

UN urges resolving fate of 2,500 foreign children at Syria camp

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GENEVA: Around 2,500 foreign children are stuck in a guarded section of a Syrian camp after fleeing Daesh's last stronghold, a senior United Nations official said on Thursday, urging governments not to abandon them.

The children's plight at the Al-Hol camp in northeast Syria is a dilemma for nations who saw citizens leave and fight for the extremist movement in Syria and Iraq only to find themselves in limbo after the fall of their self-proclaimed "caliphate."

Panos Moutzis, UN humanitarian coordinator for the Syria crisis, said home nations must take responsibility for repatriating their citizens, prosecuting where necessary.

"Really nobody should be rendered stateless and every effort should be made to find a solution for these people," he told a Geneva news briefing.

The children are among 10,000 non-Syrian and non-Iraqi nationals kept in a "restricted" section of the sprawling, Kurdish-run camp where 75,000 people live in total.

Some 211 children were among at least 260 people who died of malnutrition or disease en route to the camp since December, the latest UN figures show.

Britain revoked the citizenship of a teenager who left at 15 to join Daesh in Syria, while Austria and Switzerland have said they will not help bring home adults who joined the terrorist group.

But Moutzis said states had a legal responsibility, especially for children, many of whom were born in Daesh camps. "Children should be treated first and foremost as victims" and "irrespective of family affiliation," he said.

The situation is further complicated because most states lack the capacity to offer consular services or access their nationals in the area. "There has to be a concerted effort, this is not about blaming or 'naming and shaming', but it's really about being practical and finding a way forward that would find a solution," the UN official said.



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Australia won't risk lives returning Daesh refugees from Syria
France to try Syrian President Assad's uncle on graft charges

UN warns of 'widening conflagration' in Libya as southern Haftar base attacked

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Thu, 2019-04-18 10:04

TRIPOLI: The UN's Libya envoy warned Thursday of "a widening conflagration" in the country as an armed group attacked a major air base in the south controlled by military commander Khalifa Haftar.

Despite days of heaving fighting, Ghassan Salame told AFP there was a stalemate south of the capital between Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) and the government in Tripoli.

"After the very first successes of the Libyan National Army two weeks ago, we are witnessing a military deadlock," he said.

Fighting broke out on April 4 when Haftar and his LNA, based in the country's east, launched an offensive to take Tripoli, the western seat of the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA).

The GNA on Thursday issued an arrest warrant against Haftar for allegedly ordering deadly air strikes against civilian areas, its press office said. A spokesman for the GNA said it was seeking an international arrest warrant against Haftar for "war crimes," as two UN experts were expected in Tripoli later Thursday to investigate the origin of rocket fire that killed six people the previous day.

Salame told AFP that "international divisions" prior to the assault on Tripoli had emboldened Haftar, who is backed by Russia and Egypt and seen as a bulwark against extremists.

"There are countries that have invested in Mr. Haftar as a champion of the fight against terrorism," Salame said.

"They will not drop him now even if they do not agree with his attack on Tripoli."

The Tripoli government's interior ministry on Thursday accused France of supporting Haftar and said it would halt cooperation with Paris.

France responded to the accusation by saying that it supported "the

legitimate government of Prime Minister (Fayez Al-)Serraj and the mediation of the UN for an inclusive political solution in Libya.”

Haftar’s offensive forced the UN to postpone a national conference that was to draw up a roadmap to elections in a bid to turn the page on years of turmoil since the 2011 downfall of Muammar Qaddafi.

The renewed fighting has killed at least 205 people and left more than 900 wounded, the World Health Organization said Thursday, while more than 25,000 have been displaced, according to the International Organization for Migration.

Fighting continued Thursday on several fronts south of Tripoli, AFP journalists on the ground and security sources said.

Reuters reported that an armed group on Thursday attacked a major air base in southern Libya controlled by Haftar who has moved much of his forces north to try to take the capital Tripoli.

Fighting was continuing at the Tamanhint base near Sabha, the main city in southern Libya, Major Hamid Rafea Al-Khiyali and an eastern military official said. The base is Haftar’s main air base in southern Libya, which he seized earlier this year, though tribesmen with flexible loyalties remain strong in the sparsely populated desert region.

With both sides dug in, Tripoli this week witnessed its heaviest fighting since Haftar launched his offensive, including what the UN described as “indiscriminate rocket fire on a high-density neighborhood” of Tripoli. World powers have long been divided on how to stabilize Libya, wracked by violence since Qaddafi’s fall. Haftar’s offensive has again highlighted those divisions.

“There are interests in Libya. It’s a country rich in oil,” Salame said. This “makes companies – oil companies, construction companies, etc – salivate.” But he added that some countries had supported one camp or another for “reasons that are not necessarily economic.”

The UN Security Council has been split on how to address the latest crisis. Negotiations this week on a draft resolution demanding a cease-fire in Tripoli have failed to yield agreement.

