

In Colombia, UN political chief urges parties to 'stay the course' set out in peace accord

16 November 2017 – More must be done to ensure that the remarkable gains of the first phase of Colombia's peace process are maintained, the top United Nations political official has said, wrapping up a visit to the country with an appeal to all Colombians to rally behind the accord, especially to ensure that former combatants are reintegrated into civilian life.

"I arrived this week, at the request of the Secretary-General, to convey a sense of [growing concern](#) about how the peace process has been evolving over the past several months," the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, told reporters there on Wednesday.

Despite a range of commendable activities under way by the Government, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the international community, Mr. Feltman highlighted three concerns, beginning with the lack of an overall strategy for reintegration, concrete plans and resources to enable its success.

"The drifting of a number of FARC members out of the zones, for a range of reasons that include joining the so-called 'dissidents' is a troubling sign of what could be the result on a wider scale if reintegration efforts are not very substantially accelerated," Mr. Feltman stated.

Secondly, he underscored his apprehension over the security situation in former conflict zones, particularly areas in which FARC vacated while their laying down their arms to convert to an unarmed political movement.

"We share the deep concern about the reported vacuums of authority in many of these areas and the resultant insecurity for communities as other illegal groups move in to fill the void," he underscored.

Mr. Feltman's final concern was about legal uncertainties, predominantly affecting FARC members, which have resulted in delays in approving key legislation.

Citing Monday's decision by the Constitutional Court on the Tribunal, he expressed hope that Congress would quickly adopt the implementing legislation, asserting, that: "This would only be consistent, in our view, with the decision of the same Parliament to ratify the peace agreement one year ago."

On the ceasefire between the Government and the National Liberation Army, the Under Secretary-General said: "We hope that the parties can come to a timely decision on its extension past 9 January, and to communicate that as soon as possible to the Security Council."

While recognizing that the peace process is subject to legitimate debate, Mr. Feltman appealed to all of Colombia's institutions, parties and to the public at large, saying that despite differing views, "all surely can also see the national interest in ensuring that regions which for more than five decades have been besieged by lawlessness, violence and under-development are now stabilized and integrated fully into the economy and governance."

"It is our strong view that this can be achieved by the robust implementation of the Peace Agreement," he added.

[UN envoy urges greater support for Rohingya victims of sexual violence](#)

16 November 2017 – Following a visit to Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, where hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar have settled in makeshift camps, a United Nations envoy has called for enhanced measures to protect and assist victims of sexual violence among the displaced population.

"My observations point to a pattern of widespread atrocities, including rape, gang-rape by multiple soldiers, forced public nudity and humiliation, and sexual slavery in military captivity directed against Rohingya women and girls," UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten said Thursday.

The [humanitarian crisis](#) caused by escalating violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state is causing catastrophic suffering. Over 600,000 Rohingya refugees have fled across the border from Myanmar to Bangladesh since 25 August. The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), estimates Bangladesh now hosts more than 800,000 Rohingya refugees.

Ms. Patten's visit, mainly to Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka, and to Cox's Bazar, from 5 to 13 November, was to better understand the nature, patterns and trends of sexual violence related to the conflict in Myanmar and also to assess options for providing support to the Government of Bangladesh, the UN system and other partners to ensure that the rights of conflict-affected women and girls are respected and upheld in the settlements.

"A clear picture is also emerging of the alleged perpetrators of these atrocities and their *modus operandi*. Sexual violence is allegedly being commanded, orchestrated and perpetrated by the Armed Forces of Myanmar, otherwise known as the *Tatmadaw*," she said.

Other actors allegedly involved include the Myanmar Border Guard Police and militias composed of Rakhine state Buddhists and other ethnic groups, she added.

The release said that her Office has agreed with the Government of Bangladesh to develop a framework of cooperation, focusing particularly on the documentation, training, capacity-building, and strengthening of sexual and gender-based violence services and programmes.

Bangladesh is also in the process of developing a national action plan on women, peace and security, which is an important entry-point for action to address conflict-related sexual violence and other human rights violations against Rohingya women and girls.

However, national institutions and communities in the settlement areas are stretched to the limits of their capacity, to provide the basics of shelter, food, water and primary health care.

