

Ending use of chemical weapons in Syria: 'still work to be done', says UN disarmament chief

As inspections and investigations continue into several reported instances of chemical weapons use against civilians in Syria, the United Nations High Representative on Disarmament Affairs, [Izumi Nakamitsu](#), told the Security Council on Monday that much remains to be done to end their use, and called for international unity.

In more than seven years of brutal civil conflict, the [Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons](#) (OPCW) and the UN, through a Joint Investigative Mechanism, found evidence for [multiple instances](#) where chemical weapons – including sulfur mustard and sarin – were used by the Syrian Government forces as well as non-state armed groups.

In 2013, the UN Security Council adopted unanimously [resolution 2118](#), which called on Member States to implement a programme to eliminate the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict.

The effort, led now by the OPCW, has made some additional headway: the inspection of two facilities is currently underway in Barzah and in Jamrayah; a fact-finding mission was carried out in September in Douma into allegations of use and conclusions are expected to be released shortly; five other incidents of alleged use of chemical weapons in 2017 are also currently being investigated.

However, five years after the Security Council's resolution was adopted, High Representative Nakamitsu said "there is still work to be done." She referred for example to "allegations regarding a possible planned use of chemical weapons in Idlib" – the last area of the country under rebel control where millions of civilians are sheltering – which are "continuing to surface".

"So long as the use of chemical weapons is ongoing, or the threat of their use lingers, we must retain our focus on this issue and not allow ourselves to become inured to it," she stated.

Stressing that "unity in the UN Security Council is required," she noted that "the identification and accountability of those responsible is imperative".

In June, the OPCW Secretariat was given the task by the parties to the [Chemical Weapons Convention](#), to "put in place arrangements to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic".

Calling on the Security Council to "re-establish the norm against chemical weapons," she said that "the use of these weapons must always be seen as a violation of a deeply-held taboo".

“The vitality and credibility of the broader disarmament and non-proliferation architecture depends upon it”.

Following Ms. Nakamitsu’s briefing, Representative of the United States of America, Jonathan Cohen, expressed support for the UN-led political process to end the war in Syria, and noted that “chemical weapons have no place in our world”.

Rejecting the facts as presented by the UN disarmament chief, the Russian Ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, stated that “chemical stockpiles were withdrawn from Syria under the oversight of the OPCW,” that “the facilities of the former military chemical programme have been destroyed” and that “the inspection measures have become futile”.

[Saudi Arabia expresses ‘regret and pain’ over Khashoggi killing, during UN rights review](#)

Saudi Arabia expressed “regret and pain” for the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, during a [scheduled review session](#) at the [UN in Geneva](#) on Monday, while asserting its commitment to achieving the “highest possible standards” in human rights in the country, including for women and migrants

Confirming that an investigation is still on-going into the death of Mr Khashoggi, who was last seen entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, on 2 October, Dr. Bandar bin Mohammed Al-Aiban told Member States in Geneva that King Abdel-Aziz had personally initiated the probe.

“The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has already expressed its regret and pain for the death of Jamil Khashoggi,” Dr. Al-Aiban said. “King Abdel-Aziz has already instructed the prosecution to proceed with the investigation into this case according to the applicable laws and preparation to reaching all facts and bringing all the perpetrators to justice in order to bear the facts to the public.”

Following Dr Al-Aiban’s comments, 40 Member States appealed to Saudi Arabia to find out what had happened to Mr Khashoggi, many also calling for reform to the Kingdom’s freedom of expression laws.

Around 10 countries also expressed concern about the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis in Yemen, where Saudi Arabia has faced criticism for coordinating air strikes which have killed civilians.

On the issue of Yemen, Dr. Al-Aiban insisted that Saudi Arabia “affirms its continuous support for the Yemeni people and their legitimate government”, which had requested assistance against Houthi attackers in 2015.

“The Coalition forces are doing their best to spare civilians, particularly women and children, civilian sites, and infrastructure as a side-effect of the armed conflict,” Dr Al-Aiban said, adding that Saudi communities near the border with Yemen continue to come under attack from the rebel Houthi movement’s militia.

Saudi Arabia ‘intensifying’ coordination over aid to Yemen

Underscoring his country’s “intensifying” coordination with the international community to deliver aid to desperate people in Yemen – more than 14 million of whom face imminent famine, the UN has warned – Dr. Al-Aiban said that the Kingdom’s relief contribution amounted to more than \$11 billion since 2015.

Amid concerns over freedom of expression in Saudi Arabia, the Saudi representative insisted that it was a “guaranteed right”, before noting the launch of “many multilingual television and radio channels” as evidence of people’s right to express their opinions.

