

Syria: Suffering of 350,000 civilians in rural Damascus 'an outrage' – UN rights chief

27 October 2017 – The United Nations human rights chief on Friday called on the parties to the conflict in Syria to allow badly needed food and medical supplies to Eastern Ghouta in rural Damascus, describing the situation of at least 350,000 besieged civilians there as “an outrage.”

“The [shocking images](#) of what appear to be severely malnourished children that have emerged in recent days are a frightening indication of the plight of people in Eastern Ghouta, who are now facing a humanitarian emergency,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein in a news release from his office ([OHCHR](#)).

Eastern Ghouta, on the outskirts of the nation’s capital, is being considered one of the “de-escalation areas” brokered in May by Iran, Russia and Turkey under the Astana process. However, residential areas, including those areas previously spared attack, are now being hit on an almost daily basis by ground-based strikes by Government forces and their allies.

The UN human rights office has also received reports of armed opposition groups conducting ground-based strikes on Damascus.

Various armed groups controlling the area have restricted the work of humanitarian organisations, and clashes between these groups have for months limited civilians’ freedom of movement within the region.

The UN last reached Eastern Ghouta on 23 September. Between January and September, the Government only accepted 26 per cent of requests to deliver assistance to besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

“I remind all parties that the deliberate starvation of civilians as a method of warfare constitutes a clear violation of international humanitarian law, and may amount to a crime against humanity and/or a war crime,” said Mr. Zeid.

Unidentified attackers reportedly stormed and looted a food warehouse in the Eastern Ghouta town of Hamourya on 19 October. The following day several hundred people allegedly looted a second warehouse in the town – a possible sign of growing desperation.

“If parties to a conflict cannot meet the needs of the population under their control, they must allow and facilitate efforts by impartial humanitarian agencies to provide aid, including by granting them the right of free passage,” he stressed.

[African regional consultations on UN global compact on migration begin in Ethiopia](#)

26 October 2017 – Although the debate on migration has largely focused on Europe, the global compact being negotiated must be adapted to the realities and peculiarities of each region, including Africa, where more than half of migrants moved to other countries on the continent, a senior United Nations official said Thursday.

“Today’s consultation is an opportunity to analyse migratory trends, challenges and opportunities at the regional and sub-regional levels,” the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for International Migration, Louise Arbour, [told](#) the [African Regional Consultative Meeting](#) on the proposed global compact, which opened in Ethiopia’s capital, Addis Ababa.

Ms. Arbour said that most migration takes place within the same region, noting that in Africa, 52 per cent of migrants moved within the region, mostly between neighbouring countries.

She also emphasized the importance of an increased variety and scope of legal pathways for non-refugee migrants to access labour markets.

Indeed, both the push factors, such as conflict, poverty and climate change, and the pull factors, including labour shortages and informal economies in destination countries, remain too strong for migratory flows to be significantly curtailed.

In such a situation, she said, “the impact of policies seeking to stop migration will only encourage recourse to irregular channels and increase the cost of the journey for the individuals concerned, including them engaging the services of smugglers – too often, fatally.”

“We must therefore better understand what compels people to migrate through irregular channels, and expand regular and legal pathways to better manage the supply and demand in the world’s labour markets,” she stressed.

Consultations at the African regional meeting, which runs through Friday, will inform the process leading up to the adoption of the [global compact on migration](#) by the UN General Assembly in 2018.

The process to develop this global compact for migration started in April 2017. It will be the first, intergovernmentally negotiated agreement, prepared under the auspices of the UN, to cover all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner.

Measles deaths fall, but world still far from eliminating disease – UN-backed report

26 October 2017 – Annual deaths from measles dropped below 100,000 last year for the first time 90,000, United Nations and other international agencies reported on Thursday, as they warned however that the world is still far from reaching goals on eliminating the disease.

“We have seen a [substantial drop](#) in measles deaths for more than two decades, but now we must strive to reach zero measles cases,” said Jean-Marie Okwo-Bele, Director of the World Health Organization’s ([WHO](#)) Department of Immunization, Vaccines and Biologicals, in a joint statement on Thursday for the Measles and Rubella Initiative (MR&I).

The study, published by MR&I – a partnership formed in 2001 between the UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)), WHO, UN Foundation, American Red Cross, and US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – marks the first time that global measles deaths have fallen below 100,000 per year.

“[Measles](#) elimination will only be reached if measles vaccines reach every child, everywhere,” added Dr. Okwo-Bele.

Since 2000, an estimated 5.5 billion doses of measles-containing vaccines have been provided to children through routine immunization services and mass vaccination campaigns, saving an estimated 20.4 million lives.

However, the world is still far from reaching regional measles elimination goals.

According to the joint statement, people being treated with the first of two vaccine-required doses have stalled at approximately 85 per cent since 2009, far short of the 95 per cent coverage needed to stop the infections, and coverage with the second dose, despite recent increases, was only 64 per cent in 2016.

Some 20.8 million children are still missing their first measles vaccine dose – more than half of whom live in six countries. Nigeria has 3.3 million unvaccinated children; India has 2.9 million; Pakistan, two million; Indonesia, 1.2 million; Ethiopia, 0.9 million; and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 0.7 million are not immunized.

Since measles is a highly contagious viral disease, large outbreaks continue to occur in these and other countries in Europe and North America, putting children at risk of severe health complications, such as pneumonia, diarrhoea, encephalitis, blindness and death.

