

Korean Peninsula: Conflict prevention 'our collective priority' but onus also on DPRK, says UN chief

28 April 2017 – Preventing armed conflict in north-east Asia is the international community's collective priority while the onus is also on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to refrain from further nuclear testing and explore the path of dialogue, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres told the Security Council today.

Armed conflict in north-east Asia, which is home to one fifth of the world's people and gross domestic product, would have global implications, [warned](#) Mr. Guterres at a ministerial-level meeting to discuss the DPRK's accelerated nuclear and ballistic missile activities. The meeting was chaired by Rex Tillerson, Secretary of State of the United States, which holds the Council's presidency for the month.

Mr. Guterres noted that since January 2016, the DPRK conducted two nuclear tests, more than 30 launches using ballistic missile technology, and various other activities relating to the nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, in clear violations of Security Council resolutions.

Its launches using ballistic missile technology have included tests of short-, medium-, intermediate-range and submarine-launched ballistic missiles, as well as the placement of a satellite in orbit, he added.

We must assume that, with each test or launch, the DPRK continues to make technological advances in its pursuit of a military nuclear capability

The DPRK is the only country to have conducted nuclear tests this century. We must assume that, with each test or launch, the DPRK continues to make technological advances in its pursuit of a military nuclear capability, [he said](#), citing DPRK leader Kim Jong Un's description of his country as a [responsible nuclear-weapon State](#) and a recent statement by a delegate that [going nuclear armed is the policy of our State](#).

Mr. Guterres said he is alarmed by the risk of a military escalation in the region, including by miscalculation or misunderstanding, and is particularly concerned by the possibility that efforts to offset the destabilizing activities of the DPRK could also result in increased arms competition and tensions, further impeding the ability of the international community to maintain unity and achieve a peaceful solution.

The onus is on the DPRK to comply with its international obligations. At the same time, the international community must also step up its efforts

to manage and reduce tensions,” the UN chief stressed.

That means the DPRK refraining from further testing, complying with the relevant Council resolutions, and exploring the resumption of dialogue.

That also means reopening and strengthening communication channels, particularly military to military, to lower the risk of miscalculation or misunderstanding, and all Member States implementing relevant Council resolutions.

The Council has important tools at its disposal, from targeted sanctions to communication channels, he added.

Turning to the humanitarian situation in the DPRK, the Secretary-General noted that 13 UN agencies and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the DPRK are calling for \$114 million to meet the urgent needs of 13 million especially vulnerable people – half the country's population.

He also called on the DPRK authorities to engage with UN human rights mechanisms and with the international community to address the grave human rights situation and improve the living conditions of its people.

[UN rights office troubled by accelerated executions in US with expiring drug a factor](#)

28 April 2017 – The United Nations human rights office today expressed deep concern about the executions of four men in the United States state of Arkansas, which were reportedly done within the span of eight days to make use of an expiring lethal injection drug.

“Rushing executions can deny prisoners the opportunity to fully exercise their rights to appeal against their conviction and/or sentence, and can also lead to States' shortening their clemency processes, thereby affecting prisoners' rights,” a spokesperson for the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), Elizabeth Throssell told reporters in Geneva.

OHCHR noted that the executions had been stayed, but Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson decided to proceed with the executions because the State's supply of one of the drugs used in lethal injections – midazolam – was due to expire on 30 April and it was unclear whether further supplies could be obtained.

The use of midazolam has been criticized for failing to prevent suffering of

pain, with reports of botched executions related to its use in the US states of Alabama, Ohio and Oklahoma.

The latest prisoner to be executed was Kenneth Williams, who was pronounced dead before midnight last night local time. Ledell Lee was executed on 20 April, and Marcel Williams and Jack Jones on 24 April.

The executions in Arkansas took place after a “12 year de facto moratorium” on the use of the death penalty in the state, Ms. Throssell said.

The number of death executions overall had declined steadily over the past few years, from 52 in 2009 to 20 last year. Since the start of 2017, 10 executions had been carried out.

The OHCHR spokesperson noted that the “the UN opposes the death penalty in all circumstances and we call on all Governments that retain it to establish an official moratorium on all executions with the aim of abolishing the death penalty.”

On 1 March, the Human Rights Council held a biennial high-level panel discussion on the human rights violations related to the use of the death penalty, in particular with respect to the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

[UN calls for restraint following violence in former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#)

28 April 2017 – The United Nations today called for restraint and calm in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia following violence directed at democratic institutions and elected officials.

“We are following developments unfolding in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with great concern and call for restraint and calm. Violence directed at democratic institutions and elected representatives of the people is unacceptable,” [said](#) a statement from the Spokesman for the Secretary-General.

