

More flexibility and mobility for UN peacekeepers in DR Congo – senior official says

19 July 2017 – The United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is changing how it operates to become more flexible and mobile, the head of that mission today said, by focusing on rapid deployment of troops and air surveillance instead of fixed bases.

The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in DRC, Maman Sidikou, said the mission, known by its acronym MONUSCO, will close five fixed bases at the end of the month in the North-Kivu province.

“MONUSCO changes its mode of operations, as it continues to [to fulfil its mandate](#), that is, continuing to back Congolese authorities’ efforts for civilians’ protection,” said Mr. Sidikou.

The new operations are already underway in the Kasai province, where some 350 MONUSCO troops have been deployed.

The Mission is setting up an early warning system and improve its access to people.

“To make the device more effective, it would be critical that communities swiftly transmit all security-related information to MONUSCO,” the Mission’s military authorities said.

In March, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of MONUSCO for another year, but lowered the approved number of military personnel and military observers from 19,815 and 760, respectively, to 16,215 and 660.

The Council tasked the Mission, with, among other responsibilities, ensuring effective and dynamic protection of civilians under threat of physical violence, including by preventing, deterring, and stopping all armed groups and local militias from inflicting violence on the populations.



Maman Sidikou, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, arriving in Oicha, North Kivu. Photo: UN Photo/ Abel Kavanagh

UN chief welcomes Seoul’s proposal to

reopen dialogue with Pyongyang

19 July 2017 – [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today welcomed the move by the Republic of Korea to lower tensions on the Korean Peninsula, his spokesperson said.

“The Secretary-General welcomes the proposal by the Republic of Korea to reopen inter-Korean communication channels and encourages the leadership of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) to respond positively,” UN Deputy Spokesperson Farhan Haq told journalists in New York.

The comments follow Monday’s announcement by the Republic of Korea that its Defence Ministry had proposed to meet with DPRK representatives with the goal of ending hostilities.

“The absence of communication channels with the DPRK could be dangerous,” the spokesperson said in today’s press briefing, echoing the statement Mr. Guterres made on 28 April at the Ministerial-level Security Council meeting on non-proliferation.

At that time, Mr. Guterres said that “we need [to avoid miscalculation and misunderstanding](#) . We need to act now to prevent conflict and achieve sustainable peace.”

SEE ALSO: [Korean Peninsula: Conflict prevention ‘our collective priority’ but onus also on DPRK, says UN chief](#)

He urged DRPK to refrain from further testing, comply with relevant Security Council resolution, and explore the resumption of dialogue.

“This means reopening and strengthening communication channels, particularly military to military, to lower the risk of miscalculation or misunderstanding,” Mr. Guterres said in that speech.

UN refugee agency ‘shocked’ by reported airstrike and casualties in Yemen’s Taizz governorate

19 July 2017 – The United Nations refugee agency today said that it is “deeply shocked and saddened” at reports of the deaths and injuries of internally displaced persons in an aerial attack on the embattled Mawza district in Yemen’s Taizz governorate.

This latest incident once again demonstrates the extreme dangers facing civilians in Yemen, particularly those attempting to flee violence, as they disproportionately bear the brunt of conflict, said William Spindler, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in a press release.

Since 2015, the southern Arabian nation has been in a conflict between forces loyal to President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi and those allied to the Houthi rebel movement.

The airstrike was reported on Tuesday afternoon and the civilian casualties are still being verified with initial reports pointing to at least 20 deaths, including that of women and children, the spokesperson said.

Most of those killed are believed to be from the same family. The victims were reported to have been displaced to Mawza from nearby Al Mokha district, which is also experiencing intensified hostilities.

There are two million internally displaced people in Yemen who have fled elsewhere across Yemen since the beginning of the conflict, but continue to be exposed to danger as the conflict has affected all of Yemen's mainland governorates.

UNHCR has been appealing to parties to the conflict to ensure their utmost in the protection of civilians and the mitigation of suffering, Mr. Spindler said, stressing that a peaceful political solution is urgently needed.

[UN rights expert warns torture routinely used against Sri Lankan security suspects](#)

18 July 2017 – Concluding a five-day visit to Sri Lanka, a United Nations independent human right expert today noted “routine and endemic” use of torture against people detained on national security grounds.

“The Tamil community has borne the brunt of the State’s well-oiled torture apparatus,” said Ben Emmerson, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and counter-terrorism, adding that the law is used disproportionately against the minority group.

During his visit between 10 and 14 July to assess the progress Sri Lanka has achieved in its law, policies and practice in the fight against terrorism since the end of its internal armed conflict, Mr. Emmerson heard first-hand accounts of brutal torture.

“These included beatings with sticks, stress positions, asphyxiation using plastic bags drenched in kerosene, pulling out of fingernails, insertion of needles beneath the fingernails, various forms of water torture, suspension for several hours by the thumbs, and mutilation of the genitals.”

Mr. Emerson said 80 per cent of all suspects arrested under the anti-terror legislation in late 2016 had reported torture and other physical ill-treatment.

The expert specifically pointed to the situation of a dozen prisoners who have been detained without trial for more than 10 years under the anti-terror act, and 70 others for more than five years.

“These staggering figures are a stain on Sri Lanka’s reputation,” the expert noted, urging immediate release of the 81 suspects and announcing a dialogue with the government on the shape of proposed draft legislation which is due to replace the act.

Although recognizing that Sri Lanka had faced “tremendous security challenges” in recent years, the expert emphasized that progress towards reform, justice and human rights was at a “virtual standstill” despite Government promises.

The Special Rapporteur did welcome small signs of progress, but said failing to deliver justice and reform risked prolonging grievances and even reigniting the conflict.

“The Government has committed itself to ending the culture of impunity, ensuring accountability, peace and justice, achieving lasting reconciliation and preventing further human rights abuses” he said, pointing to the steps set out in a Human Rights Council resolution.

A comprehensive report with his findings and recommendations based on the experts visit will be presented to the UN Human Rights Council.

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.

[UN agency seeks \\$421 to support alternatives for refugees, migrants crossing to Europe](#)

18 July 2017 – The United Nations refugee agency today appealed for about

\$421.2 million to help improve protection of [refugees and migrants](#) crossing the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea, and to back European countries working to assist asylum seekers.

“We need to provide [meaningful and viable alternatives](#) to these movements or the deaths and the suffering will continue to mount,” said the Special Envoy to the Central Mediterranean Situation at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees’ ([UNHCR](#)), Vincent Cochetel.

In the first six months of this year, at least 2,171 refugees and migrants died or went missing in the Central Mediterranean.

The funds would be used to raise awareness of the risks of irregular migration, support law enforcement mechanisms, address human trafficking, and ensure humanitarian assistance to those rescued at sea, among others.

The latest appeal incorporates earlier requests, and complements activities of other organizations, UNHCR said.

Concerns about Italy’s save and rescue operations

With thousands of refugees and migrants being pulled from the Mediterranean Sea each week, the UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) today warned that Italy’s proposed code of conduct for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) carrying out search and rescue operations could put many lives at risk, especially those of children.

The code would limit the movement and operations of NGO rescue vessels in the Central Mediterranean, giving priority to law enforcement and security objectives, and inadvertently prevent lifesaving work to save children from drowning, the UN agency said.

UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Justin Forsyth said while Italy should be applauded for its efforts to save refugees and migrants, restrictions on sea rescues is not a solution

“The rest of the EU and international community more broadly must step up to help Italy, by supporting rescue missions, allowing boats to disembark and doing the right thing for children uprooted,” he said.