleka Unité pour la Centrafrique (UPC) had detained the 23 people.

The Mission also reported that in a joint operation with the Central African armed forces on Saturday, 15 people who had been taken hostage by the Lord’s Resistance Army were rescued.

“The UN Mission strongly condemns all of these events,” MINUSCA said.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, plunged the country of 4.5 million people into civil conflict in 2013.

UN eyes transition of Haiti role from peacekeeping to development

The United Nations has already started to prepare for a post-peacekeeping presence in Haiti, a senior UN official said Tuesday, stressing there are many reasons to be optimistic that the country's progress towards stability is now irreversible.

"While achieving results should remain our common priority, we have already started to prepare for a transition to a non-peacekeeping presence, based on lessons learned in Haiti and in other contexts," the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, told the Security Council.

He said that in the coming months, his office will provide progress assessments to allow the 15-member body to take well-informed decisions for the drawdown and eventual withdrawal of the UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti ([MINUJUSTH](#)).

Established in October last year, MINUJUSTH replaced UN Stabilization Mission, which operated in the tiny island nation for 13 years.

Much smaller than its predecessor, which had more than 4,000 military and police personnel, MINUJUSTH assists Haiti to further develop national police, strengthen rule of law institutions and promote and protect human rights.

While the Security Council is expected to renew MINUJUSTH, whose initial mandate expires on 15 April 2018, Mr. Lacroix said the UN is determined to ensure it be the last peacekeeping operation deployed to Haiti.

Last month, UN released a strategic assessment of MINUJUSTH, including 11 benchmarks for a smooth transition to a non-peacekeeping presence by the last quarter of 2019.

"Haiti has come a long way to achieve the relative political and security stability it is now enjoying, but persistent economic uncertainties, which can result in social exclusion, particularly of youth and the most vulnerable, may undermine this progress," said Mr. Lacroix.

In mid March, he visited Haiti for the first time since [taking office](#) a year ago.

He said that MINUJUSTH is fully operational and actively implementing its mandate.

For instance, the Mission has co-located 135 individual police officers with the Haitian National Police (HNP) in each of Haiti's 10 departments, and it is dedicated to helping curb prolonged pretrial detention and prison overcrowding through on-site monitoring.

The weaknesses of the rule of law institutions continue to generate multiple human rights challenges and encourage a culture of impunity, he said, noting that priorities in this domain include the need to strengthen national human rights institutions.

Acknowledging the relationship between the UN peacekeeping mission and the Government of Haiti could have been smoother, he welcomed the most recent announcement by the country's President of his priorities on reform, including the strengthening of the justice system and national police, the fight against impunity and prolonged pre-trial detention, the fight against and prevention of corruption, the establishment of the Permanent Electoral Council, and the launching of a national dialogue.



UN/MINUSTAH

Thanks to a water supply system funded by MINUSTAH, 18,000 people are now able to collect clean water in the remote neighbourhood of Los Palis, commune of Hinche, Haiti., by UN/MINUSTAH

[Donors pledge \\$2 billion to scale up aid delivery in Yemen; UN chief urges unrestricted access to make sure it](#)

reaches people in need

An appeal that raised some \$2 billion to help millions of people in Yemen was a “remarkable success of international solidarity” for the country’s war-weary people, but aid alone will not provide a solution to the conflict, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Tuesday.

Speaking to reporters in Geneva after opening a [pledging conference for Yemen](#), Mr. Guterres [said](#) that [more than \\$2 billion](#) had been promised by Member States before the end of the event.

Above all, the UN chief said, “we need a serious political process to lead to a political solution because there was never a humanitarian solution for any humanitarian crisis. The solution has always been political and in Yemen what we need is a political solution for these pledging conferences not to be repeated in the future.”

The Secretary-General insisted that while humanitarian resources are very important, they are not enough; it was essential, he said, that they reach the people in need. “And for that, we need unrestricted access into Yemen; we need unrestricted access everywhere inside [the country].”

This call was also made by UN aid chief Mark Lowcock, who [said](#) during the event: “We need better access across the country. We want to see Sana’a airport reopen to commercial flights, notably for humanitarian cases.”

The event was co-chaired by the UN and the governments of Sweden and Switzerland. [Pledges](#) were made by 40 Member States and organizations, including the Central Emergency Response Fund ([CERF](#)), for humanitarian action in Yemen in 2018.

International pledges for nearly \$2 billion represent almost double the amount raised in 2017 to fund humanitarian aid in the Arabian Peninsula country.

Yemen has been at war for more than three years.

Conflict is ongoing there between an international coalition forces supporting President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi on the one side, and Houthi militias and allied units of the armed forces on the other, which seized control of the capital, Sana’a.

Aid agencies have repeatedly warned about the toll this has had on non-combatants: forced and repeated displacement of families, massive food insecurity and the collapse of essential services including healthcare and education.

In 2017, the world’s worst outbreak of cholera to date affected one million Yemenis, and diphtheria is now on the rise in what was already one of the poorest and most vulnerable countries in the region before fighting erupted.

Latest UN data indicates that a record 22.2 million people – some 75 per cent of the population – now need humanitarian assistance. The UN chief added that “a horrifying 8.4 million of these do not know how they will obtain their next meal.”



UN Photo/Violaine Martin

UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock at the High Level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen.

Mr. Lowcock, who is the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, stressed the dire situation faced by millions of families in Yemen.

The \$3 billion appeal target represented a “substantial sum of money,” he said, but it was “small in relation to the needs” of Yemenis.

Many now face a 25 per cent rise in the cost of food, the UN official said, explaining that the country imported nearly all of its daily requirements and had been hit hard by the sharp devaluation of the country’s currency, the Yemeni Rial.

In total, some 190 organizations – 150 of which are Yemeni – are involved in the UN-coordinated humanitarian response plan.

It has been responsible for scaling up food assistance to seven million people a month, and helped boost access to water, health services and sanitation.

Such support would not be possible without sufficient funding, Mr. Lowcock said, before listing other “key conditions” that needed to be met to enable an effective humanitarian response.

First among these is aid access.

All ports in Yemen needed “to remain open without restrictions”, the UN

official said, a sentiment echoed by Ambassador Manuel Bessler, Head of Switzerland's Humanitarian Aid Department, who stressed that Yemenis needed help immediately:

"We heard it again and again, Yemen needs urgent help, it needs access for people [...] it needs access for the markets, for the sea ports and airports."

The end of last year saw severe delays in unloading basic foodstuffs caused by the enforced closure of much of the country's air, sea and land ports by coalition forces.

Mr. Lowcock also called for public sector salaries to be paid across Yemen after months of non-payment; this would prevent another cholera outbreak by providing essential services, he said, and keep children in school, providing essential continuity for them.



UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferre

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres briefs the media during a press conference at the High Level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen.

Those comments were echoed by Isabella Lovin, Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden, who told journalists during a break in the pledging conference that every day the conflict drags on "is one day too many" for ordinary Yemenis.

There was the risk, she added, of "an entire generation of children" going without healthcare and education, while reports of children being recruited by armed groups were "deeply disturbing."

In response to a question about the progress of UN-led efforts for peace, Mr. Guterres told reporters that his Special Envoy for Yemen [Martin Griffiths](#) had been "very encouraged" by his recent discussions with representatives of the warring parties in Sana'a and Riyadh.

The Special Envoy would also be going to the United Arab Emirates, Oman and

Aden for talks, Mr. Guterres added.

These had brought about “positive perspectives” for an inclusive Yemeni dialogue, the UN Secretary-General said, adding that the opportunity for peace should be “seized [...] and not missed.”