“We urge all political forces to resolve their differences through democratic means, strictly adhering to the Constitution, in order to overcome the political impasse without further delay,” the statement said.

According to [the UN Department of Political Affairs](#), it provides backstopping support and guidance to the personal envoy of the UN Secretary-General for

talks aimed at resolving the name dispute between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Negotiations on the name dispute began in 1993 and have been led since 1999 under the auspices of the envoy. While no solution has been reached so far, both parties have cooperated in the process and urged the continuation of the efforts of the Secretary-General and his envoy.

UN releases \$500,000 for fuel purchase to address power outages in Gaza Strip

28 April 2017 – The United Nations has approved the allocation of \$500,000 for the purchase of emergency fuel to maintain the delivery of essential services at hospitals and other emergency medical facilities in the Gaza Strip of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, following severe power outages.

With power outages at 20 hours a day and emergency fuel supplies running out, basic services are grinding to a halt, warned the UN Coordinator for Humanitarian Aid and Development Activities, Robert Piper, in a news release.

Concerned about the deteriorating energy situation in the Gaza Strip, he called for swift action from Israeli and Palestinian authorities and members of the international community to protect the provision of critical basic services to Gaza's 1.9 million residents.

According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, fuel to power back-up generators at seven out of 13 hospitals in Gaza is expected to run out within three days. Already, residents of high-rise buildings no longer receive regular water supply, due to lack of power for pumps to reach higher levels, and some 110 million litres of raw or poorly treated sewage is flowing into the Mediterranean Sea every day due to lack of energy to treat it.

Syria: 'Glimmers of humanity' overshadowed by brutality of attacks on civilians, says UN aid chief

27 April 2017 – With fighting intensifying on numerous fronts in Syria over the past months, the top United Nations humanitarian official today urged

consolidation of the nationwide ceasefire, most importantly a pause in fighting on the outskirts of Damascus, to enable the delivery of aid.

“The Secretary-General has said time and again that there will be no military end to this conflict. Yet, military might continues to be used against civilians in a way that defies all reason, let alone morality or the law,” Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien told the Security Council.

He said that the use of “abhorrent chemical weapons” on 4 April in Khan Shaykhun was yet another horrific account of such brutality. “I wish I could say mindless brutality – but no, it was deliberate, planned, predetermined, by other humans against their own fellow human beings, sheer unbridled cruelty by leaders and commanders. And we await the investigation to confirm which ones.”

“The humanitarian situation is deteriorating, if that were possible, and the need for active engagement by members of the [Security] Council is urgently needed,” he said.

The core needs of the Syrian people from the international community remain largely unchanged, noting that they include the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure by all parties to the conflict; immediate, unimpeded and sustained access to all in need throughout Syria; an immediate lifting of all sieges; and a political solution to the conflict.

In besieged eastern Ghouta, outside Damascus, civilians remain trapped amid reports of relentless shelling, airstrikes, and ground fighting, he said, noting that the last informal access routes have reportedly been closed further restricting movement for the some 400,000 people who live in the area, and who the UN has been unable to access since October last year.



Stephen O’Brien (shown on screen), Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, briefs the Security Council via video teleconference on the situation in Syria. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

As the noose has tightened around eastern Ghouta, some 30,000 people in the adjacent areas of Barza and Qaboun have also come under siege by the Government of Syria, he added.

“As it is already too late for the more than a quarter million Syrians who have died already in this atrocious war, so members of the Security Council it is action today that counts,” O’Brien stressed, via video link from Geneva, Switzerland.

He also urged the lifting of arbitrary and bureaucratic impediments by all parties throughout Syria.

“I will not repeat again the bureaucratic delaying tactics used by the Government of Syria to thwart humanitarian assistance at every turn, beyond

saying that it continues to bring untold human suffering,” Mr. O’Brien said.

Only four convoys have deployed so far under the new two-monthly April-May plan, reaching 157,500 people. None of these convoys reached besieged areas, due to a lack of necessary authorizations, he said.

Although the overall number of those besieged has been reduced to just over 620,000 people due to evacuations, this process is not in line with humanitarian principles, and not conducted in consultation with the people affected.

“Let us not pretend that those who evacuate move to a location of safety. Many of those who displace to Idlib or northern Aleppo continue to live in areas where civilian structures, including hospitals, come under regular aerial bombardment, and their access to basic goods such as food and shelter is limited,” he said.

AUDIO: Addressing the Security Council, Stephen O’Brien reiterates the UN’s belief that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict.