

[Syria: Civilians, including children, killed by airstrikes, shelling in Afrin – UN](#)

Dozens of children have been killed since fighting began in the north-western Syrian town of Afrin, where people are under bombardment, hospitals have been shut down and water supplies cut off, the United Nations have reported.

Along with Eastern Ghouta, the Kurdish-held town is among the worsening flashpoints, as the conflict in Syria enters its eighth year.

“We have been receiving [deeply alarming reports from Afrin](#) in Syria about civilian deaths and injuries due to airstrikes and ground-based strikes,” Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#), told reporters in Geneva on Friday.

She said that the humanitarian situation is reportedly worsening, with Afrin Hospital, the only medical facility equipped for major operations, being inundated by the influx of injured people.

“There is also a severe water shortage due to the reported destruction of a pumping station as well as the control of other water resources by Turkish-led forces,” Ms. Shamdasani said.

She also said that reports indicate that only those civilians who have contacts within the Kurdish authority or the Kurdish armed forces have been able to leave the town.

Civilians are at risk of being killed, injured, besieged, used as human shields or displaced as a result of the fighting, she warned, reminding all parties to the conflict that they must permit civilians wishing to leave combat areas to do so in safety, and to ensure the protection of those who remain.

In New York, the UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) said that “reports from inside Afrin indicate that dozens of children have been killed and many more injured since the start of hostilities in the district” and “for the last 10 days, children and families have suffered severe water shortages as the source of water for Afrin city has reportedly been cut off.”

“Families are relying on untreated water and boreholes, potentially increasing the risk of waterborne diseases for about 250,000 people,” said UNICEF Communications Specialist Joe English.

He said that there is no official displacement tracking mechanism but local sources estimate around 50,000 displaced people in the city. Families are being hosted by relatives and friends, in shops, government buildings and schools.

[Pakistan: UN chief condemns attack at police checkpoint near Lahore](#)

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has condemned yesterday's attack at a police checkpoint near a mosque in the outskirts of Lahore.

"[Mr. Guterres] extends his condolences to the families of the victims and wishes those injured a speedy recovery," said a [statement](#) from a UN spokesman, which said the Secretary-General calls for the perpetrators of the attack to be brought to justice.

The statement went on to say that the UN supports the efforts of the Government of Pakistan to fight terrorism with full respect for international human rights norms and obligations.

[Ukraine: UN calls for protection of civilians after attacks on water facility workers](#)

Following recent shelling of water treatment workers in eastern Ukraine, a senior United Nations official has called on all parties to the conflict to protect those civilians who maintain critical infrastructure.

"I am [deeply concerned](#) that water treatment workers and critical infrastructure continue to be targeted in eastern Ukraine's armed conflict," said Neal Walker, UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Ukraine, in a statement issued on Wednesday.

"It is clear that any targeting of civilian infrastructure and intentional disruption of access to water supply or heating systems is a violation of international humanitarian law," he added.

In the last eight days, workers seeking to maintain the Donetsk Filter Station have been shot at on four separate occasions.

The operation of the facility relies on the safe and unfettered access for the technicians, who risk their lives on a daily basis so water continues to flow to 345,000 people affected by the conflict.

On Tuesday, a truck was fired upon while making a routine delivery of water treatment chemicals vital for continued operations. A bus carrying 30 workers was also fired upon. It was only due to good luck that no one was hurt, Mr. Walker said.

Given Ukraine's harsh winter, any interruption of water supply or inter-dependent heating systems could generate severe humanitarian consequences, he warned.

After four years of armed conflict, ordinary men, women and children continue to be the most affected in eastern Ukraine, with their most basic needs, including safety and protection continuing to be denied.

Millions of Ukrainians are either trapped in active hostilities or displaced and are losing hope, he said.

