

## UN Security Council agrees 30-day ceasefire in Syria

The United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted on Saturday a resolution demanding a nationwide ceasefire in Syria for at least 30 days, along with demands for weekly aid convoys, medical evacuations and the immediate lifting of sieges, particularly in eastern Ghouta.

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## Asia-Pacific countries pledge women, girl's empowerment at high-level UN forum

At a high-level United Nations regional consultation in Bangkok, senior government representatives from Asia and the Pacific committed to empower rural women and girls, to lift their standard of living and combat structural barriers impacting their human rights.

"If we do not take concrete actions we [risk leaving rural women and girls behind](#)," said Shamshad Akhtar, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific ([ESCAP](#)) in her opening statement at the regional consultation for the 62nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62) on Friday.

Achieving adequate living standards, women's economic empowerment, land rights, food security, health care, quality education, resilience and preparedness to deal with disasters and conflicts are among the main challenges rural women and girls in Asia-Pacific confront.

The High-Level meeting, *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls*, adopted a set of recommendations that will feed into CSW62 to be held at the UN Headquarters in New York from 12 to 23 March 2018.

"Development which does not empower rural women and girls is antithetical to a rights-based approach enshrined in the 2030 Agenda," Ms. Akhtar stressed.

"We must work together to create an enabling environment which supports women and girls in rural areas of Asia and the Pacific to unfold their full potential as powerful agents of change," she added.

The recommendations reflect the urgent need to strengthen normative and legal

frameworks, and ensure coordinated action for their social and economic empowerment and meaningful participation in society.

Delegates further highlighted the need for improved availability of data and gender statistics to enhance evidence-based policy making.

“The 2030 Agenda is a commitment to leaving no-one behind,” Miwa Kato, Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific for the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women ([UN Women](#)), reminded the participants, adding that the difficulties women face are “partly due to negative gender stereotypes, harmful practices and structural inequalities that must be addressed.”

For her part, Kundhavi Kadiresan, Regional Representative of the UN’s [Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO\)](#), underscored, “Evidence shows that if rural women had access to, and control of, the same resources as men, their contributions would increase food production by as much as four per cent,” benefiting the entire family.

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## [UN chief inks pact to better coordinate counter-terrorism support to Governments](#)

Secretary-General António Guterres has signed a United Nations systemwide agreement to improve the coordination and coherence of the Organization’s activities to help Member States implement the UN’s counter-terrorism strategy.

The principal aim of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact is “to ensure that the United Nations system can have a [better impact](#) and provide stronger and more efficient counter-terrorism capacity-building support to Member States,” said a statement issued on Friday by UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric.

The Compact, which is an agreement between 36 UN entities, is to be signed by the heads of these entities, as well as INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization, as a symbol of their commitment to coordinating activities at the Headquarters and in the field.

Last year, Mr. Guterres created the [UN Office of Counter-Terrorism](#) with the aim of enhancing coordination and coherence of the UN activities on the subject.

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## [Ethiopia: Prime Minister steps down, UN chief welcomes political reforms, released detainees](#)

United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres issued a statement on Friday taking note of the recent decision by the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Hailemariam Desalegn, to resign, to “allow further political reforms to take place in the country aimed at widening democratic space.”

Through his spokesperson, Mr. Guterres asserted that the Government of Ethiopia expressed its intention to continue implementing governance reforms and increasing participation in the political process.

“The United Nations welcomes the steps so far undertaken in that direction, including the [release of detainees](#),” he underscored, adding that the UN considers Ethiopia “a valued partner in peace and security, development, humanitarian and human rights issues in the Horn of Africa and the African continent,” and will continue to support the Government and its people in implementing reforms to enhance governance, stability and development.

“The United Nations also takes note of the recent declaration of a state of emergency and stresses the importance of avoiding actions that would infringe on the human rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens, the peace, security and stability of the country, or impact on the delivery of humanitarian assistance,” concluded Mr. Guterres.

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## [‘We can achieve peace, stability, prosperity in the Sahel,’ UN chief tells Brussels conference](#)

The United Nations and its partners met in Brussels, Belgium, on Friday to strengthen support for a group of five nations in Africa’s troubled Sahel region which are facing pressing challenges including extreme poverty, food and nutrition crises and violent extremism.

The International Conference on the Sahel brought together the UN, the European Commission, the African Union and the so-called ‘Group of Five’ or

G5 Sahel countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) hailed the meeting as a timely effort that demonstrates the international community's support for the region's efforts to prevent violent extremism and fight terrorism and organized crime.

"Together – the G5 Sahel countries, the African Union, the European Union and the United Nations – we can achieve peace, stability and prosperity in the region," he said in a video message played at the conference.

The UN chief also praised the G5 Sahel Joint Force, a joint military initiative by the five countries to respond to the many interlinked challenges confronting them.

"It is also essential to reinforce the programmes envisaged under the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, which provides an overarching framework aimed at strengthening governance, resilience and security," he added.

The troops will conduct cross-border counter-terrorist operations and donors at the conference have pledged \$516 million for the force, according to media reports.

The head of UN peacekeeping, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, told the gathering that the global organization is in a good position to start supporting the force through its integrated operation in Mali, known by its French acronym, [MINUSMA](#).

This assistance is in line with a UN Security Council resolution adopted in December which provides for operational and logistical support for the Sahel force.

The Sahel stretches between the Sahara to the north and the wider Sudan region to the south. According to the UN's humanitarian wing, across the region, over 30 million people face food insecurity, one in five children under the age of five suffers from acute malnutrition and at least 4.9 million are displaced by the effects of conflicts.