

UN chief issues 'red alert,' urges world to come together in 2018 to tackle pressing challenges

31 December 2017 – In his message on the New Year, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres is calling for unity among the global community to tackle overwhelming challenges and defend values shared by all.

“New Year’s Day 2018, I am not issuing an appeal. I am issuing an alert – a [red alert](#) for our world,” said the Secretary-General.

“As we begin 2018, I call for unity. [...] We can settle conflicts, overcome hatred and defend shared values. But we can only do that together,” he expressed.

Recalling that last year he urged that 2017 be a year for peace, the UN chief noted that unfortunately – in fundamental ways, the world went in reverse.

Perils, including deepening conflicts and new dangers emerged, and global concerns over nuclear weapons reached the highest since the Cold War, he added.

At the same time, impacts of climate change worsened at an alarming rate, inequalities grew and there were horrific violations of human rights.

“Nationalism and xenophobia are on the rise,” said Mr. Guterres.

Underscoring his belief that the world can be made more safe and secure, conflicts can be settled, hatred can be overcome and shared values defended, he emphasized that unity is indispensable to achieving these goals.

“Unity is the path. Our future depends on it,” said the Secretary-General, urging leaders everywhere to resolve in the New Year to:

“Narrow the gaps. Bridge the divides. Rebuild trust by bringing people together around common goals.”

VIDEO: Message by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on the occasion of the 2018 New Year.

After 1,000 days of conflict, Yemen

sliding 'from crisis into deepening catastrophe,' UN agencies warn

30 December 2017 – As the conflict in Yemen passes the grim 1,000-day milestone, the United Nations is warning that if humanitarian workers cannot gain greater access and the violence does not subside, the cost in lives will be incalculable.

'As violence has escalated in recent days, children and families are yet again being killed in attacks and bombardments,' the heads of key UN agencies said Friday in a [joint statement](#), as they once again appeal to parties to the conflict to immediately allow full humanitarian access in Yemen and to stop the fighting.

World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) Executive Director David Beasley, and UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) Executive Director Anthony Lake, painted a dire picture of what 1,000 days of brutal violence in Yemen has wrought saying the fighting has driven families from their homes, destroyed hospitals and damaged schools.

'More than 1,000 days of children recruited to fight [...] 1,000 days of disease and death [and] of unimaginable human suffering,' they said, adding that the conflict has created the worst humanitarian crisis in the world – a crisis which has engulfed the entire country.

Some 75 per cent of Yemen's population is in need of humanitarian assistance, including 11.3 million children who cannot survive without it. At least 60 per cent of Yemenis are now food insecure and 16 million people do not have access to safe water and proper sanitation. Less than half of Yemen's health facilities are fully functional and medical staff has gone months without being paid their salaries.

'This horrific tally of the conflict's devastation reflects only what we know. In reality, the situation is likely to be worse. UN agencies do not have full humanitarian access to some of the hardest hit communities. In many, we cannot even assess their needs,' the UN leaders explained.

'But this we do know: Yemen has passed the tipping point into a rapid decline from crisis to deepening catastrophe.'

While acknowledging some progress in recent days with the first commercial fuel imports allowed into Hudaydah port, following recent commercial food imports, the agency chiefs said it is critical that these supplies are maintained, as restrictions on fuel imports have caused the price of diesel fuel to double, threatening access to safe water and sanitation, and urgent medical care.

Far too many hospitals are short of fuel for the generators that allow them

to stay open. Water pumping stations serving over three million people are quickly running out of the fuel they need to operate, while the price of commercially trucked water has increased up to six-fold.

“Safe water is now completely unaffordable for more than two thirds of Yemenis living in extreme poverty. All of this threatens to undermine efforts to contain the ongoing, deadly outbreaks of diphtheria, cholera and acute watery diarrhea,” they warned.

“We remain committed to helping the people of Yemen. We have reached nearly six million people with clean water, distributed 3.7 million litres of fuel to public hospitals, treated more than 167,000 children for severe acute malnutrition,” they noted but warned: “Yet worsening conditions on the ground threaten to overwhelm our capacity to respond.”

“Yemen’s families should not have to withstand another day of war, let alone another 1,000,” the UN leaders concluded.

[UN chief condemns attack on church near Cairo, calls for perpetrators to be brought to justice](#)

29 December 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has condemned the attack that took place earlier Friday outside Mar Mina church in the Helwan district, south of Cairo, Egypt.

In a statement from his spokesman, the Secretary-General [extended his deepest condolences](#) to the families of the victims and to the Government and people of Egypt and wishes a swift recovery to those who have been injured.

According to media reports, at least nine people were killed when gunmen opened fire on a Coptic Orthodox Church on Friday, in the southern Cairo neighborhood of Helwan.

“The Secretary-General calls for those responsible for today’s horrific attack to be swiftly brought to justice,” the statement concluded.

[Peacekeepers saved many lives despite](#)

challenges, UN officials stress at year's end

29 December 2017 – Despite a particularly deadly year for United Nations peacekeepers – with more than 60 ‘blue helmets’ killed in hostile acts – the Organization in 2017 completed its peacekeeping objectives in Côte d’Ivoire, refocused its work in Haiti and will soon complete its mandate in Liberia.

