

# Violence in North Africa, Middle East puts health of 24 million children in jeopardy – UNICEF

24 May 2017 – From Libya to Syria, grinding conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East have damaged health infrastructure and compromised water and sanitation services, threatening the health of 24 million children, the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) warned today.

“Violence is [crippling health systems](#) in conflict-affected countries and threatens children’s very survival,” said Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa. “Beyond the bombs, bullets and explosions, countless children are dying in silence from diseases that could easily be prevented and treated.”

Millions of children in Yemen, Syria, the Gaza Strip, Iraq, Libya and Sudan are lacking nutritious food and being deprived of essential health care. Moreover, water and sanitation services have been compromised, causing waterborne diseases to spread.

“When children can’t access healthcare or improved nutrition, when they drink contaminated water, when they live surrounded by waste with no sanitation, they become ill and some die as a result,” said Mr. Cappelaere. “There is very little standing between them and life-threatening illness, especially when humanitarian access is denied.”

The two-year conflict in Yemen has plunged the country into one of the world’s worst humanitarian crises with widespread acute malnutrition leaving some 9.6 million children in need. For more than seven months, health care and sanitation workers have not been paid and contaminated water sources, untreated sewage and uncollected garbage have sparked a cholera outbreak, with 323 associated deaths in the last month alone.

The conflict in Syria has rendered 5.8 million children in need. Lifesaving supplies are regularly removed from the few entering convoys and many children lack vaccinations. Those who need it, struggle to get treatment as attacks on health facilities have become commonplace – almost 20 per month between January and March this year. The few operational hospitals function with limited staff while the threat of polio – such as the outbreak that hit Syria in 2013 – still looms.

In Iraq, where 5.1 million children are at risk, water supplies in camps for the displaced around Mosul are stretched to the limit as new families arriving daily – many with malnourished children. UNICEF estimates that for the past seven months, 85,000 children have been trapped in western Mosul, with limited medical access and no humanitarian aid.

Immunization programmes in Libya have been challenged since the 2011 conflict

erupted, with suspected measles cases reported among young children. Without new funding, over 1.3 million children will not be vaccinated against the highly contagious and potentially fatal measles and rubella.

In just eight months, over 8,000 cases of acute watery diarrhoea have been recorded in Sudan's conflict-affected areas, which are set to rise rapidly once the rainy season begins in June. Some 2.3 million children there are in need.

Across these countries, UNICEF is working to provide children with safe water, water treatment, medical and nutrition supplies but as conflicts continue, and amid a shrinking humanitarian space, challenges to reach all vulnerable children with lifesaving assistance are growing.

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## [Senior UN official appeals for aid to stop 'unprecedented' spread of cholera in Yemen](#)

24 May 2017 – With more than 100,000 people in Yemen believed to be at risk for cholera, the top United Nations humanitarian official in the country is appealing to Governments for urgent financial and political support.

Cholera continues to spread at an [unprecedented rate](#) throughout Yemen affecting men, women, and children who have for more than two years withstood the consequences of a conflict that is collapsing institutions and social safety nets, the UN humanitarian coordinator in the country, Jamie McGoldrick.

More than 35,500 suspected cases of cholera were reported in Yemen in the past three weeks, and 361 deaths.

Health authorities have said that one-third of the current cases are children, drawing a link between cholera and malnutrition in a country where 17 million people are food insecure.

Hundreds of thousands of people are at a greater risk of dying as they face the 'triple threat' of conflict, starvation and cholera, Mr. McGoldrick said.

The speed at which cholera is spreading among the population exceeds the capacity of the health system to respond given its weakened state after more than two years of conflict, he noted, despite valiant work by national and international humanitarians.

The majority of health care centres in Yemen are closed, according to the

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)). Those that are open have limited staff and supplies due to import restrictions and a lack of regular salary payments to health workers.

In addition, water and sanitation services are unable to provide clean water to the population.

The humanitarian community is seeking \$55.4 million for the next six months, but every day that funding is delayed the outbreak affects more people and more resources are needed to control it, OCHA said.

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## [Marking International Day, UN honours dedication and service of peacekeepers](#)

24 May 2017 – While the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers is 29 May, the Organization today held ceremonies to pay tribute to the more than 3,500 people who have died on duty since 1948 and acknowledge the dedication and courage of those serving on the ground.

“Every day, peacekeepers help bring peace and stability to war-torn societies around the world,” UN [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres said in his message for the Day, also underscoring the sacrifices made by the more than 3,500 peacekeepers who have given their lives in the service of peace since 1948.

“Their sacrifice only strengthens our commitment to ensuring that United Nations peacekeepers continue protecting civilians in harm’s way, promoting human rights and the rule of law, removing landmines, advancing negotiations and securing a better future in the places they are deployed,” he said. “Now, more than ever, it is essential that we continue investing in peace around the world.”

On 29 May in 1948, the first UN peacekeeping mission began operations in Palestine. In 2002, the UN General Assembly designated 29 May as the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers.

At the UN Headquarters in New York, the Secretary-General presided over a wreath-laying ceremony in honour of all peacekeepers who lost their lives while serving under the UN flag.

