

## [UN lauds special chemistry of the periodic table, kicking off 150th anniversary celebrations](#)

On Tuesday, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched the [International Year of the Periodic Table of Chemical Elements](#) at its headquarters in Paris, kicking off a series of events and activities to be held throughout the year, as the world celebrates the 150th anniversary since its creation by Russian scientist Dmitri Mendeleev.

The decision two years ago by the UN General Assembly to hold this year-long celebration aims to recognize the importance of the periodic table as “one of the most important and influential achievements in modern science, reflecting the essence not only of chemistry, but also of physics, biology and other basic sciences disciplines”.

The [launch event](#) held in Paris brought together scientists and representatives of the private sector, and was opened by UNESCO’s Director-General, Audrey Azoulay, featuring notable guests such as Mikhail Kotyukov, Russia’s Minister of Science and Higher Education, Pierre Corvol, the President of the French Académie des Sciences, and Professor Ben Feringa, 2016 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry.

UNESCO will present its educational initiative, 1001 Inventions: Journeys from Alchemy to Chemistry, designed to help young people in schools all over the world improve their understanding of chemistry and its numerous uses.

Other notable activities organized throughout the year include symposiums in Paris, France, and Murcia, Spain, and an online competition to test the knowledge and stimulate the curiosity of secondary education students on the subject. An [interactive exhibit](#) is also planned until Wednesday at UNESCO’s headquarters in Paris.

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## [Nearly \\$4 billion needed to protect 41 million children from conflict and disaster](#)

Tens of millions of children living through conflict, disaster and other emergencies in dozens of countries urgently need protection, UN Children’s

Fund ([UNICEF](#)) said on Tuesday, in an appeal for \$3.9 billion to support its humanitarian work around the world.

Speaking in Geneva, the agency's Director of Emergency Operations, Manuel Fontaine, warned that conflict is at a 30-year high: "There's never been as much conflict in the world in the past 30 years as this year, so it is obviously a particular threat," he said.

Amid countless reports of deadly attacks on civilians and places of shelter – both of which are prohibited under international law – Mr. Fontaine insisted that the long-held notion that children should be protected above all others is also being undermined.

He said it was "being accepted as a new normal of attacks on schools and hospitals and detention of children," adding that increasingly, "children are being seen not only as victims, when they've been actually recruited by an armed group or used by a particular armed group, but also as a perpetrator and detained once they've been released by an armed group."

A total of 59 countries are to benefit from UNICEF's Humanitarian Action for Children 2019 appeal, as the agency pursues its goal of providing 41 million children with safe water, food, education, health and protection.

### **Syria still number one concern**

Child protection funding amounting to \$385 million includes more than \$120 million for youngsters affected by the Syria crisis, whose needs are estimated at \$904 million – the largest part of UNICEF's overall appeal.

"Nearly eight years after the conflict broke out, we still have 2.5 million Syrian children living as refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey where demand for basic services such as health and education outstrip the capacity of institutions and infrastructure to actually respond," Mr. Fontaine explained, noting that aid was needed for Syrian refugees and host communities.

Asked if he expected a significant number of Syrian families to return to the country, the UNICEF official replied that such a development was likely premature.

"There might be cases of some families, some children who decide they want to go back and we accompany them," he said. "I think it's a bit early right now to see how that's going to happen in practice."

### **Yemen: Two million children need food support**

Needs in Yemen represent UNICEF's second largest individual appeal, at just over \$542 million, as a fragile and as-yet unimplemented ceasefire deal between Houthi militants and the internationally recognised government over the Red Sea port of Hudaydah continues to cause serious concern among humanitarians.

Nearly four years since conflict escalated, more than 22 million people need humanitarian assistance, including two million Yemeni children who will require food assistance this year. "Projections from 2019 are that nearly 400,000 children will suffer from life-threatening severe acute malnutrition in Yemen during the course of the year," Mr. Fontaine warned.

Other emergency situations include the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), a vast country facing a significant escalation of violence and armed conflict linked to terrible rights abuses. An ongoing outbreak of deadly Ebola virus in the east of the country has made matters worse.

"Violations against children include forced recruitment by armed groups and rampant sexual abuse," the UNICEF official explained. "The insecurity has also seriously hindered the response to the Ebola outbreak in North Kivu and Ituri and aggravated disastrous malnutrition conditions across the country."

According to the UNICEF appeal, an estimated 1.4 million children – over three times the number at risk in Yemen – are projected to require lifesaving treatment for severe acute malnutrition in 2019.