Germany, which holds the council presidency, called for an urgent meeting Thursday, when the council was to hear a briefing on the situation on the ground and “consult on the way forward,” according to a note seen by AFP. Britain has put forward a draft resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire and de-escalation, but Russia objected to clauses that criticized Haftar’s offensive as a threat to Libya’s stability.

Britain put forward a slightly watered-down version on Wednesday but the three African countries on the council – Equatorial Guinea, Ivory Coast, South Africa – blocked it.

They have insisted on including a reference to an African Union statement on the need for all parties fighting in Tripoli to protect civilians, including migrants and refugees, according to documents seen by AFP.

Moscow said even the amended version was “still far away from accommodating our concerns,” according to a note from the Russian UN mission.

The revised text did not single out Haftar’s forces, but instead expressed “grave concern at military activity” near Tripoli, “including the launching

of a military offensive by the LNA.”

Britain had hoped to hold a vote before Friday, but that now looks unlikely. Diplomats said the United States appeared to be dragging its feet rather than pushing for a quick adoption of the draft resolution.



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UN weighs measure demanding immediate cease-fire in Libya Fighting over Libya's capital Tripoli has displaced 18,000: UN agency

[Sudan's military rulers arrest ousted president's brothers](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2019-04-18 09:15

KHARTOUM: Sudan's new military rulers arrested ousted President Omar Al-Bashir's two brothers for corruption, part of a broad sweep against officials and supporters of the former government, the country's official news agency reported Thursday.

The spokesman of the military council, Gen. Shams Eddin Kabashi, was quoted by SUNA as saying that Abdullah and Abbas Al-Bashir were taken into custody, without providing more details or saying when it happened.

The Sudanese military ousted Omar Al-Bashir last week, after four months of street protests against his 30-year rule marred by conflict, civil war and corruption. Al-Bashir is also wanted for genocide and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court for atrocities committee in the western region of Darfur.

The brothers' detention was likely another concession by the military to the protesters, who have demanded that all key figures and ranking officials from the former president's circle be arrested. A number of Al-Bashir's close associates and former government officials have already been taken into custody since the military overthrew Al-Bashir last Thursday.

The military council, which is now running the country, said the former president was transferred on Tuesday to Koper Prison in the capital, Khartoum, a facility notorious for holding political prisoners under Al-Bashir.

Huge crowds joined a protest outside Sudan's defence ministry on Thursday to demand that the country's transitional military council hand power to civilians, a Reuters witness said.

The crowds were the largest since former President Omar Al-Bashir was ousted a week ago and the military council took over, with hundreds of thousands packing the streets in the centre of the capital by early evening.

Protesters chanted "Freedom and revolution are the choice of the people" and "Civilian rule, civilian rule", and waved national flags overhead.

Activists who have been holding a sit-in outside the defence ministry compound in Khartoum since before Bashir's ouster had called for a mass

protest on Thursday to increase pressure on the council.

It comes after an opposition coalition called this week on the military to establish a civilian-led ruling council with military representation, as well as a civilian government.

The council has said it is ready to meet some of the protesters demands, including fighting corruption, but has indicated that it would not hand over power to them.

The Khartoum sit-in was the culmination of 16 weeks of protests triggered by a worsening economic crisis in Sudan, leading to the ouster and arrest of Bashir after three decades in power.

The United States supports a democratic and peaceful transition in Sudan led by civilians who represent all Sudanese, the State Department said on Thursday, as protesters in Khartoum kept up demands that the country's military hand over power to civilians.

State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said Sudan remained labeled by the US as a state sponsor of terrorism, and emphasized that Washington's policies toward Sudan would be based on "our assessment of events on the ground and the actions of transitional authorities."

She said the US was "encouraged" by the release of political prisoners and the cancellation by the transitional military council of a curfew.

Meanwhile, South Sudan's President Salva Kiir offered to mediate in Sudan's political crisis. In a letter seen by The Associated Press, Kiir this week pledged his support for a transition where the rights of the Sudanese people are protected and offered to "mediate the on-going negotiations" among various groups.

Some in South Sudan are concerned that Al-Bashir's departure will hurt their country's fragile peace deal, which Al-Bashir helped broker. South Sudan declared independence from Sudan in 2011, following decades of civil war. But the new country subsequently sank into its own civil war, which ended with an agreement signed in September. The deal calls for opposition leader Riek Machar to return to South Sudan next month to once again become Kiir's deputy, though that looks increasingly unlikely as tensions continue.

One political analyst called Kiir's offer of mediation over Al-Bashir a "hypocritical public relations" stunt.

"It doesn't make sense. You cannot leave your house in a mess and claim to clean your neighbor's house," Jacob Chol, professor at the University of Juba, told the AP.