“We do protect civilians every day. We do save lives every day. We often do it under very difficult and stressful circumstances,” Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix said in a recent interview with *UN News*.

He added that “many lives were saved” because of peacekeepers’ actions this year in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, South Sudan and other places.

“I think it’s more than warranted to pay tribute to them and their achievements,” Mr. Lacroix said. “But certainly we have to work hard to overcome the challenges we are facing.”

Challenges in 2017

One of the challenges facing UN peacekeepers, as they operate in increasingly complex and dangerous areas, is the need for better training and equipment, particularly when it comes to intelligence gathering and enhancing situational awareness.

This includes the use of modern technologies, such as unmanned aerial services, radars and tethered balloons.

The head of the UN Department of Field Support, Atul Khare, said the UN is also looking to borrow or purchase more equipment related to security reinforcements, accommodations, vehicles and communications tools, among others.

In Mali, for example, one out of four military hospitals is without staff or equipment, and in the Central African Republic, one in three, he said.

The needs also extend to gaps in working closely with local communities, which means that in some areas more peacekeepers are needed who speak French.

“We must do even more on the side of prevention and risk mitigation when seeking to protect our colleagues. Providing for the safety and security of deployed personnel in volatile environments is an absolute necessity,” Mr. Khare told *UN News*.

Sexual exploitation and abuse

One of the main challenges in peacekeeping operations has been grappling with allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers.

Earlier this year, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres unveiled his strategy for eradicating the scourge, and appointed Jane Connors as the first Victims' Rights Advocate.

“It is about dignity for the victims, compassion, a real feeling of empathy, a feeling that they are not forgotten,” Ms. Connors [said](#) in early December. “That their hurt, their pain is acknowledged, and we do as much as we possibly can do to make their situation better.”

Ms. Connors made the comments during a visit to South Sudan, where four of last year's 103 allegations were filed. This year, the UN recorded 54 allegations – roughly half the number.

“This is a result of the many robust efforts put in place to train our personnel, raise awareness among communities on the risks associated with SEA [sexual exploitation and abuse], promote and enforce the zero-tolerance policy and partner with Member States,” said Mr. Khare.

The new UN strategy to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse puts more pressure on governments to investigate and prosecute wrong-doing. In addition, 17 countries volunteered some \$1.8 million for a trust fund to aid victims get medical, psycho-social, legal or socio-economic support.

“We can see that information about allegations are coming more with less obstacle than before,” Mr. Lacroix said. “At the same time, we need to do more to fully implement the policy and it has to have strong awareness at every level.”

Protecting the environment

UN peacekeeping is also managing its impact in another way within the countries that host its operations – by preserving natural resources and not damaging the environment during the physical deployments.

“‘Do no harm’ must include both communities and the resources upon which they depend: water, land, cultural heritage,” Mr. Khare said.

Plans to reduce the peacekeeping footprint and energy consumption also saves time and resources, allowing peacekeeping missions to focus on implementing their core mandates.

All UN peacekeeping operations this year launched Environmental Action Plans which have, for example, led to 80 wastewater treatment plans being installed in peacekeeping operations.

“We are constantly looking into keeping our own house in order, and leave the place better than we found it,” said Mr. Khare.

Looking ahead to 2018

If the year 2017 brought ambitious reform, then 2018 must be the year that these reforms are implemented, Mr. Lacroix said.

He noted that this will be particularly important in the field, where colleagues must be informed and empowered to act.

Mr. Khare echoed the idea that reforms are ongoing, noting that the goal is to ensure that we are stronger in prevention, more agile in mediation, and more nimble, efficient and cost-effective in our operations.

He pointed to improved efficiency and effectiveness of peacekeeping, including also by strengthening engagement with Member States and regional organizations to better serve the most vulnerable people around the world.

We approach 2018 with a sense of hope. We will do our best to successfully implement these reforms and certainly we will do our best to support our colleagues in the field, said Mr. Lacroix.

[UN chief welcomes exchange of prisoners and detainees in eastern Ukraine](#)

29 December 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has welcomed the recent exchange of prisoners and detainees in eastern Ukraine and commended all those who helped bring about the exchange.

[The Secretary-General] hopes that this humanitarian act could serve as [a positive step towards strengthening the confidence among the sides](#), read a statement attributable to his spokesperson Thursday.

[He also] urges all parties to take further measures in this spirit, including by fully respecting and upholding the ceasefire agreement and continuing to work together to fulfil all of their commitments under the Minsk agreements, it added.

On 27 December, more than 300 detainees were released with the participation of the UN partner, International Committee of the Red Cross ([ICRC](#)). The operation took place near the town of Maiorsk and is the largest since the beginning of the conflict.

[According](#) to the ICRC, this is the first time in 2017 that, at the request of the parties concerned, the ICRC has participated in the release and transfer of detainees held in relation to the conflict in Ukraine.

In late February 2014, the situation in Ukraine transcended what was initially seen as an internal Ukrainian political crisis into violent clashes in parts of the country, later reaching full-scale conflict in the east. Nevertheless, despite a September 2014 ceasefire agreed in Minsk, the situation deteriorated and the crisis is now slipping into its fourth year.