

Civilians in war-torn Yemen 'under fire on all sides' – UN rights chief

12 February 2018 – Raising alarm over continuing civilian casualties in the midst of increased hostilities in war-ravaged Yemen, the United Nations human rights chief underscored that all parties to the conflict are obliged under international humanitarian law to ensure that civilians are not harmed.

The situation in Taizz governorate – located in south-west Yemen – is of particular concern.

“Civilians are under fire on all sides, as Houthi and affiliated forces carry out sniper attacks and indiscriminate shelling, and the Saudi-led Coalition continues to conduct airstrikes,” the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, said in a [news release](#) Monday.

“For the civilians in the city of Taizz, the conflict is not just escalating but inescapable.”

Between 1 and 8 February, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) verified that 27 people were killed and 76 injured in Yemen – more than double the number of civilian casualties confirmed during the previous week.

The actual number could be higher.

Among those killed were three children who lost their lives in shelling by Houthi forces in Al Qahirah district (northern Taizz) on 6 February; and a woman working as field monitor for the Yemen National Commission of Inquiry in Salh district on 8 February.

Elsewhere in the country, eight civilians – including a woman and a child – were killed and 32 injured on 4 February when three airstrikes hit a Ministry of the Interior building in Bani Al Harith district, in Amanat Al Asimah Governorate.

OHCHR officials who visited the scene said that there did not appear to be any military objects near the building, which had previously been hit in January 2016.

Also in the first eight days of February, OHCHR document sniping and indiscriminate shelling by Houthi forces in frontline areas in Hudaydah and Hajja governorates, and airstrikes by the Coalition on areas under the control of the Houthi forces, including in Sana’a, Sa’ada, Hudaydah and Amran Governorates.

Underscoring the obligation on all parties to the conflict to ensure that civilian populations are not harmed, the UN human rights chief reiterated that “any intentional, direct attack against civilians or civilian objects is considered a serious violation of international humanitarian law.”

Since March 2015 and as of 8 February, OHCHR has documented 15,467 civilian casualties, with 5,974 killed and 9,493 injured.

[World loses a 'human rights giant,' says UN chief on death of rights expert Asma Jahangir](#)

11 February 2018 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Sunday expressed his sorrow at the demise of prominent human rights defender and UN Special Rapporteur Asma Jahangir, who passed away at the age of 66.

“We have lost a human rights giant,” said Mr. Guterres in a [statement](#).

“Asma was brilliant, deeply principled, courageous and kind [...] She will not be forgotten,” he added, expressing his condolences to Ms. Jahangir’s family, friends and colleagues, including in the UN and civil society.

She reportedly suffered a cardiac arrest and was taken to hospital, where she passed away.

Ms. Jahangir was the current UN [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran](#), having assumed the position on 1 November 2016. Earlier, from 1998 to July 2004, she was the [Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#), and from August 2004 to July 2010, the [Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief](#).

A national of Pakistan, Ms. Jahangir, was recognized both nationally and internationally for her contribution to human rights and was the recipient of major human rights awards. She worked extensively in the field of women’s rights, protection of religious minorities and in eliminating bonded labour.

She was also elected as the President of the Supreme Court Bar Association of Pakistan and as Chairperson of the country’s Human Rights Commission.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), which supports [Special Rapporteurs and independent experts](#) in the discharge of their mandate, also expressed its sadness at Ms. Jahangir’s passing.

“She was a legendary human rights defender: pioneering, determined, calm, courageous and a lovely human being,” the office said in a tweet posted on its official account.

UN Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-

based [Human Rights Council](#) – the highest UN intergovernmental body on all matters related to human rights – to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation.

The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

[UN chief deeply saddened by tragic plane accident in Russia](#)

11 February 2018 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Sunday expressed deep sadness at the plane accident in the Moscow region, Russia, in which all passengers and crew are reported to have died.

In a [statement](#) attributable to his spokesperson, the Secretary-General conveyed his heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims and to the people and Government of Russian Federation.

According to reports, the aircraft lost contact shortly after take-off from an airport in Moscow and crashed near a village about 80 kilometres (50 miles) south-east of the city.

There were 65 passengers and six crew on board the airplane.

