

Armed insurgency in north-east Nigeria 'has created a humanitarian tragedy'

Following an upsurge in violence in north-east Nigeria, which was brought to global attention five years ago with the abduction by Boko Haram extremists of the Chibok schoolgirls, tens of thousands of innocent civilians continue to flee, prompting "grave concern" from the United Nations envoy there.

Clashes between Nigerian government forces and non-State armed groups on 26 December in Baga town, about 200 kilometers north of state capital Maiduguri, triggered massive displacement, pushing civilians to converge on already-congested camps or sites for internally displaced people (IDPs).

An attempted attack on 28 December in Monguno, further exacerbated the situation, leading to more displacement.

It is heart-wrenching to see so many...living in congested camps, or sleeping outside with no shelter – *UN Humanitarian Coordinator*

"The impact of the recent fighting on innocent civilians is devastating and has created a humanitarian tragedy," said UN Humanitarian Coordinator Edward Kallon after visiting Monguno and Teachers Village camp for internally displaced people in Maiduguri.

"It is heart-wrenching to see so many of these people living in congested camps, or sleeping outside with no shelter," he lamented.

"The United Nations is extremely concerned about the impact that violence in north-east Nigeria, especially in Borno State, is having on civilians", he added.

In recent weeks, more than 30,000 internally displaced people have arrived in Maiduguri, mainly from Baga – the majority since 20 December, often after arduous journeys with young children.

Of these, an estimated 20,000 IDPs in Teachers Village camp in Maiduguri has stretched its capacity beyond the limit.

And while it is still unclear how many people are taking refuge in Monguno, tens of thousands are in need of humanitarian assistance, notably shelter, food, water and sanitation.

Some 260 aid workers have been withdrawn from the local government areas of Monguno, Kala/Balge and Kukawa, which have been affected by the conflict since November. This represents the largest withdrawal of aid workers since the international humanitarian response was scaled up in 2016, hindering the delivery of vital aid to hundreds-of-thousands of people.

While aid workers have begun returning to respond to the urgent, life-saving needs, the lack of a secure operating environment continues to prevent normal humanitarian activities.

[‘We cannot lose momentum’ on the road to peace in Yemen, UN envoy warns](#)

Martin Griffiths told Council members he was “under no illusion that these are very sensitive and challenging days” for both the Government coalition, and opposition Houthi leaders, “and for Yemen as a whole.”

Mr. Griffiths updated the Council that since the consultations in Stockholm, President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi and Abdelmalik Al-Houthi, leader of Houthi opposition movement Ansar Allah, have recognized the meetings “as an important step towards a comprehensive resolution to the conflict” and were determined to build on that progress through more dialogue.

Noting that the 18 December ceasefire in and around Hudaydah had been largely adhered to, Mr. Griffiths said the fighting was now “very limited” compared to the clashes beforehand, which threatened the lives of hundreds-of-thousands of civilians living inside the Houthi-held port and city.

“This relative calm, I believe, indicates the tangible benefit of the [Stockholm Agreement](#) for the Yemeni people and the continued commitment of the parties to making the agreement work,” he asserted.

The special envoy credited the Council’s “swift authorization” of December’s [resolution 2451](#), and rapid deployment of ceasefire monitors as “a clear signal to the parties and the Yemeni people of the international community’s desire to turn the agreement into facts on the ground” and hoped that security arrangements and the humanitarian access routes agreed in Stockholm will be implemented swiftly.

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Turning to the major city Taiz where the two sides have battled for control for more than three years, the UN envoy recalled its “enormous historic significance” and called its people a driving economic and cultural force.

“Civilians in Taiz have suffered far too much for too long, and the destruction in the city has been terrible”, he underscored. “The flow of humanitarian aid needs to increase, and people need the chance to rebuild”, he added, pointing out that the Stockholm consultations provided a platform

for this.

On the prisoner exchange agreement, Mr. Griffiths said that although implementation has been “gradual and tentative”, the UN was working with both parties to finalize the lists each submitted in Stockholm and would follow up with talks on 14 January in Amman, Jordan.