Countries with the greatest number of measles deaths rely most heavily on polio-funded resources. Once polio eradication is achieved, those resources, which support routine immunization services, measles and rubella vaccination campaigns and surveillance will be at high risk of diminishing and disappearing, reversing the progress made.

[UN envoy 'confident' Baghdad and Erbil can work hand in hand to overcome differences](#)

26 October 2017 – Even as Iraq breathes a sigh of relief with the defeat of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Da'esh), it has been hit by another crisis – one between Baghdad, the capital, and Erbil, in the Kurdistan region – the top United Nations official in the country has said.

“The post-Da'esh period has brought to the fore many serious problems that accumulated over the years and remain unresolved,” Ján Kubiš, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, [said](#) Tuesday.

“Challenged by the unilaterally declared independence referendum Baghdad has taken steps to re-assert the constitutional order, re-establish the federal authority,” he added, noting that the strained Baghdad-Erbil relations, including deficiencies in the implementation of the Iraqi Constitution.

According to Mr. Kubiš, the developments have, sadly, triggered confrontation between the erstwhile partners who worked together to overthrow dictatorship in the country and, more recently, fought together against ISIL.

The differences have also added to insecurity, fragmentation and difficulties, bringing about new waves of displacements, this time mostly of Kurds.

Adding that the UN continues to closely monitor the situation, provide humanitarian assistance to communities affected as well as work to protect human rights, guided by the principle of impartiality and with the interests of Iraqi people – including in Kurdistan region – at heart, Mr. Kubiš expressed confidence that Iraq will be able to overcome the crisis.

“A solution lies primarily in stopping military activities and in de-escalation, including ending public inflammatory statements and confrontational actions,” he said, also highlighting the need for dialogue between Baghdad and Erbil on the basis of the Constitution.

Stressing the importance of preserving the unity and re-establishing stability of the country and peaceful coexistence amongst all Iraqis, based

on equal rights and justice in the condition of good and democratic governance, the UN envoy said that the UN stands ready to provide needed assistance, if requested.

“We are confident that the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan regional government, just like they banded together to defeat Da’esh, can work hand in hand to overcome their differences through dialogue and away from confrontation to resolve all outstanding issues in a manner that is consistent with the Constitution,” he concluded.

[UN chief stresses need to support Central African Republic’s peacebuilding strategy](#)

26 October 2017 – On the third day of his visit to the Central African Republic (CAR), United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Thursday called on the international community to support the conflict-ravaged country’s peacebuilding and recovery strategy.

“There must be resources available for this country to have the solidarity it deserves to ensure its citizens a dignified life, and to ensure that government projects turn into a reality of peace, stability and prosperity,” Mr. Guterres told reporters in the nation’s capital, Bangui, following a meeting on the country’s plan regarding disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants and the security sector reform.

The Secretary-General saluted President Faustin-Archange Touadéra and his Government’s efforts to consolidate peace in the country and pledged the UN’s support to the extension of national institutions.

The UN chief highlighted the four linked components – security, State-building, national reconciliation and development – that shape the country’s vision for peacebuilding and recovery.

On the security front, Mr. Guterres noted that the UN Security Council has been asked to strengthen the capacity of its peacekeeping mission, known by its French acronym, MINUSCA, and its operational capacity to better protect civilians in the CAR.

Also in the other areas, the UN supports the Government’s projects, he said, stressing the importance of national ownership of those programmes.

The Secretary-General also called on armed groups to lay down their weapons so that they can participate in the political process of the country.

Noting that almost all religious conflicts he knows are caused by political manipulation, Mr. Guterres urged political, community and religious leaders in CAR to work towards true national reconciliation.

“Central African religious communities – Christians, Muslims and others – have always lived together,” he said. “It is imperative that political leaders, leaders of armed groups and community religious leaders call for genuine reconciliation, mutual respect, and the understanding that everyone must live together to build the new Central African Republic.”

In that regard, the international community must play its role. “We cannot leave the Central Africans abandoned. Everyone needs to be mobilized to help this country build a future that Central Africans deserve,” he emphasized.

Secretary-General meets African Union officials, local Central African leaders

In New York, Mr. Guterres’ spokesman briefed the press on the Secretary-General’s activities in the CAR, saying the UN chief met with ambassadors from the African Union and the Economic Community of Central African States, at the UN Mission headquarters.

He then had a separate meeting with local religious leaders and civil society leaders, telling them how much the CAR needs a strong and vibrant civil society.

Mr. Guterres also reiterated his zero-tolerance for any sexual abuse or exploitation by UN personnel as he outlined his new approach, including a closer partnership with troop-contributing countries. He also introduced to them Jane Connors, the new Victims’ Rights Advocate, who is accompanying him.

The Secretary-General then met with representatives of political parties. He told them that the current situation in the country can only be solved with a political solution, which cannot be imposed from the outside.

Mr. Guterres was then briefed by the European Union on its training mission of the armed forces of the CAR.

He also held a meeting with over 100 members of the UN military and police contingents at M’poko airport. In his discussion, the Secretary-General told them of his pride of being their colleague and for the work they are doing for the people of CAR. He also stressed that the UN’s conduct in the country must be exemplary and that as UN staff need to protect vulnerable populations and their human rights.