

'None of us should stand silent' while civilians suffer in Syria, Security Council told

27 July 2017 – Despite the remarkable hope and strength shown by most Syrians, daily life remains dangerous for millions of people across the country, a senior United Nations aid official warned today, calling for the parties to the six year conflict to stop targeting of civilians, to allow humanitarian access, and to end the “horrific” practice of siege.

[Briefing](#) the UN Security Council via videoconference from Amman, Jordan, Deputy UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Ursula Mueller said that earlier in the day, she had visited the Azraq refugee camp, where around 35,000 refugees lived, many of whom had been there for several years. Most were women and children, she added.

“I was inspired by the incredible hope and strength of those who I met despite the terrible circumstances that have been forced upon them,” she said, delivering remarks on behalf of Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Stephen O’Brien.

“Their message to me was clear and I pass it on to you today,” she continued. “What they want more than anything is for the [guns to fall silent](#); the conflict to end; and for them to be able to go home when it is safe to do so.”

She went on to note that the “hope and strength found in Azraq is replicated across Syria. This is remarkable given that daily life remains dangerous and desperate for millions of people inside the country.”

Pointing to a reduction of violence in some areas since a 4 May memorandum on de-escalation, she said the humanitarian and protection situation remains extremely difficult for civilians in many parts of the country.

Indeed, Ms. Mueller spotlighted continued fighting and the situations in besieged areas of Damascus and the Syrian-Jordanian border as well as anti-ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/Da’esh) operations in Raqqa governorate. Infighting among non-State armed groups and designated terrorist groups, mentioning the north-western part of the country, was also a concern.



Deputy UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Ursula Mueller (on screen) briefs the UN Security Council via videoconference. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

'Not much positive news to report' on humanitarian access

Turning to humanitarian access for besieged and hard-to-reach areas, she lamented that “there is not much positive news to report,” listing obstacles to convoys that included lack of approvals; lack of facilitation letters by the Syrian Government; other administrative delays; as well as insecurity and fighting.

“At the same time, arbitrary restrictions by some non-State armed groups, listed terrorist groups, and self-designated local authorities also continue to obstruct access in various ways, especially in Idleb and the eastern governorates of Syria. This means that, despite reductions in violence, we have not been able to noticeably increase our reach,” she explained.

Despite security and access challenges to besieged and hard-to-reach areas, Ms. Mueller underscored that in Syria, the UN continues to implement one of the largest humanitarian operations in the world, saying “humanitarians continue to reach millions on a monthly basis.”

As of May, humanitarians have collectively reached 8.5 million people in a single month, including 4.4 million women and girls, and 4.1 million men and boys with multi-sector assistance.

“The conflict in Syria may be complex, but ensuring people are protected and supported is our imperative as humanitarians, and as human beings. None of us should stand silent while civilians suffer and while fear tactics and the denial of food, water, medical supplies, and other forms of aid are used as methods of war,” stressed Ms. Mueller.

'Sustainable, inclusive societies,' priority for new President of UN economic and social body

27 July 2017 – A week after the High-Level Political Forum ([HPLF](#)) assessed the progress on implementing the [2030 Agenda](#), the newly elected President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) has stressed her priority to push forward the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

“I wish to announce that the key priority of my Presidency will be to develop initiatives towards fostering sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies through participation of all,” said Marie Chatardová, Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the UN, after her [election by acclamation](#) earlier today.

Delivering her first remarks as President, Ms. Chatardova welcomed the enormous interest among Member States to participate in the Voluntary National Reviews. “It proves that we take our shared vision of a better world seriously,” she said.

Noting several positive developments towards reaching the 2030 targets, such as unprecedented technological advancement and innovation, she said that nevertheless, the world continued to experience rising inequalities in most countries.

“If multilateralism is to stay relevant in this evolving context, we need to take these challenges seriously, and work on devising solutions to address them. I believe that the ECOSOC system has a key role to play,” she asserted.

To explore further collective action on the issue, the new President announced her intention to convene an ECOSOC Special Meeting at UN Headquarters in May 2018.

“We must work together and make all efforts to achieve what we have set out: ‘to leave no-one behind.’ Truly no one!” she underscored.



Ambassador Marie Chatardová, newly-elected President of the Economic and Social Council, addresses the Council. UN Photo/Kim Haughton

ECOSOC now seen as multi-stakeholder forum for tackling complex issues

Outgoing ECOSOC President Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava took stock of activities under his tenure.

On the priority of eradicating poverty, he said “we explored various means for promoting sustainable development; expanding opportunities; and addressing related challenges to leave no one behind,” he recalled.

“It was a tall order, but we made good progress,” he affirmed.

Inspired by what the delegation of Norway said during the HLPF: “No one can do everything, but we can all do something,” Mr. Shava urged the respective Ministries, organizations and communities to use this as their mantra in implementing the [SDGs](#).

Asserting that “the moment is ripe” to further strengthen ECOSOC to support the 2030 Agenda, the outgoing president emphasized the importance of aligning the agendas of the General Assembly, ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies.

According to Mr. Shava, one of the biggest take-aways from the Council’s 2017 substantive session was “the importance of ECOSOC as a multi-stakeholder platform for forging solutions to complex and emerging issues,” observing that it is uniquely positioned at the global level to support

efforts to leave no one behind

The success of ECOSOC should be measured not by the number of resolutions that it adopts, but by the impact that it has on the lives of real people. ECOSOC is where Member States coordinate and guide the UN development system, and can therefore make a real impact on citizens around the world," concluded the outgoing President.

