

# Saudi Arabia must halt air strikes in Yemen, says UN panel

The conflict in Yemen has been highlighted by a UN human rights committee which on Thursday urged Saudi Arabia to “put an end to the air strikes” against its southern neighbour, amid reports that they have resulted in the deaths of at least 1,248 children since March 2015.

The recommendation was addressed to Saudi Arabia by the UN [Committee on the Rights of the Child](#), which also issued concluding observations on Benin, El Salvador, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mauritania and Niger.

Each country is a signatory to the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), which has two Optional Protocols: [involvement of children in armed conflict](#) and the [sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography](#).

Every four years, Member States are expected to provide an update to the UN on their activities and progress relating to these international accords.

In a statement, the 18-member UN panel noted that Saudi Arabia was involved in the Yemen conflict as the leader of an internationally-backed coalition “to restore legitimacy” there.

The country has been split by a devastating war involving the internationally recognized government of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi, in the south, and Houthi opposition fighters, who control the capital, Sana’a to the north, and other key locations.

Saudi representatives said that the coalition had been “accidentally responsible for casualties among children”, the Committee noted in its report, before expressing serious concern that youngsters “continue to be the primary victims of that ongoing conflict” and represented 20 per cent of all civilian casualties caused by air strikes.

Of three aerial attacks in August highlighted in the UN report – on 9, 22, and 23 August – it was the initial strike which prompted particular international [condemnation](#), after at least 21 boys died when a bus they were travelling in was hit in Dahyan market in Saada governorate, in the north of the country.

All parties in the conflict had been responsible for attacks on civilians, the UN panel said, underscoring how targets included “homes, medical facilities, schools, farms, wedding functions, markets, vehicles in crowded areas”.

Cluster munitions had been used in some of these attacks, the Committee said, before highlighting how the on-going aerial and naval blockade on Yemen had “dramatic consequences” for “many millions of people, including a high proportion of children”.

Among its other concerns, the UN panel noted “the inefficiency” of the coalition’s investigative mechanism into attacks on “children and facilities and spaces frequented by children” and underscored the “lack of independence of its members”.

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## [Nigeria floods: Guterres ‘deeply saddened’ by loss of life and rising need](#)

The United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres [said](#) on Thursday he is “deeply saddened”, as the Government of Nigeria announced that some 200 people have died, and a further 1,310 injured, due to flooding across a dozen states. Overall, around two million have been affected.

Nigeria’s two main rivers, the Niger and the Benue, burst their banks after heavy rains began in August, and the country has been experiencing large-scale floods ever since. A state of national disaster has been declared in the four most-affected states of Kogi, Niger, Anambra and Delta.

According to the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA), more than 561,000 people are internally displaced as a result and over 350,000 need immediate help – especially temporary shelter, food, safe drinking water, household items and medical care.

Flooded houses in Niger State, following torrential rains which have hit the region since mid-July 2018. Credit: UNDAC/Pierre Trouche.

In addition, more than 150,000 hectares of farmland are entirely inundated which raises serious medium-term food security concerns, as to how farmers will be able to replant vital crops.

Close to 80,000 houses were damaged including 18,000 completely destroyed, and more than 320 roads and bridges are impassable. In the most affected areas, children have not been able to go to school for weeks.

The Secretary-General extended his condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government and people of Nigeria and wished the injured a speedy recovery, stressing that the UN stands in solidarity with the country during this difficult time and “ready to support as required”.

Activities conducted so far by the United Nations include: food distributions by the [World Food Programme](#) (WFP); the provision of emergency medical care as well as disease control for cholera and malaria, by the [World Health](#)

[Organization](#) (WHO); and distributions of hygiene or “dignity” kits, for women and girls by the UN sexual and reproductive health agency ([UNFPA](#)).

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## [Algeria must stop arbitrary expulsion of West African migrants in desert: UN migration rights expert](#)

Atrocities suffered by child and adult migrants from West African States “should shock the conscience of humanity” into action, a UN rights investigator said on Thursday, before calling for Algeria to halt the collective expulsion of thousands of foreign nationals to Niger.