### **Venezuela's adolescents in dire need of protection**

Turning to Venezuela, where 40 people have died in recent clashes between demonstrators and security forces, according to UN human rights office, ([OHCHR](#)), Mr. Fontaine appealed for children to be protected.

"We are very concerned about the risk of violence," he said. "We are obviously calling on everyone to protect children in this particular moment and adolescents in particular."

The UNICEF official confirmed that an estimated three million people have left the troubled South American country in recent years, and that the agency is "working in the neighbouring countries, in Colombia, Brazil Ecuador and other countries to help the struggling host communities receiving families and children that are crossing the border".

### **'Toxic stress' last longer than physical wounds**

Faced with such unprecedented needs, UNICEF is appealing for funding that can be allocated where it is needed most urgently, not least to under-reported emergencies including the Lake Chad region, where nearly 21 million people in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Niger and Nigeria have been affected by ongoing conflicts.

Despite the challenges, Mr. Fontaine insisted that the agency has been successful in helping vulnerable children, not least those whose mental scars caused by the "toxic stress" of conflict often take longer than physical wounds to heal.

"At the same time, I would say we've also made great progress," he insisted. "It is the behaviour of parties to conflict that actually creates this kind of situation. Should they give us more access, should they give us more ways

to protect children and should they themselves respect the sanctity of the protection of children, things would actually go a lot better.”

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## **‘Humiliation was the worst’; Holocaust survivor asks the world to act with ‘empathy and compassion’**

More than seven decades ago in Auschwitz, Jewish teenager Marian Turski felt he “had no name, he had nothing, but a number” tattooed on his body. Speaking on Monday, at the [annual Holocaust Memorial Ceremony](#), at United Nations Headquarters in New York, the 92-year-old called on the world to express renewed “empathy and compassion”.

Sharing his extraordinary story, he said that the worst part of surviving the Nazi death camps was not the extreme hunger, the coldness or the deteriorating living conditions, but “the humiliation, just because you were Jewish, you were treated not like a human being, you were treated like a louse, a bed bug, like a cockroach”, he told those who had gathered to commemorate.

Mentioning conflicts going on now in Ukraine, Sudan and Yemen, Mr. Turski said that when it came to giving advice today, “the most important words are: empathy and compassion”. He highlighted the importance of “protecting our children” from all catastrophes.

His story followed testimony from Inge Auerbacher, who was liberated from a different camp, on the same day as Mr. Turski. She described how in the concentration camps “life was especially hard for children, for whom the most important words in their vocabulary were potatoes, bread and soup.”

Inge was born in Germany and spent three years between seven and 10 years of age in the Terezin (Theresienstadt) concentration camp in Czechoslovakia, where only around one per cent of its 15,000 children, survived.

Lamenting the rising wave of anti-Semitism today, Ms. Auerbacher pleaded for everyone across the world to “make good choices”.

“My hope, wish, and prayer, is for every child to live in peace without hunger and prejudice. The antidote to hatred is education, no more genocides, no more anti-Semitism”, she added.

Ms. Auerbacher also wrote the words to the song “Who am I”, which was performed during the UN Holocaust Remembrance ceremony by the PS22 elementary school Chorus of Staten Island, New York.



UN Photo/Loey Felipe

Sara J. Bloomfield, Director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, delivers her keynote speech during the annual United Nations Holocaust Remembrance Ceremony.

The role of education and history was emphasized by Sara Bloomfield, Director of the powerful United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, in Washington DC, who added that “after 2000 years of various forms of anti-Semitism, it doesn’t seem to be an eradicable disease, nor does hate”.

Drawing parallels between the horror of the Holocaust, and the present, Ms. Bloomfield added that it’s essential to “look back, to remember the victims lives and to remember that we failed them. We can’t fail them again by forgetting, by ignoring anti-Semitism and by not learning from our failures”, she concluded.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Day is marked each 27 January, when the notorious Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp was liberated by Allied troops, 74 years ago, in the final months of the World War Two.

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## [UN chief of peace operations honours fallen Chadian ‘blue helmets’ serving in northern Mali](#)

After 10 Chadian peacekeepers serving with the United Nations mission in Mali ([MINUSMA](#)) [were killed](#) in a terrorist attack on 20 January, the UN chief of

peace operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, went to N'Djamena, the capital of Chad, to pay tribute to them on Monday in a ceremony organised by the Government.

“I am in N'Djamena to pay tribute to 10 peacekeepers who made the ultimate sacrifice for peacebuilding in Mali,” [said](#) Under-Secretary-General Lacroix on Twitter. “Their bravery imposes respect because Chad is the country that has lost the most men in combat serving with MINUSMA.”

