

UN envoy urges hold-out armed groups to sign accord for durable peace in Sudan's Darfur

While the security situation in Sudan's Darfur region remained stable, the causes of the conflict – and their related consequences – have been largely unaddressed, the head of the African Union-United Nations peacekeeping mission said Wednesday, calling on holdout armed groups to sign the foundational 2011 peace agreement without delay.

“That would be the only way the people of Darfur, and indeed the international community, could have any realistic hope for the achievement of durable peace in Darfur,” Jeremiah Mamabolo, the Joint Special Representative and the head of the AU-UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur ([UNAMID](#)), told the Security Council.

In particular, he urged the Council to use its leverage to have Abdul Wahid al Nur, who leads a faction of the Sudanese Liberation Army, join the peace process.

[Addressing](#) the 15-member body via video-conference from El Fasher, Mr. Mamabolo said conditions in Darfur are not the same as in 2003, when the conflict began.

Aside from sporadic fighting in Jebel Marra, there is a general absence of war, a reality reflected in UNAMID's adjusted mandate and posture, now in its second phase of reconfiguration.

Since January, he said, some military, police, and civilian personnel have been redeployed to strengthen Jebel Marra Task Force operations.

He said the Force is organized in two sectors: The Jebel Marra Task Force, with headquarters in Zalingei, and the State Stabilization Assistance Force, covering areas outside the former's operation area. Phase II reconfiguration also entails reduction in the number of military personnel, from 11,305 to 8,735; police from 2,888 to 2,500; and civilian staff from 2,918 to 2,760.

While it is too early to assess the impact on the overall security and civilian protection situation in areas where UNAMID has withdrawn under its phase I reconfiguration, he said UNAMID continued to engage with the Government to overcome access restrictions.

In some areas of Darfur, intra and inter-communal clashes persisted, albeit at a reduced scale, and instability persisted in internally displaced person camps in Kalma, Hassa Hissa and Hamadiya, where clashes are mainly fuelled by longstanding unresolved socioeconomic and political issues at the root of Darfur's conflict landscape over the years.

He said that significant resources are needed for post-conflict reconstruction, urging the Council to ensure they are mobilized apace with the mission's drawdown.

[UN-World Bank panel report calls for 'fundamental shift' in water management](#)

With 700 million people worldwide at risk of being displaced by intense water scarcity by 2030, water infrastructure investment must be at least doubled over the next five years, a panel set up by the United Nations and the World Bank recommended on Wednesday.

Making Every Drop Count: An Agenda for Water Action, released by a [panel](#) of 11 Heads of State and a Special Advisor, calls for a fundamental shift in the way the world manages water so that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly [Goal 6](#) on ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, can be achieved.

According to the report, 40 per cent of the world's people are being affected by water scarcity. If not addressed, as many as 700 million could be displaced by 2030 in search for water. More than two billion people are compelled to drink unsafe water and more than 4.5 billion do not have safely managed sanitation services.

The report says women and girls suffer disproportionately when water and sanitation are lacking, affecting health and often restricting work and education opportunities. Some 80 per cent of wastewater is discharged untreated into the environment and water-related disasters account for 90 per cent of the 1,000 most devastating natural disasters since 1990.

"It is my deep belief that water is a matter of life and death," UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) commented upon receiving the report on Wednesday, noting that 60 per cent of human body is water.

He said that water-related natural disasters are occurring more frequently and becoming more and more dangerous everywhere, which means "water is indeed a matter of life and death" and "must be an absolute priority in everything we do."

In a press release, World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim stressed that Heads of State and Government make up the panel "because the world can no longer afford to take water for granted."

“The ecosystems on which life itself is based – our food security, energy sustainability, public health, jobs, cities – are all at risk because of how water is managed today,” he warned.

The panel, created in 2016 for an initial period of two years, is advocating for evidence-based policies and innovative approaches at the global, national and local level to make water management as well as water and sanitation services attractive for investment and more disaster-resilient.

The panel calls for policies that will allow for at least a doubling of investment in water infrastructure in the next five years.



UN Photo/UNAMA

A view of Bamiyan National Park in September 2016. Afghanistan is characterized by rugged mountains, with more than half of the land area above 2,000 metres. There are also lakes and rivers, with most new water supply coming from rain and snow melt.

The report also highlights the essential need for partnerships between Governments, communities, the private sector and researchers.

The members of the panel are Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, Mauritius' President (Co-Chair); Enrique Peña Nieto, Mexico's President (Co-Chair); Malcolm Turnbull, Australia's Prime Minister; Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh's Prime Minister; János Áder, Hungary's President; Hani Mulki, Jordan's Prime Minister; Mark Rutte, Netherlands' Prime Minister; Pedro Pablo Kuczynski Godard, Peru's President; Jacob Zuma, South Africa's President; Macky Sall, Senegal's President; Emomali Rahmon, Tajikistan's President; and Han Seung-soo, Special Advisor and former Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea.

In an open letter, they conclude: “Whoever you are, whatever you do, wherever you live, we urge you get involved, and contribute to meeting this great challenge: safe water and sanitation for all, and our water resources managed sustainably. Make every drop count. It's time for action.”

UN aid chief urges international support to tackle 'spiralling humanitarian needs' in DR Congo

As fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has forced 4.5 million people to flee their homes over the past year and left more than 13 million in need of humanitarian assistance, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator has called on the international community to urgently address the crisis.