The appeal for help from the international community from [UN Special Rapporteur on migration](#) Felipe González Morales, follows his official visit to Niger; a hub for those looking to leave in search of new opportunities, for decades.

In a [statement](#), he cited testimonies of migrants exposed to “unimaginable atrocities”: trafficking, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, rape, as well as worker-exploitation and enslavement. They had taken migrant routes through Sudan, Chad, Libya and Mali to Niger.

I heard testimonies of migrant women, men and children who were raided in their homes in the middle of the night, arbitrarily arrested and detained, beaten and ill-treated – *UN migration expert, Felipe González*

While commending Niger for its “generosity and solidarity” in hosting refugees, Mr. González Morales noted how in recent years restrictive migration laws and policies had made it a “virtual southern border of Europe”.

He highlighted how the 2015 law on illicit smuggling of migrants had resulted in a “de facto ban of migration towards the north”, prompting people to look for other, even riskier alternatives. 1

“Despite its purported aim to prevent and combat the illicit smuggling of migrants, the implementation of the law has led to the criminalization of migration and violations of the human rights of migrants,” the Special Rapporteur said. “Multiple sources have indicated that instead migrants have shifted to more dangerous, longer and more expensive routes.”

The independent rights expert, who was appointed in June 2017 by the UN Human

Rights Council, insisted that migration policies “cannot solely rely on security considerations” and must have human rights “as a central component”.

Any help from the international community – and the European Union – should help Niger “in re-focusing” its migration management strategy, he said.

This would involve strengthening national institutions, so they could cope with large movements of migrants, enhancing monitoring of their human rights, and supporting development projects in local communities.

The Special Rapporteur also called on Algeria to halt the alleged collective expulsions of Nigerien and West African migrants to Niger immediately, noting that this had involved more than 17,000 people this year so far.

The allegations have been denied by Algeria.

“I heard testimonies of migrant women, men and children who were raided in their homes in the middle of the night, arbitrarily arrested and detained, beaten and ill-treated, transported in trucks and dropped 15 kilometres from the border with Niger,” Mr. González Morales said.

“These migrants are forced to walk through the desert, without any assistance from Algerian or Nigerien authorities, until the first Nigerien village, 20 kilometres away from the border.”

The development comes amid ongoing efforts by the international community to develop solutions for migrants and Member States by means of a Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration.

This follows the [New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants](#)’ adoption at the UN General Assembly in September 2016 – recognition, in part, that the issue cannot be managed by one State alone.

The final text of the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#) was adopted in July this year and a high-level [summit](#) is planned in Morocco on 10-11 December to discuss its adoption.

While the protection of refugees and the international community’s responsibility towards them is addressed in the 1951 Convention, migrants have yet to benefit from such an approach.

If it is adopted in Marrakesh, the Global Compact will go some way to addressing this, with a series of recommendations and [objectives](#) for States that sign it, to better manage migration at local, national, regional and global levels.

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# Backed by UN, Asia-Pacific countries to advance space technology for 'development transformation'

Gathered at a United Nations conference in Bangkok, countries from the Asia-Pacific region pledged to work together on Wednesday to leverage the power of space technology and boost sustainable development.

Adopting a ministerial declaration on Wednesday, countries also agreed to enhance resilience and mitigate disaster risk, through a regional action plan, making Asia-Pacific the first region ever to adopt a coordinated approach to using space technology and geospatial information services, in the service of development.

Hongjoo Hahm, the acting head of the UN [Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific](#) (ESCAP), highlighted that the declaration reaffirms countries' commitment to the key role of space technology for a sustainable future.

"Our region has the potential to achieve a developmental transformation that will serve as a global model on the cooperative use of innovative technologies for the common good of humankind," he said.

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– *Hongjoo Hahm, acting head of ESCAP*

[According](#) to ESCAP, countries that do not have space programmes or have limited capacity, can benefit immensely by working with nations which do. One such example is Mongolia – a pilot country for a [space-based drought monitoring mechanism](#) – which recently established its own surveillance system, with technical support from China, India and Thailand.