In terms of sexual and gender-based violence programmes, there is an acute funding shortfall of more than \$10 million for the next three months to deliver essential services, including clinical case management, community outreach, awareness-raising and the distribution of dignity kits, which contain clothing and sanitary items.

“The international community must come together to support the Government of Bangladesh to address this vast humanitarian and protection crisis,” she urged.

All of the women she spoke with wanted the perpetrators to be brought to justice, and to ensure that these atrocities would never repeat, she said.

“Such words must serve as our moral compass as we chart the way towards a durable solution that respects the human rights and human dignity of a community that has been called ‘the most persecuted people on earth,’” she said.

[UN plan for post-conflict transition in Libya makes headway, Security Council told](#)

16 November 2017 – The political process for a successful post-conflict transition in Libya has made significant headway over the past two months, the United Nations envoy for the North African country said Thursday.

“The re-launch of the political process has created a [new momentum](#),” Ghassan Salamé, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and head of the UN Support Mission in Libya ([UNSMIL](#)), told the Security Council.

“I am pleased to see many constructive and peaceful debates on the future of

the country,” he added.

The Action Plan for Libya was launched two months ago. The Plan is made of various ingredients, including amending the [Libyan Political Agreement](#), organizing a National Conference, preparing for elections and providing humanitarian assistance, he explained.

Libya is a nation without stark ethnic or sectarian divides, but with good education and a wealth of natural resources. Many challenges faced elsewhere are not there.

“But what might be mistaken for a homogenous nation, is actually a country divided at an atomic level,” Mr. Salamé said, noting that in the wake of the 2011 conflict, the national polity has been replaced by competing individual agendas.

“Reconstituting the Libyan national polity is a must,” he said.

Based on the Action Plan, the UN convened two sessions of the Joint Drafting Committee, composed of members from both the House of Representatives and of the High Council of State, to agree on a set of amendments to the Libyan Political Agreement.

He welcomed the mutual recognition of the two assemblies, and their acknowledgment of the Libyan political agreement as the sole available framework to end the crisis in Libya.

Any mechanism to select a new Presidency Council and Government must be transparent and fair.

UNSMIL is currently exploring the possibility of hosting the National Conference inside Libya. The National Conference, slated for February 2018, will give Libyans from all across the country the opportunity to come together in one place, renew their common national narrative, and agree on the tangible steps required to end the transition.

As for elections, the High National Election Commission is working to initiate a voter registration update before the end of the year, which will be the first such exercise since 2014. The international community stands fully ready to support the process.

The Constitutional Drafting Assembly was elected and mandated to produce a new constitution and they have completed their draft. The constitutional process must now move forward, he said.

Serious challenges ahead

Beyond the Action Plan, there are three very serious challenges on UNSMIL’s agenda; impunity for grave crimes, the economy of predation and the erosion of frozen assets, he said.

First, impunity and lawlessness continue to prevail across the country in face of increasingly heinous crimes committed every day.

Second, politics in Libya is strongly shaped by economic predation. In an environment of protracted insecurity and lack of accountability, the shadow economy has been flourishing. Billions of dollars are lost every year in illicit money transfers.

Thirdly, beyond predation, hundreds of millions more are being silently lost due to poor management of Libya's frozen assets. Freezing the assets is one thing, however, their mismanagement is another. There is a need to revisit how Libya's external wealth and investments are taken care of, so that they are not silently and gradually lost for future generations.

Drawing attention to the dire humanitarian situation in Libya, he said: "In the past, the country has been a donor to much of Africa, now 25 per cent of the population have humanitarian needs."

'Discrimination against one is discrimination against all,' says UNESCO on Day for Tolerance

16 November 2017 – Marking the [International Day for Tolerance](#), the head of the United Nations cultural agency underscored how tolerance must be nurtured to celebrate the diversity that makes us strong and the values that bring us together.

"[Tolerance is respect](#), acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human," said Audrey Azoulay, the newly-appointed Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), in her message on the International Day.

"Discrimination against one is discrimination against all," she continued.

Ms. Azoulay pointed out that as globalization is accelerating across the world, societies are undergoing deep transformations, which open vast opportunities for dialogue and exchange as well as raise new challenges – sharpened by inequality and poverty, enduring conflicts and movements of people.

