

Deadly war weapons endanger lives of over 220,000 children in eastern Ukraine – UNICEF

21 December 2017 – Landmines, unexploded ordnance and other explosive remnants of war threaten the lives of over 220,000 children in eastern Ukraine, the United Nations Children’s Fund has warned, calling on all parties to the conflict to immediately end the use of the lethal weapons and allow mine clearance activities to begin.

“It is unacceptable that places where children could safely play less than four years ago [are now riddled with deadly explosives](#),” said Giovanna Barberis, the head of UNICEF operations in the country, in a news release Thursday.

“All parties to the conflict must immediately end the use of these gruesome weapons that have contaminated communities and put children in constant danger of injury and death,” she added.

According to UNICEF, a child has become a conflict-related casualty every week, on average, between January and November this year along eastern Ukraine’s contact line – a 500-kilometre strip of land dividing Government and non-government controlled areas, where fighting is most severe.

Landmines, explosive remnants of war and unexploded ordnance were the leading cause of these tragedies, accounting for approximately two-thirds of all recorded injuries and deaths during the period. In most cases the casualties occurred when children picked up explosives such as hand grenades and fuses.

I picked it up and I think I pressed something, and it just exploded. There was a lot of blood...Aleksey, a 14-year-old boy

Many more children have been left with lifelong disabilities.

Aleksey, a 14-year-old boy, badly injured in one such incident recently told UNICEF: “I picked it up and I think I pressed something, and it just exploded. There was a lot of blood and the fingers were hanging. I was so scared that I started shaking. I almost collapsed.”

In an effort to make children aware of the dangers, UNICEF and partners have been conducting mine risk education programmes since 2015, reaching over 500,000 children across the region. The UN agency has also provided psychosocial support to 270,000 children affected by the ongoing conflict.

However, persisting funding gaps have severely hampered the response.

With just mere days left in the year, UNICEF's emergency appeal to support children and their families in eastern Ukraine is only 46 per cent funded, while its child protection programmes including mine risk education and providing psychosocial support for children has an even larger funding gap of 73 per cent.

[UN envoy urges support for efforts to resume political process in Yemen](#)

20 December 2017 – The United Nations envoy for Yemen on Wednesday called for halting violence and supporting efforts to bring warring parties together for the resumption of the political process.

Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Yemen, "is deeply concerned about the [escalation of violence](#) in Yemen and the continuous violations putting the life of civilians at risk," said a statement issued by his office.

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 envoy reiterated that there is no military solution to the crisis, and the only solution is a Yemeni-owned political process "without any foreign intervention," the statement said.

Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed condemned targeting the Saudi capital of Riyadh on 19 December with a ballistic missile, saying that "this is an escalation that hinders peace efforts in Yemen."

The envoy called for restraint and urged parties to refrain from any acts of violence that would aggravate the already difficult humanitarian and security situation in the country.

The envoy welcomed the decision of the Arab Alliance to open the port of Hodeidah for humanitarian and relief access and allow commercial ships to enter for 30 days, also calling for the continuation of these measures thereafter.

The envoy reiterated his earnest intention to redouble his efforts urgently to get in contact with all parties to prepare the resumption of a comprehensive and credible political process.

Migration, UN reform and sustainable development among 2018 priorities, says Assembly President

20 December 2017 – Safe migration, conflict prevention, sustainable development and United Nations reform will be the priorities of the 72nd UN General Assembly over the coming year, the 193-member body's President, Miroslav Lajčák, said on Wednesday.

"We will continue our work on the [Global Compact](#) for safe, orderly and regular migration," Mr. Lajčák told a press conference at UN Headquarters, welcoming constructive debates and a positive atmosphere during the consultation and preparatory phases on the initiative.

"The next steps will be the intergovernmental negotiations, which will start in February with the aim of concluding them before July," he explained, noting that he will hold parallel meetings on the pressing issue of safe migration with key actors from academia, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, aiming to take into account the views of society as a whole.

Meanwhile, Mr. Lajčák said that on 24 and 25 April 2018, he would convene a high-level meeting on peacebuilding. "This will be a good opportunity to focus on the UN's work on sustainable peace and conflict prevention," he noted.

Keeping up the global momentum on the [2030 Agenda](#) and its Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), he said the Assembly would organize three events between March and June.

In May, the General Assembly would organize an event on youth focused on education, employment and the prevention of radicalism. "We do not want to make this event a routine meeting. We want this programme to be designed with young people," said Mr. Lajčák, who said it is vital "not only talk to young people [but also] to listen to what [they] have to say about the work of the UN."

