

## [Nigeria: UN chief condemns killing of aid workers by Boko Haram insurgents](#)

United Nations [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) has condemned the killing of three aid workers Thursday night in Rann town in Borno state, Nigeria, following an attack by suspected Boko Haram insurgents.

According to the UN, at least one other aid worker remains critically injured and another three are still missing. Eight members of the Nigerian national security forces were also killed.

At the time of the attack, over 40 humanitarian workers were in Rann. All humanitarian personnel have been evacuated from Rann, and all humanitarian deliveries in the area have been temporarily suspended.

“The Secretary-General expresses his deepest condolences to the affected aid workers, their families and to the Government and people of Nigeria,” said a [statement](#) from UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric, adding that Mr. Guterres wishes those injured a swift recovery.

The UN chief recalled that attacks targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure violate international humanitarian law.

“Those responsible for these and other atrocities in Nigeria must be apprehended and prosecuted,” said the statement, adding that the Secretary-General calls on all the parties to ensure at all times the protection of all civilians in Nigeria.

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## [On World Wildlife Day, UN joins call for protection of planet's big cats](#)

Big cats, the planet's most majestic predators, are under increasing threat – mostly caused by human activities – and this year's World Wildlife Day, the United Nations is joining the world in raising awareness to their plight and galvanizing support for the many actions already under way to save these iconic species.

“This year,” United Nations [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) said in his message on the Day, “the spotlight falls on the world's big cats,” which include species such as cheetahs, pumas and snow leopards, found from Africa to Asia and the Americas.

“These charismatic creatures are universally revered for their grace and power, yet they are increasingly in [danger of extinction](#),” he continued, noting the massive decline in their numbers.

Just over a century ago, some 100,000 wild tigers roamed Asia, while fewer than 4,000 remain today. All the big cats are collectively under threat from habitat loss, climate change, poaching, illicit trafficking, and human-wildlife conflict.

“We are the cause of their decline, so we can also be their salvation,” Mr. Guterres asserted. “The Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) include specific targets to end the poaching and illegal trafficking of protected species of wild fauna and flora.”

Last year, UN Member States adopted the third in a series of resolutions tackling wildlife decline.

“Ultimately, the solution to saving big cats and other threatened and endangered species is conservation policy based on sound science and the rule of law,” noted the UN chief, adding the need that local people be given full consideration.

“When local communities and economies benefit from wildlife conservation, strategies are much more likely to succeed,” he elaborated.

By protecting big cats we also protect the landscapes they inhabit and the life they harbour, “it is a gateway to protecting entire ecosystems that are crucial to our planet’s health,” Mr. Guterres pointed out.

“Wildlife conservation is a shared responsibility,” he concluded, calling on people around the world to “help raise awareness and to take personal action to help ensure the survival of the world’s big cats and all its precious and fragile biological diversity.”



A Cheetah mother with her two cubs in Kenya. (Image used under license from Shutterstock.com)

In his message, Yury Fedotov, the Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)), said that while “the cheetah is the world’s fastest land animal [...] like other big cat species, it cannot outrun the threat of extinction.”

Mr. Fedotov maintained that this year’s theme: ‘Big cats: predators under threat,’ is bringing much-needed attention to the urgent challenges faced by these majestic animals.

“Across the world, lions, tigers, leopards and jaguars, as well as many other big cat species, are under pressure [due to poaching](#), lost habitats and disappearing prey,” he detailed.

UNODC is working to help countries criminalize wildlife poaching and trafficking as a means of protecting animals, including big cat species, and halting their tragic disappearance into history.

“Our collective roar of defiance must be aimed at the poachers, traffickers and all those who would destroy our natural heritage. We must not let them succeed,” he exhorted.

Mr. Fedotov wrapped up his message calling on everyone to “work with the international community to stop wildlife crime and prevent the world’s big cat species from sliding into extinction,”

At an event at UN Headquarters in New York on Friday, co-organized by the Permanent Missions of Gabon, Germany, Kyrgyzstan and Thailand, and [UNDP](#), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species ([CITES](#)), the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)), UNODC, African Parks, Panthera, WCS and WWF, Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed explained that SDG 15 highlights actions to reverse the loss of biodiversity across all regions.

