

Syria: UN rights officials decry 'devastating' impact of surging violence on civilians

19 January 2018 – Concerned over the devastating impact of escalating violence in Syria, where dozens of people in eastern Ghouta have been killed in recent airstrikes, and schools and hospitals are being deliberately destroyed, senior United Nations officials have underscored the obligation on all parties to the conflict, and the international community, to protect civilians from atrocity crimes.

"We cannot stand by silently in the face of indiscriminate violence and violations of international human rights and humanitarian law," said Adama Dieng the UN Special Adviser on Prevention of Genocide, and Ivan Simonovic, the UN Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, in a [statement](#) issued Thursday.

"We urge all stakeholders, including the Security Council, to condemn this violence, and we urge the parties to the conflict to ensure that basic principles of humanitarian law are protected, in particular with regards to proportionality and distinction."

The worst impact of fighting has been felt in eastern Ghouta (near the capital, Damascus) and Idlib (in the north-west of the country) – both designated as de-escalation areas under the Astana process, were "civilians should expect a minimum level of safety," added the statement.

However, since mid-November 2017, the estimated 393,000 people in eastern Ghouta have been subjected to airstrikes, shelling and bombardment on an almost daily basis by Government forces and their allies. Rockets fired by armed opposition groups in eastern Ghouta into residential areas of Damascus have reportedly further aggravated the situation.

In southern Idlib and northern rural Hama, where fighting between government forces and armed opposition groups – which control a majority of the Idlib governorate – has escalated since December, over 200,000 civilians have been displaced and numerous people have been killed.

In addition to civilians, medical facilities too have come under attack.

Between 3 and 10 January, at least four health care facilities and two education facilities have reportedly been attacked, added the statement.

In the statement, Mr. Dieng and Mr. Simonovic, underscored that indiscriminate attacks or those directly target civilians or civilian objects are a violation of fundamental principles of international humanitarian law.

"All actors involved in the conflict in Syria have an obligation to ensure that these fundamental principles are respected," underscored the statement.

Across war-ravaged Syria, more than six million people are internally displaced, many displaced multiple times, and more than five million Syrians have been forced as refugees in other countries.

At the same time, estimates indicate that more than half of the country's basic infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed, and over 13 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, as a result of the seven-year conflict – now longer than World War II.

More flee Cameroon's English-speaking areas; UN concerned over safety of women and children

19 January 2018 – As swelling numbers of people flee English-speaking areas of Cameroon for Nigeria, the United Nations on Friday expressed concern over the precarious situation of women and children, which make now up about 80 per cent of the approximately 10,000 registered refugees in eastern Nigeria's Cross River state.

"Some of these are boys and girls who fled to Nigeria alone," William Spindler, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) told reporters at the regular press briefing in Geneva, adding that unaccompanied and separated children are particularly vulnerable.

"UNHCR has received numerous reports that [children have to work or beg](#) to survive or to help their families," he added.

Many reported that they were unable to attend school, for lack of time and money. Thousands more are among the population of unregistered Cameroonians in neighbouring states, where some of the children are unaccompanied and vulnerable.

"UNHCR is working with the Nigerian authorities to assist with the reunification of separated children with their families, to provide unaccompanied children with protection services and to restore the basic right of all children to education," Mr. Spindler said.

Some of the children fleeing to Nigeria told UNHCR that they had been out of school in Cameroon for all of 2017.

"For women, the lack of work combined with the over-stretched reception facilities, creates a higher risk of sexual and gender-based violence, particularly from survival sex," he continued.

While only a limited number of cases have been recorded, mainly in the Amana

community of Cross River state, UNHCR is concerned that many more go unreported or are referred only to community elders.

“Incidents of domestic violence, as well as cases of teenage pregnancies involving girls as young as 14, have also been reported,” the spokesperson elaborated.

In Nigeria’s Benue state, two school buildings are serving as temporary refugee accommodations, where women and their families sleep inside communal school halls – deprived of private space and the right to family dignity.

“For them, and for the rest of the population living in temporary tents hastily built next to local residences, sufficient and appropriate shelter is key to ensure adequate registration, systematic aid distribution and reduced protection risks,” Mr. Spindler underscored.

UNHCR and the Nigerian authorities are currently working to identify sites away from the border, where the refugees can live according to international standards.

“We are also establishing offices in the towns of Calabar and Adikpo to better provide assistance and protection to the women and children,” he said, noting that support includes food, basic relief items, water and sanitation facilities.

Since mid-2017, Cameroon’s Anglophone regions have seen demonstrations as tensions have mounted over what the country’s English-speakers see as discrimination against them in favour of the majority French-speaking population.

[UN chief spotlights potential offered by cooperation among countries of Central Asia and Afghanistan](#)

19 January 2018 – The threats of violent extremism and transnational organized crime in Afghanistan reverberate across Central Asia and the world and countering them cannot be the responsibility of one country alone, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres said Friday, urging regional and multilateral cooperation, based firmly on human rights.

“Regional cooperation offers opportunities to address common concerns, including counter-terrorist financing, improving border security, fostering dialogue with religious institutions and leaders, and countering human trafficking and drug smuggling,” said the Secretary-General, [briefing](#) a Security Council meeting on building regional partnership in Afghanistan and

Central Asia.

Convened by Kazakhstan in its capacity as the President of the Security Council for the month of January, the ministerial-level debate was chaired by the country's Foreign Minister, Kairat Abdrakhmanov.

The debate was addressed by other senior ministers from the region, including: Abdulaziz Kamilov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan; Erlan Abdyldaev, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan; Sirodjidin Aslov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan; and Hekanat Khalil Karzai, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan. The day-long session will focus on the link between security and development and the need to integrate the economies of Afghanistan and its Central Asian neighbours.