In June, the Assembly President will hold a meeting on financing for development. "We need to address significant funding gaps when it comes to implementing the [SDGs](#)," Mr. Lajčák stated: adding: "The truth is that with the current budget and pace, we will not be able to achieve the SDGs by 2030. So we need to strengthen the links between the SDGs and the financial resources that are available within the private sector."

On other priorities, he said the UN reforms initiated by the Secretary-General will also be at the heart of the Assembly's agenda in 2018. To that end, Mr. Lajčák announced that the Assembly had earlier on Wednesday adopted by consensus a resolution on overhauling the UN peace and security

architecture. The text requests the Secretary-General to provide a second comprehensive report on this reform and on the development and management system of the Organization.

[South Sudan: First UN safe haven for displaced civilians closes](#)

20 December 2017 – The first ‘Protection of Civilians’ site – a place of refuge and safety set up next to a United Nations base in South Sudan – has been successfully closed after internally displaced families expressed the desire and confidence to return to their homes, the UN mission in the country said Wednesday.

“It’s gratifying to finally see people [feel safe enough](#) to go home,” said the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Mission in South Sudan ([UNMISS](#)), David Shearer.

“There is conflict across much of South Sudan where people fear for their lives. But in some areas, like Melut, we are able to help people out of the camps back to their communities,” he added.

The world’s youngest country, South Sudan has spent much of its short life mired in conflict, riven by a political face-off between President Salva Kiir and his then former Vice-President Riek Machar that erupted into full-blown war late in 2013.

The site, next to the UN base in Melut in the Upper Nile region, had provided sanctuary to hundreds of families since the conflict broke out four years ago in the world’s youngest nation.

Over the past week, these families have been returned to their homes with the assistance of UNMISS and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) in partnership with other humanitarian agencies.

VIDEO:The United Nations peacekeeping mission in South Sudan, UNMISS, closed one of the sites where it was providing sanctuary for families in the wake of the conflict that broke out four years ago.

Of the 562 recently registered, most chose to settle in Melut town given the improved security situation there. Approximately 255 were relocated elsewhere with some choosing to shift to the Malakal site because of personal protection needs while others moved home to Renk, Ulang, Maban and Wau.

There has been significant consultation with the community and humanitarian agencies about the relocation process and ensuring the families continue to

receive assistance for returns.

The protection of civilians is primarily the South Sudan government's responsibility but, in many cases, people have fled from government security forces.

UNMISS provides sanctuary to almost 210,000 internally displaced people at seven locations across South Sudan. These camps are a last resort and exist only to shelter people who genuinely fear for their lives.

"We will look at every camp individually to see if the conditions allow people to return home voluntarily and safely. Where these conditions exist, we will try to assist people back," said Mr. Shearer. "Camps are not a long-term solution and certainly not the right place to bring up children or live with dignity."

The closure of the site at Melut will enable the peacekeeping troops based there to shift their focus from guarding the camp to increasing patrols in the surrounding area. Extending their protective presence into other communities will save lives and build confidence so that, over time, more people will feel safe enough to return home.

Learn more about the UN Mission in South Sudan [here](#)

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

20 December 2017 – As the United Nations tribunal dealing with atrocities committed during the Balkans conflicts in the 1990s prepares to close its doors on 31 December, top officials say the court has proven skeptics wrong, citing its achievements and its immense contribution to international criminal justice.

Established in 1993, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has spent 10,800 trial days, heard 4,650 witnesses, produced 2.5 million pages of transcripts and indicted 161 individuals – all in its quest to end impunity for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed there.

"The ICTY has been the foundation for the existing international criminal justice regime. I believe it's fair to say the ICTY can be considered the genesis of the global culture of accountability," the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and UN Legal Counsel, Miguel de Serpa Soares, told a recent event held to reflect on the tribunal's 24 years of operation.

The ICTY has been the foundation for the existing international criminal justice regime

Among other achievements, Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic – two of the main architects of some of the worst atrocities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the genocide of Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica – were convicted by the ICTY, with sentences of 40 years and life in prison, respectively.

“In 1993, I think, no one believed that we would have been able to bring justice to anyone [...] We have proved exactly the opposite,” ICTY President Carmel Agius told *UN News*. He noted that the court has completed all judicial work, despite complex challenges, including the difficulty to bring witnesses from abroad, translation and interpretation issues, and a lack of cooperation from countries from which help was needed.