“I hope these talks will allow many thousands of prisoners to go home and be reunited with their families”, he said, asking for the Council’s support in encouraging the parties to “overcome any challenges that may be encountered along the way.”

Mr. Griffiths lamented that no consensus was reached on the Central Bank of Yemen or opening the Sana’a airport, which would significantly contribute to the economy and help relieve humanitarian suffering.

“I continue to work with the parties to resolve them,” he maintained, urging both sides to “exert restraint in their media rhetoric”.

With the goal of reaching a lasting political settlement, Mr. Griffiths said “Sweden was just a start” and that it was important to keep up the momentum in moving the process forward.

Calling speedy implementation “crucial”, he stressed that a lot of work needs to be done “before the parties can reach a comprehensive peace agreement”.

The UN envoy spelled out: “We need to convene the next round, but we need substantive progress on what was agreed in Stockholm”.

“Progress in Sweden is a basis for confidence. It would be conducive to further progress at the next round of consultations”, he concluded.

‘Implement what was agreed in Sweden’

UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock was next to brief the 15-member Council and began with positive news that the Stockholm Agreement, and resolution 2451, “is already having an impact”.

Civilians in Hudaydah “are a little more confident and a little less afraid that they will be victims of air strikes or caught in crossfire as they go about their lives” he said, although, he added that the wider humanitarian situation in Yemen “remains catastrophic”.

Mr. Lowcock laid out what humanitarian agencies are doing to meet Yemen’s needs, including the [World Food Programme’s \(WFP\)](#) December operation, providing a record 9.5 million people with emergency food assistance.

“WFP will expand operations to reach 12 million people a month, including the 10 million most at risk of famine, and two million acutely-vulnerable Internally Displaced People (IDPs)” he elaborated.

Humanitarian agencies continue to roll back what was the world’s worst

cholera epidemic last year, improve IDP living conditions, and mitigate hunger and malnutrition for 240,000 people facing catastrophic levels of food insecurity. “Altogether, operations in Yemen this year will, if funding is available, reach 15 million people – about half the population,” he informed.

He acknowledged the seriousness of WFP’s recent strong statement against the theft of food intended for civilians, seeking [action](#) from *defacto* authorities over food aid misappropriation, saying “Steps to improve targeting and delivery mechanisms are being taken as we speak”.

Security Council resolution status

The relief chief also updated the Council on humanitarian issues related to Resolution 2451, beginning with access.

“The humanitarian scale-up that Yemenis need will not be possible if aid workers and supplies cannot travel safely and freely to where they are needed”, he said, pointing out that enough grain for 3.5 million people had been sitting unused, possibly spoiling in the Red Sea Mills and humanitarian warehouses of Hudaydah.

“All parties must allow and facilitate safe, timely and unhindered humanitarian access, in line with international humanitarian law and the requirements of Security Council resolution 2451,” he said, saying that WFP still had nearly 500 containers stuck in Aden port.

Situation at a glance:

- More than 24 million people, or 80 per cent of the population, need humanitarian assistance.
- Nearly 10 million of them are one step away from famine.
- More than 3.3 million have been displaced, 600 in the last 12 months.
- Only half of health facilities are fully functioning.
- Millions of Yemenis are hungrier, sicker and more vulnerable than a year ago.

Regarding the economy, he said: “Your resolution also points out that paying pensions and civil-servant salaries across the country is another key element of strengthening the economy.”

The resolution calls also on the parties to strengthen the economy and the Central Bank.

Mr. Lowcock noted that the Yemeni rial is losing value, and without intervention, the International Monetary Fund ([IMF](#)) estimates that the exchange rate is likely to slide further – devastating for the millions of people who need “food, fuel and medicines.”

Turning to additional funding for the 2019 UN Coordinated Humanitarian Response Plan, he recalled that last year, \$2.4 billion, or 83 per cent of

requirements, were eventually raised.

