

Restoring prospect of peace in Middle East is 'our shared responsibility' UN envoy tells Security Council

Violence is on the rise in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Israeli authorities are continuing to demolish and confiscate Palestinian-owned homes and property, in contravention of international law, the United Nations envoy for the Middle East Peace Process said on Thursday.

Briefing the Security Council, Nikolay Mladenov called on Israel to stop the demolitions, adding that a negotiated resolution of the so-called final status issues – as defined by Israelis and Palestinians themselves – was essential for any lasting peace settlement.

“It is our shared responsibility to restore that prospect, to facilitate negotiations, to help the weaker party, to insulate the process from radicals and extremists and to show results.”

Speaking via video link, UN Special Coordinator Mladenov also strongly condemned the killing of an Israeli man and woman by a Palestinian assailant in an industrial area in the West Bank, on 7 October, as well as of a Palestinian woman allegedly stoned to death by Israeli assailants, near a checkpoint in Nablus, on 12 October.

“I extend my condolences to the bereaved families. Such incidents must be condemned in the strongest of terms, and I call on everyone to stand up to violence and condemn terrorism,” he stressed.

‘Gaza is imploding ... It is a reality’

Turning to Gaza, Mr. Mladenov said that protests at the border fence which began in March, have expanded to include night demonstrations, and Hamas – which controls the Strip – and other militants, continue to send incendiary kites and balloons across the border, causing fires on the Israeli side, prompting Israeli forces to respond with live ammunition.

The humanitarian and economic situation in the enclave remains dire, he added, noting extremely high rates of unemployment and poverty, with every second person in Gaza now living below the poverty line.

We remain on the brink of another potentially devastating conflict, a conflict that nobody claims to want, but a conflict that needs much more than just words to prevent – *UN Special Coordinator Mladenov*

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conflict that nobody claims to want, but a conflict that needs much more than just words to prevent.”

The senior UN official also asked Security Council members to urge all sides “to step back from the brink” and adhere to the 2014 ceasefire agreement.

“ Hamas and other militant groups must immediately and effectively stop all provocations,” he said, adding that “ Israel must restore the delivery of critical supplies to Gaza and improve the movement and access of goods and people [and] exercise maximum restraint in the use of live ammunition,” he said.

He also called on the Palestinian Authority not to disengage from Gaza and to continue working with the international community to help alleviate the suffering of its people in Gaza.

Mr. Mladenov also recalled the September ministerial meeting on the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), on the margins of the General Assembly’s high-level general debate, which raised some \$122 million, but added that a “significant” funding gap remains.

Also addressing the Security Council, Hagai El-Ad from the Israeli non-governmental organization B’tselem, was invited to speak, and noted the hardship that Palestinians face across the board. The NGO is known as the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, and works towards ending occupation.

“It is hard to articulate the flesh and blood meaning of the exposed lives Palestinians endure under occupation,” he said, calling on Security Council members to act to reduce their suffering.

[Bring killers of journalists to justice: UN agency seeks media partners for new campaign](#)

Every four days, a journalist is murdered, often for simply doing their job of uncovering something that someone wants to stay hidden: the vast majority of these killings go unpunished.

To help raise awareness of this situation, [UNESCO](#), the [UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization](#), is launching a new campaign, Truth Never Dies, on 2 November, the [International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists](#).

The organization is calling for media partners to support the campaign by publishing stories on, or by, journalists who have been killed simply for doing their job, to coincide with the 2 November commemoration. UNESCO has produced a [toolkit](#) for media that want to take part.

In a statement released on Wednesday, UNESCO said that journalist killings affect the whole of society because they prevent the free circulation of information and all citizens' expression of opinions and ideas. The message of the campaign is that, by publishing stories of these journalists in the media and demanding that justice be done, truth will not die.

2 November was chosen as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists following a resolution passed by the UN General Assembly in 2013. The date was chosen to commemorate the assassination of two French journalists, Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon, who were killed on that date in Mali, whilst on assignment.

