

UN 'will not give up' on push for ceasefire, says Syria envoy

The United Nations mediator for the Syrian conflict on Thursday said the world body has not given up on the implementation of a recent Security Council resolution demanding a 30-day ceasefire across the war-ravaged country.

"We cannot afford the luxury of giving up, so any type of feeling that the UN is frustrated –forget it, we are not frustrated, we are determined because this otherwise becomes the copycat of Aleppo, and we saw it already happening," Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura told reporters in Geneva, referring to the situation in east Ghouta, where UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) said earlier some 400,000 people are living "in hell on earth."

Mr. de Mistura called on both parties to the conflict to stop shelling each other's areas and to allow humanitarian convoys to reach east Ghouta, stressing that the priority needs to be stopping the suffering and the tragedy of the civilians there and elsewhere.

"The UN here has not and will not give up in asking for the full implementation of (Security Council resolution) [2401](#). And we will continue asking until we are red in the face, blue in the face, for both side," he declared, emphasizing that the world does not want to see "[another] Aleppo," referring to another war-battered Syrian enclave, which saw massive shelling in 2016.

Jan Egeland, Special Adviser to the UN Special Envoy, said east Ghouta is "the place where the violence is at its worst," and called on Russia, the United States and countries with influence on the ground to help the UN dispatch several convoys per weeks to reach all places in east Ghouta, get more than 1,000 priority medical cases evacuated from there, and also to evacuate civilians out of the conflict zone.



UN Photo/Pierre Albouy

Special Advisor to the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Jan Egeland.

“All of this should be possible, if the Security Council resolution became a reality,” he said, adding that since the adoption of the resolution, the situation has not gotten better, it got worse.

Mr. Egeland said convoys may now be able to go to eastern Ghouta in the next few days and 45 trucks are ready to go to Rukban.

For a full transcript of a joint press stakeout by Mr. de Mistura and Mr. Egeland, [here](#).

[In crisis-torn Sahel, UN anti-drugs and crime agency helps bolster justice system](#)

Africa’s vast Sahel – plagued by humanitarian crises, armed conflict and terrorism – is now witnessing improvements in its criminal justice system thanks to a special programme by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which assists Governments in the region to come together to fight corruption, and human and drug trafficking.

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The impact of the Governments' commitment is evident through an increase in the number of seizures, greater cooperation and innovative judicial solutions, [says](#) Pierre Lapaque, the regional head for West and Central Africa at UNODC.

"UNODC has witnessed positive systemic change in the region in the past years. We are seeing an increase in national and regional ownership, which positively impacts the security situation in the Sahel," he highlighted.

According to the UN agency, for 2017 alone, law enforcement officers based in the airports of Bamako (Mali), Niamey (Niger) and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) have seized over 35 kilograms (77 pounds) of drugs and over \$1 million in foreign currencies.

Just two weeks ago, in early February, Joint Airport Interdiction Task Force agents in Ouagadougou proceeded to the seizure of 4.8 kg of heroin, off a single passenger.

On the judicial side as well as, Government efforts are yielding results. Last year, Niger secured its first two convictions for terrorist financing involving eight suspects, and a third conviction for participation in terrorist acts, involving one suspect.

Furthermore, supported by UNODC and UN volunteers (UNVs), Nigerien judicial authorities processed some 230 cases involving terrorism suspects days last spring.

Combatting corruption; building trust

Supported by UNODC, Governments are also making strides in the battle against corruption.

Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger have already ratified the [UN Convention against Corruption](#), and Chad is currently taking steps towards ratification.

In addition, anti-corruption laws are being developed in countries and increasingly more number of cases are being investigated and transferred to justice systems.

The combination of these efforts are also helping nations in implementing the commitments under the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development, especially its Sustainable Development [Goal 16](#) on providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Furthermore, strong respect for human rights and gender equality are the fundamental underpinnings of its assistance programmes, affirmed UNODC.

More than 10,000 direct beneficiaries reached

Since 2014, UNODC's [Sahel Programme](#) has reached over 10,000 direct beneficiaries through the implementation of more than 400 activities ranging from legislative assistance to the provision of equipment, or from practical training workshop to high level meetings, both at national and regional levels.

During this time, UNODC has also forced close cooperation and coordination with a wide range of partners, including UN missions, the G5 Sahel, European Union, the Civil Society and others. The Programme also complements the UN Integrated Strategy for Sahel (UNISS) by building on the progress already made in the past years, and by realigning the UNISS' objectives with 2030 Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.

"We make a point of getting our partners as involved as possible, to ensure that our Programme meets their needs, their objectives and their priorities," expressed Mr. Lapaque.

[UN launches new global data collection tool to help reduce disaster, losses taking 'a huge toll'](#)

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) kick-offed on Thursday a historic new effort to collect comprehensive global data on disaster losses.

"It is impossible to prevent disasters and to manage risk if a country is not measuring its disaster losses, particularly at the local level, for both small-scale and large-scale events," said the Secretary-General's newly appointed Special Representative of the for Disaster Risk Reduction, Mami Mizutori.

"Such losses are a great setback for efforts to eradicate poverty," she added.