[UN Security Council calls for all Yemen's ports to remain fully open to all aid imports](#)

The Security Council has urged warring parties in Yemen to allow humanitarian convoys to safely reach all conflict-affected governorates without hindrance, while also asking that all Yemen's ports remain fully open to commercial and relief supply imports.

These calls were made in a [Presidential Statement](#) issued Thursday by the 15-member body.

Since the uprisings in Yemen broke out in early 2011, the United Nations has been engaged, through the [good offices](#) of the Secretary-General, in helping Yemenis to find a peaceful solution.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), 20.7 million people in Yemen need some kind of [humanitarian or protection support](#), with some 9.8 million in acute need of assistance.

In the Statement, the Council noted "with great concern" the impact that access restrictions on commercial and aid imports have on the humanitarian situation, and called on the parties to "immediately facilitate access for these essential imports into the country and their distribution throughout in order to reach the entire civilian population."

"In this regard, the Security Council calls for the full and sustained opening of all Yemen's ports, including Hodeida and Saleef ports, and

stresses the importance of keeping these functioning and open to all commercial and humanitarian imports, including food, fuel and medical imports,” the Statement added.

The Council also called for increased access to Sana’s Airport for lifesaving humanitarian supplies and movement of urgent humanitarian cases.

Further, the Council reaffirmed that “denial of humanitarian access can constitute a violation of international humanitarian law,” stressing that the operation of the UN humanitarian air and sea services and related services for staff of relief agencies should proceed unhindered.

Major reports on biodiversity and ecosystem services to be launched at UN-backed meeting in Medellin

With our planet’s flora and fauna facing unprecedented threats, science and policy experts are set to gather next week in Medellin, Colombia, for a United Nations-backed meeting to consider five landmark reports aiming to inform better decisions by Governments, businesses and even individuals on biodiversity, and issues of land degradation and restoration.

“Literally, all Governments around the world should be looking at [the reports] to see what are we saying,” Sir Robert Watson, Chair of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services ([IPBES](#)) told *UN News* ahead of the body’s sixth plenary session which will run in Colombia’s second largest city from 18-24 March.

“That will be the basis for informed decisions,” said the IPBES Chair.

Established in 2012, IPBES is the global science-policy platform tasked with providing the best-available evidence to inform better decisions affecting nature – by everyone from Governments and industry to non-governmental organization (NGOs) and the general public – towards strengthening services for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, long-term human well-being and sustainable development.

The IPBES assessment reports are intended to provide decision makers with comprehensive, credible, evidence-based policy options to help reverse the unsustainable use of irreplaceable natural resources.

Prepared by more than 550 leading international experts and peer-reviewed by experts from both government and academia, the reports took three years to develop at a cost of more than \$6 million. IPBES will present the reports to

representatives of its 128 member States for approval at the upcoming plenary.

The reports to be presented comprise four regional assessments of biodiversity in Africa; the Americas; Asia and the Pacific; and Europe and Central Asia; as well as an assessment of land degradation and restoration, both regionally and globally.

Each regional assessment will evaluate the status of biodiversity in its respective region and subregions, identifying progress, drivers of change and threats, as well as the policy-relevant issues affecting them.

In addition, the regional assessments will present lessons learned and progress (or lack thereof) on the [Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020](#) and its [Biodiversity Targets](#), agreed by States parties to the [UN Convention on Biodiversity](#) at their meeting in Aichi, Japan.

The assessments will also describe the implications regarding biodiversity in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) and fulfilling the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change.

The assessment on land degradation and restoration will identify threats to land-based ecosystems, offering evidence from around the world and a range of best-available solutions to reduce the environmental, social and economic risks and impacts of land degradation.

The findings of the five IPBES reports will also be key inputs to a new comprehensive IPBES global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services, due for release in 2019. IPBES has previously issued a large-scale thematic assessment on global and regional pollination.

IPBES meets annually at a date and venue decided at the prior session. The Platform is placed under the auspices of four United Nations entities – the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), the [Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO\)](#) and the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)) – and administered by UNEP.