

# Attacks on hospitals and medical staff 'symptoms of grave disregard' for international law – UN chief

25 May 2017 – Attacks on hospitals and medical staff 'symptoms of grave disregard' for international law – UN chief Parties to conflict are treating hospitals and clinics as targets, rather than respecting them as sanctuaries, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres warned today during a Security Council debate on the protection of civilians in armed violence.

"Despite our efforts, [civilians continue to bear the brunt of conflict](#) around the world," Mr. Guterres told the 15-member body, stressing that attacks on medical staff and facilities continue in conflict zones. Alongside him were Christine Beerli, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Bruno Stagno Ugarte, Deputy Executive Director for Advocacy of Human Rights Watch.

The UN chief recalled that last year, the Council took specific action to improve the protection of medical care during conflict, by [adopting](#) which, among others, urged 'States and all parties to armed conflict to develop effective measures to prevent and address acts of violence, attacks and threats against medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties.

In August, his predecessor submitted recommendations for the swift implementation of this resolution.

"But on the ground, little has changed," Mr. Guterres warned, citing statistics from the World Health Organization showing that attacks on medical care took place in at least 20 countries affected by conflict in 2016.

Attacks on hospitals and medical staff, and the removal of medical supplies from humanitarian convoys, are symptoms of a continued grave disregard for international law and the protection of civilians

In Syria, Physicians for Human Rights has documented more than 400 attacks on medical facilities since the conflict began. More than 800 medical staff have been killed, and more than half of all medical facilities are closed or are only partially functioning, with two-thirds of specialized medical personnel having fled the country.

In Yemen, just a few months after the adoption of resolution 2286, 15 people including three medical staff were reported killed when a hospital was hit in an airstrike.

In Afghanistan, the number of reported attacks against health facilities and

personnel almost doubled in 2016 compared with 2015.

In South Sudan, after years of attacks, less than 50 per cent of medical facilities are functional in areas affected by conflict.

“These attacks are evidence of a broader trend: parties to conflict are treating hospitals and health clinics as targets, rather than respecting them as sanctuaries,” Mr. Guterres said.

He went on to highlight the three main protection priorities; ensure greater respect for international humanitarian and human rights law; stepping up the protection of humanitarian and medical missions, by implementing his predecessor’s recommendations on Security Council resolution 2286 (2016); and preventing forced displacement and finding durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced people.

On the third point, he stressed the need to address the root causes of conflicts that are driving displacement, by investing in inclusive and sustainable development, promoting all human rights and the rule of law, strengthening governance and institutions, and enhancing mediation capacity, from communities to national governments.

“Preventing and ending conflict is my first priority,” he declared. “I call on you all to make it yours, for the sake of the millions of civilians who are suffering around the world.”

According to a concept note circulated by Uruguay, which holds the Council presidency for May, Member States are invited to place the issue of the protection of healthcare in a broader context, connecting it to overarching ‘protection of civilian’ issues.

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## [On Africa Day, UN chief says world must move from ‘managing crises to preventing them’](#)

25 May 2017 – ‘Africa Day’ 2017 comes at an important moment in the continent’s endeavours towards peace, inclusive economic growth and sustainable development United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres said, urging humanity to listen and learn with the people of Africa.

“All of humanity will benefit by listening, learning and working with the [people of Africa](#). It starts with prevention. Our world needs to move from managing crises to preventing them in the first place. We need to break the cycle of responding too late and too little,” said Mr. Guterres in his message commemorating Africa Day.

The UN chief pointed out that most of today's conflicts are internal, triggered by competition for power and resources, inequality, marginalization, disrespect for human rights and sectarian divides. Often, they are inflamed by violent extremism or provide the fuel for it.

But prevention goes far beyond focusing solely on conflict.

"The best means of prevention and the surest path to durable peace is inclusive and sustainable development. It is critical to continue building more effective and accountable institutions to address governance challenges, advance the rule of law and promote civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights," he stressed.

As the international community has entered the second year of implementing the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development to tackle global poverty, inequality, instability and injustice, Mr. Guterres highlighted that Africa has adopted its own complementary and ambitious plan: Agenda 2063.



