

Iraq: UN aid agencies preparing for 'all scenarios' as western Mosul military operations set to begin

18 February 2017 – With military operations to retake western Mosul starting, United Nations humanitarian agencies in Iraq are rushing to prepare for the humanitarian impact of the fighting amid grave concerns that tens of thousands of families are at extreme risks.

According to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the country, food and fuel supplies are dwindling, markets and shops have closed, running water is scarce and electricity in many neighborhoods is either intermittent or cut off.

“The situation is distressing. People, right now, are in trouble. We are hearing reports of parents struggling to feed their children and to heat their homes,” said Lise Grande, Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq.

According to estimates, between 750,000 and 800,000 civilians reside in the western section of Mosul.

However, few if any commercial supplies have reached the city in the past three months since the main road to Syria was cut-off.

Sources in the city also reported that nearly half of all food shops have closed and bakeries throughout the area have run out of fuel and many can no longer afford to purchase costly flour.

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Prices of fuel such as kerosene and cooking gas have skyrocketed and many of the most destitute families are burning wood, furniture, plastic or garbage for cooking and heating.

Families, children face critical shortage of drinking water, do not have enough to eat

According to the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the UN World Food Programme (WFP) there are critical shortages of food and safe drinking water.

Three out of five people now depend on untreated water
UNICEF Representative in Iraq Peter Hawkins

“Three out of five people now depend on untreated water from wells for cooking and drinking as water systems and treatment plants have been damaged by fighting or run out of chlorine,” said Peter Hawkins, UNICEF Representative in Iraq.

“Food prices in western Mosul are almost double than in eastern Mosul,” added Sally Haydock, the WFP Representative in the country, noting that many families do not have enough to eat.

Preparing to aid as many as 400,000 fleeing civilians

According to OCHA, UN and humanitarian partners are rushing to prepare for the humanitarian impact of the military operation.

“We don’t know what will happen during the military campaign but we have to be ready for all scenarios. Tens of thousands of people may flee or be forced to leave the city. Hundreds of thousands of civilians might be trapped – maybe for weeks, maybe for months,” said Ms. Grande.

Emergency sites are being constructed south of the city and stocks of life-saving supplies are being pre-positioned for the 250,000-400,000 civilians who may flee.

“Protecting civilians is the highest priority in a situation like this – nothing is more important [...] The battle hasn’t started but already there is a humanitarian crisis,” the UN humanitarian official added.

[At Munich Security Conference, UN chief Guterres highlights need for ‘a surge in diplomacy for peace’](#)

18 February 2017 – Highlighting the complex and interlinked challenges confronting the global community that also compound the suffering of the most vulnerable, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres called for a boost in preventive diplomacy and mediation efforts, as well as for a strategy to address root causes of such conflicts in the world.

“There are things that are obvious: the alignment of the sustainable and inclusive development with the sustaining peace agenda,” said Mr. Guterres in his remarks to the Munich Security Conference, noting also their importance in preventing conflicts.

He also drew attention to the need to address the fragility of states and to support states, institutions and civil societies to become stronger and more resilient to diminish the tendency for states to be involved in conflict situations.

Noting the centrality of climate change and strain on resources in increasing the probability of conflicts and dramatic humanitarian crises, Secretary-General Guterres called on the international community to rally behind the

Paris Agreement on climate change as well as to focus attention on population growth, especially in Africa.

“And for me, a key condition to address it is the combination of education and the empowerment of women and girls,” he said, noting: “This is probably the best way to be able to address the problems of excessive population growth that is impacting dramatically in some parts of the world.”

Further in his remarks, the UN chief noted the need for strengthened global multilateralism and the need for responsive reform to enhance confidence and capacity of multilateral institutions to better respond to global challenges and to meet the expectations of the world’s peoples.

In the case of the UN, the Secretary-General noted that the organization has been engaged in reforms to its peace and security strategy, operational setup and architecture; its development system; and its management.

RELATED: UN chief Guterres announces steps towards reforming Organization’s peace and security architecture

Also in his address, Mr. Guterres noted that while the world prepares for responding to the crises it faces today, it is equally important to consider that the problems of peace and security in the future will have new dimensions for which we need to be prepared.

Noting the already existing challenges related to cyberspace and lack of instruments to address those, Mr. Guterres highlighted that developing a capacity of analysis, discussion, and to be able to think about models of governance for new areas of scientific and technological development, such as artificial and intelligence genetic engineering will be crucial in the near future.

“I believe that when people will meet herein 10 or 20 years’ time in Munich, we will probably be discussing other things in relation to the priorities of today, but I hope we don’t get to those discussions too late and [having done] too little,” he said.