The [Sendai Framework](#) for Disaster Risk Reduction – the first major agreement of the post-2015 development agenda – launched its online tool: The [Sendai Framework Monitor](#).

This tool captures data on the achievement of the Framework's five targets of reducing mortality from disasters; the numbers of disaster affected people; economic losses; and reducing damage to critical infrastructure; along with recording the number of countries with national and local strategies for

disaster risk reduction.

“The Sendai Framework Monitor will provide inputs to the first report on achieving progress on implementing the Sustainable Development Goals[SDGs] in July,” Ms. Mizutori said in a statement marking the launch.

In a world where climate change and extreme weather events contribute to pushing 26 million people into poverty every year, she underscored “improving how we manage risk is vital and this requires a deeper understanding of where these losses are occurring and not just for major internationally recorded events.”

“The silent, small-recurring events, such as floods and droughts can take a huge toll on communities which lack essential health services and other coping capacities,” she concluded.

[Ukraine crisis ‘forgotten by the world,’ senior UN relief official says, urging greater global support](#)

With 4.4 million people in Ukraine soon to enter a fifth year of conflict, the international community has an important role to play in supporting conflict resolution and bringing about lasting peace – the only durable humanitarian solution for the affected population, a senior United Nations official has said.

“This crisis is happening in [Europe’s backyard](#), yet it is largely forgotten by the world,” UN Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Ursula Mueller told a European conference on the humanitarian crisis in eastern Ukraine and the way forward, held on Wednesday in Brussels, Belgium.

“We must do better at communicating the daily violence and intensifying deprivation in eastern Ukraine affecting millions of people,” added Ms. Mueller, who is also Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator.

She noted that the human toll of the armed conflict is appalling, with over 2,530 civilians killed and 9,000 injured. Thousands of homes, hundreds of hospitals, schools, and water and electricity facilities have been damaged due to the hostilities.

“Countless ceasefire agreements have failed to stick, and it is this political failure to bring about a definitive end to the conflict that continues to force 4.4 million conflict-affected Ukrainians to endure daily suffering and to make impossible choices,” she warned.

Hostilities aside, hundreds of lives have been lost due to mines and explosive remnants. eastern Ukraine is rapidly becoming “one of the most mined areas in the world,” which, if not addressed, will stall reconstruction and development for many years to come, she said, noting that mine clearance and risk education is urgently needed in all conflict-affected areas, particularly along the “contact line,” including the checkpoints.

With one million crossings each month across the 457-km “contact line,” thousands of people face delays and obstacles in accessing basic services, pensions, social benefits, and markets every day.

Last December, humanitarian in Ukraine consolidated a comprehensive and prioritized \$187 million Humanitarian Response Plan that sets out the urgent need to reach vulnerable Ukrainians with assistance and protection throughout 2018.

“It is sobering to note that four years ago, Ukraine had no need of a humanitarian appeal,” Ms. Mueller said.

It is clear from a 2018 assessment that needs across all sectors continue to rise, particularly in non-Government controlled areas and across the “contact line,” she said, urging the de facto authorities to facilitate the resumption of the activities of all humanitarian actors’ programmes, and appealing to the Government of Ukraine to do all it can to ensure freedom of movement of civilians, and to end the commercial ban across the contact line.

Governments should place more emphasis on drug treatment and rehabilitation, says UN-backed narcotics control board

Governments are being urged to invest more in drug treatment and rehabilitation rather than just focusing solely on prevention, the latest report by the [International Narcotics Control Board](#) (INCB) recommends.

The study, published on Thursday, reveals that only one in six people globally who needs treatment has access to these services.

Further, even where treatment is available, the quality often is poor or not in line with international standards.

“Our report shows that treatment of drug dependence is highly cost-effective and, most importantly, treatment of drug dependence should be seen as part of the ‘right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health,’ and as such, an element of the right to health,”

INCB president Viroj Sumyai said in a message included in the report.

The INCB is an independent quasi-judicial body which monitors implementation of three United Nations [international drug control conventions](#).

In addition to pressing for more government action in the areas of treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration, it is calling for attention to be paid to “special populations” such as women, migrants and refugees.

The [report](#) also highlights the need for the global community to support Afghanistan, where illicit opium production and opium poppy cultivation hit a record high last year.

The [Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017](#), produced by the [UN Office on Drugs and Crime](#) (UNODC) and the country’s Ministry of Counter Narcotics, shows opium production reached 9,000 metric tonnes: a nearly 90 per cent increase over 2016 figures.

The INCB also emphasizes the need to address the global gap in access to controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medicinal and scientific purposes.

This “global pain divide” disproportionately impacts low- and middle-income countries, according to the body.

The INCB notes that 2018 marks several anniversaries, including 70 years since the proclamation of [the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).

Considered a “milestone document” by the UN, the Declaration recognizes the inherent dignity of all human beings.

“In this context, INCB once again calls on countries to ensure that any drug control measures are in full compliance with international human rights standards and norms,” according to a press release from the organization.

“This includes protecting and guaranteeing the rights to health, the rights of alleged drug offenders, and drug users and ensuring proportional responses in dealing with drug offences, including abolishing the death penalty for drug-related offences. The Board also reiterates its strong condemnation of extrajudicial responses to drug-related criminality.”