

## UN refugee agency focuses on sheltering displaced as Iraqi offensive moves to west Mosul

21 February 2017 – The United Nations refugee agency is focusing efforts on camp construction in and around the Iraqi city of Mosul, where renewed fighting could displace up to 250,000 people.

“With the predicted exodus of up to a quarter of a million people, it will be impossible to accommodate such large numbers on existing land,” said Matthew Saltmarsh, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), at the regular press briefing in Geneva.

Almost 217,000 people have fled from the eastern sections of Mosul since the military offensive to oust Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) terrorists began on 17 October 2016. About 160,000 remain displaced while others have returned to their homes in the now Government-controlled areas.

The spokesperson said UNHCR has eight camps open or completed at present, and one under construction. “We are planning for the start of work at another site in Hamam Al Alil, south of Mosul,” he said.

The Iraqi Government has decided, initially, to transport people displaced from western Mosul to camps in the east while new capacity is being added in the south.

UNHCR has been asked to support a new site at Hamam Al-Alil, 20 km south of Mosul. It is expected that many of those fleeing western Mosul will reach there on foot. This site will provide shelter for up to 60,000 people.

According to reports and testimonies, conditions in the densely-populated west of the city are worsening, and hence concerns are mounting for the well-being of civilians. There are shortages of food, water, fuel and medicine. Half of all food shops have closed and most people can only access untreated water.

Food prices are skyrocketing and there are reports of families burning furniture, clothing and plastic to stay warm.

Mr. Saltmarsh said that during the battle for eastern Mosul, the protection of civilians was prioritized in military planning and activities, and UNHCR hopes this principle will continue to be upheld.

However, he added, the new battle will be different as the city’s west is densely populated, with many narrow streets, and fighting will be street by street. Armed groups have built a network of tunnels.

Insecurity and recent suicide attacks in eastern Mosul have resulted in some families who had opted to return to their homes coming back to

the camps in search of safety, he said.

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## [At Security Council, UN chief Guterres highlights global significance of a peaceful Europe](#)

21 February 2017 – Noting that recent crises in Europe show that the continent remains at risk from new outbreaks of conflict, United Nations Secretary-General called for reinforcing mutual trust and respect to strengthen stability and cooperation both within Europe and beyond.

The Security Council meeting at which the UN chief delivered this message started with a moment of silence in memory of the Permanent Representative of Russia to the United Nations, Vitaly Churkin, who passed away yesterday.

“I think [the Ambassador’s] passing represents a deep loss for all of us in the UN, including in this Council, where his distinctive voice was ever-present for the past decade, and where, I think, we will all miss that voice in the sessions to come,” said Mr. Guterres in his tribute.

Turning to the subject at hand, the Secretary-General, who briefed the Council alongside Lamberto Zannier, the Secretary-General of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and Helga Schmid, Secretary-General, European External Action Service of the European Union (EU), said crises in Europe could also adversely impact economic progress and sustainable development.

“Conflict in Europe is not only a tragedy for those directly involved: those killed, injured, displaced, who have lost loved ones, who may be unable to access healthcare and are missing vital years of their education,” Mr. Guterres said, adding: “It is also reversing development gains and preventing communities and societies from achieving their full potential and contributing to regional and global prosperity.”

Noting that no single factor is responsible for the emergence and continuation of conflicts, he said that in many cases, peace agreements were “simply not being implemented.”

Other factors included challenges to democratic governance and the rule of law, and the manipulation of ethnic, economic, religious and communal tensions for personal or political gain.

“Whatever the causes may be, the inability of regional and international institutions, including our own, to prevent and resolve conflicts is seriously undermining their credibility and making it more difficult for them

to succeed in future,&#8221 added the UN chief.

Speaking specifically on the conflict in Ukraine, Mr. Guterres said the UN remains committed to supporting a peaceful resolution, in a manner that fully upholds the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine, and in accordance with relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

**AUDIO:** António Guterres was speaking in the Security Council during an open debate which looked at cooperation between the UN and regional bodies in responding resolving existing conflicts in Europe

He also noted that the UN fully supported the efforts within the Normandy Four, the Trilateral Contact Group, and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission, and that it has repeatedly called for the full implementation by all sides of all of their commitments under the Minsk Process, both in letter and in spirit.

&#8220I urge all stakeholders to avoid unilateral steps or attempts to create facts on the ground, which further complicate and endanger efforts to find negotiated settlements. This is especially relevant in view of the latest actions taken in relation to the conflicts in eastern Ukraine and the South Caucasus,&#8221 he highlighted, urging all sides to give the highest priority to protecting civilians.

In his remarks, Mr. Guterres also spoke of challenges to peace in other parts of Europe, such as in the Balkans, Cyprus, Georgia, Moldova and South Caucasus, as well as on the long-standing name issue between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

He also noted new challenges and threats such as the phenomenon of populism, nationalism, xenophobia and violent extremism were both causes and effects of conflict.

&#8220I encourage Member States, this Council, regional mechanisms and all stakeholders to intensify their efforts to define a peace and security agenda to address today's complex challenges,&#8221 urged Secretary-General Guterres.

&#8220The status quo is not sustainable.&#8221

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[\*\*Trial of Gaddafi regime a 'missed\*\*](#)

# opportunity for justice,' says new UN report

21 February 2017 – Pointing out that the recent trial in Libya of members of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's regime fell short of international fair-trial standards, the United Nations human rights wing and the UN mission in the North African country called on authorities to address flaws identified in a new report.