In Swaziland, children clap at morning assembly at a UNICEF-supported child-friendly school in Mbabane. Photo: UNICEF/Giacomo Pirozzi

"For the people of Africa to fully benefit from these important efforts, these two agendas need to be strategically aligned," he said.

We can speed progress by doing more to provide opportunities and hope to young people

Mr. Guterres referred to last month's first-ever UN-African Union annual conference as "a unique opportunity to strengthen our partnership and establish a higher platform of cooperation," saying: "Our work is based on four driving principles: mutual respect, solidarity, complementarity and interdependence.

Mr. Guterres said that the UN partnership with Africa is also rooted in a deep sense of gratitude.

"Africa provides the majority of United Nations peacekeepers around the world. African nations are among the world's largest and most generous hosts of refugees. Africa includes some of the world's fastest-growing economies," he elaborated.

Turning to youth, he noted "We can speed progress by doing more to provide opportunities and hope to young people. More than three out of five Africans are under 35 years of age. Making the most of this tremendous asset means more investment in education, training, decent work and engaging young people in shaping their future."

The UN chief also stressed: "We must also do our utmost to empower women so they can play a full role in sustainable development and sustainable peace. I am pleased that the African Union has consistently placed a special focus on

gender equality and women's empowerment."

He also reaffirmed his commitment as a partner, friend and committed advocate for changing the narrative about this diverse and vital continent.

"Crises represent at best a partial view. But, from a higher platform of cooperation, we can see the whole picture – one that recognizes the enormous potential and remarkable success stories throughout the African continent," concluded the Secretary-General.

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## [UNICEF urges G7 leaders to adopt six-point action plan to keep refugee children safe](#)

25 May 2017 – Ahead of the Group of Seven summit in Italy, the United Nations children's agency has urged the leaders of G7 industrialized countries to adopt its six-point action plan for the protection of refugee and migrant children.

At least 36,000 of the [refugees and migrants](#) rescued since January have been taken to Sicily, the site of this year's summit, and the Italian G7 presidency has made migration a priority for this year's talks.

"Sicily stands as a symbol of hope for uprooted children seeking a better life, but it is also the endpoint of an extremely dangerous journey that has claimed the lives of many children along the way," said Justin Forsyth, Deputy Executive Director of the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)).

UNICEF's call comes at a time when the dangerous Central Mediterranean migration journey from North Africa to Italy draws renewed attention.

At least 200 children have died while crossing the Central Mediterranean from North Africa to Italy so far this year, a rate of more than one child per day, according to the latest estimates from UNICEF.

Between 1 January and 23 May, more than 45,000 refugees and migrants arrived to Italy by sea, up 44 per cent over the same period last year. This includes some 5,500 unaccompanied and separated children, an increase of 22 per cent from 2016, who account for approximately 92 per cent of all children arriving to Italy via the Central Mediterranean route.



Italian Coastguard, children, volunteers and officials take part in a symbolic rescue of paper boats to send a message to the G7 leaders to take action to safeguard children on the move off a beach in Palermo, Italy, on

Thursday, 25 May 2017. Photo: UNICEF/Salvatore Cavalli

A record high 26,000 unaccompanied and separated children arrived to Italy last year, but if current trends hold, that record will be smashed in 2017.

“That is not a record to be proud of, but a reminder of our collective failure to ensure the safety and wellbeing of refugee and migrant children,” Mr. Forsyth said.

Earlier today, on the eve of the G7 summit, children, volunteers, the Italian coastguard, Italian and UNICEF officials took part in a symbolic rescue of paper boats to commemorate the thousands of children who have risked their lives crossing the Central Mediterranean and send a message to the G7 to take action to safeguard children on the move.

The action plan’s six points are:

- Protect child refugees and migrants, particularly unaccompanied children, from exploitation and violence;
- End the detention of children seeking refugee status or migrating, by introducing a range of practical alternatives;
- Keep families together as the best way to protect children and give children legal status;
- Keep all refugee and migrant children learning and give them access to health and other quality services;
- Press for action on the underlying causes of large scale movements of refugees and migrants;
- Promote measures to combat xenophobia, discrimination and marginalization in countries of transit and destination.

In addition, UNICEF has also launched the “#AChildIsAChild” campaign, which has so far been supported on social media by more than 2 million people.

