

Mali: UN Peacekeeping chief 'extremely concerned' over insecurity, regrets peace deal delays

After commending the “overall peaceful” climate in which the Malian elections were held in July, the United Nations peacekeeping chief said on Friday that he is “extremely concerned” over the increasing number of attacks by armed insurgents, against a backdrop of continued delays in implementing the 2015 peace agreement.

Briefing the Security Council, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, noted recent positive developments, including the successful presidential vote, which highlighted the “political maturity of the Malian people as well as the commitment of the political leaders to the democratic process”.

He regretted however the continued delays in getting interim authorities up and running, advancing the National Reconciliation Charter, implementing key institutional reforms – such as changes in the security sector or the constitution – and moving ahead with the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration process.

Conflict in northern Mali started in 2012, but the security situation remains volatile with an increased number of incidents in 2018, in particular in the central parts of the country. On Thursday again, five peacekeepers from Chad were injured during attacks, and MINUSMA has for many months now, been the most dangerous place in the world to serve as a ‘blue helmet’.

“I want to share with the Security Council that I am extremely concerned with the security situation,” said Mr. Lacroix, noting that July, August and September were the [deadliest months](#) since the peacekeeping operation, [MINUSMA](#), was established in 2013. Close to 300 civilians died in targeted attacks.

In addition to limiting humanitarian access, violence has also worsened the living conditions of millions of women, children and men. According to the [UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#), about 5.2 million people – one in four Malians – are now estimated to be in dire need of assistance.

As the country prepares for parliamentary elections, Mr. Lacroix said this will be “a new test” to measure the “cohesion of political leaders and Malian society and an important step for the consolidation of democratic institutions.”

“I call on the Government and the opposition to engage in constructive political dialogue, based on inclusivity, keeping in mind the national

interest,” he said, adding that he hopes these upcoming elections will provide an occasion to “build a more representative parliament by promoting candidacies of young people and women”.

He commended the composition of the new administration which, in line with Malian law, is composed of 30 per cent women.

[UN deplores pre-election killings and attacks, urges Afghans to defy terror, and vote](#)

With just hours to go before Saturday’s parliamentary elections in Afghanistan, the UN has been expressing concern at the uptick in deadly political violence in the country, whilst encouraging Afghans to exercise their right to vote.

In a [statement](#) released on Friday, the UN mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)) called for the elections to be held in a safe and secure environment, at a time when Taliban extremists have indicated their intention to attack schools used as polling stations. UNAMA urged the militants not to threaten civilians or attack them simply for exercising their right to vote.

Responding to the killing of senior Afghan government officials in Kandahar on Thursday, for which the Taliban reportedly claimed responsibility, the Mission’s statement condemned the attack which has “contributed to a feeling of uncertainty and insecurity at a moment when many Afghan citizens were preparing to exercise their constitutional right to elect their representatives.”

Following the killings, voting in Kandahar will be postponed for one week.

UNAMA declared that schools, voters and civilians working in polling stations cannot be regarded as military targets, and that international humanitarian law “explicitly prohibits attacks against civilians and acts or threats of violence aimed at terrorizing the civilian population.”

United Nations Secretary-General [António Guterres](#) and the members of the [Security Council](#) added their own calls for Afghan voters to be protected from political violence.

Mr. Guterres said in a statement that, through the act of voting, Afghans will “contribute to the development of sustainable democratic institutions and creating conditions conducive for a more stable and peaceful Afghanistan,” and called on all political leaders to “work together to ensure

full respect for the electoral process, in which every voter, in particular women and minority groups, will be able to cast their ballot.”

The Security Council statement also condemned “in the strongest terms” the Afghan attacks that have taken place over recent weeks, underscoring the importance of a secure voting environment, and emphasizing that “violence in any form, or the threat thereof, intended to disrupt the elections and democratic process in Afghanistan is unacceptable.”

[Sulawesi devastation ‘beyond imagination’ as massive aid operation continues: UNHCR](#)

More emergency shelter supplies and relief for thousands of victims of Indonesia’s recent earthquake and tsunami is set to arrive on the island of Sulawesi in the coming days, the UN refugee agency ([UNHCR](#)) said on Friday, amid reports from staff that the devastation is “beyond imagination”.

Three weeks since disaster struck, it is estimated to have killed more than 2,000 people, displaced 80,000 and destroyed nearly 70,000 houses. At least 680 individuals remain unaccounted for, UNHCR says.

In addition to the tremors and tidal waves, huge landslides turned the ground into liquid mud which washed over large areas.

UNHCR airlifted a shipment of 1,400 emergency tents to Indonesia to meet the ongoing needs for survivors of last month’s deadly earthquake and tsunami in Sulawesi. muhammad.assad@unhcr.org

“Our staff described the effects of the earthquake and tsunami as ‘beyond imagination’ and ‘devastating’,” said Charlie Yaxley, spokesperson for UNHCR in Geneva. “Communities have seen their houses, schools and hospitals reduced to rubble. Entire villages have been decimated.”

Mr Yaxley confirmed that UNHCR had delivered 435 tents to the hub at Balikpapan airport, on the neighbouring island of Borneo earlier on Friday. The relief items were delivered to Indonesian authorities, which assisted with transferring them to Sulawesi.

