

## UN aid workers urge safe passage for civilians fleeing northern Iraq ahead of battle

22 August 2017 – Warning of harassment, revenge attacks and abuse of civilians displaced from the northern Iraqi city of Tal Afar, United Nations refugee and migration agencies today called for people trying to flee the city ahead of military operations to have safe passage.

“We fear that Iraqi civilians are likely to be held as human shields again and that attempts to flee could result in executions/shootings,” Andrej Mahecic, spokesperson at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) told journalists in Geneva about the ongoing operations to retake the city.

He also noted reports of people being denied access to safety and stopped along the way.

“We call on all parties to the conflict to allow civilians to leave the conflict area and to access to safety,” Mr. Mahecic said.

Thousands of civilians are believed to be in Tal Afar, which has been without aid since the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) terrorist group took control of the surrounding communities in 2014.

Since April this year, more than 30,000 people fled Tal Afar district, many living in camps sheltering other displaced families mainly from Mosul, some 65 kilometres south-west.

Conditions in the district are believed to be “very difficult,” Mr. Mahecic said, noting a lack of food, water and electricity.

“People are said to have been surviving on unclean water and bread for the past three to four months,” he told journalists.

Those who fled have often had to walk in temperatures up to 50 degrees Celsius for up to 20 hours at a time, amid shooting, and often leaving behind children, elderly and disabled who are too vulnerable for the trip.

“Many talk of seeing dead bodies along the way, and there are reports that some were killed by extremist groups. Others appear to have died due to dehydration or illnesses,” said Mr. Mahecic.

In the past four days, some 1,500 people arrived at nearby emergency sites [managed](#) by the UN International Migration Agency (IOM)

In conjunction with partners, IOM and UNHCR have been treating arrivals with food and water, transporting them to hospitals, if needed, and helping them settle in camps.

IOM is preparing additional aid for hundreds more arrivals expected in the coming days.

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## [Justice vital to help Iraqi victims of ISIL's sexual violence rebuild lives – UN report](#)

22 August 2017 – The Iraqi Government must ensure that the thousands of women and girls who survived sexual violence by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) terrorist fighters receive care, protection and justice, and that children born because of such violence do not face a life of discrimination and abuse, a United Nations report published today says.

“The physical, mental, and emotional injuries inflicted by ISIL are almost beyond comprehension. If victims are to rebuild their lives, and indeed those of their children, [they need justice and they need redress](#),” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein in a press release.

Victims have been subjected to rape and sexual assault, forced displacement, abduction, deprivation of liberty, slavery, forced religious conversion, and cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment. Women from the Yezidi and other minority communities have been especially vulnerable to abuses of human rights and violation of international humanitarian law.

The report notes that the Iraqi Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government have taken some positive steps to promote women and children's rights and to address the needs of those who have suffered abuses at the hands of ISIL.

However, the report says, the criminal justice system largely fails to ensure the appropriate protection of victims, requiring significant legislative and institutional changes to facilitate access to justice and to ensure the care and protection of victims in such proceedings.

The situation of hundreds of children born to women in ISIL-controlled areas without birth certificates or whose ISIL-issued documents are not accepted by the Government of Iraq or the Kurdistan Regional Government is also deeply troubling, the report says.

Birth registration requires the parents to present proof of marital status and two witnesses must confirm the circumstances of the child's birth – exceedingly difficult in the case of children whose parents may be dead or missing; where the father's identity is not known; where a child has been abandoned due to stigma or for those who live in IDP camps where no civil

status offices or courts operate.

Children who were born in ISIL-controlled areas have the same legal rights as any other Iraqi citizen and the Government must ensure they are protected from marginalisation and abuse, neither exposed to discrimination through references on their birth certificate that they were born out of wedlock or have a father linked to ISIL, nor left unregistered and at risk of statelessness, exploitation and trafficking, the High Commissioner stressed.

The report makes several recommendations on access to justice; provision of support and care for victims; information and counselling services to reunite separated families, and the importance of birth registration.

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## [UN labour agency launches global panel to address rapid transformations in the world of work](#)

21 August 2017 – The United Nations labour agency has launched a high-level international body that will chart the course towards a future of decent and sustainable work opportunities for all, and to tackle the challenges of delivering social justice in today's rapidly transforming world of work.

