

UN, partners complete first aid delivery in months to Syria's war-battered east Ghouta

Thousands of civilians in east Ghouta now have life-saving food and medical supplies after the first aid convoy in nearly three months reached the besieged enclave just outside the Syrian capital of Damascus, the top United Nations humanitarian official in the country said on Friday.

"Whilst this development is welcome, it is absolutely insufficient. The people reached represent 2.6 per cent of the 272,500 people in need in east Ghouta," the Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria, Ali Al-Za'tari, said in a statement Friday.

The supplies were delivered on 14 February. Aid workers have had no access to the besieged city for 78 days.

However, other supplies, including much-needed water and sanitation, education materials and non-food items, such as kitchen sets, blankets and plastic sheets, were not allowed to be loaded in the convoy, added the UN official.

As to the situation on the ground, the convoy – comprising UN agencies and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent – reported that the months-long isolation has left the local population "tired and exhausted."

"Families are forced to skip meals, some only having one meal a day. A young ailing girl informed the team she has been eating yogurt and nothing else," noted Mr. Al-Za'tari.

In addition, the stocks of basic commodities in the market are running dangerously low and prices are prohibitively expensive for the vast majority of people.

The rations delivered by the convoy will be shared among families, with five families sharing one basket.

This is not enough to sustain them for long and the impact of increasing levels of food insecurity – especially on children and pregnant women – is evident.

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The UN team witnessed a number of cases of severe acute malnutrition amid

growing reports of an impending crisis. Healthcare workers at Shofiniyeh hospital reportedly screened 317 children under five in the last two weeks with 69 cases of acute malnutrition and 127 of children at risk.

Furthermore, caesarean-sections (C-sections) now account for 25 per cent of all births, likely caused by malnutrition among women and their lack of strength to give birth.

Paucity of medicines and health supplies taking a toll

The UN team also saw expired anaesthetics, the use of which has resulted in two deaths; and with vaccines running low, hundreds of children are feared to be at risk of disease.

Reports of cases of communicable diseases, such as tuberculosis, typhoid fever and scabies have emerged. Furthermore, with flare up of hostilities the number of people in need of urgent medical evacuation have also increased significantly.

The fighting has resulted in a surge of new displacement, with reports of hundreds of families desperate enough to seek refuge in other parts of east Ghouta – many of which are not safer – than the places they were forced to flee.

“People in need must be served, wherever they are. If Nashabiyeh is a sample of communities in need, then the situation is far graver than imagined,” said Mr. Al-Za’tari, calling on all parties to the conflict, and those with influence over them, to allow immediate, safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to all in need – particularly those in besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

“To do so, we repeat our call for an urgently required one-month cessation of hostilities. We will continue appealing for access to all those in need, and remind those responsible of their obligation to grant it under international humanitarian law,” he added.

Service and Sacrifice: Honouring Nigeria’s contribution to UN peacekeeping

Since the 1960s, Nigeria has been a major contributor of troops and police to United Nations peace operations, having served in dozens of missions. Most recently, Nigerian troops were the military backbone of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), from 2003-2018, helping to restore security throughout a country that had undergone a brutal civil war.

In January 2018, Liberians and the international community watched the first democratic transfer of power in the country in decades – thanks in no small part to Nigeria and other troop and police contributing countries.

Liberia's new President, George Weah, recently commended UNMIL for its longstanding support to peace and stability, saying: "The Liberian people will forever remain grateful to you for your bravery and service to our great nation... Remember Liberia is your home."

Nigeria was one of the first countries to provide troops in Liberia in 2003, and was among the last to leave, its final troops flying out just last week.

Below is a snapshot of Nigeria's active participation in UN peacekeeping around the world over the years.

[UN rights chief urges Iran to halt executions of juveniles on death row](#)

Expressing concern over a "surge" in the number of juvenile offenders being executed in Iran, the United Nations top human rights official called on the country to abide by its obligations under international law and immediately halt all executions of people sentenced to death for crimes committed when they were under the age of eighteen.

"The execution of juvenile offenders is unequivocally prohibited under international law, regardless of the circumstances and nature of the crime committed," the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, said in a [news release](#) Friday.

"The imposition of the death penalty on people who committed crimes when they were under 18 is in clear violation of Iran's obligations under two international treaties that it has ratified and is obliged to uphold – namely the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) and the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)."