[Under fire, UN refugee agency evacuates 135 detained in Libya to Niger](#)

Amid increasingly violent clashes between rival armed groups in Libya's capital, Tripoli, the UN Refugee Agency ([UNHCR](#)) has successfully airlifted 135 migrants and refugees to safety in Niger.

The agency staff endured security challenges including having to operate under the threat of intermittent fire between rival militias.

Many of those evacuated have been held in Libyan detention centres for several months, living in [wretched](#) conditions and suffering malnutrition and poor health.

They are now being hosted under UNHCR's Emergency Transit programme (ETM), pending more permanent solutions. UNHCR Chief of Mission in Libya, Roberto Mignone, said that for many of the Nigeriens, rescue meant the difference between living, and dying.

"These evacuations are a life-changing and life-saving escape for refugees trapped in detention in Libya," he said. "Refugees and migrants in detention centres often suffer squalid conditions and are at risk of being sold to traffickers and smugglers."



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Many Nigerien migrants making their way to Europe are intercepted while attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea, ending up in Libyan detention centres, and returning home with accounts of the horrific human rights abuses they have suffered.

This evacuation, the first from Libya since June, brings the total number of migrants and asylum seekers evacuated since December 2017, to 1997.

Another 85 refugees from Syria, Sudan and Eritrea were also flown to relative safety this week, with assistance from the UN migration agency ([IOM](#)), and will spend a few days at UNHCR's Emergency Transit Mechanism before flying to Norway.

UNHCR welcomes the efforts of countries coming forward with offers to host refugees leaving Libya, and urges resettlement countries to speed up the process.

"People are being intercepted off the Libyan coast faster than we can evacuate them," said Mr. Mignone. "We are deeply grateful for all those who have come forward with resettlement places but the simple truth is we need more evacuations, more often."

['More time' agreed for buffer zone, to spare three million Syrian civilians in Idlib](#)

Russia and Turkey have said that they will allow "more time" for opposition groups to withdraw from a de-escalation zone in Syria's Idlib, which has been spared air raids for more than a month, a senior humanitarian adviser to the UN said on Thursday.

Speaking to journalists in Geneva after a meeting of the International Syria Support Group's Humanitarian Access Task Force, [Jan Egeland](#) expressed "relief" that further violence in the north-west of the country had been averted, so far.

"The Russian and the Turkish side have indicated that indeed more time will be given to implement the agreement," Mr Egeland said, in his capacity as Senior Advisor to the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, who announced his resignation on [Wednesday](#).

The big battles have ended in most of the country (but Idlib) could still become the worst battle yet – *Jan Egeland, Humanitarian Adviser*

"Some of the first deadlines have passed ... there will be more time for diplomacy and that is a great relief to us," he said, adding that "if one is to follow a military logic that has too often been followed in this war alone, it would be horrific news for civilians".

After more than seven years of fighting that has left hundreds of thousands of Syrians dead, uprooted millions more and enmeshed the interests of several foreign powers, Mr. Egeland stressed the value of the current deal between Russia and Turkey, who are the guarantors of a proposed demilitarized zone in Idlib.

"We have now had five weeks without any air raids," he said. "I can't remember such a period for the last three years in Idlib. It's a calm through this very sensitive, complex, difficult area full of three million civilians. It is a welcome calm."

In addition to opposition groups, some three million people live in Idlib, along with 12,000 humanitarian workers.

Many people are there after fleeing other areas of Syria which have been reclaimed by Government forces; most recently the provinces of Dar'a and Quneitra in the south-east, as well as Eastern Ghouta, on the outskirts of Damascus.

"The big battles have ended in most of the country" but Idlib "could still become the worst battle yet", Mr Egeland said.

He explained that even if the opposition groups including Al-Nusra withdrew their heavy weapons from the contact line, they would "of course" embed themselves in built-up areas of Idlib, leaving "a million civilians engulfed" in conflict.

"This is a fantastic deal so far because it prevents bloodshed, it has to continue like that," he insisted.