“In response to the deterioration in the situation we have seen especially over the last six months, humanitarian agencies will need even more money,” he argued.

He outlined that on 26 February, the Secretary-General would convene a high-level pledging conference in Geneva where “We are counting on all our donors to announce even more generous funding”.

“Millions of Yemenis are looking to us for assistance and protection, and we need to see more and faster progress on all the humanitarian elements of your resolution to make any practical difference to their lives” concluded the Humanitarian Coordinator.

[Somalia: UN congratulates Puntland region's newly-elected President](#)

The UN's Deputy Special Representative for Somalia, on Wednesday congratulated the newly-elected president of Puntland, Somalia's semi-autonomous region in the country's north east.

Mr. Said Abdullahi Deni and Mr. Ahmed Elmi Karash were elected as President and Vice-President of Puntland, respectively, on Tuesday.

Somalia's five regions – Puntland, Galmudug, Hirshabelle, South West State, and Jubaland – are in the midst of a presidential election process, which began last November, running through to the end of 2019. Voters in South West State went to the polls in November. Hirshabelle will follow on from Puntland.

The deputy chief of UN mission UNSOM, who is also UN Deputy Special Representative in the country, Raïsedon Zenenga, congratulated the electoral commission for organizing and conducting a transparent, peaceful, free and fair electoral process.

“We look forward to working closely with the administration of President Deni in Puntland,” said Mr. Zenenga in a [statement](#). “We also commend outgoing President Abdiweli Mohamed Ali ‘Gaas’ and his administration for overseeing a peaceful transfer of power and for establishing conditions that enabled the electoral commission to conduct a successful electoral process”, he added.

Mr. Zenenga is the Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia ([UNSOM](#)), following the decision by the Somali Federal Government last week to expel the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for

Somalia, Nicholas Haysom, declaring him persona non grata.

Mr. Haysom was accused by the Government of interfering in its internal affairs, by questioning the legal basis for the arrest of a former al-Shabab deputy leader early last month, who was a leading candidate for election in South West state.

UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) said he deeply regretted the Government decision to expel the top envoy, a stance backed by the 15-member UN Security Council, which cautioned that 2019 would be a “critical year” for the country which is recovering from decades of civil conflict and battling multiple challenges on the road to full political reform and economic renewal.

[Amid troop build-up in Rohingya's home state, UN appeals to Myanmar for peaceful solution](#)

Major fighting in Myanmar's troubled Rakhine state has so far been avoided following clashes between armed separatists and national security forces who are increasing troop numbers there, a top UN humanitarian official there said on Wednesday.

In an interview with *UN News*, [Knut Ostby](#), Acting Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Myanmar, reiterated calls for all sides “to find a peaceful solution to the situation”, amid concern “that there could be a quite immediate escalation of fighting”.

It is also vital that humanitarian access is improved to help all those affected by the violence, Mr Ostby said.

We are worried that if there is new major displacement and new need for major humanitarian assistance that access... will not be sufficient to deliver the assistance needed – *Knut Ostby, UN in Myanmar*

Some 4,500 people have been displaced in the fighting in recent weeks, Mr Ostby noted, adding that the Myanmar authorities have announced that they intend to “crush” the so-called Arakan Army insurgents.

“I think the situation as far as we know, has not broken out to major fighting, but there have been more troop build-ups”, Mr Ostby said, before speaking of his shock at attacks on police outposts last Friday that claimed 13 officers' lives.

Noting that humanitarian access to communities in need of help in Rakhine state “has not improved since 2017” – when some 700,000 Rohingya Muslims fled violence there to neighbouring Bangladesh – the UN official warned that facilities were not in place to cope with yet more mass movement of people.

An estimated 600,000 Rohingya remain in Rakhine state, the UN official explained.

“We are worried that if there is new major displacement and new need for major humanitarian assistance that the access we are having will not be sufficient to deliver the assistance needed”, Mr. Ostby said, noting that the violence risked affecting “all ethnic groups”.

