

UN and regional partners urge DR Congo parties to resume political talks

16 February 2017 – Increasingly concerned about the political impasse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the United Nations and regional partner organizations today urged political actors to work out how to implement the 31 December political agreement on a timeframe for elections.

The UN, the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU) and the International Organization of La Francophonie (IOF) today released a joint statement warning that the situation “has the potential to undermine the political goodwill” that led to the signing of the agreement in December.

“The four partner organizations note that six weeks after agreeing on the modalities of a transition period leading to the holding of peaceful and credible elections by December 2017, the parties are yet to conclude discussions on the effective implementation of the agreement,” according to the statement.

The agreement – facilitated by Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo (CENCO) mediators, and reached in DRC’s capital, Kinshasa, on 31 December 2016 – would result in new elections being held in the country before the end of the year and for President Joseph Kabila to step down.

In today’s statement, the four partner organizations reaffirm the need for all parties to rally behind the mediation efforts by CENCO, and urge all stakeholders “to redouble, in good faith” their efforts to conclude the ongoing talks.

A lack of implementation plans threaten to shake the “legitimacy of the transitional institutions until elections,” the partners said.

Path to Middle East peace ‘riddled with hazards,’ UN envoy tells Security Council

16 February 2017 – Extremism, bloodshed and displacement continue to plague the Middle East, a senior United Nations envoy told the Security Council today, warning that these phenomena are feeding intolerance, violence, and religious radicalism far beyond the region.

“It is critical that we all understand that we must never allow the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict to drift into the abyss of the extremism and radicalism sweeping the region," said Nickolay Mladenov, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, briefing the Security Council.

"Palestinians, Israelis and the international community have a duty to act responsibly, avoid escalating tensions, refrain from unilateral actions and work together to uphold peace," he added.

He also drew attention of the Council members to the recently adopted so called "Regularisation Law" which has the potential to retroactively regularise thousands of existing settlement units built on land owned by Palestinian individuals living under occupation, as well as dozens of illegal outposts.

Noting that the "Regularisation Law" is in contravention of international law and that according to the Israeli Attorney General it is also unconstitutional, Mr. Mladenov told the Council that the Supreme Court is expected to rule on its constitutionality soon.

"If the Law stays in place, it will have far-reaching consequences for Israel, while seriously undermining prospects for the two-state solution and for Arab-Israeli peace," he cautioned.

RELATED: Israeli legislation on settlements violates international law, says UN chief Guterres

Also in his briefing, the UN envoy expressed concern over daily violence and so-called "lone wolf" attacks against Israeli civilians. In one such recent incident, six Israelis were injured in a shooting and stabbing attack by an 18-year-old Palestinian from Nablus (a city in northern West Bank).

He further told the Security Council members that the volatile situation in Gaza continued to exacerbate humanitarian and development challenges, related in large part to the crippling closures of the Strip and the continuing political divide.

"This winter has borne witness to a serious electricity crisis which in December left Palestinians in Gaza with only two hours of electricity per day," he said, informing them of UN's work to address the electricity challenges in a sustainable manner.

The two-state solution remains the only way to achieve the legitimate national aspirations of both peoples

He also spoke of the situation in the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) areas of operations, noting that the ceasefire between Israel and Syria (under UNDOF area of operations) is holding, albeit in a volatile security environment.

Concluding his briefing, the UN envoy recalled that the Middle East Quartet Report and Security Council resolutions clearly outlined what is required to

advance a sustainable and just peace in the region.

“The two-state solution remains the only way to achieve the legitimate national aspirations of both peoples,” he said, noting that Israel can take the necessary step to stop settlement expansion and construction in order to preserve this prospect, while the Palestinian leadership can demonstrate their commitment to tackling the challenges of violence and incitement on their side.

“This will create an environment that will facilitate bilateral final status negotiations that the international community can support,” he added.

[South Sudan: UN depllores lack of information on 20,000 people displaced in Upper Nile](#)

16 February 2017 – The top United Nations peacekeeping official in South Sudan has described the lack of information about the situation of some 20,000 internally displaced people on the west bank of the Nile in the country’s north, as a “real problem.”

“We want to find out what has happened to those people, and provide them with assistance if they need it,” said David Shearer, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and head of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), who was making his first field trip to the town of Malakal after taking up his position as Mission chief four weeks ago.

