

All sides in Syria crisis felt impact of 'horrific' weekend attack on evacuee convoy, says UN envoy

20 April 2017 – Speaking to journalists after a meeting of the Humanitarian Taskforce (HTF), Staffan de Mistura, the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, stated that the horrific attack on a convoy of evacuees this past weekend had impacted everyone at today's talks.

"Armed groups' representatives [present at the HTF], Government representatives and non-governmental organizations, all of them [were] affected by the explosion, all helped to make sure that [the wounded] could get to the hospital," [said](#) Mr. de Mistura.

"That was the main moment of total unity among all the members of the HTF [...] in a way the divisions were blurred by the horrific attack which was meant to do the opposite," he added.

At least 130 people, including 67 children were killed in the attack near Rashideen, western rural Aleppo, and more than 200 were wounded. [According](#) to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), video showed children gathering around a person giving out sweets just prior to the explosion.

Mr. de Mistura also informed the media that he will be meeting with the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister on Monday, 24 April, to discuss the next steps regarding both Astana process – which yielded the December 2016 ceasefire in Syria brokered by Russia, Turkey and Iran – and the UN-facilitated [intra-Syrian talks](#).

He also noted that though the trilateral meeting, involving the UN, the United States and Russia has been postponed, it "is still on the table" and there is a clear intention to maintain the forum and resume it at a later date.

Together with the Ceasefire Taskforce, the Humanitarian Taskforce was established last February by the International Syria Support Group (ISSG). They have been meeting separately on a way forward in the crisis. Russia and the United States are the co-chairs of the taskforces and the ISSG, which also comprises the UN, the Arab League, the European Union and 16 other countries.

Also speaking alongside Mr. de Mistura, Jan Egeland, the UN Senior Advisor informed the media that as of mid-April, some 564,000 people across front lines, and in besieged and hard-to-reach areas were provided with relief. Compared to last year, fewer people were reached in besieged areas (160,000) but more were provided relief in hard-to-reach areas.

“So 30 per cent less access to besieged areas, 35 per cent more to hard-to-reach areas,” he said, noting that there are resources for relief in Syria and humanitarians willing to deliver them, “but the military logic is [prevailing over] the besieged areas these days [and] we are not able to go there.”

Mr. Egeland further underlined that besiegement should end by being lifted, not by places being emptied from people, and expressed hope for a breakthrough so that people are able to access urgently needed humanitarian relief as well as get back to their normal lives.

“If they follow a military logic, I think they will continue, if they follow a humanitarian logic I think a breather could be wise to ensure that there are sufficient protection guarantees,” he said. “[Sieges] belong in the Middle Ages, they do not belong in 2017, they could be lifted, you can still choose to fight a war, but without suffocation of civilians.”

[UN seeks more ‘cost-effective’ flight logistics in peacekeeping, political missions](#)

20 April 2017 – [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today launched an initiative to boost efficiency of United Nations planes and flights, as it was revealed that the Organization spent close to \$750 million from 2015 to 2016 on air assets in its peacekeeping and political missions.

“While these assets provide essential logistics and military enabling capabilities, given their significant cost implications, the Secretary-General has asked the heads of field missions to systematically analyze and adjust the composition and utilization of their air fleet and to seek alternative solutions that may be more cost-effective,” UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric told journalists in New York.

Immediate changes include reducing fleets, limiting passenger movement to essential needs and cutting the number of non-mission passengers traveling on UN flights, and reducing the number of special flights.

The UN currently deploys 58 fixed-wing and 157 rotary-wing aircraft in 12 peacekeeping missions and 6 special political missions, the Spokesperson said.

The effort to reduce costs is being led by the Department of Field Support, which provides logistical support to the Department of Peacekeeping and the Department of Political Affairs.

The policy change is part of the Secretariat's "ongoing review of costs and the use of resources provided by Member States," the Spokesperson added.

[INTERVIEW: 'Act now,' or by 2030, millions could be graduating from schools without even basic education, warns UN envoy](#)

20 April 2017 – The ground-breaking, United Nations-backed International Finance Facility for Education is vital to ensure that half of the world's children don't miss out on the basic schooling needed to meet the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

That's the view of the UN [Special Envoy for Global Education](#), Gordon Brown, who said yesterday in an interview with *UN News* that "education has been neglected for too long" and the international community needs to "act now" through a new Financing Compact between developed and developing countries.

Sustainable Development [Goal 4](#) commits countries to provide "inclusive and quality education for all" and yet if current trends continue, more than 800 million young people will be leaving school in 2030, without even a basic education, said Mr. Brown.

He said the new Finance Facility would unlock nearly \$10 billion annually for new education investments, help meet the SDG 2030 deadline, and deliver the right of every girl to an education "free from exploitation, child marriage, child labour and child trafficking."

The envoy, who is former Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, said that currently, only \$8 per child is spent on educational aid to the poorest countries, "barely enough in aid to pay for a text book."

"A new approach is essential [...] Of all the investments we make, education is the longest term need with children requiring 12 years of consistent, sustained and uninterrupted funding," he added.

