

UN agency gravely concerned by lack of medical services in Syria's eastern Ghouta

22 November 2017 – Despite escalating violence and increasing humanitarian needs, life-saving medicines, medical equipment, and surgical supplies are prevented from entering eastern Ghouta in Syria and the plan to transfer critically ill patients to hospitals elsewhere has not been approved, the United Nations health agency has warned.

“Continuous and [unimpeded humanitarian aid](#) to eastern Ghouta is urgently needed, and medical evacuations of critically ill patients are long overdue,” said Elizabeth Hoff, World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) Representative in Syria.

“Life-saving health supplies are available, and WHO, along with partners, stands ready to respond to health needs once access is granted,” she added.

In eastern Ghouta of Rural Damascus, local health authorities report that in just four days through 17 November, 84 people were killed, including 17 children and 6 women; and 659 people were injured, including 127 children and 87 women.

During the same period, more than 200 surgical operations were conducted in eastern Ghouta's overwhelmed and under-resourced hospitals. Hospitals and healthcare centres have been damaged, severely limiting medical care for people at a time when they need it most.

On 18 November, two resident doctors and three patients at al-Mujtahed Hospital in Damascus city were injured in an attack. The 412-bed facility is one of the main public hospitals in Damascus serving patients from eastern Ghouta and other parts of the country.

WHO is also concerned that lack of essential health services, as well as limited electricity, fuel, safe drinking-water and basic sanitation services are increasing the risk of disease outbreaks such as diarrheal diseases, typhoid and hepatitis.

Further, inter-agency convoys to the area have been irregular, and the aid provided has been insufficient to meet the increasing needs of up to 400,000 people besieged for more than 4 years.

Conviction of Mladic, the 'epitome of evil,' a momentous victory for justice – UN rights chief

22 November 2017 – Welcoming today's conviction of former Bosnian Serb army commander Ratko Mladic on multiple counts of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes by a United Nations international tribunal, the Organization's top human right official said that the verdict is a warning to perpetrators of such crimes that they will be brought to justice.

Mladic is the epitome of evil, and the prosecution of Mladic is the epitome of what international justice is all about, underscored Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in a [statement](#) Wednesday.

Today's verdict is a warning to the perpetrators of such crimes that they will not escape justice, no matter how powerful they may be nor how long it may take. They will be held accountable, he added.

Mladic presided over some of the most horrific crimes to occur in Europe since World War II, bringing terror, death and destruction to thousands of victims, and sorrow, tragedy and trauma to countless more.

In the statement, Mr. Zeid also noted that Mladic's conviction, by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), is a testament to the courage and determination of those victims and witnesses who never gave up hope that they would see him brought to justice.

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He also expressed hope that while the conviction will not return loved ones to their families or erase the past, the verdict can help counter the voices of those who either deny these horrific crimes or glorify those who committed them.

Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic two of the main architects of some of the worst atrocities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the genocide of Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica have now been convicted by the Tribunal and are facing lengthy jail sentences.

From 1994 to 1996, Mr. Zeid, had served at the UN Protection Force in the former Yugoslavia and experienced the war there first-hand. He later played a key role International Criminal Court ([ICC](#)).

Underscoring that all those who question the importance of the ICC should

reflect on the Mladic case, Mr. Zeid also underscored that all those who are committing serious international crimes in so many situations today across the world should fear this result.

UN chief condemns suicide attack that leaves dozens dead in northern Nigeria town

21 November 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has condemned the suicide attacks that took place earlier Tuesday in Adamawa state, Nigeria, which resulted in scores of casualties, and called for those responsible for the “heinous acts” to be swiftly brought to justice.

“The Secretary-General extends his condolences to the bereaved families and to the Government and people of Nigeria for the loss of life. He wishes a speedy recovery to the injured,” according to a [statement](#) issued by Deputy UN Spokesman Farhan Haq.

Through the statement, Mr. Guterres reiterated the solidarity of the UN with the Government of Nigeria in its fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

“He also renews the commitment of the United Nations to continue to support regional counter-terrorism initiatives,” the statement concluded.