Germany is symbol of tolerance and hospitality for those in need of protection – UN chief Guterres

17 February 2017 – Speaking to the media in Munich, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres hailed the important role Germany has placed at a number of multilateral institutions, including the European Union and the

United Nations.

“Germany has been extremely active in all aspects in which the international community needs to come together to face the dramatic challenges that are threatening our daily lives,” said Mr. Guterres at a press encounter alongside German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

He further noted that in a world where diversity is perceived as a threat and not a richness and where so many populist, xenophobic demonstrations exist, Germany and Chancellor Merkel had been a symbol of “tolerance” and “hospitality” for people displaced from their homes and who are in need of protection.

“A symbol I would like to see followed in many, many other parts of the world in order for us to be able to respond to the dramatic suffering that we are witnessing because of the terrible conflicts that have spread around the world,” the UN chief added.

“So, in this moment, I would like to say that I am sure that the cooperation that, as Secretary-General, I will have with Germany and its Government will be as solid, as positive, as deep and as successful as the cooperation we had when, as High Commissioner for Refugees, I could be fully in support of the German policy for the protection of refugees.”

In his remarks, Mr. Guterres also underlined the need for global responses to global challenges such as complex and interlinked conflicts, rising terrorism, impact of climate change and enormous movements of people and migration.

He further emphasized the importance of multilateralism and for countries to come together and to use multilateral institutions, in a spirit of solidarity, to overcome the obstacles of today’s world.

[Iraq: UN condemns car bomb attack in Baghdad](#)

17 February 2017 – The United Nations today condemned the deadly terrorist attack in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, for which the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) has claimed responsibility.

“We condemn the terrorist attack in the south of Baghdad [...] This week has seen a series of such atrocious crimes in the Iraqi capital,” said the statement issued by the spokesperson for UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

“The United Nations will continue to stand by the Government and people of

Iraq in their efforts to fight terrorism and violent extremism, notably by building trust and mutual understanding through peaceful and inclusive,” the statement added.

Meanwhile, the UN envoy in Iraq also strongly condemned yesterday’s car bomb attack in the Bayaa district of Baghdad, which, according to news reports, left more than 50 people dead.

“Yet again, the terrorists are continuing with their carnage against innocent civilians. This is totally unacceptable,” said the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Iraq, Ján Kubiš.

“The Iraqi people have shown their courage and determination in the fight against terrorism, and these desperate tactics by the terrorists will only increase the resolve of Iraqis, who want to live in peace and tranquility to terminate the so-called ISIL throughout the country,” Mr. Kubiš added.

[A decade on, UN urges all Governments to endorse convention on enforced disappearance](#)

17 February 2017 – Marking the tenth anniversary of an historic treaty to keep people from suffering enforced disappearance or secret detentions, the United Nations today urged all Governments that have not done so to ratify it, as the world body honoured victims separated from their loved ones.

The UN General Assembly adopted the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances on 20 December 2006, and it opened for signature the following February.

Speaking at a High-Level Assembly meeting, the current President of the 193-member UN body said that since its adoption, the Convention has filled “an important judicial void in the international system” by preventing future victimization and seeking to redress past wrongs.

“While the catalyst to establishing the Convention was the horrendous events that took place in Latin America during the 1970’s and 1980’s, in many parts of our world today the scourge of enforced disappearance continues,” said Peter Thomson.

As the international community’s attention focuses on implementing the 2030 Agenda, it is important that the Convention be seen as a vital element in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“This applies particularly to SDG 16 in promoting the rule of law, ensuring

equal access to justice, ending impunity, protecting human rights, sustaining peace, and in achieving the central tenet of the 2030 Agenda of leaving no one behind”, he continued, adding that faithful implementation of SDG 16 will create the conditions that will ensure no one will ever be subjected to enforced disappearance.

The idea that forced disappearances – in one form or another – continue today were echoed in the video message from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, who noted that most of the family members attending the high-level meeting have had members of their families disappear.

“The practice of enforced disappearance is not decreasing – it is morphing,” he said. “In the context of migration, internal conflict, transnational organized crime, humanitarian crises and the struggle against violent extremism, we are seeing new and alarming patterns of enforced disappearance.”

Mr. Thomson and Mr. Zeid commended the at least 55 Member States that have ratified or acceded to the Convention, and urged those remaining to join.

In their separate addresses, both senior officials also commended the work of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances, which alongside the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, is the main UN expert mechanism in this field.

Speaking on behalf of the Committee, its Chair, Santiago Corcuera Cabezut said there were 347 urgent actions currently under consideration by the Committee – up from just five in 2012.

“The values protected by this Convention are universal, and therefore, the universality of the instrument should be achieved in the near future, just like the Convention on the Rights of the Child,” he said.

To support the principles of the Convention, the UN General Assembly has designated 30 August as the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearance to draw attention to the global problem of enforced disappearance.