

Syria: UN health agency calls for immediate and unimpeded access to save lives in Ghouta

12 November 2017 – Amid worsening humanitarian, health and security situation in Syria's besieged eastern Ghouta, the United Nations health agency has demanded that all parties to the conflict stop attacks on civilians, facilitate immediate medical evacuations, and allow safe passage of medical supplies.

"The situation is heartbreaking," said Elizabeth Hoff, the head of the UN World Health Organization (WHO) operations in Syria, in a [news release](#) Sunday.

"We have now reached a critical point, where the lives of hundreds of people, including many children, are at stake. If they do not immediately get the medical care they urgently need, they will most likely die."

Severe food and medical shortages are reported in eastern Ghouta, rural Damascus, where as many as 400,000 people remain besieged and cut-off from life-saving assistance. Among them, over 240 people require urgent advanced medical care, including 29 "priority" patients "mostly children in critical condition who need immediate medical evacuation."

According to the UN agency, plans are in place for medical evacuations from Ghouta to hospitals and medical facilities in the capital, Damascus, and elsewhere. Medicines have also been prepared for immediate dispatch.

"At this stage, however, no formal approval for evacuations has been received from the responsible national authorities," added WHO in the release.

SEE ALSO: [Syrian conflict has now lasted longer than World War II "UN humanitarian envoy](#)

In addition to the medical necessities in the region, malnutrition "especially among children" is reported to be rising, leaving them at a higher risk of life-threatening infectious diseases.

Safe drinking water is also reportedly hard to find and diseases like [Brucellosis](#), [Hepatitis A](#) and [tuberculosis](#) have reappeared.

In wake of 'Paradise Papers' leak, UN experts urge States to take action against corporate tax fraud

10 November 2017 – Ratings agencies must downgrade businesses responsible for unethical practices such as tax evasion carried out through off-shore-registered companies, two United Nations human rights experts warned, while urging countries to cooperate to counter this global tax abuse problem.

“States must stop harmful tax competition amongst each other and work together to stop [unethical tax avoidance schemes](#) for wealthy individuals and international corporations,” said Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky, the UN Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt and human rights, who also monitors the impact of illicit financial flows.

Mr. Bohoslavsky made the comment as information from the leak of the so-named ‘Paradise Papers’ continues to be exposed, following series of tax abuse scandals.

The Paradise Papers presented systematic tax avoidance by well-known international corporations, making use of tax havens in places such as Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, and the Isle of Man.

“Wealthy individuals and international corporations are continuing to engage in unethical practices, reducing their tax burdens to minimal levels by using tax havens, which undermines the realisation of human rights,” Mr. Bohoslavsky warned Thursday.

In this connection, Surya Deva, chairperson of the [UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights](#), called on businesses to assume their corporate responsibility, in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

“All business enterprises have a responsibility to avoid adverse human rights impacts caused or contributed by their tax evasion practices,” said Mr. Deva.

Noting that many countries are struggling with increased debt levels as tax revenues do not match public expenditure, the experts urged Governments to make greater efforts to ensure tax justice rather than reducing spending on infrastructure.

They also warned law firms that facilitate tax avoidance schemes to assume their responsibility.

“The [UN Guiding Principles](#) apply to law firms too – they should consider human rights implications of their legal advice given to businesses,” said Mr. Deva.

The experts further underscored that corporations should extend their

commitments for respecting human rights to taxation, to be considered ethical.

The issue of corporate tax avoidance will also be addressed at the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights to be held in Geneva, Switzerland, from 27 to 29 November 2017.

[Bonn: new efforts announced at UN climate conference to push for further, faster climate action](#)

11 November 2017 – Cities, the transport sector and ocean advocates today announced a number of new initiatives to push for further, faster climate action, at the United Nations Climate Change Conference ([COP 23](#)) in Bonn, Germany.

These announcements were made under the auspices of the [Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action](#), created last year to spur action by state and non-state sectors to help implement the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change.

New Transport Decarbonisation Alliance

In a major new partnership, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Costa Rica and the Paris Process on Mobility and Climate (PPMC) launched the *Transport Decarbonisation Alliance* to stimulate greater political leadership in the sector.

Transport contributes about one quarter of all energy-related carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions and about 15-17 per cent of the entire spread of human CO₂ emissions.

“More ambitious and coordinated action on transport is required to deliver on the Paris Agreement,” said José Mendes, Deputy Minister for Environment of Portugal.

Six new voluntary sector initiatives were also introduced in Bonn to address specific aspects of transport and climate change. These include: the ‘below50’ (expanding the global market for the world’s most sustainable fuels); the EcoMobility Alliance (cities committed to sustainable transport); EV100 (accelerating the transition to electro-mobility); Walk 21 (valuing and delivering more walkable communities); the Global Strategy for Cleaner Fuels and Vehicles; and the Transforming Urban Mobility Initiative (accelerating implementation of sustainable urban transport development and mitigation of climate change).

Cities and communities speed coordinated climate action

Similarly, global cities and communities also announced new efforts Saturday to coordinate their climate action commitments to deliver bigger and faster results together.

Local and regional governments are making commitments that will help national Governments close the gap between current national commitments and the emissions reductions needed to achieve the Paris Agreement targets, said Gino Van Begin, Secretary General of ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability, a global network of more than 1,500 cities, towns and regions working together for sustainable development.

Urban areas account for around two-thirds of the world's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from global energy use. Their overall contribution to total greenhouse gas emissions is estimated at between 37 and 49 per cent globally, depending on base assumptions of data used.

Also at a press conference at COP 23, the Mayor of city of Pittsburgh (in the United States), William Peduto, announced that 367 American mayors have agreed to be part of the Paris Agreement no matter what our Federal Government did.

It's going to happen at the local level, he said.

The new initiatives announced include efforts ICLEI and the global NDC Partnership (a coalition of countries and institutions working to mobilize support for climate goals and enhancing sustainable development) to design, implement and align climate action strategies across all levels of governments.

Similarly, the Cities Climate Finance Leadership Alliance (a group of some 40 organizations working to mobilize investment in low-carbon and climate-resilient infrastructure in cities and urban areas internationally) is mapping available finance to match known infrastructure projects a critical requirement to help local governments identify funding.



Rabi Island, Fiji. Rising sea levels and more extreme weather events pose an imminent threat to low-lying atoll islands across the Pacific. Photo: OCHA/Danielle Parry

Threat of ocean warming and ocean acidification

Also Saturday at COP 23, a new declaration was signed to strengthen global response to climate change impacts on oceans and coastal zones.

Oceans are the planet's largest carbon sink, a major regulating force of global climate, and fundamental to the survival and well-being of humanity.

Oceans have featured little in the UN climate negotiations to date, and

yet they are not only important for planetary survival but also offer great opportunities for innovation towards a low-carbon blue economy” said Biliana Cicin-Sain, President of the Global Ocean Forum.

Isabel Torres de Noronha, Executive Secretary of the Future Ocean Alliance, a non-governmental organization, in an interview with *UN News*, underscored that ocean acidification “might put at risk not only ecosystems but also many economic activities and food security of coastal populations.”

Among initiatives at national level, she highlighted one from Viet Nam about strengthening the coastline by planting forests of mangroves.

[In wake of ‘Paradise Papers’ leak, UN experts urge States to act against tax abuse by corporations](#)

10 November 2017 – Ratings agencies must downgrade businesses responsible for unethical practices such as tax evasion carried out through off-shore-registered companies, two United Nations human rights experts warned, while urging countries to cooperate to counter this global tax abuse problem.

“States must stop harmful tax competition amongst each other and work together to stop [unethical tax avoidance schemes](#) for wealthy individuals and international corporations,” said Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky, UN Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt and human rights, who also monitors the impact of illicit financial flows.

Mr. Bohoslavsky made the comment as information from the leak of the so-named ‘Paradise Papers’ continues to be exposed, following series of tax abuse scandals.

The Paradise Papers presented systematic tax avoidance by well-known international corporations, making use of tax havens in places such as Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, and the Isle of Man.

“Wealthy individuals and international corporations are continuing to engage in unethical practices, reducing their tax burdens to minimal levels by using tax havens, which undermines the realisation of human rights” stressed Mr. Bohoslavsky.

In this connection, Surya Deva, chairperson of the [UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights](#), called on businesses to assume their corporate responsibility, in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

“All business enterprises have a responsibility to avoid adverse human rights impacts caused or contributed by their tax evasion practices,” said Mr. Deva.

Noting that many countries are struggling with increased debt levels as tax revenues do not match public expenditure, the experts urged Governments to make greater efforts to ensure tax justice rather than reducing spending on infrastructure.

They also warned law firms that facilitate tax avoidance schemes to assume their responsibility.

“The [UN Guiding Principles](#) apply to law firms too – they should consider human rights implications of their legal advice given to businesses,” said Mr. Deva.

The experts further underscored that corporations should extend their commitments for respecting human rights to taxation, to be considered ethical.

The issue of corporate tax avoidance will also be addressed at the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights to be held in Geneva, Switzerland, from 27 to 29 November 2017.

[France’s former Culture Minister appointed new UNESCO chief](#)

10 November 2017 – Member States of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) on Friday appointed Audrey Azoulay, a former culture minister of France, to the top post of the agency.

“I now think of all the people I met in recent months, or had met in my various professional capacities, who have great expectations from UNESCO,” Ms. Azoulay [told](#) the UNESCO General Conference, which endorsed her 13 October nomination by agency’s Executive Board.

Ms. Azoulay, who will replace outgoing Director-General [Irina Bokova](#), will take office on 15 November.

“I think of UNESCO’s mandate, which is strikingly modern. I think of all of you who are aware of the difficulties of the Organization but who know that it is irreplaceable, that it is essential, in facing current global challenges and who aspire to the unity and serenity necessary to let it exercise its mandate to best effect,” Ms. Azoulay said. Born in 1972, Ms. Azoulay was France’s Minister of Culture and Communication from February 2016 to May 2017.

She has occupied senior positions in France's public broadcasting sector and then served as rapporteur to France's public auditing authority, the *Cour des comptes*, and as a European Commission legislative expert on issues of culture and the media.

Ms. Azoulay served France's National Cinema Centre (CNC), first as Deputy Audiovisual Director, then as Director of Financial and Legal Affairs, and finally as Deputy Director-General.

A graduate of the *Ecole National d'Administration* and the Paris *Institut d'études politiques*, Ms. Azoulay also holds a Masters degree in Business Administration from the University of Lancaster (UK).

She is the 11th Director-General of UNESCO and the second woman to occupy this position.

UNESCO is [responsible for](#) coordinating international cooperation in education, science, culture and communication. The organization's theme is 'Building peace in the minds of men and women,' and the themes that fall under its mandate include education in the twenty-first century, fostering free expression, protecting cultural heritage and stewardship of the planet's oceans.