While the eyes of the international community remain fixed on Idlib, there is

still tremendous suffering in many areas of Syria, including in the east of the country, Mr Egeland stressed.

“There is horrific fighting that nobody seems to be caring about in the east, with 15,000 people in crossfire between Islamic state fighters and the attacking forces,” he said, stressing that although war is ending “in more and more provinces”, peace can only be built through human rights and the implementation of rule of law.

Egeland to follow de Mistura, and leave post next month

After coordinating the UN’s efforts to deliver humanitarian aid to Syria for more than three years, liaising with the Government of Syria and the international community over safe passage for aid convoys across front lines and borders, Mr Egeland also announced that it was time for him to step down.

Mirroring Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy for Syria, who made a similar announcement on Wednesday at UN headquarters in New York, Mr Egeland said that he would be leaving his post at the end of November.

“It’s been very exhausting really...there hasn’t really been an evening or a weekend where we have not been dealing with an Aleppo, Homs, Dera’a, Eastern Ghouta, now Idlib, Rukban or some other issues,” he said. “So that’s the issue, and I presume I will be replaced by somebody better and that they will continue with a Task Force because the job is not even half done.”

UN rights chief calls for release of hundreds abducted and abused in South Sudan

Hundreds of civilians who were taken by opposition forces in South Sudan’s Western Equatoria region during an uptick in fighting are still missing, the UN’s top rights official said on Thursday, in a call for their immediate release.

The development reportedly happened in April, ahead of the signing in August of a new peace agreement aimed at ending years of bloody civil war involving President Salva Kiir and former vice-President, Riek Machar, who has backing from the Sudan People’s Liberation Army in-Opposition (SPLA-IO).

“Most of the abducted civilians are, as far as we know, still being held captive”, said Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. “The SPLA-IO (RM) must immediately release them, first and foremost the children.”

The High Commissioner's appeal follows the publication of a UN [report](#) into grave rights abuses against villagers in South Sudan's Gbudue and Tambura states, both of which are in Western Equatoria region.

A new peace agreement has been signed which puts the onus and responsibility on the warring parties to ensure that no atrocities are committed in future – *David Shearer, Head, UNMISS*

It details testimonies from victims and witnesses that indicate how women and girls as young as 12 were abducted by opposition forces...then paraded and lined up for commanders to choose as "wives".

Some 900 people were abducted in total and 24,000 were forced to flee their homes, the report notes. Those who were not chosen were left for other fighters who subjected them to repeated rapes, while abducted young men and boys were forced to fight, or work as porters.

At least 28 villages were attacked by the same troops, along with a settlement for internally displaced people and a refugee camp, according to the report, which was compiled jointly by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) and the UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan, [UNMISS](#).



UNMISS

A delegation of UN and humanitarian agencies travelled to remote Tambura in Western Equatoria to see first-hand the plight of thousands of people who have fled escalating violence and are in urgent need of safe shelter and aid. 12 July 2018.

During these attacks, victims were subjected to "unlawful killings,

abduction, rape, sexual slavery, forced recruitment and the destruction of property”, OHCHR said in a statement, which noted that three commanders had been identified who “allegedly had effective command and control of the forces committing these abuses, which may amount to war crimes”.

Government forces were also found to have harmed civilians in their offensives against SPLA-IO (RM) militia, the report said, noting that “these operations failed to distinguish between civilians and combatants”.

Head of UNMISS, David Shearer, expressed disappointment that the spike in violence happened while warring parties were negotiating a new peace agreement and despite reconciliation efforts in the region at the time.

“A new peace agreement has been signed which puts the onus and responsibility on the warring parties to ensure that no atrocities are committed in future,” Mr Shearer said. “UNMISS will be closely monitoring any potential violations and abuses.”

In addition to calling for the release of those taken during the attacks in Gbudue and Tambura, High Commissioner Bachelet called for rights abusers to be held accountable.

“As part of the revitalised peace process, it is also essential that the Government of South Sudan acts to hold the perpetrators of the abuses and violations detailed in this report to account,” she said.