Another 1,305 tents will be delivered to Balikpapan in “the next few days”, he added, noting that this initial consignment will provide “much-needed shelter” to around 6,500 of the most vulnerable.

Far more material and psychological assistance will be required, however, and additional emergency tents, sleeping mats, mosquito nets and solar lamps will be delivered in the coming weeks.

'Strong resilience' of survivors continues

"There remains a strong resilience, with people helping each other where they can and simply by sharing their stories," Mr Yaxley said. "One woman said that she felt 'lucky' that she had only lost her father, and that her husband and son had survived."

The [World Food Programme \(WFP\)](#) is also assisting with the relief effort after installing storage facilities at Palu airport in Sulawesi in early October.

Another 10 "mobile storage hubs" are being set up around Palu and Donggala "to ensure the smooth flow and distribution of aid to where it is needed", WFP said in a statement.

"WFP is due to have 40 trucks in operation in and around Palu by 20 October," said spokesperson Hervé Verhoosel. "These trucks will be available to all partners through a common services agreement for transporting and distributing aid."

Palu in Central Sulawesi, is one of the worst-hit areas. Earlier this week, UNHCR staff went there to coordinate with local government and partners. In Petobo and Balaroa, "many people have not only lost their home, but even the land on which it once stood", Mr Yaxley said.

In answer to a question about aid workers' access to Sulawesi, the UNHCR spokesperson insisted that the Government of Indonesia and humanitarian workers had been working "tirelessly" as first responders in the affected areas.

"The Government is leading the response and they are coordinating that," he said. "It's Indonesian aid staff who are leading that as well. Our staff were on the ground earlier this week and they've had no issues with access to the affected areas."

UN postal agency 'regrets' US withdrawal

The United Nations specialized agency which coordinates the global postal system, has expressed "regret" over the withdrawal by the United States from the world body's membership.

In a [statement](#) on Thursday, Pascal Clivaz, the Deputy Director General of the UN [Universal Postal Union](#) (UPU), established in the 19th Century, recalled the “tremendous and positive contribution” made by the US.

“It is, therefore, regrettable that the US has taken this step. We, however, respect the decision because we believe it was taken after careful consideration and reflection,” he said.

According to UPU, the official notification on Wednesday, from US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, said that the withdrawal “shall be effective one year after the day on which [the UPU receives] this notice.”

Media reports stated that the US has decided to withdraw on the grounds that international mailing rates set by the UPU, in the view of the US, give an unfair advantage in particular, to China. The Union sets shipping rates for overseas mail, at a lower rate for developing countries, than developed nations.

Further in the statement, Mr. Clivaz said that UPU Director General Bishar A. Hussein will be seeking to meet with US officials to further discuss the matter, and expressed hope that, “through discussion and a constructive dialogue, we can help to resolve this issue to everyone’s satisfaction.”

“The decision of the United States of America to withdraw from the UPU treaties is a serious one, but I believe, with the support of other members, we can resolve the matter amicably. We will, therefore, continue to seek a constructive dialogue and to try to resolve this situation, while also upholding the UPU Constitution.”

He added that UPU remains committed to support international collaboration in the postal sector.

“This means ensuring that, by working with all 192 member countries, the UPU treaties best serve everyone, including the US.”

Established in 1874, UPU is the primary global forum for cooperation between postal systems. It works with its member countries to bring postal services to everyone on the planet. The second oldest international organization worldwide, UPU became a UN specialised agency in 1948.

[Kashoggi case highlights ‘very worrying practice’ of overseas abductions, says UN expert](#)

The case of Saudi dissident journalist Jamal Kashoggi is just the latest

example of a “new and very worrying practice” of States abducting individuals beyond their own borders, said the Chair of the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances, addressing the UN General Assembly on Thursday.

In its [annual report](#), presented to the UN Human Rights Council at the end of September, the Working Group on Enforced Disappearances highlighted the practice which Chair, Bernard Duhaime, said “occurs with or without the acquiescence of the host state, and while in most cases the victims reappear in detention after a short period, in other cases they remain disappeared – as in the recent shocking case of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.”

Mr. Duhaime reiterated a [statement](#) released on 9 October, which called for an independent international investigation into what happened, and the identification and prosecution of the perpetrators

He added that the Working Group had previously expressed its concerns over ‘short-term disappearances’, increasingly used in recent years especially in the context of anti-terrorism operations. Mr. Duhaime said it was often done “to extract evidence and finalise the investigation outside the protection of the law and often resorting to coercion, if not torture”.

This year’s report expresses serious concern that the number of enforced disappearances continues to be unacceptably high worldwide, with 820 new cases reported between May 2017 and May this year, and called for more assistance to be made available to family members and members of civil society to enable them to report cases to the Working Group and, more importantly, to keep working on enforced disappearance issues.

“Whether it is used to repress political dissent, combat organised crime, or allegedly fight terrorism, when resorting to enforced disappearance, States are actually perpetrating a crime and an offence to human dignity”, Mr. Duhaime told the Assembly, urging all Member States to ratify, without delay, the [International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance](#).

The Working Group was set up in 1980, to help families find out what happened to their relatives. It serves as a channel of communication between family members of victims of enforced disappearance and other sources reporting cases of disappearances, and the Governments concerned.