“[Biodiversity is disappearing](#) at a thousand times the natural rate,” lamented Ms. Mohammed, saying that the varied causes are all linked to the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda.

She observed that in many cases poverty, hunger and biodiversity loss are intrinsically connected.

“Protecting ecosystems and ensuring access to ecosystem services by poor and vulnerable groups are therefore essential to eradicating extreme poverty and hunger,” he underscored.

Calling conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biological diversity “an effective anti-poverty strategy,” Ms. Mohammed emphasized the need to better maintain the natural resources on which billions of people depend – especially the world’s rural poor.

“We must work resolutely to improve biodiversity conservation and to eliminate the associated mismanagement, illicit trade, corruption and trafficking,” she said.

“They say cats have nine lives. Our big cats are on at least number eight,”

she held sway, highlighting the need for a new paradigm to conserve and sustainably manage their habitats, one that “acknowledges that economic growth is not in direct conflict with conservation.”

“We need people-centred and planet-sensitive economic growth strategies that support environmental protection and wildlife conservation,” she affirmed.

Indicating that wildlife conservation is a shared responsibility in which consumers, communities, policy-makers and businesses all have a role to play, she urged people all around the world to help raise awareness.

“Let us act together to help ensure the survival of the world’s big cats and all of our planet’s precious and fragile biological diversity,” concluded Ms. Mohammed.

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## [‘Dossiers are being built up’ for prosecution of crimes in Syria, says UN rights chief](#)

War crimes, potentially crimes against humanity, are likely being committed in east Ghouta and elsewhere in Syria, and the perpetrators of these acts must know they are being identified and will be held accountable, the United Nations human rights chief warned on Friday.

“Civilians are being pounded into [submission or death](#),” the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, told the Geneva-based Human Rights Council during an urgent debate on situation in east Ghouta, where some 400,000 civilians are trapped amid daily airstrikes, shelling and the reported release of toxic agents, which have killed and injured hundreds of people in the past two weeks alone.

The UN human rights chief said: “The perpetrators of these crimes must know they are being identified; that dossiers are being built up with a view to their prosecution; and that they will be held accountable for what they have done.”

He said that over the past four months, some high-profile perpetrators were brought to justice: Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladic was convicted of genocide; Salvadoran Colonel Inocente Orlando Montano has been extradited to Spain to face charges related to killings in San Salvador in 1989; and two Argentinian former Navy Captains, Alfredo Astiz and Jorge Eduardo Acosta, were convicted for crimes against humanity committed between 1976 and 1983.





UN Photo/Violaine Martin

Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, UN High Commissioner for the Human Rights at the 37th Session of the Human Rights Council, Palais des Nations

“The wheels of justice may be slow, but they do grind,” Mr. Zeid said, noting that the Human Rights Council can have a real impact in ensuring that there will be justice – determined, inescapable and effective – for the suffering that has been inflicted on the Syrian people.

He also said that Syria must be referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC), urging all States to greatly increase their support for the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) set up last year with its mandate focused on ensuring that information about serious crimes is collected, analyzed and preserved, with a view to furnishing dossiers for future prosecutions.

He also strongly encouraged the Council to renew the mandate of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria.

Meanwhile, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) on Friday called once again on those fighting on the ground inside Syria and all those who have influence over them to put their arms down and stop the war on children.

“Is our call falling once again on deaf ears? The children of Syria have been waiting for way too long. [The world has failed the children of Syria](#) so many times...,” Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, told reporters at a regular briefing in Geneva.

Nearly a week ago, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution that would have created an opportunity for hundreds of thousands of children to finally get respite from the brutal and unabated violence they have been living through.

“We all thought this was an excellent window for UNICEF and other partners to

deliver urgent and lifesaving assistance to children in need wherever they are inside the country,” he said.

“But as the days went by, these hopes turned into illusions, the windows shut abruptly in our faces,” he added, noting that violence continued in several places across the country, escalating in some and flaring up in others, despite the resolution’s call for a 30-day ceasefire.