VIDEO: Speaking to UN News, Special Envoy Gordon Brown says that "education has been neglected for too long," calling for the creation of a new financing compact between developed and developing countries.

While the Finance Facility – inspired by the highly successful Heavily-

Indebted Poor Countries initiative and Global Funds for health and immunization – will be presented at the upcoming World Bank annual meetings, Mr. Brown said, adding that a new Inquiry on Protecting Children in Conflict –supported by Save the Children UK and Theirworld – would also be launched this week.

It would build on the work of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and complement the mission of long-term investment in education, as so many of the countries deprived of functioning classrooms were also conflict zones, he said.

With “moral lines” having been crossed so clearly, as with last week’s purported chemical weapons attack in Idlib, Syria – and the deliberate bombing of schools there – more robust legal protection was needed, said the envoy.

“We think that we need to look at international law, see whether perhaps even an International Criminal Court for children’s issues should be set up; see whether we can strengthen domestic laws.”

A leading London-based lawyer, Shaheed Fatima, will be conducting a legal review to “look at whether we can actually make recommendations that would strengthen the protection of children who are in these conflict zones” said Mr. Brown, who will chair the Inquiry.

Discussing his new initiatives with journalists at UN Headquarters on Wednesday, the Special Envoy said that “only when international law is robust enough [...] to secure accountability for children’s rights will we have done all in our power to ensure that no child of God will ever again suffer the horrors of Syria.”

“When we ask ourselves what breaks the weak, it is not just the Mediterranean wave that submerges the life vest, nor the food convoy that does not make it to the besieged Syrian town. It is the absence of hope – the soul-crushing certainty that there is nothing ahead to plan or prepare for, not even a place in school,” he said.

AUDIO: UN Special Envoy for Global Education, Gordon Brown on the importance of prompt action.

[Security Council condemns latest ‘highly destabilizing’ DPRK ballistic](#)

missile test

20 April 2017 – Strongly condemning the 15 April ballistic-missile launch conducted by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), the United Nations Security Council today demanded that the country immediately cease further actions in violation of the UN body’s relevant resolutions and comply fully with its obligations under these resolutions.

In a press statement, the Council expressed its [utmost concern](#) over the DPRK’s “highly destabilizing behaviour and flagrant and provocative defiance of the Security Council by conducting this ballistic-missile launch in violation of its international obligations under its successive resolutions on the issue between 2006 and 2016.

Council members agreed that the 15-member body would continue to closely monitor the situation and take further significant measures, including sanctions, in line with its previously expressed determination.

Stressing that the DPRK’s illegal ballistic-missile activities are contributing to its development of nuclear-weapons delivery systems and are greatly increasing tension in the region and beyond, the members of the Council further regretted that the country is diverting resources to the pursuit of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons while its citizens have great unmet needs.

The members of the Security Council went on to emphasize the vital importance of the DPRK immediately showing sincere commitment to denuclearization and stressed the importance of working to reduce tensions in the Korean Peninsula and beyond. To that end, the Council demanded the DPRK conduct no further nuclear tests.

Further to the press statement, the Council strongly urged all Member States to significantly accelerate their efforts to implement fully the measures imposed on the DPRK by the Security Council, particularly the comprehensive measures contained in resolutions 2321 (2016) and 2270 (2016).

The Security Council reiterated the importance of maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in North-East Asia at large, expressed their commitment to a peaceful, diplomatic and political solution to the situation and welcomed efforts by Council members, as well as other States, to facilitate a peaceful and comprehensive solution through dialogue.

UN expert body urges accountability

for attacks against children in crisis-torn Syria

20 April 2017 – In the wake of the recent attack on an evacuation convoy near Aleppo, Syria, and the purported use of chemical weapons in southern Idlib, the United Nations child rights body today called for investigations into all attacks on children in the country and for bringing the perpetrators to justice.

“Children are [bearing the brunt](#) of horrific attacks in Syria,” said Benyam Dawit Mezmur, Committee Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

“I urge all relevant actors to investigate these abhorrent acts and bring their perpetrators to justice, including by providing full support to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons’ fact-finding mission, the independent Joint Investigative Mechanism, the Syria Commission of Inquiry and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism on Syria,” Mr. Mezmur added.

He stressed that States Parties to the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), which includes Syria, as well as other actors, have an obligation to prevent violations of international human rights and humanitarian laws and to take all possible measures to minimize the impact of the conflict in Syria on children.

Children in Syria “have been killed, maimed, subjected to sexual violence and traumatized,” Mr. Mezmur said.

About 2.4 million children have been displaced and some 280,000 are in besieged areas, according to UN figures the independent expert cited.

Most recently, at least 67 children were killed in an attack near Rashideen, western rural Aleppo Governorate, targeting a convoy carrying people from the besieged Syrian towns of Fuha and Kefraya to Government-controlled areas. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), video shows children gathering around a person giving out sweets just prior to the explosion.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child is the body of 18 independent experts that monitors implementation of the child rights Convention by its State Parties. It also monitors implementation of the Convention’s two Optional Protocols, on involvement of children in armed conflict and on sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.