Kazakhstan's 'concept note' outlining key factors for success in Afghanistan and wider regional integration can be found [here](#)

"With greater regional cooperation and investment, Central Asia and Afghanistan have the potential to become symbols of dialogue, peace, and the promotion of contacts between cultures, religions and civilizations," Mr. Guterres continued.

The Secretary-General also highlighted significant opportunities for intra-regional trade and said that even "modest" improvements can result in substantial gains for all the people of the region.

In that context, he noted ongoing recent intensification of cooperation between Central Asian governments on water resources through bilateral water commissions and agreements.

"These developments hold important lessons for Afghanistan, where water-dependent farming and agriculture make up nearly half the economy," he said, noting also developments in energy cooperation and projects on strengthening trade and transport connectivity.

Mr. Guterres went on to underscore the importance of sustainable development to enable communities and societies flourish and fulfil their potential and in that context, urged Governments to make education, vocational training and jobs "an absolute priority" in national and regional development cooperation.

Only by addressing the root causes of crisis, including inequality, exclusion and discrimination, will we build peaceful societies resilient to terrorism and violent extremismSecretary-General Guterres

Inclusive and sustainable development, he underlined, is vital to preventing and ending conflict, and in sustaining peace.

"Only by addressing the root causes of crisis, including inequality, exclusion and discrimination, will we build peaceful societies resilient to terrorism and violent extremism," added the Secretary-General.

Concluding his remarks, Mr. Guterres also spoke of the work of the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia ([UNRCCA](#)) and the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)) in supporting the region and countries.

"The entire UN family stands ready to assist in promoting greater cooperation and integration among the countries of Central Asia and Afghanistan, toward achieving the goals of peace, sustainable development, stability and security," he said.

Millions of children's lives hang in the balance as South Sudan conflict grinds on – UNICEF chief

19 January 2018 – Following a two-day visit to conflict-ravaged South Sudan, where a quarter of a million children are severely malnourished and at imminent risk of death, the head of the United Nations children's agency has said only an end to hostilities can bring back hope and safety to the children and young people there.

"I have just spent two days in South Sudan where I saw first-hand how four years of a man-made conflict have left children sick, hungry and on the brink of death," Henrietta H. Fore, the Executive Director of the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)), said Thursday in the capital, Juba, as she [wrapped up](#) her visit.

She said the impact of the relentless violence has been devastating. She recalled meeting a mother who had to walk for days to get treatment for her malnourished baby. Recounting another grim incident, Ms. Fore said she had spoken with a young boy who was forced to join an armed group at the age of 10.

At the same time, she said, she saw "signs of hope" emanating from the families experiencing the horror.

"UNICEF and other aid agencies are working on the ground in some of the most dangerous conditions to provide children and young people with their basic needs. This is no small feat," she said, describing South Sudan "the most dangerous place in the world for humanitarians" as 28 aid workers were killed last year alone.

Forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and his former Vice-President Riek Machar, have been battling for the past five years, turning what began in 2013 as a political rivalry into all out conflict that, [according to](#) the UN relief wing, has left some seven million people in need of assistance and

protection, and forced more than two million to flee to neighbouring countries.

Ms. Fore noted that the fighting shows no sign of abating and the humanitarian needs are massive: 2.4 million children have been forced to flee their homes. More than a quarter of a million children are severely malnourished and at imminent risk of death. Over 19,000 children have been recruited into the conflict. At least one in three schools has been damaged, destroyed, occupied or closed. More than 1,200 cases of sexual violence against children have been documented.

"The numbers go on and on. Together they equal an entire generation of young people denied the opportunities they so desperately need to contribute to building their society," she said.

As the dry season approaches, the needs and threats will only continue to grow.

"Only an end to hostilities can bring back hope and safety to the children and young people of South Sudan. Until then, we need unconditional, sustainable access from parties to the conflict and more resources from donors," she said. "Without these, the lives and futures of millions of children in South Sudan will continue to hang in the balance."

[Amid 'dramatic deterioration' in DR Congo, UN and partners launch \\$1.68 billion aid appeal](#)

18 January 2018 – Warning of a "dramatic deterioration" in the humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) over the last 12 months, United Nations agencies and relief partners on Thursday launched the largest-ever funding appeal for the vast central African country.

According to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), the 2018 appeal – totalling \$1.68 billion – aims to reach 10.5 million vulnerable people across the nation, where over 13 million are in need of assistance.

"The past year has been one of the most difficult for millions of civilians, with unrelenting cycle of violence, diseases, malnutrition and loss of livelihoods taking a toll on families," said Kim Bolduc, the Humanitarian Coordinator in the DRC, in capital Kinshasa, launching the appeal on Thursday.

“This appeal reflects the magnitude, severity and unpredictability of a crisis that has gone on for far too long. We are grappling with one of the world’s largest, most acute, and complex humanitarian crisis.”

According to OCHA, there are now some 4.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) across DRC – the highest number in Africa – and the country also grapples with the worst cholera outbreak in the past 15 years.

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Humanitarian Coordinator Kim Bolduc

On the food and nutrition front, over 7.7 million suffer are food insecure, a 30 per cent increase over the previous year.

Worse still is the fact that aid operations in the country suffer with severe underfunding and only half of the \$812.5 million humanitarian response for 2017 was funded.

“Without the essential support of the humanitarian community, the survival of thousands of people is at risk, and hopes of early recovery will be dashed,” Ms. Bolduc stressed.

“We must ensure sufficient funding so to match the magnitude of the crisis.”

The UN relief wing has more on the DR Congo crisis [here](#)