

Children suffer grave atrocities in Sudan's conflict – UN reports

27 March 2017 – Fewer children have been recruited to fight in parts of Sudan, but they are still killed and injured, and victims of sexual violence in the country, according to a new report by the United Nations Secretary-General.

“Boys and girls continued to be victims of grave violations committed by all parties to the conflict, including killing and maiming, sexual violence and attacks on schools and hospitals,” said Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

The report, released on Friday, details the impact of the armed conflict on children in Darfur, South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Abyei between March 2011 and December 2016.

During that time period, nearly 1,300 children were either killed or maimed in conflict as a result of hostilities between the Government and the armed groups. The majority of the casualties took place in Darfur, according to the report.

Rape and sexual violence were also a major concern in Darfur, where the UN confirmed at least 372 children were victimized.

“In most cases, children were raped during attacks on their villages or while getting wood or water in the vicinity of camps for displaced people,” the report authors wrote.

Despite these ongoing atrocities, the report notes a positive trend in recruitment and use of children – with fewer being conscripted.

However, there are concerns about cross-border recruitment and use of children by Sudanese and South Sudanese groups, notably the SPLM/N, Sudan People's Liberation Army-in Opposition and Justice (SPLA-iO) and Equality Movement (JEM).

Since 2011, the Government of Sudan has strengthened its national framework to protect children and raised the minimum recruitment age for national forces to 18.

In addition, the UN has signed three Action Plans with national authorities to protect children, as well as separately with SPLM/N and JEM.

The Special Representative has called on the Government and all other parties to conflict to take concrete measures to protect children.

UN report explores ways urbanization can be a catalyst for rural development

27 March 2017 – One way to encourage mutually beneficial developments for urban and rural areas alike is to develop value chains and food systems more efficient and inclusive, a United Nations-backed report examining the ‘quiet revolution’ towards sustainable urbanization has found.

Meeting the rising urban demand for food can increase the incomes of the rural poor, most of whom derive their livelihoods from small and family farm agriculture, said the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Director-General, José Graziano da Silva.

“But growing urban demand will not automatically benefit small farmers, so we must look for solutions that can seize on the opportunities, and avoid the downside of increasing urbanization,” he said in a new release on the report presented by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and FAO.

Better roads, reliable and extensive electrification, refrigerated transportation and better storage facilities are all key to success, Mr. Graziano da Silva said, noting that such transformation would also lead farmers to grow higher-value and more nutritious produce, which is essential for the proper nutrition of growing urban populations.

The report notes that growing urban populations will be especially visible in Africa, as a majority of the continent’s fast-growing population will be living in cities by 2030. Globally, some 2.5 billion more people will be living in urban areas than do today. Africa and Asia will account for 90 per cent of the increase.

Quality concerns over locally produced food by urban residents in many developing countries often result in greater preference for imported varieties, according to the report. Better vertical integration of the domestic food value chain – requiring improved processing, milling, cleaning, marketing, bagging, branding and possibly even supermarkets – could remedy that.

Such an effort would produce a host of agribusiness jobs and enhance the agricultural sector’s ability to make productivity-boosting investments.

The report also highlights the role of intermediate towns, which can play a catalyzing role in mediating the urban-rural nexus. The vicinity of such towns tends to provide smallholder farmers with greater opportunities to market their products and share in the gains from economic growth.

Smaller towns also offer migration destinations that more likely help the

rural poor escape from poverty than big cities do.

“Intermediate cities can be, and most of the time, are, the effective promoter of rural development,” said Mr. Graziano da Silva.

Near East and North Africa: Conflicts threaten to erode gains in region’s zero-hunger battle

27 March 2017 – Food security and nutrition levels have sharply deteriorated over the last five years in the Near East and North Africa due largely to the spread and magnitude of conflicts and protracted crises, reversing the pre-2010 trend of improvement, a new United Nations report said today.

“A peaceful and stable environment is an absolute pre-condition for farmers to respond to the challenges of water scarcity and climate change,” said Abdessalam Ould Ahmed, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in a news release.

“Achieving food security is still at hand, provided we take concerted efforts and make the right moves now,” he added.

The FAO 2016 Regional Overview of Food Insecurity in the Near East and North Africa noted that the deterioration is largely driven by conflicts and protracted crises.

The FAO assessment shows that the prevalence of severe food insecurity in the adult population of the Near East and North Africa was close to 9.5 per cent in 2014-2015, representing approximately 30 million people. Before 2010, the prevalence of undernourishment, stunting, anaemia and poverty were decreasing.

“The region is facing unprecedented challenges to its food security due to multiple risks arising from conflicts, water scarcity and climate change. Countries of the region need to implement long-term and comprehensive sustainable water management to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of ending hunger by 2030,” said the FAO official said.

The Syria crisis in particular has deepened during the period 2015-2016, leaving more than half of the population in need of food assistance and 4.8 million refugees, mostly in neighboring countries. The numbers of food insecure and the internally displaced are also rising in Iraq and Yemen.