The issue was picked up by many Member States, including Denmark, France, Germany and the United States, which although it is not a current member of the Human Rights Council, is permitted as a UN Member State to attend UPR discussions.

Specifically, it urged Saudi Arabia to more clearly define what constituted terrorism in law, so as not to criminalize expression, association or peaceful assembly.

Another non-Council member, the Russian Federation, meanwhile, echoed other countries’ comments that welcomed Saudi efforts to increase women’s participation in social and political life, before expressing concern about possible violations of religious minorities, prisoners and detainees, amid reports of alleged torture in detention centres – and of migrant workers, who make up one-third of Saudi’s population.

In addition to many calls for the abolition of the death penalty amid concerns that its use is increasing in Saudi Arabia, Member States present also urged the kingdom to banish the practice of male guardianship of adult women.

Reforms of the practice had only been put in place “partially”, Switzerland’s delegation said, and in most cases the discrimination against women “persists”.

“Recent news tells us of the oppressive atmosphere creating lethal consequences,” the Swiss delegation explained. “We call for freedom of expression to be reinforced, freedom of association and expression for all, ensuring security for all journalists and releasing from prison all those who have been imprisoned for freely expressing their opinions.”

A total of 97 countries spoke at the Universal Period Review of Saudi Arabia in Geneva. [Read our UN News piece here](#), on how the UPR system works.

Dr. Al-Aiban noted that Saudi Arabia had accepted more than 150 recommendations made at its last UPR appearance in addition to another 37 recommendations, which it had accepted partially.

According to UPR rules, all 193 UN Member States are reviewed by their peers, at a rate of 42 a year.

The body meets three times a year and reports to the [UN Human Rights Council](#).

States that have been reviewed also receive recommendations which they are expected to implement before their next review.

['Rare but devastating' tsunamis underscore need for better preparation, UN chief urges on World Day](#)

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has called for greater preparedness to offset the disastrous impact of tsunamis, which are causing increasing human, economic and development losses, illustrated most recently by the destruction across the Indonesian island of Sulawesi.

"Tsunamis are rare but devastating," said the Secretary-General in a [message](#) on World Tsunami Awareness Day, adding that he saw the impact "first-hand" during his recent visit to Sulawesi.

[According](#) to the UN coordination office for humanitarian affairs (OCHA), the disaster claimed 2,077 lives, with more than 1,000 still missing. In all, over 1.5 million people were affected, including 211,000 displaced, and the disaster resulted in estimated \$910 million in damages.

Globally, the scale of losses to tsunamis is staggering: between 1998-2017, over 250,000 people died and \$280 billion was lost as a result of tsunami events, [according](#) to the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), with countries along the Indian and Pacific Oceans worst hit.

Better preparation for likely disasters is therefore vital, added the Secretary-General, noting also that such efforts are required to implement the targets under the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#) as well as for eradicating extreme poverty.

“World Tsunami Awareness Day is an opportunity to emphasize again the importance of disaster prevention and preparedness,” he said, “including early warning, public education, science to better understand and predict tsunamis, and development that takes account of risk in seismic zones and exposed coastal areas.”

In December 2015, the UN General Assembly designated 5 November as [World Tsunami Awareness Day](#), calling on all countries, international bodies and civil society to observe the day, to raise tsunami awareness and share innovative approaches to saving lives.

This year, the World Day focuses on Target “C” of the Sendai Framework, which aims at reducing economic losses due to tsunamis.

[Healing of ozone layer gives hope for climate action: UN report](#)

The findings of a new UN-backed [report](#), released on Monday, showing the ongoing healing of the ozone layer, are being hailed as a demonstration of what global agreements can achieve, and an inspiration for more ambitious climate action to halt a catastrophic rise in world temperatures.

The study, “Scientific Assessment of Ozone Depletion: 2018”, is the latest in a series of reports, released every four years, which monitor the recovery of ozone in the stratosphere, a layer that protects life on Earth from harmful layers of ultraviolet rays from the sun.

It shows that the concentration of ozone-depleting substances continues to decrease, leading to an improvement in the layer since the previous assessment carried out in 2014.

Ozone in parts of the stratosphere has recovered at a rate of 1-3 percent since 2000 and, at projected rates, Northern Hemisphere and mid-latitude ozone is scheduled to heal completely by the 2030s, followed by the Southern Hemisphere in the 2050s and polar regions by 2060.

This is due to internationally agreed actions carried out under the historic Montreal Protocol, which came into being over 30 years ago in response to the revelation that chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and other ozone-depleting substances – used in aerosols, cooling and refrigeration systems, and many other items – were tearing a hole in the ozone layer and allowing dangerous ultraviolet radiation to flood through.