The 21-point ministerial declaration also includes a specific call on Governments to promote women's participation in science and technology education, in addition to the space and development pledges.

Countries also urged the UN to promote regional cooperation and support sharing of good practices as well as assist with the development of national policies relating to the aims of the declaration.

## **Action plan on space applications for sustainable development**

Also endorsed on Wednesday, the Asia-Pacific Plan of Action on Space Applications for Sustainable Development (2018-2030) will help countries

harness space applications and digital innovations to strengthen the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Plan of Action was formulated through a comprehensive and inclusive consultation process driven by country needs, according to ESCAP.

It focuses on six key sectoral areas, including disaster risk management; natural resource management; connectivity; social development; energy; and climate change, and will be implemented through research and knowledge-sharing; capacity-building and technical support; and intergovernmental processes.

On mitigating impacts of climate change, for instance, specific action includes developing space application capacity for climate modelling and vulnerability mapping as well as providing access to Earth observation data and products derived from space data through the Space Climate Observatory.

ESCAP is the UN's socio-economic development arm in the Asia-Pacific region. Its 53 [member States and associate members](#) span a geographic area from the Pacific island of Tuvalu in the east to Turkey in the west, and Russia in the north to New Zealand in the south. The region is home to nearly two-thirds of the world's population.

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## **'Concerted effort' must be made to help 600 million-plus adolescent girls realize full potential: UN chief**

There are "multiple barriers" including "systemic discrimination" bias and lack of training, which are keeping the largest generation of girls in human history from reaching their full potential, said UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in a [statement](#) on Thursday, marking [International Day of the Girl Child](#).

Noting that "far too often, girls are not given the space and opportunities they need to achieve their full potential," he said that today, 600 million adolescent girls are preparing to enter a workforce, "transformed by innovation and automation", in which female college graduates and workers are outnumbered.

Women make up less than 30 percent of graduates in information and technology and occupy less than 30 percent of research and development jobs globally.

Let us recommit to supporting every girl to develop her skills,

enter the workforce on equal terms and reach her full potential –  
*UN chief Guterres*

“Negative gender stereotypes related to girls’ education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics begin as early as primary school, and have the devastating effect of making them doubt their own potential.”

He underscored the importance of equipping youth with skills transferable for lifelong success, noting that abilities such as critical thinking, creativity, and digital awareness will shine through in a changing workforce.

Highlighting the value of a support system, he said that having role models in fields where the presence of women is sparse, is key, and referenced the recent launch of [Youth2030](#) in September 2018, a strategy aimed at understanding youth needs, and supporting them in materializing their ideas.

The Secretary-General added, “let us recommit to supporting every girl to develop her skills, enter the workforce on equal terms and reach her full potential.”

The Executive Director of the [UN Population Fund](#) (UNFPA) Natalia Kanem, said to mark the day, that too many girls face roadblocks on their journey to adulthood.

“Child marriage and adolescent pregnancy force millions of girls to drop out of school. Harmful laws and social norms curtail girls’ knowledge of and autonomy over their own bodies,” she said, adding that “entrenched gender discrimination can lay the foundation for a lifetime of missed opportunities.”

Let’s invest in their health and education, their skills and their leadership, and then let’s get out of their way and let them lead –  
*UNFPA’s Natalia Kanem*

She said that to allow girls to compete fairly, “countries need to ensure each young person entering the labour market has the skills and knowledge needed to help businesses thrive and nations prosper. That means investing now in a skilled girl force that can become a new force for innovation and leadership.”

She said millions of adolescent girls were “waiting to claim their power and fulfil their potential. Let’s help them exercise their rights and realize their aspirations. Let’s invest in their health and education, their skills and their leadership, and then let’s get out of their way and let them lead!”

Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of the [UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization](#), [UNESCO](#), said that “girls’ education must be one of our priorities, because to a great extent the peace and prosperity of our world depend upon it.”

“A collective consciousness is rising to ensure that the right to quality education for all girls becomes a reality”, she added.