[Urgent international action needed to stop soaring violence in war-torn Syria, stresses UN rights chief](#)

10 February 2018 – The United Nations human rights chief on Saturday called for urgent international action to protect civilians caught up in the Syrian conflict, which, he said, saw one of its bloodiest periods with hundreds of lives lost in “wave after wave” of deadly airstrikes.

“The no-holds-barred nature of this assault is evidenced by reports that at least nine medical facilities, six of them in Idlib and three in eastern Ghouta, were hit by airstrikes,” said the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, in a news release issued by his office ([OHCHR](#)).

Even by Syria's atrocious standards, these are exceptionally deplorable developments and a cruel irony given that both have been declared 'de-escalation areas', he added.

According to OHCHR, between 4 and 9 February, at least 277 civilians are reported to have been killed, with 230 among them in airstrikes by the Syrian Government and its allies. A further 812 civilians are reported to have been injured.

In one of the worst incidents, a rolling series of airstrikes on residential areas of Duma (near the capital, Damascus) on 6 February reportedly killed at least 31 civilians, including 12 women and four children, and injured more than 100 others, including 37 children.

In the news release, the UN human rights wing also noted that numerous rockets and mortars continue to be fired from opposition-held areas into populated areas of Government-held capital Damascus and surrounding suburbs, with at least seven civilians reported killed and 18 others injured in various locations between 6 and 9 February.

Even by Syria's atrocious standards, these are exceptionally deplorable developments and a cruel irony given that both have been declared 'de-escalation areas' High Commissioner Zeid

Elsewhere in the war-ravaged country, fighting continues to take its toll with a number of civilians, including children, reportedly killed and injured in Afrin district in north-western Syria.

In the east of the country, civilian casualties are reported in airstrikes and ground-based strikes in areas still under the control of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) primarily in Deir-ez-Zor governorate. However, the greatest threats now faced by civilians in such areas are improvised explosive devices, unexploded ordinance and other explosive remnants of war.

Violations of international law continue on a daily basis UN rights chief

In the news release, Mr. Zeid also said that the various Governments and some armed opposition groups professing to adhere to international humanitarian law and international human rights law, violations continue on a daily basis, despite the creation of so-called 'de-escalation areas' in 2017.

The term 'de-escalation area' is becoming all too reminiscent of the so-called 'safe areas' in Bosnia, which proved anything but safe, as we were starkly reminded during the recent trials of Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic, he added, underscoring that the situation in Syria is crying out to be referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC), as well as for a much more concerted effort by UN Member States to bring peace.

The conduct and management of this war has been utterly shameful from

the outset, and the failure to end it marks an epic failure of global diplomacy,” the High Commissioner stressed.

[Yemen: Raging violence displaces more than 85,000 civilians, says UN refugee agency](#)

9 February 2018 – Surging violence across Yemen has resulted in the displacement of more than 85,000 people in just the last 10 weeks, the United Nations refugee agency reported Friday.

Yemen is the world’s largest humanitarian crisis with more than 22 million in need, fuelled by ongoing conflict, a breakdown in public services and a collapsing economy.

“We are particularly [concerned](#) for those that remain in areas close to hostilities in Taiz and Hudaydah governorates,” said Cécile Pouilly, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), told reporters in Geneva, Switzerland.

“As a result of prolonged fighting in those two governorates, conditions continue to deteriorate, exposing people to violence and disease without access to basic services,” she added, noting that the agency was “alarmed” as hundreds of people are forced to flee their homes each day, due to increasing military operations, particularly on the west coast.

Most of those displaced in these two governorates are trapped inside their homes or in caves as ground clashes, aerial bombardment and sniper fire rage around them.

In addition to new displacements from those fleeing the coast, UNHCR is also observing a spike from other frontline areas, including Yemen’s border governorates.

Meanwhile, the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) has launched an appeal for \$96.2 million to fund its 2018 response for the humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

“Three years of conflict have [inflicted suffering](#) on millions, affecting every Yemeni – man, woman or child,” said William Lacy Swing, the UN migration agency’s Director General, from its headquarters in Geneva.

“With armed conflict ongoing, a stalled peace process and an economic blockade, Yemen is in the grips of a devastating protracted humanitarian and developmental crisis,” he added.