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## [Despite decades-long effort, one-in-five children worldwide out of school – UN cultural agency](#)

Updated data reveals that some 263 million – one-in-five – children, adolescents and youth worldwide are out school, a figure that has barely changed over the past five years, according to a new United Nations cultural agency report.

“These new figures show starkly the size of the gap that needs to be closed to [ensure universal access](#) to education,” Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), said Friday.

Despite decades of efforts to get every child into the classroom, progress has come to a standstill, according to data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics ([UIS](#)).

“We need much more comprehensive and targeted approaches together with more resources to reach those children and youth who are denied the right to education, with a special emphasis on girls and on improving the quality of education for all,” Ms. Azoulay added.

The new numbers are published as delegates gather in Paris for the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)-Education 2030 Steering Committee meeting, which provides strategic guidance on advancing the Education 2030 Agenda.

SDG4 includes a concrete commitment to ensure that every girl and boy complete a quality primary and secondary education by 2030.

“This is the greatest urgency for unlocking progress towards [SDG4](#),” stressed Ms. Azoulay.

The [UIS paper](#) shows that the rate of progress, or the lack of it, varies by age group.

At primary level, nine per cent of children aged six to 11 years, or 63

million, are out of school.

Additionally, 61 million aged 12 to 14 years and 139 million between the ages of about 15 to 17 – one-in-three – are not enrolled in school. The older group are four times more likely to be out of school than children of primary age, and more than twice as likely to be out of school as those of lower secondary age.

Across sub-Saharan Africa, one-in-three children, adolescents and youth are out of school with girls more likely to be excluded. For every 100 primary age boys out of school, 123 girls are denied the right to education.

The data also highlight a gulf between out-of-school rates in the world's poorest and richest countries – with 59 per cent of upper-secondary youth across the world's low-income countries out-of-school, compared to 6 per cent in high-income countries.

“Access to education is only part of the picture. We also have a [learning crisis](#), with one in six children and adolescents not reaching minimum proficiency levels in reading or mathematics; the majority of them are in school,” said UIS Director Silvia Montoya.

The new figures reinforce calls for greater education investment globally to ensure progress towards SDG 4, including resources for data gathering and analysis to monitor the pace and equity progress.

“Education has to deliver for every child, which requires effective monitoring to ensure that all children are in school, and that they are learning what they need to know,” Ms. Montoya continued. “That is why the UIS, which is the official data source for SDG 4, is developing new indicators on equitable education and learning outcomes.”

These issues will be tabled at the fourth SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee, the global education consultation and coordination mechanism for the 2030 Agenda, which provides strategic advice on policies, financing, monitoring and reporting and advocacy.

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## [Investing in school meals ‘win-win’ for West African nations – UN](#)

The United Nations food relief agency has urged Governments in West Africa to spend more money on school meal programmes as these investments not only contribute to children's better future but also create local jobs around agriculture.

“It is a [win-win opportunity](#) which governments must seize,” said Abdou Dieng, UN World Food Programme (WFP) Regional Director for West and Central Africa. “Children enjoy healthy meals that make it more likely that they will stay in school and learn for a better future, while jobs are created and businesses develop.”

The call was made on African Day of School Feeding, annually observed on 1 March.

Increasingly, the food for the meals is sourced from smallholder farmers within the community. The idea is that home-grown school meals provide local farmers and businesses with a predictable outlet for their products, leading to more stable incomes, more investment, higher productivity and the creation of jobs for youth and women in the communities concerned.

In Burkina Faso, the introduction of yoghurt in school meals has had multiple benefits – a women’s group that collects milk locally has recently set up a processing plant for yoghurt that is now delivered to schools by young people on motorcycles.

Some governments in the region are showing a growing interest in investing more in national school meals programmes. The Government of Benin has allotted \$47 million to feed 400,000 children over the course of five years in partnership with WFP, using a home-grown school meals model.

WFP’s regional school meals programme, which aims to assist about 2.7 million children this year, faces a \$60 million funding gap. Without proper financing, the programme will fall short, leave many vulnerable students hungry and at risk of dropping out of school.