Wu Hongbo, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, said inequalities among and within countries are deep and addressing them is important for achieving sustainable development and peace. International support for sustainable and resilient societies is based on the recognition that "we cannot overcome global challenges in isolation."

Solidarity, shared responsibility and open dialogue are more important than ever, he continued. The 2030 Agenda, the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change, the [Addis Ababa Action Agenda](#), and [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#) together had formed an action plan for global prosperity and partnership.

The Council and its various forums had a key role in nurturing that vital opportunity by supporting implementation through the sharing of integrated and holistic approaches, he stated.

UN chief welcomes news crisis in Jerusalem's Old City has been 'defused'

27 July 2017 – After days of mounting tensions over the situation around Jerusalem's holy sites, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today welcomed news that the crisis in the Old City has been defused.

In a [statement](#) issued by a UN spokesman, the Secretary-General welcomed the news that the crisis has been defused "in line with the status quo at the holy sites before 14 July."

The statement comes in the wake of a series of clashes and rising tensions in and around Jerusalem's Old City since mid-June, particularly near the holy site known as the Temple Mount and as Haram al-Sharif, where a deadly stabbing of two Israeli police officers occurred on 14 July.

News reports today suggest that metal detectors and other security measures around the holy sites have been removed or eased. According to media reports, the 1967 status quo is an accord between Israel and Jordan, which allows the Islamic Trust or Waqf to manage the holy site.

[The Secretary-General] hopes that the dialogue will continue and contribute to creating an atmosphere of trust amongst the communities,” said the statement, adding, that the UN chief will remain engaged with all stakeholders to this effect.

Migrant workers in south-east Asia lack access to fair, responsive legal remedies – UN report

27 July 2017 – Access to justice is often out of reach for migrant workers in South-east Asia, the United Nations labour agency reported today in a study that shows non-governmental organizations assisting more often than Government officials or trade unions.

Barriers to accessing formal assistance are one of the key reasons why migrant workers are vulnerable to labour rights violations during recruitment and employment,” said Tomoko Nishimoto, UN International Labour Organization's (ILO) Assistant Director-General and Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, in the forward to the report [Access to justice for migrant workers in South-east Asia](#).

The report found that while the estimated 20.2 million migrant workers originating from South-east Asia have equal access to labour rights and social protections in the countries in which they work, “they frequently experience unequal and discriminatory treatment in practice.”

Lack of written evidence, high cost of legal assistance, fear of retaliation and language barriers are among the challenges to accessing justice noted in the report.

The authors argue that there is a substantial and largely unmet demand for fair and responsive remedies in the countries surveyed.

The study is based on complaint case data gathered by Migrant Worker Resource Centres (MRCs) from 2011 to 2015. Detailed information on over 1,000 cases involving more than 7,000 women and men migrant workers was documented in Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam, establishing the largest regional dataset of migrant complaints compiled within South-East Asia.

Migrant workers' [vulnerability to exploitation](#) is exacerbated by the absence of fair, efficient and accessible means to resolve grievances when they occur, said says Ben Harkins, ILO Technical Officer and lead author of the report.

Most migrant workers who are faced with situations of exploitation and abuse

seek practical resolutions, such as disbursement of unpaid wages, deployment to destination countries and return of identification documents, ILO reported.

It is clear that these demands are not adequately met through enforcement of labour and human trafficking laws currently and that greater efforts are needed to ensure that migrant workers are provided with just remedies," said Mr. Harkins.

Its release comes ahead of the World Day against Trafficking in Persons, marked annually on 30 July.

UN expert urges two Koreas to discuss human rights

27 July 2017 – The proposed resumption of dialogue between the two Koreas is an opportunity to discuss and improve the human rights situation in the North, a United Nations expert has said at the end of his second visit to the South.

The Republic of Korea's new President has proposed the resumption of dialogue with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on military and humanitarian issues.

While I welcome the initiative by the administration of President Moon Jae-in to resume dialogue, it is important that that engagement serves as a platform for North Korea to discuss ways to improve human rights," said Tomás Ojea Quintana, the Special Rapporteur on human rights in DPRK.

During his [five-day mission](#) to Seoul, from 17 to 21 July, the Special Rapporteur met senior Government officials as well as representatives of civil society and other groups. His requests for access to the North have not been granted.

The Special Rapporteur reiterated his deep concern about human rights violations in the North, including allegations of arbitrary detention, human trafficking and enforced disappearances, as well as sexual and gender-based violence against women detained in holding centres in the border areas.

The information I have been receiving points to different violations that continue to affect the lives of ordinary North Koreans and even foreigners," he said.

Pyongyang has recently rejected a call by Seoul to resume family reunions, which have not been held for two years, after DPRK resumed nuclear tests and long-range missile launches.

The Special Rapporteur met with a man who wishes to return to DPRK where his wife and son live, despite the risk of being punished for leaving for ROK three years ago.

“If anything, these cases highlight the complexity of the family separation issue that started 70 years ago, and the fact that it continues to take new forms and affect people in the Korean peninsula in profound ways,” he said.

The expert highlighted a surge in the number of Koreans from the North caught in China. They are detained or sent back. Usually harsh labour sentences await them upon their return.

“North Koreans who leave their country are caught in a horrendous cycle of physical and psychological violence, and I received information that some take their own lives when they find out that they are scheduled for repatriation,” said Mr. Ojea Quintana.

The expert noted that China has a responsibility to abide by the principle of non-refoulement in international law. “I appeal to the Government of China to halt the policy, protect those in custody and engage with my mandate and with relevant UN agencies to think of alternatives,” he stressed.

The Special Rapporteur will report his findings and recommendations to the UN General Assembly in October 2017.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN 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.