

Aid has not reached 'a single soul' in Syria's besieged areas in December, says UN advisor

21 December 2017 – The list of people requiring life-saving medical help in Syria is getting shorter not because they were evacuated, but because they died, a senior United Nations advisor warned Thursday.

“In many months we reached only 10 or maximum 20 per cent of people in besieged areas. In December, we haven’t reached a single soul,” Jan Egeland, Special Advisor to the UN Special Envoy, told journalists in Geneva after meeting with countries that have influence on the warring parties inside Syria, where war has raged for nearly seven years.

Mr. Egeland said that inside “what is left of Syria,” nearly 14 million people need humanitarian assistance and well over half of them get help every month. Things are much more complicated for the 3.4 million people surviving in besieged areas and so-called “hard-to-reach” places, including Eastern Ghouta, Foah, Kafraya and Yarmuk.

The international humanitarian task force has helped “dozens and dozens” of aid convoys reach previously inaccessible areas, but many other places still remain out of bounds, he said, calling for improved aid access to the country’s most vulnerable communities in 2018.

Mr. Egeland said although the number of people living in these front-line areas has fallen by nearly a half since 2016, humanitarian access has not improved.



Jan Egeland, Special Advisor to the Special Envoy for Syria at a press conference. UN Photo/ Jean Marc Ferré

He expressed hope that upcoming ceasefire talks in Astana with Russia, Turkey and Iran, would improve access for aid workers, before calling for a political solution to the “quagmire” that Syria has become.

Just outside Damascus, conditions remain dire in Eastern Ghouta, an opposition-held area where 400,000 people are still under siege, amid ongoing mortar attacks by rebels into the Syrian capital.

Food is now only available “to the most affluent,” Mr. Egeland said, warning that the list of people requiring life-saving medical help is getting shorter all the time – “not because we are evacuating them, but because they are dying.”

He said these include a nine-month old infant born in Eastern Ghouta with a

cleft-palate who died a week ago from severe acute malnutrition.

[Conflict casts shadow on fight to end hunger in some regions – UN agriculture agency](#)

21 December 2017 – Conflict and protracted crises in a handful of countries in the Near East and North Africa are hindering efforts to eradicate hunger in the region by 2030, according to a United Nations report published Thursday.

“When countries in the region are suffering from an escalation of conflicts, the aim to tackle the region’s deepest concerns of malnutrition, water scarcity and climate change becomes more challenging but at the same time [more urgent](#),” said Abdessalam Ould Ahmed, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)), at the report’s launch in Cairo, Egypt.

The 2017 edition of the Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) highlights in particular how an ongoing intensification of violence is opening a wide “hunger gap” between countries being affected by conflicts and those that are not.

Mr. Ould Ahmed pointed to “the growing need to implement long-term and comprehensive policies and practices to achieve zero hunger by 2030,” adding that that “only through improved cooperation and solidarity will the region be able to end conflicts and violence and get back to development.”

NENA countries include, Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

In the region’s countries directly impacted by conflict, 27.2 per cent of all people were chronically hungry, or undernourished, during the 2014-16 period. That’s six times higher than the share of the population that was undernourished in countries not affected by strife – 4.6 per cent.

Meanwhile, “severe food insecurity,” another metric used by FAO to measure hunger, in conflict-affected countries is now double that in non-conflict countries.

In Syria, violence has provoked a 67 per cent reduction in the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) and severely undermined food security. About 70 to 80 per cent of Syrians now need humanitarian assistance, while 50 per cent require food assistance.

In Iraq, where violence has led to for 58 per cent decline in GDP, 30 per cent of the population needs humanitarian assistance while nine per cent requires food assistance.

Yemen is also being wracked by conflict, leading to a situation in which 70 to 80 per cent of the population are in need humanitarian assistance and 50 per cent require food assistance.

Libya is another hot spot where conflict is undermining food security; there, six per cent of the population are in need of food assistance, according to the report.

[UN tribunal for former Yugoslavia leaves behind culture of accountability, says Guterres](#)

21 December 2017 – The United Nations tribunal dealing with atrocities committed during the Balkans wars of 1990s has been a pioneer in creating the contemporary architecture of international criminal justice, and “gave a voice to victims,” [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres said Thursday.

“The creation of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in 1993 was a [ground-breaking moment](#),” said Mr. Guterres in his keynote address at the closing ceremony of the court in The Hague, Netherlands.

Recalling that it had been close to half a century since the Nuremberg and Tokyo war crimes trials and the 1948 Genocide Convention entered into force in 1951, Mr. Guterres said no international criminal tribunal that would recognize individual criminal responsibility for such a crime had yet been established.

“The creation of this Tribunal demonstrated a newfound and serious commitment by the international community that those responsible for perpetrating the most serious crimes of international concern should be held accountable for their actions,” he said.

Beyond these numbers, the Tribunal gave a voice to victims

The Tribunal sat for more than 10,000 days of trial, and heard testimony from nearly 5,000 people. Ninety individuals were sentenced for their crimes, including genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Former Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic conducted his own defence in a five-year-long

trial before the Tribunal, which ended without a verdict when he died in 2006.

“Beyond these numbers, the Tribunal gave a voice to victims,” the Secretary-General said, noting that people who had experienced atrocious violence and tragic losses were given the opportunity to tell their stories in court, to place their experiences on the record, and to see the perpetrators of crimes against them held accountable.