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US says Sudan new regime can exit terror list if progress made Saudi Cabinet vows support for Sudanese people

[Egypt referendum on El-Sisi term extension to start Saturday](#)

Wed, 2019-04-17 16:44

CAIRO: Egypt on Wednesday set a referendum for April 20-22 on sweeping constitutional changes including amendments that could extend President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's rule until 2030.

"The referendum process ... will take place inside Egypt... from April 20-22," Lashin Ibrahim, head of the National Election Authority said at a press conference.

The announcement came after Egypt's parliament on Tuesday overwhelmingly passed the changes, despite complaints from critics that they are "unconstitutional" and designed to "consolidate authoritarianism".

The amendments extend presidential terms from four to six years, but maintain a limit of two terms.

Under the changes, El-Sisi's current term will be prolonged to 2024 from 2022 and he would then be allowed to run for another six-year term.

The constitutional changes also include giving the military greater influence

in political life, granting El-Sisi wide control over the judiciary and broadening the jurisdiction of military courts over civilians. As a military chief, El-Sisi led the army's overthrow of Mohamed Morsi in 2013 following mass protests against the Islamist leader's rule. He won his first term as president in 2014 and was re-elected in March 2018 with more than 97 percent of the vote, after standing virtually unopposed. His government has been widely criticised by human rights groups for the repression of political opponents.



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Egypt parliament votes to extend El-Sisi rule
Egypt parliament to vote this week to extend El-Sisi's rule

[Turkey's opposition takes office in Istanbul, appeal still pending](#)

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ISTANBUL/ANKARA: Turkey's main opposition candidate was declared Istanbul's mayor on Wednesday after election recounts were finally completed, despite an appeal still pending by President Tayyip Erdogan's AK Party to re-run the vote in the country's largest city.

The final result of the March 31 local elections showed a narrow victory for the secularist opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) in Turkey's commercial hub, ending 25 years of control by the AK Party (AKP) and its Islamist predecessors.

The loss is especially hard for Erdogan, who launched his political career in Istanbul as mayor in the 1990s and has triumphed in more than a dozen elections since his Islamist-rooted AKP came to power in 2002.

The Turkish lira, which has dipped since the election, firmed on Wednesday. As he formally took office after a campaign which featured months of harsh rhetoric from Erdogan's AK Party and more than two weeks of challenges and recounts, Ekrem Imamoglu promised to work for all 16 million residents of the city.

"We never gave up, we never gave up on our battle for democracy and rights," he told supporters at Istanbul's municipality building. "We are aware of our responsibilities and the needs of this city. We will start to serve immediately."

Imamoglu's margin of victory – the final count put him some 13,000 votes, or less than 0.2 percentage points, ahead of the AK Party candidate and former prime minister Binali Yildirim – prompted several AKP challenges.

On Tuesday, after 16 days of appeals and recounts, the AKP asked the High Election Board (YSK) to annul and re-run the election in Istanbul over what it said were irregularities. Its nationalist MHP allies made a similar request on Wednesday.

"We are aware there are ongoing processes... We hope the relevant authorities will complete these processes in the most sensitive and just way," Imamoglu said.

"TOO MANY IRREGULARITIES"

The repeated challenges by the AKP and MHP have fuelled frustration among opposition supporters which spilled over into football stadiums at the weekend when fans chanted at top Istanbul derby matches for the mayoral mandate to be given to their candidate.

"There are way too many irregularities," AKP Deputy Chairman Ali Ihsan Yavuz said, presenting the party's justification for its demand for a new vote. "We are saying that organised fraud, unlawfulness and crimes were committed."

CHP Deputy Chairman Muharrem Erkek responded that there were "no concrete documents, information or evidence in the AKP appeal for an annulment."

"There is no legitimate reason at all. You are using your right (to appeal) to damage the will of Istanbul," he said.

While the AKP was defeated in the battle for Istanbul mayor, results showed the party had won most seats in its municipal councils. The AKP's re-run appeal applies only to the mayoral elections, not those for municipal councils.

Wolfgang Piccoli, co-president of Teneo political risk advisers, said it was

puzzling to call only for a re-run of the mayoral elections, and added that some of the areas where the AKP claimed fraud took place were under its responsibility.

Uncertainty over the election results has also put pressure on financial markets, pushing the lira down nearly 5 percent.

“From the market perspective, an extended period of uncertainty around elections is a bad idea – it would suggest more election-related policy easing which is bad for the rebalancing story,” Tim Ash, senior emerging markets strategist at BlueBay Asset Management, told Reuters.

Erdogan had vowed that Turkey would enter a four and half year period with no elections after March 31, during which the ailing economy would be the focus. If the AKP appeal is upheld, Istanbul, which makes up more than a third of Turkey’s economy, will head to polls again on June 2.



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Pro-Kurdish party slams Turkey ban on elected mayors taking office
Turkey’s ruling AK Party to seek new Istanbul election