According to media reports, at least 50 people were killed in an early morning bomb attack at a mosque in northern Nigeria town of Mubi, which is near the border with Cameroon.

Nearly 21 million people now have access to HIV treatment – UN agency

21 November 2017 – About 20.9 million people now have access to the antiretroviral therapy, according to a new report by the UN agency leading the global push to end AIDS, spotlighting that this remarkable progress has been made possible by people living with HIV demanding their rights, strong leadership and financial commitment.

“People, no matter what their health needs, require [comprehensive health](#)

[solutions](#) that are accessible, available, acceptable and of good quality,” Michel Sidibé, the Executive Director of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), said in the foreword of the agency’s new report, [Right to health](#), which was launched yesterday in South Africa.

Mr. Sidibé cited South Africa as an example of a dramatic scale-up of HIV treatment, saying that while in 2000, the country had on 90 people on treatment, today, there are more than four million.

“Today, South Africa has the biggest life-saving treatment programme in the world [...] This is the kind of acceleration we need to encourage, sustain and replicate,” he said.

The rising treatment helps keep more people living with HIV alive and well. As treatment access has increased for pregnant women living with HIV, new infections among children have been rapidly reduced by almost half worldwide, according to UNAIDS.

The new report highlights the gaps in accessing to health, while also providing some innovative examples of AIDS response.

One challenge is to ensure 17.1 million people, including 1.2 million children, have access to HIV treatment, especially in the countries where new HIV infections are rising.

In that regard, the report points out that new HIV infections are rising at a rapid pace in countries that have not expanded health services to those most affected. Wherever the right to health is compromised, HIV spreads, says UNAIDS.

In eastern Europe and Central Asia, for example, new HIV infections have risen by 60 per cent since 2010, and AIDS-related deaths by 27 per cent.

While in sub-Saharan Africa, the majority of new HIV infections are among young women and girls aged between 15 and 24 years.

The report “has been giving a voice to people living with HIV and giving affected communities and civil society the means to demand their right to health,” stressed Mr. Sidibé.

He further called on Governments to respect, protect and fulfil the right to health of everyone and reiterated the world’s commitment to Sustainable Development [Goal 3](#), to ensure good health and well-being for all.

Situation on Australian ‘offshore

processing' facility deteriorates by the day – UN refugee official

21 November 2017 – Three weeks following the closure of the Manus Island regional processing centre, the situation on the ground is very serious and deteriorates by the day, a senior United Nations official on protection of refugees has said.

“Without distribution of food and clean water over the last three weeks [and] significant accumulation of waste and rubbish in the hot and humid weather, the health and sanitation is becoming a very significant issue,” Nai Jit Lam, Deputy Regional Representative of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), currently on Manus Island, [told journalists in Geneva over the phone](#).

“The people that we have spoken to are extremely angry and they see this as an opportunity to tell the world and to show the world, years of anger about how they have been treated over the four years, after being forcibly transferred to Papua New Guinea,” he added.

According to the UN refugee agency, the conditions and the lack of medicines, increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers at the former facility are falling physically and mentally unwell. Alternative accommodation and services outside the facility are still under construction and it could be another two weeks before they are ready.

“We have observed [concerns] regarding security and the lack of interpreters on the Island, that brings about the issue of how they would communicate with local people or even the police as well,” added the UNHCR official, noting that local contractual disputes hinder staffing of caseworkers to look after the wellbeing of those there, and tensions with local community also remains.

Calling on Australian authorities for an active role resolve the situation, which Mr. Lam said that is a result of the forcible transfer of people, refugees and asylum seekers by Australia to Papua New Guinea and Nauru under its offshore policy.

“Australia must take responsibility for the protection, assistance and solutions for the refugees here on Manus Island,” he stressed.

According to the UN refugee agency, Manus Island (located some 320 kilometres or 200 miles off the northern coast of Papua New Guinea) has been the focus of Australia's off-shore processing policy. Of the approximately 3,000 refugees and asylum-seekers forcibly transferred by Australia to facilities in Nauru and Manus, some 1,200 remain in Nauru and 900 in Papua New Guinea.