The latest violence comes amid a wider pattern of sporadic but at times intense fighting between ethnic groups and the authorities in Myanmar dating back more than 70 years in some cases, since independence in January 1948.

Although a ceasefire is in place in northern and eastern areas of Myanmar, the UN official explained that “it does not include Rakhine state, and that is why we are worried that there will be new escalation that would lead to new suffering of the civilian population”.

The United Nations will continue to maintain contact with local authorities in Rakhine state as well as central Government to “try to do more on the humanitarian and development side” in Myanmar, Mr Ostby insisted, noting that “there is a lot more that could be done and should be done, if we had more access”.

[100 years on, ILO mission focussed on growing inequality, says Director-General](#)

As it celebrates its centenary year, the International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)) must help to tackle inequality in the world of work through the efforts of its 180-plus members, said Director-General Guy Ryder on Wednesday.

The ILO chief’s message coincides with the launch of an interactive [campaign](#) promoting the work of the organization.

Founded by 44 countries in the aftermath of the First World War, the organization’s mission was to address growing and potentially explosive discontent with poor working conditions in Europe.

Today, that objective is shared by ILO’s 187 Member States, Mr Ryder

maintained, in a statement to mark 100 years since the body was founded on 6 June, 1919.

Noting that the nature of work “has changed out of all recognition” in many parts of the world since 1919, thanks in large part to technological advances, Mr Ryder warned that many people have not seen the benefits.

“Hopes and fears are unevenly distributed,” he said. “Uncertainty is high and the levels of trust are all too low. And this tells us that the ILO centenary matters. It matters to us all, whatever the country you live in.”

From the number of hours we work to the principle of a fair wage and protection for injured or sick workers, these and many other social benefits and workplace rights that people from many nations take for granted, are the fruit of [ILO](#)’s intervention on the global stage.

Its work to improve labour laws and standards worldwide is symbolized by a triple-locking gate at its former headquarters in Geneva – now the home of the World Trade Organization ([WTO](#)) – whose keys are marked separately with each partner: governments, workers and employers.

Mr Ryder recalled that ILO’s role in promoting international peace through social justice was seen by some as a “wild dream” – a phrase first used by US President Franklin Roosevelt, ahead of the US decision to join the body in 1934.

Here’s what President Roosevelt said at the time: “I well remember that in those days the ILO was still a dream. To many it was a wild dream. Who had ever heard of governments getting together to raise the standards of labour on an international plane? Wilder still was the idea that the people themselves who were directly affected – the workers and the employers of the various countries – should have a hand with government in determining these labour standards.”

Born out of war and unrest

In 1919, the task of drafting the ILO Constitution was entrusted to a Labour Commission that was set up by Member States who took part in the Treaty of Versailles, which demanded reparations from a defeated Germany after the First World War.

The Commission met between January and April to write the Constitution, whose [preamble](#) highlights “unrest so great that the peace and harmony of the world are imperilled” – a reference to workers’ demands that the peace settlement should include measures for fairer working conditions, promoted through labour legislation and trade union rights.

Amid such fears of potentially explosive social unrest – and with ILO’s place in the maintenance of peace clearly defined – the first International Labour Conference attended by 40 countries – was held in the U.S. capital, Washington DC, from October to November 1919.

Then, as now, international labour standards were adopted and crafted into

international treaties, spelling out the actions to be taken and the principles to be respected by the countries that ratify them.

These standards are one of ILO's principal means of action and influence in the world of work, helping to create a level playing field in which governments, employers and workers compete fairly, ILO Director-General Guy Ryder believes.

"It is surely not beyond our capacities to build the future of work that we want, a future with decent jobs for all," he said.

This vision "and the political will that goes with it" are needed as never before, Mr Ryder insisted, "because for too many people, the world of work falls far short of their reasonable expectations".

Noting that the ILO has "100 years of accumulated experience and expertise" and "decades of experience" in bringing about improvements in the world of work for many decades, Mr Ryder added that he believed "that (political) determination is very much present in the ILO's constituents".