"We heard their [heart-wrenching stories](#), their descriptions of what they need, but also their hopes and their stories of resilience and courage in the face of unimaginable challenges," said Mark Lowcock, who is also the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, wrapping up his visit to the country with Sigrid Kaag, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation for the Netherlands.

With humanitarian needs having doubled since last year, more than 4.6 million Congolese children are acutely malnourished, including 2.2 million severely acute cases. Moreover, epidemics are spreading – counting the worst outbreak of cholera in 15 years.

"What we know is happening in many parts of the country, doesn't need to persist if we work together," continued Mr. Lowcock. "Every vulnerable Congolese family deserves all our support to rebuild their lives."

Mr. Lowcock and Ms. Kaag Tuesday travelled to Kalemie in the south-eastern province of Tanganyika where they visited the Katanika displacement site and spoke with some of the over 13,000 people who live there, having fled ethnic violence.

Ms. Kaag joined a group of women, including survivors of sexual violence, to listen to their experiences, needs, and hopes for the future. In Katanika, as in most Congolese provinces affected by displacement, women and children make up the majority of the severely affected people.

They also travelled to the Kalunga displacement site, which, since November 2016, has received nearly 3,500 displaced families. Humanitarian partners there have established education; water and sanitation; and agricultural to help meet the needs of displaced people.

On Monday, Mr. Lowcock and Ms. Kaag met with Jose Makila Sumanda, acting Prime Minister, and Bernard Biando Sango, Minister of Solidarity and Humanitarian Action and discussed the impact of insecurity on aid operations.

The Government representatives said they would facilitate the work of humanitarian organizations and reduce tariffs for humanitarian imports, including medicines and food

Humanitarian partners require nearly \$1.7 billion this year to address humanitarian needs in the country, including for 4.5 million internally displaced people. On 13 April in Geneva, the European Commission, the Netherlands and United Arab Emirates will co-host the first-ever DRC humanitarian donor conference.

[As Syria conflict enters eighth year, UN agencies join call for peace and safe aid delivery](#)

The United Nations hunger relief agency on Wednesday joined a chorus of international organizations and partners in the quest for an end to seven years of conflict in Syria, urging warring parties to allow humanitarian access for the delivery of life-saving assistance to those desperately in need.

“Every day that goes by without a resolution to this crisis is another day where [we have failed the people of Syria](#),” Jakob Kern, World Food Programme (WFP) Representative and Country Director in Syria, said in a news release.

“The single greatest priority must be an end to this conflict. History will hold us accountable,” he added.

The conflict, which is entering its eighth year, has brought intolerable suffering to millions of people. In many parts of the country, the violence has reached unbearable levels and still.

Every day, families under bombardment and shelling face a nightmare and more innocent lives are lost. More than a third of Syria’s population is internally displaced.

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With this continuous displacement come alarmingly high levels of hunger and need. Some 6.5 million people in Syria are food insecure and another four million people – twice as many as a year ago – are at risk of becoming so.

Since the conflict started, food prices have soared beyond the reach of many.

Bread is now eight times more expensive compared to pre-crisis times. Today, a shocking seven in ten Syrians live in extreme poverty.

In 2017, UN-led humanitarian convoys reached [820,200 people](#) inside Syria, according to UN relief agencies.

“We are humans. We are civilians. We do not deserve this. My children are hungry and have no food to eat,” a resident in Eastern Ghouta told WFP during a rare delivery of humanitarian aid in February – rare because the fighting hardly ever lets up long enough for humanitarian convoys to reach the besieged enclave.

WFP, which each year assists some 80 million people in around 80 countries, said it adds its voice to the call for peace and safe, unhindered and unconditional humanitarian access in Syria.

[Civil society in forefront of struggle for gender parity, UN chief tells townhall event](#)

The United Nations has embarked on an initiative to address the male-dominated power structure within its own ranks and now has more women than men in the senior management team, Secretary-General António Guterres told civil society activists on Tuesday.

“The struggle for gender equality is a tough struggle, and obviously it is tougher when we look at it from the perspective of Governments and institutions,” Mr. Guterres said during a town hall-style discussion at UN Headquarters in New York, an event held on the margins of the [62nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women \(CSW62\)](#), the UN’s largest gathering on gender equality.

“So it is civil society that is indeed being in the forefront of this struggle... Without civil society leadership and pressure, I doubt we would be where we are today,” he added.

The Commission is taking place from 12 to 23 March, with the theme, ‘Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls,’ bringing together global leaders, non-governmental organizations, private sector actors, UN partners and activists from around the world.

The UN chief stressed that the Organization must reach gender parity, starting from the upper echelons, noting that his Executive Office now has a

staff ratio of 56 per cent for women against 44 per cent for men. The female-male ratio was 40 per cent to 60 per cent when he started as the top executive.

At the most-senior management level, gender parity was reached last month – for the first time in UN history – with 23 women against 21 men. “This is the clear symbol that when I talked about gender parity, it is not just an intention,” he said.

In April, he expects to increase the proportion of female resident coordinators from 47 per cent now to 50 per cent.

The next target for gender parity is the ranks of Special Representatives and Envoys, in which only one third of positions are held by women.

He also said he has issued a roadmap to achieve full gender parity in 2028, having already asked all UN departments and agencies to present their plans.

Mr. Guterres also said he is addressing the problem of UN staff sexually exploiting and abusing the people they serve as well as sexual harassments happening within the UN.