Next year, the Protocol is set to be strengthened with the ratification of the [Kigali Amendment](#), which calls for the future use of powerful climate-

warming gases in refrigerators, air conditioners and related products to be slashed.

“The Montreal Protocol is one of the most successful multilateral agreements in history for a reason,” said Erik Solheim, head of UN Environment. “The careful mix of authoritative science and collaborative action that has defined the Protocol for more than 30 years and was set to heal our ozone layer is precisely why the Kigali Amendment holds such promise for climate action in future.”

The findings provide a ray of hope, less than a month after the IPCC, or Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change ([IPCC](#)), released a watershed [report](#) which described the devastating effects of a 2°C temperature rise compared to pre-industrial levels, described by [UN chief António Guterres](#) as an “ear-splitting wake-up call.”

The writers of the report found that, if the Kigali Amendment is fully implemented, the world can avoid up to 0.4 percent of global warming this century, meaning that it will play a major role in keeping the global temperature rise below 2°C.

[Yemen: ‘Living hell’ for all children, says UNICEF; Angelia Jolie calls for ‘lasting ceasefire’](#)

“A [living hell](#) not for 50-60 per cent of children. It is a living hell for every single boy and girl in Yemen,” he added at the press conference in Amman, which he dedicated to the memory Amal, the emaciated girl whose *New York Times* cover photo shocked the world.

During any given year, 1.8 million children suffer from acute malnutrition and each day 400,000 from severe acute malnutrition, 40 per cent of whom live in Hodeida and governorates where war rages.

Mr. Cappelaere recounted that on Thursday he able to see children in al-Thawra hospital – the only remaining referral hospital in Hodeida – because heavy fighting that night rendered it off-limits by Friday.

Half of Yemen’s under-age-five children are chronically malnourished, and more than a million pregnant or lactating women are anemic.

Every 10 minutes, a child is dying from diseases that can be easily prevented – *UNICEF Regional Director*

“When giving birth, these women know that their children will be of low birth weight, starting that cycle of malnutrition and leading to chronic malnutrition and all the health consequences for these boys and girls,” he lamented.

Moreover, vaccination levels have dipped dramatically since the war began, and outbreaks of measles and diphtheria are fatally impacting children.

He said: “in Yemen today, every 10 minutes, a child is dying from diseases that can be easily prevented.”

Mr. Cappelaere also elaborated on the dire economic, pointing out that fresh fruits, vegetables meat, fish and even drinking water are too expensive for the most vulnerable families, he observed, “so you can easily understand why we have such high malnutrition.”

He concluded by stressing that while a permanent ceasefire “is incredibly needed,” ending the suffering of children will require a Yemeni governance that puts its people at the centre.

World response ‘shamefully slow’ – Jolie

In parallel coverage, Angelina Jolie, Special Envoy for the UN Refugee Agency ([UNHCR](#)) called urgently for a ceasefire and a lasting settlement to the Yemen conflict, while advocating for vitally-needed support for refugees globally.

“As an international community we have been [shamefully slow](#) to act to end the crisis in Yemen,” she said on Sunday. “We have watched the situation deteriorate to the point that Yemen is now on the brink of man-made famine and facing the worst cholera epidemic in the world in decades.”

The UNHCR envoy is visiting some 500 Yemenis in South Korea who, fleeing the conflict, have been living in Jeju since May.

*We have been shamefully slow...to end the crisis in Yemen – UNHCR
envoy Angelina Jolie*

“When conflict develops to this extent, many people have no choice but to flee if they are to have any chance of survival. The only way to enable refugees to return home, and to bring down the overall numbers worldwide, is to end conflicts themselves.”

Ms. Jolie called on the Security Council to find a negotiated end to the conflict and to uphold international laws on the protection of civilians while appealing for greater understanding of refugee protection laws, and for all countries to play their part in alleviating the human suffering in Yemen.

“I hope there can be greater understanding of the human realities causing people to flee, the strict legal criteria and process by which refugee status is determined by UNHCR, working with national authorities, and our shared responsibility to assist refugees until they can return home,” she continued.

“Without a global response based on international law and collective responsibility, we risk much greater instability and insecurity over the long term, which would have a negative impact on all countries,” concluded Ms. Jolie.

Push to resume the political process

In Amman, Jordan, Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths discussed the current situation with a group of independent Yemeni figures along with his endeavors to resume the political process.



UN Geneva/Violaine Martin

With nearly one-third of the participants women, the Special Envoy discussed his ongoing efforts to achieve progress on Confidence Building Measures, stressing his keenness to engage with various Yemeni figures, civil society and women groups, as representatives of the country’s citizens at large.

Discussions during this meeting covered a wide range of issues, including the deteriorating humanitarian and economic conditions, the lack of basic services and the steps needed to de-escalate the conflict.