When the ICTY – the first court to undertake the prosecution and adjudication of the gravest international crimes since the post-World War II Nuremberg and Tokyo trials – was created, the international community was studying the possibility of creating an international criminal court and was still developing international criminal code, Mr. Agius recalled.

VIDEO: Through its trials, the Tribunal has heard close to 5,000 witnesses; established facts about numerous horrific crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia.

Given the atrocities being committed with absolute impunity in what was then Yugoslavia, UN Member States could not stand by and created the ICTY as “an emergency remedy,” said Mr. Agius, who was first elected to the tribunal as a judge in 2001 and has been serving as its President since November 2015.

In his view, an early success of the ICTY paved the way for the establishment of a permanent tribunal, namely the International Criminal Court ([ICC](#)).

“The international community, which believed in international justice and was watching us to see if we could make this experiment work, suddenly realized that the time was ripe to take one step further and that what could not be achieved over the previous 50 years could now become a possibility,” he said.

Mr. Agius said he was part of the negotiations for the establishment of the ICC that started around 1995. “By 1998, we had the [Rome] Statute,” he said, referring to the treaty that established the ICC as the central institution of the global criminal justice system.

“The Americans speak of the miracle of Philadelphia. I speak of the miracle of the ICTY,” he said, “because we inspired the international community to take our example forward” to create a permanent international criminal court.

Earlier this month, Mr. Agius addressed the Security Council, the body that created the ICTY, for the last time.

“Despite all the sceptics, the naysayers, the deniers who, from the very beginning, embarked on a campaign against the Tribunal and have been at pains to question our legitimacy and integrity and portray a doomsday scenario, I am proud to appear before this esteemed Council today and say: mission accomplished,” he declared.

Phone call: ‘General Mladic was arrested’

The Chief Prosecutor of the ICTY, Serge Brammertz, told *UN News* that the closure of the court, which is based in The Hague, in the Netherlands, does not mean the end of impunity for the crimes committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and other places.

“We have indicted 161 individuals. It is a lot, compared with other international tribunals, but it’s very little if we look at the number of crimes which still need to be investigated and prosecuted,” he said, noting that in Sarajevo alone, there are more than 3,000 investigations ongoing.

“You can only have peace, long-term peace, if there is accountability for crimes committed during the conflict,” he added.



In 1995, a government soldier reads out the names of soldiers who are confirmed survivors or escapees from the fallen city of Srebrenica. Photo: UNICEF/LeMoyne

Mr. Brammertz said the ICTY “exceeded expectations” and was “a success despite the legitimate criticism” that many victims’ associations have because of their higher expectations.

The most important moments for him over the past 10 years as Chief Prosecutor were his meetings with victims and survivors, who always reminded him why the tribunal was set up.

“But if I have to choose one specific moment, it was when I got the phone call: ‘General Mladic was arrested,’” he said.

Legacy of fighting impunity, ensuring accountability

Among the tribunal’s achievements, it held individuals to account regardless of their position. The ICTY indicted heads of state, prime ministers, army chiefs-of-staff, government ministers and many other leaders.

It has also provided thousands of victims the opportunity to be heard and to speak about their suffering. Many of them displayed exceptional courage in recalling their harrowing experiences. The tribunal preserves their testimonies in court transcripts and video recordings.

One of the witnesses who testified at the ICTY, Teufika Ibrahimfendic, a healthcare professional who had been involved in treating victims of war crimes, said that “the Hague Tribunal, [for] all the victims, all the women

with whom I have had a chance to work, has a very great significance for them... They do trust that the real causes of what happened will be identified and that the people will muster enough courage, including victims, to tell the story of what happened... People expect that justice will be done and that the right decisions will be reached.”

The ICTY has also established crucial facts related to crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia, following careful review of testimonies of eyewitnesses, survivors and perpetrators, forensic data and documentary and video evidence. The tribunal’s judgements have contributed to creating a historical record, combatting denial and preventing attempts at revisionism and provided the basis for future transitional justice initiatives in the region.

In addition, the tribunal has encouraged judiciaries in the former Yugoslavia to reform and to continue its work of trying those responsible for war crimes committed there during the 1990s. It works in partnership with domestic courts in the region – transferring its evidence, knowledge and jurisprudence – as part of its continuing efforts to bring justice to victims in the former Yugoslavia.