In the report issued today, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) also recognized the challenge of trying former members of the regime, especially amid armed conflict and political polarization, but noted that the trial raised concerns such as serious violations of due process, including prolonged periods of incommunicado detention for the defendants amid allegations of torture which were not properly investigated.

“Holding perpetrators responsible for violations is vitally important but accountability should be the result of due process and a fair trial,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein in a news release detailing the report's findings on the trial proceedings that examined violations of human rights during the 2011 civil uprising that toppled the long-time Libyan leader's regime.

“This trial was a missed opportunity for justice and for the Libyan people to have the chance to confront and reflect on the conduct of the former regime.”

Of the 37 members of the former regime under trial including Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's son Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, former intelligence chief Abdullah al-Senussi, and former Prime Minister Al-Baghdadi al-Mahmudi six defendants were sentenced to death; eight given life sentences; 15 others jail terms of five to 12 years; four were acquitted on all charges; and one was referred to a mental health institution.

UNSMIL and OHCHR closely monitored the case from the pre-trial phase through the court proceedings, which began in March 2014, to the verdict in July 2015. They also interviewed many of the defendants and their relatives and lawyers, reviewed the case dossier and judgement, and had extensive discussions with Libyan officials and Libyan and international experts.

They noted that the public prosecutor's office, in particular, provided documentation and was available for discussion of the trial throughout the process. However, they also said that the defendants' lawyers complained repeatedly of difficulties in meeting defendants in private and accessing documentation.

“The right to defence was also undermined by the fact that no prosecution witnesses were called to testify in court” the

prosecution's case was only briefly presented during the court sessions and the court restricted each defendant to two witnesses, noted the news release.

In addition, the Libyan judicial system does not allow for a full appeal but only cassation a review focused on points of law only.

[We urge] the Court of Cassation to take into full account the due process violations identified in the report and provide effective remedies, pending the adoption of reforms needed to bring Libyan trials into full compliance with international standards, the two UN entities noted.

Among other specific recommendations, the report also called for a review of the Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure to ensure all crimes are clearly defined, access to lawyers during interrogation is guaranteed and other fair trial safeguards are strengthened.

The report also said the Libyan authorities should also ensure the surrender of Saif al-Islam Gaddafi to the International Criminal Court (ICC), in compliance with Libya's international obligations.

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## [Multilingual education is 'absolutely essential,' UNESCO chief says on Mother Language Day](#)

21 February 2017 – Learning languages is a promise of peace, innovation and creativity, and will contribute to the achievement of global development goals, the head of the United Nations agency for culture and education has said, marking International Mother Language Day.

There can be no authentic dialogue or effective international cooperation without respect for linguistic diversity, which opens up true understanding of every culture, said UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Director-General Irina Bokova in her message on the Day.

Access to the diversity of languages can awaken the curiosity and mutual understanding of peoples. That is why learning languages is at one and the same time a promise of peace, of innovation and of creativity, she stated.

This year, the International Day, observed annually on 21 February, is devoted to multilingual education.

Ms. Bokova said the Day is an opportunity to mobilize for the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs), and in particular Goal 4, to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.

Education and information in the mother language is absolutely essential to improving learning and developing confidence and self-esteem, which are among the most powerful engines of development," she said.

As such, she appealed for the potential of multilingual education to be acknowledged everywhere, in education and administrative systems, in cultural expressions and the media, cyberspace and trade.

International Mother Language Day was proclaimed by UNESCO's General Conference in November 1999, and it has been observed every year since February 2000 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism.

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## [‘We cannot give up the fight’ to end child recruitment, says UNICEF chief](#)

21 February 2017 – Even though over the past 10 years, more than 65,000 children have been released from armed forces and armed groups, tens of thousands of boys and girls under the age of 18 continue to be used in conflicts around the world, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said today.

"[It] is not only about looking back at what has been accomplished but looking forward to the work that remains to be done to support the children of war," said UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake as global leaders gather in the French capital on the anniversary of the Paris commitments to end the use of children in conflict.

Adopted 10 years ago, the Paris commitments, together with the Paris principles and guidelines, lay out guidance for protecting children from recruitment and use by armed forces or armed groups, and assisting their release and reintegration, with other vulnerable children affected by armed conflict in their communities.

According to UNICEF, exact data on the number of children used and recruited in armed conflict is difficult to ascertain because of the unlawful nature of child recruitment. But estimates indicate that tens of thousands under the age of 18 are used in conflicts worldwide.

For instance, since 2013 an estimated 17,000 children have been recruited in South Sudan and up to 10,000 have been recruited in the Central African Republic (CAR). Similarly, nearly 2,000 children were recruited by Boko Haram, in Nigeria and neighbouring countries, last year alone, and there have

been nearly 1,500 cases of child recruitment in Yemen since the conflict escalated in March 2015.

There has also been progress: since it was adopted, the number of countries endorsing the Paris commitments has nearly doubled from 58 countries in 2007 to 105 at present, signalling an increasing global commitment to end the use of children in conflict.

Globally, more than 65,000 children have been released from armed forces and armed groups, including 20,000 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo); nearly 9,000 in the Central African Republic; and over 1,600 children in Chad.

But more needs to be done.

Seeking to build on the current momentum, the Paris International Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Children in Armed Conflicts is urging for unconditional release of all children without exception and putting an end to child recruitment.

It is also calling increased resources to help reintegrate and educate children who have been released, and urgent action to protect internally displaced children, child refugees and migrants.

As long as children are still affected by the fighting, we cannot give up the fight for the children, Mr. Lake added.