"We see today the rise of exclusive politics and discourses of division. We see diversity being rejected as a source of weakness," she said.

Ms. Azoulay maintained that fuelled by ignorance and sometimes hatred, myths of "pure" lore cultures are being gloried while scapegoating and repressing people.

Also citing “barbaric terrorist attacks designed to weaken the fabric of ‘living together,’” she spotlighted the need that tolerance be more than the indifferent, passive acceptance of others.

“Tolerance must be seen as an act of liberation, whereby the differences of others are accepted as the same as our own,” stressed Ms. Azoulay.

The UN official said that that meant respecting the diversity of humanity on the basis of human rights; reaching out to others with dialogue; and standing up to all forms of racism, hatred and discrimination.

Noting that all cultures are different, she emphasized that “humanity is a single community, sharing values, a past and future.”

“There are seven billion ways of ‘being human,’ but we stand together as members of the same family, all different, all equally seeking respect for rights and dignity,” she underscored.

Ms. Azoulay termed tolerance “a struggle for peace” that calls for new policies that respect diversity and pluralism on the basis of human rights.

“Most of all,” she added, “this calls on each of us, women and men across the world, to act for tolerance in our own lives, in seeking to understand others, in rejecting all racism and hatred, including anti-Semitism.”

The UNESCO chief said its role is “to deepen the binds of a single humanity, through understanding, dialogue and knowledge,” which is why the UN agency defend humanity’s cultural diversity and heritage from pillaging and attacks.

“This is why we seek to prevent violent extremism through education, freedom of expression and media literacy, to empower young women and men. This is why we work to strengthen dialogue between cultures and religions, spearheading the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures,” she said, adding that it was also why “UNESCO’s International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities works to fight racism, discrimination, xenophobia and exclusion.”

Conflicts, climatic change drive food insecurity and undernourishment in sub-Saharan Africa – UN

16 November 2017 – Adverse climatic conditions, a sluggish global economy and conflicts are key factors driving food insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa, the United Nations agriculture agency said on Thursday.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) 2017 [Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition report](#), chronic undernourishment appears to have risen from 20.8 to 22.7 per cent between 2015 and 2016 – pointing to the need to build affected communities' resilience and find peaceful solutions that strengthen food security.

"The number of [undernourished people rose](#) from 200 to 224 million, accounting for 25 per cent of the 815 million people undernourished in the world in 2016," said Bukar Tijani, FAO Assistant Director-General of and Regional Representative for Africa.

Under the theme 'The Food Security and Nutrition – Conflict Nexus: Building Resilience for Food Security, Nutrition and Peace,' this year's report was launched at the joint FAO/WHO [World Health Organization] [Africa Regional Symposium](#) on Sustainable Food Systems for Healthy Diets and Improved Nutrition, which is underway in Abidjan from 16 to 17 November 2017.

"Major factors have caused this surge in hunger: the proportion of the population that has experienced severe food insecurity because of their inability to access food has risen in the region; as well, adverse climatic conditions and conflict, often occurring concurrently, are key factors driving the recent increase in food insecurity in the region," Mr. Tijani explained.

The report indicates that during the first decade of the millennium, sub-Saharan Africa made progress in fighting hunger with undernourishment falling from 29.1 to 20.6 per cent.

However, the following period showed no progress – with conditions worsening in many countries from 2015 to 2016. This was mainly due to the impact of conflict and adverse climatic conditions, such as repeated droughts, often linked to the [El Niño phenomenon](#), which resulted in poor harvests and the loss of livestock.

In sub-Saharan Africa, undernourishment is about double that of conflict-affected countries, with generally worse nutrition outcomes as well. In 2016, the majority, or 489 million of the 815 million undernourished people in the world, lived in [countries struggling with conflict, violence and fragility](#).

Resisting hunger

The FAO report identifies a range of pathways supporting food security and livelihoods; helping to build resilience against conflict; and contributing to sustainable peace that require a multi-sectoral set of interventions before, during and after conflicts.

It also points out how many countries have developed or are developing policy frameworks and investment plans aligned with the second Sustainable Development Goal ([SDGs](#)) and the 2014 Malabo Declaration, through which African leaders recommitted their countries to end hunger and halve poverty by 2025, boost intra-African trade and enhance climate change resilience.