

UN chief calls on Venezuela's politicians to 'avoid escalation', end suffering of the people

Reports of violence and casualties linked to unrest in Venezuela should be investigated transparently and independently, UN Secretary-General [Antonio Guterres](#) said on Thursday, before calling for calm.

In a statement issued by his Spokesperson, the UN chief urged all parties to "lower tensions" in the South American country, which is riven by economic and political crisis, after deadly clashes in the capital Caracas between security forces and thousands of demonstrators opposed to the Government of President Nicolás Maduro.

"The Secretary-General is concerned over reports of casualties in the context of demonstrations and unrest in Venezuela and calls for a transparent and independent investigation of these incidents," said Stéphane Dujarric.

At this "critical" time, Mr. Guterres "urges all actors to lower tensions and pursue every effort to prevent violence and avoid any escalation", the Spokesperson added.

The development follows Wednesday's declaration by opposition leader Juan Guaidó that he had become the country's interim president until fresh elections could be held. Mr. Maduro was officially sworn back into office for his disputed second term, following elections mired in controversy, just two weeks ago.

What we hope is that dialogue can be possible, and that we avoid an escalation that could lead to the kind of conflict that would be a total disaster for Venezuela – *UN chief Guterres*

Issued from the World Economic Forum ([WEF](#)) in Davos, Switzerland, where Mr. Guterres gave a keynote address, his statement highlighted "the urgent need for all relevant actors to commit to inclusive and credible political dialogue to address the protracted crisis in the country, with full respect for the rule of law and human rights".

[Speaking during a Facebook Live event](#) in Davos, the UN chief would not comment on those governments which have decided to officially recognize Mr. Guaido's claim to the presidency, saying only that all sovereign governments are in charge of their own decision-making, but expressed concern over "the suffering of the Venezuelan people."

"So many have left the country, with the economic difficulties that everybody faces, and with the political polarization", he said, adding: "What we hope

is that dialogue can be possible, and that we avoid an escalation that could lead to the kind of conflict that would be a total disaster for Venezuela, for the Venezuelan people and for the region.”

The UN chief said during the interview, that “if dialogue is not possible, then what are we doing? In all circumstances in the world – even the most difficult circumstances – we need to push for dialogue.”

According to the [World Food Programme \(WFP\)](#), three million Venezuelans have left their country in recent years owing to a lack of food, medicine and the loss of their livelihoods.

In addition to the humanitarian crisis, grave human rights abuses have been reported by the UN, including killings, the use of excessive force against demonstrators, arbitrary detentions, ill-treatment and torture.

In a [report](#) issued in June last year, the UN human rights office ([OHCHR](#)) documented “credible, shocking accounts of extrajudicial killings” during crime-fighting operations carried out between 2015 and 2017.

[‘No country, no region’ can tackle global challenges alone says UN’s Mohammed](#)

Against the backdrop of seemingly endless challenges across the world, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed told a conference of development-minded partners in Nigeria that “no country, no region” could tackle them alone

“In the regions today, no country is alone. Our borders don’t make any difference in the Sahel when we talk about issues of terrorism, migration, and climate change”, Ms. Mohammed said on Tuesday at the opening of the Kaduna State [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) Acceleration Conference 2019.

“No country, no region can tackle the global challenges of today”, she spelled out.

Under the theme “Building effective partnership for accelerated progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals”, the two-day conference aims to fortify partnerships to fast-track implementation of the global goals, which each country is adapting to reach ambitious targets on poverty and hunger eradication, among other challenges.

United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed (center) at the Kaduna State Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Acceleration Conference on 22 January, 2019., by UNIC Lagos

Ms. Mohammed advocated strongly for gender parity saying that “part of our population, especially women and girls, has to be put at the centre of the results” and not only “at the centre of our policies”.

Moreover, she continued, “we need to see young people at the centre of the impact that is made on everyone’s life. Because they are not the future tomorrow; they are the future today.”

Calling the rise in global hunger over the past few years “a great concern”, Ms. Mohammed underscored that the world has enough to feed itself two to three times over, but inequalities mean that millions go to bed hungry and “short change us in the revenue [that] otherwise would have been put into governance.”

Despite a global decline in the number of people living in poverty, the Deputy Secretary-General observed that there are many reasons why extreme poverty remains. She singled out the two explanations of “when there is no enabling environment and when there is no stability”.

Ms. Mohammed stressed the importance of using a national outlook, within a regional context, to drive what are global goals.

The Deputy Secretary-General also argued that effective partnerships are vital to achieving the SDGs. As a case in point she focused on the room, where federal and state governments, members of the international community, civil society, and local and community authorities, were all participants.