According to a press statement issued today by the office of the Mission’s spokesperson, UNMISS believes that the 20,000 people have fled towards Kodok from Wau Shilluk, a town eight miles north of the UN base in Malakal on the west bank of the River Nile.

Fighting between the Government Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) forces and opposition forces has expanded geographically across the west bank over the past week, and shows no signs of abating, forcing more people to flee their homes.

On Thursday, UN peacekeepers attempted to carry out a foot patrol to Wau Shilluk, but were prevented from doing so by SPLA soldiers located at Wau Shilluk, a situation Mr. Shearer described as “very frustrating.”

Meanwhile, the statement noted that UNMISS has described government relocations by air of internally displaced people through Juba into Malakal as unsustainable if they are not also supported with humanitarian assistance on arrival.

The Shilluk population of Malakal has abandoned the town and 33,000 people are currently taking refuge in the camp administered by UNMISS.

[New UN report reveals obstacles to combat impunity for conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine](#)

16 February 2017 – Lack of laws, capacity and professional experience to effectively investigate and prosecute conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine is not only resulting in widespread impunity, it is causing survivors of sexual violence to be “victimized twice”, according to a new United Nations human rights report.

“What’s the point of saying what happened to me? No one will be able to help and no one will be able to find those who did it. No one will punish them,” one survivor of sexual violence quoted in the report said.

The report, issued today by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), also revealed that beatings and electrocution on the genitals, rape, threats of rape and forced nudity were used to punish, humiliate or extract confessions. In the territory controlled by armed groups, sexual violence was also used to compel people in detention to hand over property or to do as the perpetrators demanded, as an explicit condition for their release.

The majority of the documented cases happened when people, both men and women, were detained by either Government forces or armed groups.

“[...] he told me that if I refused to write, perpetrators would bring my [...] daughter in and will make me watch how they take turns one after another to rape her. After that I filled in eight pages with the text they dictated to me,” read the report, citing a woman who was detained on conflict-related charges.

“The investigation and conviction of perpetrators of sexual violence is vital for the victims who are entitled to justice and redress,” said Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, underscoring that doing so can also have a decisive impact in preventing such crimes.

“Impunity encourages the criminals, for that is what they are, to continue.”

Furthermore, the report also noted that deteriorating economic situation, particularly in conflict-affected regions, combined with a breakdown of

community ties due to conflict and displacement, has led some people to use harmful survival strategies and coping mechanisms that may increase the risk of sexual violence and trafficking.

The report was prepared by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) – deployed to the country in March 2014 upon the invitation of the Government of Ukraine – and looks at the period from 14 March 2014 to 31 January this year and covers all territory of the country, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, with a special focus on the eastern regions, parts of which are under the control of armed groups.

Lack of support for victims further complicated by restrictions placed by armed groups

The report also draws specific attention to the lack of support for victims, especially in areas of Donetsk and Luhansk controlled by armed groups.

Furthermore, medical professionals and state institutions throughout the country lack the specific knowledge and skills needed to deal with survivors of torture and conflict-related sexual violence.

In this situation, civil society organizations are stepping in through donor-funded programmes, as well as by various UN agencies and international organizations to offer support to the victims. However, these are mostly confined to urban areas and there is little or no assistance available in smaller towns and rural areas.

On top of this, restrictions imposed by the armed groups have hindered these organizations to carry out their programmes, particularly those linked to protection and psycho-social support and there are no real redress mechanisms available for victims in the territory controlled by armed groups, noted the report.

Iraq: UN health agency delivers medical aid to newly retaken areas of Mosul

16 February 2017 – The United Nations health agency has delivered medical supplies to parts of eastern Mosul, the Iraqi city liberated from the Islamic State (ISIL), where clinics are receiving an influx of people in urgent need of medical care.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said the supplies will support treatment of patients with infectious diseases, chronic conditions, diarrheal diseases and trauma cases who have been deprived of medical care.

According to the press release, the supplies are a donation from the Government of Norway and include medicines, emergency health kits, surgical kits and an interagency diarrheal disease kits.

They were delivered to newly retaken areas of Mosul, including 16 primary health centres, one hospital and the Directorate of Health (DOH) of Ninewa – the governorate which includes Mosul.

WHO has appealed for \$65 million to support health interventions in this part of Iraq through the end of the year. So far, \$14 million has been received.