

UN envoy commends plan to setup de-escalation zones in Syria as 'promising positive step'

4 May 2017 – Following today's signing of a deal to setup so-called 'de-escalation zones' in Syria, the United Nations envoy for the war-torn country praised the agreement and said its success could bolster the path towards peace talks.

"Today in Astana I think we have been able to witness an [important, promising and positive step](#) in the right direction in the process of de-escalation of the conflict," said Staffan de Mistura, who witnessed today's signing.

He is in Astana as an observer to the latest round of the Astana talks aimed to bolster the ceasefire regime brokered by Russia, Turkey and Iran in late December 2016.

"The hard work of Iran, Russian Federation, Turkey and the presence at the senior level of the United States of America and of Jordan has produced something that we believe as a UN is a very significant, and in my opinion – our opinion – is a promising step," Mr. de Mistura also noted.

While details of the de-escalation agreement between the three guarantor parties have not been made public, expectations have been raised that it will lead to greater humanitarian access for the 6.3 million Syrians still living in the country.

Speaking to journalists today, Mr. de Mistura said that "if and when" the de-escalation agreement becomes concrete, it would be "conducive and helping" the intra-Syrian discussions.

"We hope it is going to be concrete in the next two weeks for the resumption of the Geneva talks," the UN envoy said.

The [intra-Syrian talks](#) taking place in Geneva, held in parallel to the Astana talks, aim for a political solution to the six-year conflict. The discussions are guided by UN Security Council [resolution 2254 \(2015\)](#), focusing on matters of governance, a schedule and process to draft a new constitution and the holding of elections as the basis for a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned process to end the conflict. The last round wrapped up in March.

In addition to today's agreement, Mr. de Mistura said that the three guarantor countries, plus Jordan and US, have been discussing humanitarian demining in Syria and the issue of detainees, missing people and abductees.

"Both areas have not been yet formally finalized but we believe is being almost finalized, we believe, in imminent discussions. This is also a very good development. Conclusion: this is an important day," said Mr. de Mistura.

Importance of broad financing for sustainable forest management highlighted at UN forum

4 May 2017 – A United Nations meeting on sustainable management of forests today discussed the importance of mobilizing resources from a diverse range of actors to ensure broad ownership as well as to advance the overall sustainable development agenda.

“By far the greatest source of forest financing has been – and will continue to be – from commercial private sector investments in sustainable forest management,” Manoel Sobral Filho, the Director of the [UN Forum on Forests](#) secretariat, [said](#) in a briefing on the importance of diversifying resources.

In the UN Strategic Plan for Forests, agreed earlier this year, UN Member States stressed the importance of partnerships of philanthropic organizations, foundations, as well as public-private and other multi-stakeholder entities in scaling up resources for sustainable forest management and as well as the plan’s own implementation.

The Strategic Plan also provides a framework for forest-related contributions to the implementation of the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development, the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change and a number of other international instruments, commitments and goals.

In addition to these direct links, importance of ensuring sustainable forest management was also recognized in the [Addis Ababa Action Agenda](#) – one of the key constituents of the 2030 Agenda – given the importance of forests for efforts to combat hunger and malnutrition as well as for its larger environmental benefits.

In his briefing today, Mr. Filho further informed the meeting of funding received from resources allocated for sustainable forest management initiatives, as well as the activities of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network, one of the five main components of the post-2015 International Arrangement on Forests.

Some key functions of the Network include mobilizing and supporting new and additional financial resources, and promoting effective use of existing financial resources for sustainable forest management.

The briefing was followed by a panel discussion that was attended, among others, by officials from the Ford Foundation and the World Bank.

Penny Davies, Programme Officer for Equitable Development, Ford Foundation, said the organization planned to disburse \$1 billion over the next 10 years

into private funds promoting “social and environmental justice” activities, she described two specific streams of forest-related investment financing: first, sustainable agriculture that did not clear natural forests and included some protection of forests; and second, sustainable forest management and community-based forest management.

“However, we are finding it difficult to place [that financing],” she said, due to a number of constraints that made those investments too difficult to justify, including: “incoherent spatial mapping” and uncertain land tenure, where investments could be contested by several parties; conflict, which could cause delays in the Foundation’s projects or cause the withdrawal of its partners; and the fact that the Ford Foundation’s private finance is insufficient in the face of government subsidies to unsustainable forest and agricultural management, that incentivizes forest clearance.