Beyond conflicts and crises, the report argues that water scarcity and

climate change are the most fundamental challenges to ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture by 2030. Water scarcity is the binding factor to agricultural production in the Near East and North Africa region and the driver of the region's dependency on food imports.

The report explores other major options for the adaptation to climate change impacts on water and agriculture, including the need for designing and implementing social protection measures for building resilience of farmers to extreme events, cutting food losses and improving trade policies.

Children paying the heaviest price as conflict in Yemen enters third year – UN

27 March 2017 – As the escalation of the conflict in Yemen enters its third year this week, the top United Nations humanitarian official has called on the parties to the conflict to commit to political dialogue and resolve the situation or risk an unending manmade crisis.

In a statement, Stephen O'Brien, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs underscored that in addition to wrecking the country's economy, killing thousands and displacing millions, the fighting has brought Yemen to the brink of a famine.

"During my third visit to Yemen only weeks ago, I saw the terrible and terrifying evidence of looming famine," said Mr. O'Brien.

"In the hospital ward, the complete stillness of the tiny malnourished child whose eyes focus on nothing. The grim realization that these patients were the fortunate ones who could access a hospital and might survive."

Underscoring that UN and its partners are already providing life-saving assistance in all of Yemen's 22 governorates, reaching almost 6 million people every month, Mr. O'Brien urged parties to the conflict to expedite immediate, timely, and unimpeded humanitarian access as well as facilitate commercial activities critical to reversing prevailing massive food insecurity and ensuring that people's basic needs can be met.

Nearly 19 million Yemenis – over two-thirds of the population – need humanitarian assistance and, according to UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), seven million are facing starvation.

"Most of all, the Yemeni people need the parties to commit to political dialogue, or this man-made crisis will never end," noted Mr. O'Brien.

In the meantime, together we can we must avert this famine, this human catastrophe.



A boy sits amid rubble, all that remains of his home – which was destroyed in an air strike – in Okash Village, near Sana'a, the capital of Yemen. Photo: UNICEF/Hamoud



Children hold shrapnel from exploded artillery shells while standing on a street damaged by blasts in Sana'a. Photo: UNICEF/Hamoud



A boy stands atop a large piece of exploded artillery shell, which landed near his home in the village of Al Mahjar, a suburb of Sana'a. Photo: UNICEF/Hamoud

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Number of children injured, recruited in conflict nearly doubled in one year UNICEF

As with most crises, it is the children who are bearing the brunt of the suffering.

Families are having to resort to extreme measures to support their children as coping measures have been severely eroded, turning Yemen the poorest country in the region into one of the largest food security and malnutrition emergencies in the world, noted United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in a new report, *Falling through the Cracks* today.

According to UN verified data, in the past year alone, the number of children killed increased from 900 to more than 1,500; those injured nearly doubled from 1,300 to 2,450; children recruited in fighting neared 1,580 (compared to 850 last year); and 212 schools were attacked (up from 50 last year).

Also, Yemen's health system is on the verge of collapse, leaving close to 15 million men, women and children with no access to health care. This is all the more concerning given an outbreak of cholera and acute watery diarrhoea in October 2016 that continues to spread, with over 22,500 suspected cases and 106 deaths.

The war in Yemen continues to claim children's lives and their future, said Meritxell Relaño, UNICEF Representative in the war-torn country.

We need to act now to pull families back from the brink. The risks for generations to come are extremely high.

UN agency chief urges stronger cooperation to aid refugees' transfer from Greek islands

27 March 2017 – The head of the United Nations refugee agency today noted the need for more accommodations on the Greek mainland to help improve conditions at reception centres on the Greek islands.

The effort is one of eight recommendations issued by the UN refugee agency, or UNHCR, to move from an emergency response to longer-term sustainability where asylum-seekers and refugees have access to care and support.

"The situation in Greece can be managed," said Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees. "But to achieve this, firm commitment is needed on all sides."

Mr. Grandi called on European Union Governments to provide strong support for Greece: "More solidarity and responsibility sharing across Europe is needed."

The High Commissioner also renewed his call to the Greek Government for clear coordination structures, with well-defined roles and responsibilities for all actors.

As of 20 March, only 10,000 asylum-seekers had left Greece for other European countries.

The UN agency said that it has been working with the Greek Government over the past months to find alternative sites for temporary housing, as well as to help some refugees who were to remain in Greece to more easily integrate to the country's social culture.

Progress in reception conditions will also help prevent and fight sexual and gender based violence, to which many vulnerable asylum-seekers, including women and children, are exposed in the sites.

More attention is needed to the length and quality of the asylum procedures and reception conditions on the islands, said the High Commissioner.

"This will allow for more and faster transfers to the mainland and prevent sites on the islands from falling back into the dire conditions and the overcrowding we have witnessed in the past months," he added, noting that UNHCR supported some 7,000 of the more than 10,000 transfers organized since June 2016.

The UNHCR recommendations also include accelerating the pace of reuniting people with their families and building self-reliance among refugees.