Mr. Guterres led a moment of silence to remember the fallen peacekeepers, including 117 military, police and civilian peacekeepers from 43 countries who died in service in 2016.

He expressed his “deepest condolences and appreciation” to the family members and friends of those who died, as well as his “deepest sorrow and greatest appreciation” to the countries that contributed the troops and police

officers.

The UN chief warned that peacekeepers continue to come under attack from armed groups, spoilers and increasingly by terrorists, including incidents in Mali, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan.

“But the closure of our operations in Cote d’Ivoire and Liberia over the coming months reminds us that the contributions, investments and sacrifices of our United Nations peacekeepers have contributed to the transformation of these countries from battlefields to peaceful states,” he stressed.

“And the greatest tribute we can pay to those who have died is to rededicate ourselves to continuing their work to build and maintain peace,” he said.

The [Dag Hammarskjöld Medal](#) was awarded posthumously to the peacekeepers who have fallen while serving in the cause of peace, during the preceding year.

UN peacekeeping operations use the Day to strengthen bonds with the local populations that they have been deployed to serve. For example by holding sporting events, school and orphanage visits, art and essay competitions, photo exhibits, neighbourhood clean ups, tree plantings, concerts, and conferences and workshops on peace issues.

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## **[DR Congo: 400,000 children in Greater Kasai at risk of severe acute malnutrition, UNICEF warns](#)**

24 May 2017 – Deteriorating security conditions have severely disrupted life-saving interventions for children in Greater Kasai in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in recent months, putting an estimated 400,000 children at risk of severe acute malnutrition, the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has said.

“These children are among the most vulnerable in the country, and now they face a looming crisis if access to basic services is not restored quickly,” said Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF’s Regional Director for West and Central Africa, in a press release.

“Without adequate health care, without access to food and clean water, the lives of hundreds of thousands of children are at risk,” she added.

Across the five provinces of Greater Kasai, critical health infrastructures are no longer operational due to the conflict. In Central Kasai Province alone, more than one-third of health centers have been forced to close following looting, due to security concerns for staff or lack of medical

supplies, depriving children of vital services and medicine.

Supplies of food and basic necessities are dwindling, and displacement has forced families to live in conditions with inadequate hygiene or sanitation.

“Our priority over the next few weeks is to reach thousands of severely malnourished children that can no longer be cared for in the health centers that have been destroyed,” said Tajudeen Oyewale, acting UNICEF Representative in the Democratic Republic of Congo. “But insecurity in these remote areas is making our work very challenging.”

Even before the latest wave of violence, the Kasai Provinces were among the poorest in the country. More than one in ten children die before the age of five due to lack of adequate health care. Half the children suffer from chronic malnutrition or stunting.

UNICEF needs \$40.2 million for its emergency response in Greater Kasai.

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## [Samples from alleged chemical attacks in Syria reveal evidence of sulfur mustard, sarin – UN official](#)

23 May 2017 – A fact-finding mission in Syria has found evidence of sulfur mustard in samples taken from an alleged attack on 16 September 2016, while samples from a 4 April incident have revealed exposure to sarin or a sarin-like substance, the United Nations disarmament chief told the Security Council today.

“We must not allow ourselves to become inured to the ongoing allegations of the use of chemical weapons. This is an issue about which the United Nations cannot be neutral,” Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, said in her [first briefing](#) to the Security Council since her appointment.

Citing initial findings from the fact-finding mission by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons ([OPCW](#)), she emphasized that the use of chemical weapons by any actor – whether Government forces, terrorist factions or armed opposition groups – could never be justified, regardless of provocation or circumstance.

“Their re-emergence is indefensible and cannot be viewed as anything other than a violation of the most basic international law and a serious deviation from the internationally agreed broader path towards the goal of a world free of chemical weapons,” she said. “As such, this is not an issue to be politicized.”

She said OPCW has deployed a fact-finding mission on two occasions following allegations of chemical weapons use on that date in the area of Um Hosh, in the Aleppo countryside. Members of the mission have conducted interviews, collected testimonies and reviewed documents, as well as information provided by the Syrian authorities, she added.

While the prevailing security situation has prevented the team from visiting the site of the alleged incident, she continued, it has been able to review analyses of blood samples from two female casualties reported to have been involved in the attack.

They were found to have suffered exposure to sulfur mustard, as was a mortar handed over to the team by the Russian Federation's Chemical, Biological, Nuclear and Radiological Team.

RELATED: [As US responds militarily to chemical attack, UN urges restraint to avoid escalation](#)

Regarding the reported incident in Khan Shaykhoun on [4 April](#) – she said that, after a preliminary assessment, a fact-finding mission was deployed to a neighbouring country, where it conducted interviews and witnessed the collection of biomedical samples from the alleged incident.

It has also received biological-environmental samples from dead animals reported to have been close to the suspected impact point, attended the autopsies of three alleged victims, and witnessed the extraction of biomedical samples from their bodies.

She, however, emphasized that all materials and information collected were currently being analyzed, thus not final.

On the situation relating to the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons production facilities remained unchanged, she said that OPCW has verified the destruction of 24 of the 27 declared facilities, but the prevailing security situation continues to preclude safe access to the three remaining sites.