The UN Forum on Forests (UNFF) is a high-level intergovernmental policy forum that includes UN Member States, Permanent Observers as well as regional organizations and groups.

Its current (twelfth) session concludes tomorrow, 5 May.

[Peace, human security at forefront of UN global intercultural dialogue forum](#)

4 May 2017 – The integration of migrants in cities, countering the rise of violent extremism, as well as youth radicalization on the Internet are just some of the issues being discussed at a United Nations conference opening on Friday in Baku, Azerbaijan.

The [Fourth World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue](#), hosted by the Government of Azerbaijan in partnership with the UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), will provide an opportunity to examine effective responses to challenges facing human security, including massive migration, violent extremism and conflicts.

The Forum brings together heads of government and ministers, representatives of intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, policy-makers, cultural professionals, journalists and civil society activists under the theme ‘Advancing Intercultural Dialogue – New avenues for human security, peace and sustainable development.’

Speaking to *UN News*, Nadia Al-Nashif, UNESCO Assistant Director General for Social and Human Sciences, said the Baku Forum has a “very strong vision and resonates deeply with UNESCO’s mandate to build peace in the minds of men and women.”

“The world has become a very complicated place,” she noted. “We are looking at huge innovations in technology but at the same time, we are facing increased tensions, a result of the lack of general trust that stems from how much insecurity there is in the world.”

Ms. Al-Nashif said the UN intercultural dialogue is a platform for people to debate the notion of coexistence and what that means in regards to the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development that seeks to “promote norms for social justice, advocate for social inclusion, integration, acceptance, and not just tolerance but empathy.”

UNESCO is hosting 13 sessions at the Forum, showcasing the agency’s diverse work on intercultural dialogue to address issues such as the integration of migrants in cities, countering violent extremism as well as the growth of youth radicalization on the Internet.

“This is not just an academic forum where we are just preaching to the converted,” underscored Ms. Al-Nashif. “We bring our UNESCO Chairs but also the focal points from cities and local authorities.”

The Organization has been developing tools to help cities cope better with the flow of migrants into cities. A ministerial forum on culture and tourism is also scheduled to be held on the margins of the Baku Forum.

Furthermore, a number of its products will be launched on Friday, among them a research publication entitled “Interculturalism at a crossroads, comparative perspectives on concepts, policies and practices” an initiative by the UNESCO Chairs in Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue; and two innovative online platforms: an e-Learning platform on intercultural competences financed with the support of Azerbaijan and another on the Muslim-Arab Legacy in the West.

“What the Baku Forum and UNESCO is doing,” Ms Al-Nashif said, “is finding a common access where we continue to engage, to inform scientific evidence for why it doesn’t make sense to be racist, why discrimination hurts socially and economically as well.”

Ahead of the Forum, the network of the [UNESCO Silk Road Online Platform](#) met at the Baku Congress Centre today, to examine progress made in its 2016-2018 Action Plan.

[In Bogota, Security Council pledges support to Colombia’s efforts to](#)

implement peace process

4 May 2017 – In Colombia to acknowledge and to witness first-hand both the progress and the challenges of carrying out the aims of a hard-won peace deal, a delegation from the United Nations Security Council today met President Juan Manuel Santos and applauded the country as an example for overcoming difficulties and setbacks to bring to an end more than a half a century of conflict.

Speaking to reporters in Bogota, Elbio Roselli, of Uruguay, which holds the Council's presidency for the month, [said](#) that "with the process of pacification of Colombia, the American continent is the only region of the world in which there is no active conflict."

"We thank you for the example you are giving. These processes are never linear, they have ups and downs, they may have setbacks but what matters is to maintain the effort. This Security Council is committed to providing the support that Colombians want and deserve," said Mr. Roselli.

In early October 2016, Colombian voters narrowly rejected the historic peace accord between the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP). That deal was the culmination of four years of talks hosted in Havana, Cuba, between the two sides, and which led to a cessation of hostilities and agreements on key issues such as political participation, land rights, illicit drugs and victims' rights and transitional justice. The two sides signed a new agreement in late November 2016.