It is fundamentally important that we confront these challenges from the conviction that [the future of work is not decided](#) for us in advance, said Guy Ryder, Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO) at the launch of the [Global Commission](#) on the Future of Work.

According to ILO, the global body is expected to undertake an in-depth examination of the future of work that can provide the analytical basis for the delivery of social justice in the 21st century. It will in particular on the relationship between work and society, the challenge of creating decent jobs for all, the organization of work and production, and the governance of work.

Mr. Ryder reminded the audience attending the launch ceremony in Geneva that these are key issues of our time, which increasingly occupy political life and define hopes, and sometimes fears, of families across the world.

It is a future that we must make according to the values and preferences that we choose and through policies that we design and implement, he added.

Co-chairs Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, the President of Mauritius, and Stefan Löfven,

the Prime Minister of Sweden, announced the 20 members of the Commission, as the ILO chief underscored that the membership reflects a balance of geographical regions, of different disciplines. There is gender balance and there is representation of workers and employers.

The Commission was set up under the ILO's Future of Work Centenary Initiative launched in 2013 by Mr. Ryder.

Over the past 18 months, in the run-up to the launch of the Global Commission, the ILO's tripartite constituents governments, employer and worker organizations have held national dialogues in over 110 countries. Their outcome will feed into the independent report that will be submitted to the Centenary Conference of the ILO in 2019.

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## [UN health agency rushes to prevent malaria, cholera outbreaks in flood-hit Sierra Leone](#)

21 August 2017 – The United Nations health agency is working closely with the Government of Sierra Leone to prevent the spread of infectious diseases such as malaria and cholera in the wake of last week's mudslides and flooding in the country's capital, Freetown.

The [mudslides have caused extreme suffering](#) and loss of life, and we must do all we can to protect the population from additional health risks," said Alexander Chimbaru, Officer in Charge of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Sierra Leone, in a press release.

With damage to water and sanitation facilities, residents of affected areas are particularly vulnerable to outbreaks of pre-existing infectious diseases including malaria and diarrheal conditions such as typhoid and cholera. The most recent cholera outbreak in the country occurred in 2012.

Cholera response kits, including rapid testing tools, are being distributed to areas at risk, while health and community workers are being trained to recognize the signs of priority diseases.

While the Government and WHO are working hard to strengthen health services in the affected areas, we also urge the population to take the following precautions to help avoid a possible outbreak: hand washing, drinking only water that has been properly boiled or treated, use of latrines for sanitation, and adherence to good food hygiene practices," added Dr. Chimbaru.

Around 500 people are known to have died as a result of the flooding and

mudslides that devastated whole communities in and around Freetown, and hundreds more are still missing.

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## [Following El Salvador visit, UN right expert urges authorities to protect people from gangs](#)

21 August 2017 – El Salvador is suffering a ‘hidden tragedy’ due to gang-related violence, an independent United Nations human rights expert today said, urging national authorities to intensify efforts to help and protect people affected by gangs.

“El Salvador is suffering a [hidden tragedy](#) of people who have had to leave their homes because of the high levels of gang-related violence,” said Special Rapporteur Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, who examines the human rights of internally displaced persons, after visiting violence-hit areas including Mejicanos in San Salvador.

“The problem is more significant and widespread than the Government is currently accepting,” she added. “The Government needs to acknowledge the full extent of internal displacement and act to tackle it and the gang violence which is driving it.”

The UN expert noted that gangs dominate people through threats, intimidation and “a culture of violence” that infects entire communities and every day interactions.

“Killings are commonplace and extortion is widespread. If people are under threat from gangs, they and their families leave their homes to seek safety elsewhere,” she said.

Young people, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to such violence, including also rape, as are members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex communities.

“Young people are particularly affected by violence,” said Ms. Jimenez-Damary who visited El Salvador at the invitation of the Government.

“One young woman told me: ‘It is a crime and dangerous to be a young person in El Salvador today’. This situation is due not only to the gang violence, but in some cases is the result of oppressive police and military operations.”

During her five-day visit, from 14 to 18 August, the expert met senior State and Government officials, United Nations and other humanitarian partners,

representatives of civil society organizations, and people who had fled their homes.

Her full findings and recommendations will be included in a report to the Human Rights Council in June 2018.

UN Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.