Also speaking at the conference, Governor Mallam Nasir Ahmad el-Rufai said that Kaduna state stood out as an SDG pacesetter. He noted that his administration has adopted the targets and indicators, and developed an integrated, sustainable infrastructure that would make Kaduna a leading investment destination in Nigeria and provide it with a “comparative advantage” to make it globally competitive.

Sudan: Amidst deaths, injuries, imprisonments, UNICEF stresses children’s protection ‘at all times’

Children are likely among the dead during a month of nationwide protests in Sudan with “scores” of others injured and detained, according to a top UN

Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) official, who spelled out that "children should never be targeted nor used or exploited".

"Children were reportedly killed in ongoing turmoil that broke out last month in Sudan," [Geert Cappelaere](#), UNICEF Regional Director for the [Middle East and North Africa](#), said on Wednesday, noting that "scores of children were also injured and others detained".

Against the back drop of an "unprecedented hike in the cost of living and shortages in bread and fuel" he said that poverty has increased, "forcing some families into negative measures like taking their children out of school".

UNICEF calls on the authorities in Sudan to prioritize the protection of children – *UNICEF Regional Director Geert Cappelaere*

Pointing to information it had received, UNICEF revealed that there has been an uptick in the number of Sudanese children now requiring health and nutrition care, since the anti-Government protests began.

"While it is difficult for UNICEF to verify these reports, children must be protected at all times from all forms of violence, harm, cruelty and mistreatment whether physical or mental" stressed Mr. Cappelaere.

"UNICEF calls on the authorities in Sudan to prioritize the protection of children and safeguard their rights to education and health in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child" concluded the UNICEF Regional Director.

News agencies have reported that demonstrations against an on-going economic crisis have been taking place across the country on a near-daily basis, since 19 December. Large crowds, including teenagers and demonstrators in their 20s, have been calling for an end to the 30-year rule of President Omar al-Bashir.

There have been reports of many being fired on with tear gas and bullets, and thousands being detained. The UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet, expressed alarm at the use of "excessive force" last Thursday.

A Government crackdown against journalists covering the protests is also reportedly underway. At least 26 people are reported to have died, including two security officers.

Central African Republic militia leader and football executive, transferred to ICC

Patrice-Edouard Ngaïssona, the coordinator of a mainly Christian militia faction in the Central African Republic and a senior African football executive, has been transferred to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to face accusations of crimes against humanity and war crimes.

In a [statement](#), the Court, which is based in The Hague, the Netherlands, detailed an extensive list of some of his alleged crimes, including murder, torture, persecution, mutilation, deportation or forcible transfer, enforced disappearance and “other inhumane acts.”

Mr Ngaïssona was arrested on 12 December last year in France, on a warrant for crimes allegedly committed in CAR during 2013 and 2014. In a press release, the ICC said that the date of his initial appearance before the court will be announced “soon.”

Speaking on Wednesday to UN News, ICC spokesperson Fadi El Abdallah outlined the next steps in the case: “The Pre-Trial Chamber Two of the ICC found reasonable grounds to believe that Mr Ngaïssona is liable for these charges”, he said, adding that the pre-trial hearing would “confirm the identity of the suspect, ensure that he understands the charges and confirms the language in which the proceedings should be conducted for his understanding”.

He said it would also set a date “to begin the confirmation of charges hearing, which is a pre-trial hearing allowing the judges to decide whether or not the case should move to a trial.”

The ICC Registrar, Peter Lewis, thanked the French authorities, and those of the Netherlands, for their cooperation in the arrest and transfer of the accused to the Court.

Mr. Ngaïssona, who was Minister of Youth and Sports under François Bozizé, President of the Central African Republic from 2003 to 2013, reportedly denies any involvement in the violence.

According to news reports, he was the political coordinator of the Christian anti-Balaka militia, which rose to prominence after the mainly Muslim Seleka rebels, swept Mr. Bozizé from power. The militia has been blamed for numerous killings since 2013.

Mr Ngaïssona was elected in February 2018 to the executive committee of the Confederation of African Football, despite the objections of some human rights groups.

[FROM THE FIELD: Enduring freezing winter in a war zone](#)

In Ukraine, extreme winter cold is making life harder for thousands of people whose lives have already been torn apart by conflict. Hoping to find safer places to live, families in the region have had to endure a battle for survival, in buildings without heat or electricity.



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Since 2014, conflict in Ukraine has forced 1.5 million people to flee their homes, according to the UN Refugee Agency, [UNHCR](#). After five years, many of the displaced are often forced to choose between buying food and medicine or paying for heating.

In 2018 the agency stepped up the distribution of aid, including clothing, fuel and cash, to thousands of displaced households in eastern Ukraine.

[Read more](#) here, about four displaced Ukrainians who will not be left out in the cold this winter.