The Council delegation also met with Chancellor María Ángela Holguín, Ambassador María Emma Mejía, and the post-conflict cabinet. The Council gave a clear message of support to the implementation of the peace process in Colombia.

In his remarks to the press, president Santos said: "I want to highlight the way the United Nations has helped us to manage the cease-fire. More than 2,670 lives have been saved so far in the peace process."

United Kingdom Ambassador Matthew Rycroft, co-leader of the visit with Uruguay, highlighted the full support of the Security Council and the international community to make the peace process a reality.

"This is a once in a lifetime opportunity for Colombians, make sure that all the parties fulfil all of the commitments and finally the peace that your country deserves will be a reality, from which there cannot be a turning back," said Ambassador Rycroft.

Before leaving New York, Mr. Roselli [noted](#) that it is time for the Council to make contact with all parties in the process, in order to see how the UN is helping and can continue to do so.

The visit follows a recent announcement by the [UN Mission in Colombia](#) that it hopes to receive [60 percent](#) of all FARC-EP arms.

Mr. Roselli also said that the Council not only wants to recognize the importance in relation to the Colombian ceasefire and the laying down of arms, but also inform itself about the substantive part.



Jean Arnault, Special Representative of the Secretary General and Mission chief, shakes hands with the President of Colombia Juan Manuel Santos while Elbio Roselli, President of Security Council, looks on. Photo: UN Photo/ Juan Manuel Barrero Bueno

Late September last year representatives of the Government of Colombia, as well as members from the FARC-EP and international observers from the UN mission in the country started working together at the joint Monitoring and Verification Mechanism headquarters in Bogota.

Verification of the bilateral ceasefire and cessation of hostilities in Colombia is part of the Mechanisms task, and according to the UN Mission in the South American country, they also have been planning and coordinating logistics for the regional offices and the zones where the separation of forces has been taking place.

Earlier this year UN News [reported](#) that at eight regional and 26 local sites, FARC-EP and Government members, along with 350 UN observers, have been working together to verify the parties' commitments towards the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities.

The UN Mission in Colombia reported [today](#) that to-date they have received and stored a thousand weapons from FARC-EP combatants. The combatants are currently in camps established for their transition and reintegration into civilian life, but also to ensure the safety of the civilian population and of FARC-EP and Public Force members.

[Nigeria: UN report details 'grave violations' against children by Boko Haram](#)

4 May 2017 – Children in north-east Nigeria continue to be brutalized as a result of Boko Haram's insurgency in the region and the ensuing conflict, a first-of-its-kind United Nations report has concluded.

"With tactics including widespread recruitment and use, abductions, sexual violence, attacks on schools and the increasing use of children in so-called 'suicide' attacks, Boko Haram has inflicted unspeakable horror upon the

children of Nigeria's north-east and neighbouring countries," said Virginia Gamba, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, in a press release from her Office.

The [report](#) of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Nigeria documents the impact on children of the severe deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in the country between January 2013 and December 2016.

Violations committed by Boko Haram

During the reporting period, attacks by Boko Haram on communities and confrontations between the group and security forces resulted in at least 3,900 children killed and 7,300 more maimed.

Suicide attacks became the second leading cause of child casualties, accounting for over one thousand deaths and 2,100 injuries during the reporting period. The UN verified the use of 90 children for suicide bombings in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger, the majority of whom were girls.

The UN verified the recruitment and use of 1,650 children. Testimonies from children separated from Boko Haram indicate that many were abducted, but that others joined the group due to financial incentives, peer pressure, familial ties and for ideological reasons. In some instances, parents gave up their children to obtain security guarantees or for economic gain.

The children were used in direct hostilities, for planting improvised explosive devices, to burn schools or houses and in a variety of support roles.

Schools have been targets of choice for Boko Haram and the UN estimates that 1,500 were destroyed since 2014, with at least 1,280 casualties among teachers and students.

Response to Boko Haram also raises concerns

The response to Boko Haram's insurgency also generated protection concerns, including allegations of extra judicial killings.

The UN documented the recruitment and use of 228 children, including some as young as nine by the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), created in Borno state to assist the Nigerian Security Forces.

Children were used mainly for intelligence-related purposes, in search operations, night patrols, for crowd control and to guard posts.

She urged all parties to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law and to ensure civilians are protected during armed clashes.