[According](#) to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in January, three people – two male and one female – were executed for crimes they committed when they were 15 or 16 years old. A fourth juvenile offender, who was believed to be on the point of being executed on Wednesday, has reportedly received a temporary reprieve of two months.

In addition, a number of other juvenile offenders are also believed to be in danger of imminent execution, with a total of some 80 such individuals reported to be currently on death row, after being sentenced to death for crimes they committed when they were under eighteen.

"I am sad to say that Iran violates this absolute prohibition under international human rights law far more often than any other State," expressed the UN rights chief, stressing that no other State "comes even remotely close" to the total number of juveniles who have been executed in Iran over the past couple of decades.

Mr. Zeid also said that Iran assigns criminal responsibility to girls as young as nine years old, whereas boys are not considered criminally responsible until they reach the age of 15.

This discrepancy between the two genders is "wholly unjustifiable on every level," he stressed, adding that the application of the death penalty to any person, female or male, under 18 is "illegal and unacceptable."

Some partial improvements in application of death penalty in drugs crime

Also in the release, the High Commissioner noted that there had been some "partial" improvements in relation to other aspects of the application of the death penalty in Iran, most notably a bill amending the drug-trafficking law that was approved by the Guardian Council in October 2017.

As a result of the amendment, some drug offences that were previously punishable by the death penalty are now subject to a prison term, although the mandatory death sentence is retained for a wide range of drug-related offences.

According to OHCHR, the amendment provides for retroactive applicability, which means that all people currently on death row for drug-related offences which are no longer punishable by the death penalty should see their sentence commuted.

In this context, Mr. Zeid urged Iran to swiftly establish the modalities for the review of all individual cases sentenced to death under the drug-trafficking law, following the principles of transparency, due process and to ensure effective legal representation of all those sentenced.

At present, there are about 5,300 inmates on death row for drugs crimes in the country.

UN chief expresses 'profound sadness' at Florida gun massacre

Secretary-General António Guterres has expressed his profound sadness at the horrific gun massacre in Florida in a message he wrote to the Governor and to the United States' Ambassador to the United Nations, UN spokesman said

Thursday.

“It is wrenching to see so many young lives cut short – in a place where students should feel safe – as well as so many families torn apart, and yet another community thrown into shock,” Mr. Guterres wrote to Governor Rick Scott and US Permanent Representative to the UN, Nikki Haley.

“At this time of profound sorrow, we at the United Nations wish to say that our thoughts are with all those who have been touched by this tragedy,” Mr. Guterres added, according to his Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric.

News organizations reported that 17 people were killed and another 14 were wounded in the shooting that took place Wednesday at a high school in Parkland.

[Mali: \\$263 million sought to assist most vulnerable with humanitarian support, says UN relief official](#)

Aid agencies in Mali have launched the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan ([HRP](#)), asking for \$263 million to provide humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable people, a senior United Nations aid official in the country said

“Today, with this joint plan, the [humanitarian actors renew their commitment](#) alongside the Malian people,” Mbaranga Gasarabwe, Humanitarian Coordinator for Mali, said Wednesday.

The humanitarian community is focusing on food security and nutrition; protection; health services’ water; hygiene and sanitation; and education.

About 5.1 million people, or more than 27 per cent of the total population, live in areas affected by a security crisis – with food uncertainty affecting more than one-in-five people.

Between 2017 and 2018, the number of children suffering from severe acute malnutrition jumped more than 10 per cent, from 142,000 to an alarming 165,000 – weakening their immune systems and increasing their chances of death by nine-fold should they fall ill.

Four million of these in the northern regions will not be self-sufficient enough to meet their basic needs – in Mopti and Macina and Niono cercles in Segou.

Moreover, in recent months schools have continued to close at a steady, significant rate, from 297 in 2016 to 500 at the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year.

The HRP aims to provide humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable by strengthening access to basic social services, improving livelihoods and resilience, and strengthening emergency preparedness.

It focuses on emergency response, while encouraging the adoption of sustainable solutions in connection with development actors – taking into account the changing political and security context and the ability of actors to intervene on the ground.

“The world must stop observing the crisis only through a purely security prism,” warned Ms. Gasarabwe.”

“The current politico-security crisis comes in particular juxtapose with a chronic vulnerability inherent in natural hazards. Thus, the effects of climate change are perceptible with the rarefaction and irregularity of the rains, the early declines in the interior delta of Niger and the silting up of cultivable land. These factors promote food and nutritional insecurity and cause forced displacement of populations with the risk of community tensions and the deschooling of children,” she added.