The attack, which targeted the mission's camp in Aguelhok, in the Kidal region, in northern Mali, took place in the early hours of Sunday 20 January and left at least 25 'blue helmets' wounded in addition to the 10 who lost their lives.

Five days later, on Friday, another two MINUSMA peacekeepers, from Sri Lanka this time, [were killed](#) in a roadside bomb explosion near Douentza, in the central region of Mopti.

After a failed coup six years ago, a proliferation of armed groups fighting government forces and their allies in the centre and northern areas of the country has plunged the country into conflict. Today, MINUSMA is the deadliest mission to serve in as a UN 'blue helmet' with some 180 paying the ultimate sacrifice, since it was established in 2013.

Mr. Lacroix praised the heroism of the Chadian contingent in not only repelling a well-coordinated attack and protecting many lives in Aguelhok, but also in taking every precaution to avoid civilian casualties.

He also conveyed the UN's "immense gratitude" for Chad's commitment to the restoration of peace and security in Mali and the Sahel. Behind Burkina Faso, the country is the second largest troop contributor to MINUSMA with 1,450 troops and 22 policemen, as of November 2018.

“We owe it to the deceased to carry out the implementation of Mali's peace and reconciliation agreement, re-instate the rule of law and enable at last economic development,” stated Mr. Lacroix. “I am confident that with the participation of the parties to the agreement and our partners, we will meet these objectives.”

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## [Link between conflict and hunger worldwide, 'all too persistent and deadly', says new UN report](#)

Conflict-driven hunger is getting worse, according to a snapshot of the eight

places in the world with the highest number of people in need of emergency food support, and the link between them is “all too persistent and deadly” according to a new report delivered to the UN Security Council on Monday.

The [new report released](#) by the [Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO\)](#) and the [World Food Programme \(WFP\)](#) follows on from a landmark Council resolution on preventing hunger in conflict zones, adopted in May.

The situation in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and Yemen worsened in the latter part of 2018 largely because of conflict, although Somalia, Syria and the Lake Chad Basin, saw some improvements in line with improved security. In total, around 56 million people are in need of urgent food and livelihood assistance across the eight theatres of war.

“This report clearly demonstrates the impact of armed violence on the lives and livelihoods of millions of men, women, boys and girls caught up in conflict,” wrote FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva states in the report’s foreword.

“I would strongly encourage you to keep in mind that behind these seemingly dry statistics are real people experiencing rates of hunger that are simply unacceptable in the 21st century,” he continued.

Violence against humanitarian workers is also on the rise, sometimes forcing organizations to suspend their life-saving operations, leaving those at risk, even more vulnerable. Every single country covered in the report, saw attacks carried out on aid workers and facilities last year.

“This report shows again the tragic link between conflict and hunger and how it still pervades far too much of the world. We need better and quicker access in all conflict zones, so we can get to more of the civilians who need our help. But what the world needs most of all is an end to the wars,” wrote WFP chief David Beasley in the foreword.

The Security Council’s [Resolution 2417](#) condemns unequivocally, starvation as a tool of war. It calls on all parties to armed conflict to comply with their obligations under International Humanitarian Law to minimize the impact of military actions on civilians, including on food production and distribution, and to allow humanitarian access in a safe and timely manner to civilians needing lifesaving food, nutritional and medical assistance.

“The millions of men, women and children going hungry as a result of armed conflict will not be reduced unless and until these fundamental principles are followed”, states the joint UN agency report.

### **Here’s the outlook for some of the countries in the spotlight:**

\* Yemen’s three-year war is a stark demonstration of the urgent need for a cessation of hostilities to address the world’s largest food security emergency. In its country analysis, the report states that conflicting parties disregarded the protected status of humanitarian facilities and

personnel.

\* The Democratic Republic of the Congo had the second highest number (13 million) of acutely food insecure people, driven by a rise in armed conflict, during the second half of 2018.

\* In South Sudan, after more than five years of war, the lean season is expected to start earlier than normal, according to the report, pushing those in need of urgent support up to more than 5 million between January and March, 2019.

\* In the Lake Chad basin including north-eastern Nigeria, Chad's Lac region and Niger's Diffa, where extremist groups are highly active, a major deterioration in food security is projected during this year's lean season beginning in June, and three million people are expected to face acute food insecurity.

\* In Afghanistan, the percentage of rural Afghans facing acute food deficits is projected to reach 47 percent (or 10.6 million people) by March if urgent life-saving assistance is not provided.

\* In the Central African Republic, armed conflict remained the main driver of hunger in 2018, with 1.9 million people experiencing a severe lack of food.