The Tribunal leaves behind one of its most important legacies: the immense archives documenting what happened in Sarajevo, Foca, Vukovar, Suva Reka, Srebrenica and elsewhere.

“These records ensure that the world will not forget, that history cannot be re-written, and that the victims’ voices will continue to resound down the decades,” he said.

FEATURE: [Curtain falls on UN tribunal’s 24-year history of fighting impunity in former Yugoslavia](#)

The Tribunal has been a pioneer in creating the contemporary architecture of international criminal justice, and pushed international expectations of accountability beyond what was anticipated in 1993.

Accountability has taken root in our collective consciousness

“Accountability has taken root in our collective consciousness,” he said, explaining that it is common practice for the UN Security Council to call for the perpetrators of atrocities to be held accountable, and similarly this is reflected on the statements of heads of state; in the work of journalists; in the efforts of national courts; and in public opinion.

The Tribunal also inspired the establishment of entities for ensuring accountability both at the international and national levels.

Indeed, without the UN tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda, there might never have been a permanent International Criminal Court, the central institution of the international criminal justice system today, Mr. Guterres said.

But the future is not only the fight against impunity, it is also the pursuit of truth and reconciliation.

The genocide in Srebrenica will continue to haunt the global conscience. Just as the whole international community, including the UN, has had to acknowledge their share of responsibility for the massacre, so must the various communities of the former Yugoslavia build on the legacy of the Tribunal and deepen their efforts towards trust and full reconciliation.

“Accepting the undeniable truth and facts of past tragedies is crucial for building a better and common future,” he said.

[General Assembly demands all States comply with UN resolutions regarding status of Jerusalem](#)

21 December 2017 – By an overwhelming majority, Member States in the United Nations General Assembly on Thursday “demanded” that all countries comply with Security Council resolutions regarding the status of Jerusalem.

Through a resolution adopted by a recorded vote of 128 in favour to nine against, with 35 abstentions, the 193-member Assembly expressed “deep regret” over recent decisions concerning the status of Jerusalem and stressed that the Holy City “is a final status issue to be resolved through negotiations in line with relevant UN resolutions.”

Action in the Assembly today follows a [failed attempt by the Security Council on Monday adopt a similar text](#) reflecting regret among the body’s members about “recent decisions regarding the status of Jerusalem,” with a veto from the United States, a permanent member of the Council.

Ahead of that failed resolution, Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, told the Security Council that the security situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory had become more tense in the wake of US President Donald Trump’s decision on 6 December to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Subsequently, Yemen and Turkey, in their respective capacities as Chair of the Arab Group and the Chair of the Summit of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation, [requested](#) the President of the General Assembly to “urgently resume’ the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly in accordance with the so-named ‘Uniting for peace’ procedure.

This procedure, under Assembly resolution 377 (1950), is a [pathway around](#) a Security Council veto. By it, the Assembly can call an emergency special session to consider a matter “with a view to making appropriate recommendations to members for collective measures,” if the Security Council fails to act or if there is lack of unanimity among the Council’s permanent members, China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, and the United States.

Since the tenth such meeting, the Assembly has temporarily adjourned the emergency special session and authorized “the President of the General Assembly [...] to resume its meeting upon request from Member States,” allowing for speedy consideration by the body of urgent issues.

The [most recent](#) resumed emergency session was in 2009 when the Assembly called a meeting on East Jerusalem and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Resolutions in the Assembly are non-binding and do not carry the force of international law as do measures agreed in the Security Council.

Find out more about the Assembly's emergency special sessions and resolution 377 (1950) [here](#)

Today's resolution demanded that "all States comply with Security Council resolutions regarding the Holy City of Jerusalem, and not recognize any actions or measures contrary to those resolutions."

The General Assembly further affirmed that "any decisions and actions which purport to have altered the character, status or demographic composition of the Holy City of Jerusalem have no legal effect, are null and void and must be rescinded in compliance with relevant resolutions of the Security Council."

In that regard the Assembly also called upon all States to refrain from the establishment of diplomatic missions in the Holy City of Jerusalem, pursuant to Security Council resolution 478 adopted in 1980.

Reiterating its call for the reversal of the negative trends that endanger the two-State solution, the Assembly urged greater international and regional efforts and support aimed at achieving, without delay, a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

[UNICEF airlifts six million doses of vaccines to children in Yemen](#)

21 December 2017 – A plane chartered by the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) landed in Sana'a, Yemen, on Thursday, delivering nearly 6 million doses of essential vaccines to protect millions of children at risk of preventable diseases, including the current diphtheria outbreak that has reportedly infected over 300 people and killed 35.

"Vaccinating children in Yemen now is critical to protect them from preventable diseases and death. It is vital that vaccines and other lifesaving supplies for children continue to flow into Yemen and across the country unimpeded. They are a [lifeline](#) for millions of children," said Meritxell Relaño, UNICEF Representative in Yemen.

Most diphtheria cases and deaths are among children.

Since 2015, the southern Arabian nation has been in a conflict between forces loyal to President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi and those allied to the Houthi rebel movement.

The country is in the grips of the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with restrictions on fuel and food imports further complicating emergency response.

The restrictions add to the misery of children in Yemen who already face the triple threat of diseases, malnutrition and violence.

UNICEF reiterates its call on all parties to allow unhindered humanitarian access to all of Yemen's land, sea and air ports and to facilitate the distribution of lifesaving assistance for children inside the country.