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## [Formal trade in Africa can improve region, prospects for women – UN agency reports](#)

25 May 2017 – Simplifying the requirements for a business license, offering incentives to tax payers, and tackling official corruption are among the recommendations by the United Nations agricultural organization to cut informal trade among African countries and boost economic prosperity,

particularly for women.

Informal cross-border trading, in which transactions are not compliant with local tax and other rules, accounts for a large share between [20 and a hefty 70 per cent](#)

of employment in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the UN Food and Agricultural Organization ([FAO](#)).

Putting it on a regular footing can lift sustainable prosperity and markedly improve prospects for women, FAO said in a new publication, [Formalization of informal trade in Africa](#).

Informal cross-border trade, often agricultural, is the result of poor access to government offices, a lack of administrative skills and improper understanding of import and custom-tax laws.

One of the main groups that would be affected by formalization is women, who constitute the largest share of informal traders about 70 per cent in Southern Africa and more than half in other parts, according to the report.

Facilitating formalization is the only viable policy option for Africa's transformation agenda to realize its objectives, said Suffyan Koroma, FAO senior economist and lead author of the report.

The publication was presented today at a conference in Kigali, Rwanda. The event is part of ongoing FAO-supported work in the country, along with UN Women and other development partners, aimed at enabling women to benefit more from agri-food chains, a project geared to allowing women small traders access useful information as well as start-up capital.

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## [South Sudan: 'Fighting stop now' so millions can be spared from famine, say UN agency chiefs](#)

24 May 2017 – Despite “appalling conditions” in South Sudan, it is not too late to save more people from dying, the head of the United Nations agriculture agency said today, joining the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) chief in a call to all parties enmeshed in the country's conflict to end the violence and work together to ensure access to food and other life-saving support.

José Graziano da Silva, head of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) and WFP's David Beasley made the call during a visit to the former Unity state, one of the areas in South Sudan worst hit by the

current hunger crisis.

“We can still avoid a worsening of the disaster, but the fighting has to stop now,” Mr. Graziano da Silva said. “There can be no progress without peace. People must be given immediate access to food, and farmers need to be allowed to work on their fields and tend to their livestock,” he added.

Around 5.5 million people in South Sudan, or almost half the population, face severe hunger ahead of the lean season, which peaks in July. Of these, more than 90,000 face starvation with famine declared in parts of former Unity state while another one million teeter on the brink. The UN stresses that this unprecedented situation reflects the impact of ongoing strife, obstacles to delivering humanitarian assistance and declining agricultural production.

Both UN officials stressed that an immediate, massive response is critical, combining emergency food assistance and support for agriculture, livestock and fisheries.

***‘The fighting must end’ so investment in children can begin, WFP’s Beasley***

In the former Unity state, they visited people coping with the hunger crisis with the support of both agencies and met with people facing famine on Kok Island, a refuge in the Nile River where many people have sought shelter from fighting.

The two agency heads saw aid workers from international and local partner organizations distributing WFP food and nutrition treatments, as well as seeds and FAO fishing kits.

“Food, treatment for malnourished kids, kits that help people fish and grow vegetables – these are the difference between life and death for people we met in Unity state,” Mr. Beasley said. “But we can’t keep scaling up forever. The fighting has to end to make the kind of investments that give the children of South Sudan any hope for the future they deserve.”

***‘Saving livelihoods saves lives,’ says FAO’s Graziano da Silva***

The two UN agency heads visited an FAO project aiming to provide women farmers and pastoralists with a place to process milk. With rising malnutrition levels across the country, the project is an innovative way to increase the availability of safe, quality milk and milk products – a major dietary staple and a source of protein vitamins and minerals, essential components for a healthy diet.

Mr. Graziano da Silva highlighted that saving livelihoods also saves lives, saying “South Sudan has great potential – it has land, water and courageous people. If it also has peace, then together we can work to end hunger.”

Both agency heads underscored the need for further international support to confront a \$182 million funding gap over the next six months.

Mr. Beasley assured that while WFP would continue to stand by the South Sudanese, its leaders “must show good faith by facilitating humanitarian

efforts, including getting rid of unnecessary fees and procedures that delay and hinder aid.”