

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," 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.

I 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, 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.

I 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, urged Secretary-General Guterres.

The status quo is not sustainable.

[Famine declared in region of South Sudan – UN](#)

20 February 2017 – Famine has been formally declared in parts of South Sudan, the United Nations said today, warning that war and a collapsing economy have left some 100,000 people facing starvation there and a further 1 million people are classified as being on the brink of famine.

Famine has become a tragic reality in parts of South Sudan and our

worst fears have been realised,” said Serge Tissot, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Representative in South Sudan, in a news release issued jointly with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

“Many families have exhausted every means they have to survive,” he stated, explaining that these people are predominantly farmers who have lost their livestock, even their farming tools.

Famine is currently affecting parts of Unity State in the northern-central part of the country. A formal famine declaration means people have already started dying of hunger.

Famine has become a tragic reality in parts of South Sudan

The situation is the worst hunger catastrophe since fighting erupted more than three years ago between rival forces – the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) loyal to President Salva Kiir and the SPLA in Opposition backing First Vice-President Riek Machar.

The three UN agencies warned that urgent action is needed to prevent more people from dying of hunger.

According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) update released today by the government, the three agencies and other humanitarian partners, 4.9 million people – more than 40 percent of South Sudan's population – are in need of urgent food, agriculture and nutrition assistance.

The total number of food insecure people is expected to rise to 5.5 million at the height of the lean season in July if nothing is done to curb the severity and spread of the food crisis.

“More than one million children are currently estimated to be acutely malnourished across South Sudan; over a quarter of a million children are already severely malnourished. If we do not reach these children with urgent aid many of them will die,” said Jeremy Hopkins, UNICEF Representative a.i in South Sudan.

“We have also warned that there is only so much that humanitarian assistance can achieve in the absence of meaningful peace and security, both for relief workers and the crisis-affected people they serve,” said WFP Country Director Joyce Luma.

Critical food aid shortages hit Africa's refugees hard, UN warns

20 February 2017 – Across Africa, some two million refugees are facing critical shortages in food assistance, the United Nations warned today.

Refugee operations in 10 African countries have experienced cuts affecting the quantity and quality of food assistance for approximately two million refugees, according to a joint press release from the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Millions of refugees depend on WFP food and our work to treat and prevent malnutrition to stay alive. But in Africa they are in danger of being overshadowed by large humanitarian crises elsewhere, WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin said in the release.

Food rations have been dramatically cut in some cases by up to 50 per cent in large operations including Cameroon, Chad, Kenya, Mauritania, South Sudan and Uganda.

Refugees in Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Burundi and Ethiopia have had specific commodities cut including micronutrient fortified blended foods, needed to ensure an adequate quality diet.

RELATED: Famine hits parts of South Sudan, UN warns

We can't imagine how difficult life is for thousands of refugee families with no food, and often denied the possibility to work or provide for themselves in other ways, said UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi. Refugees are extraordinarily resilient, but cuts in food assistance sometimes as high as 50 per cent are having a devastating impact on the health and nutrition of thousands of families.

The number of refugees in Africa nearly doubled from 2.6 million in 2011 to nearly five million in 2016, the release said. While donor funding for refugee assistance increased during this period, it did not keep pace with rapidly rising needs. As a result, the humanitarian response is significantly underfunded.

Amid global paradox, solutions that

unify economic and social progress needed – UN labour chief

20 February 2017 – Highlighting that many around the world are left out from being able to benefit from global prosperity dividends and that even flourishing societies are seeing inequalities widen, the head of the United Nations labour agency today called for solutions that can bring economic growth combined with social progress.

In his message on World Day of Social Justice, UN International Labour Organization chief Guy Ryder also underlined that the feeling of absence of social justice: children without secure futures, parents without decent jobs and a general feeling of abandonment, have grave consequences not only for communities and societies, but for economies as well.

“We need solutions that lead away from conflict and towards recovery, to economic growth with social progress, solutions that build institutions girded by labour standards that guarantee rights at work,” said Mr. Ryder.

“In an interconnected world this is a global agenda and a global responsibility,” he added.

Marked this year with the theme ‘Preventing conflict and sustaining peace through decent work’ the Day calls upon the international community work towards eradicating poverty, promoting full employment and decent work, gender equity, and access to social well-being and justice for all.

Mr. Ryder also stressed that lack of decent jobs and the fear that aspirations for a better life will remain unfulfilled multiplies people’s worries, leaving young people without a stake in society.

Urging for the formulation of policies that can deliver the decent work opportunities given their importance for the stability and success of societies, he added: “[The words] *Si vis pacem, cole justatium*: ‘If you seek peace, cultivate justice’ [...] are as compelling today as they were when written nearly one hundred years ago when the world was emerging from the ravages of war.”

RELATED: Responses to global ills must integrate peace and sustainable development, UN Member States told

In 2007, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 20 February as World Day of Social Justice, inviting Member States to promote national activities in accordance with the objectives and goals of the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly.

Also today, UN independent human rights experts underlined everyone’s right to a standard of living that ensures adequate health and well-being for themselves and their families, including access to food, clothing, housing,

health care and social services.

"The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which sets out these rights, also makes clear that all people are entitled to a social and international order in which their rights and freedoms can be fully realized," said Alfred de Zayas, UN Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order; and Idriss Jazairy, UN Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights.

They also underlined that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include commitments to eradicate poverty, provide clean, affordable energy, promote peaceful and inclusive societies, and implement nationally appropriate social protection systems for all, including social protection floors.

[‘Historic’ day as last FARC-EP members gather to turn in arms – UN mission in Colombia](#)

20 February 2017 – About 300 members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army (FARC-EP) today arrived in central Colombia’s Agua Bonita zone, bringing the number to close to 6,900, to lay down their arms under United Nations verification, and to begin a transition to social, economic and political life, the UN Mission in the country said today.

"In the past 19 days they rode cars, buses, boats or walked some 8,700 kilometres [...] across the country, accompanied by over 860 [members] of the tripartite Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (MVM)," read a news release from the UN Mission in Colombia.

The Mission’s Chief Observer and MVM coordinator, Major General Javier Pérez Aquino, called the day "historic."

"The UN Mission in Colombia and the MVM consider that the FARC-EP’s decision to move into the zones [...] in spite of the limited logistics in the majority of them [...] very positive," he said.

"This decision considerably reduces the possibility of armed contact [...] and we also hope that their presence will accelerate the construction works in these camps, creating the appropriate conditions to continue with the process that will lead to their reinsertion into the social, economic and political life," he added.

The Chief Observer also noted that despite limited logistics, the deadline

for the completion of the laying down of arms 180 days after the Final Agreement, which came into force on 1 December stands.

Working hand-in-hand so that 'our children and grandchildren live in a conflict-free country'

In Colombia's capital, Bogotá, as well as at eight regional and 26 local sites, FARC-EP and Government members, along with 350 UN observers, are working together to verify the parties' commitments towards the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities.

"We work together to implement the Final Agreement and I feel hopeful that this process will lead to a country with more social justice," said 45-year-old Esperanza Fajardo, who joined FARC-EP in the 1990's, now working with Government and UN Mission counterparts.

Mayor Alejandro Cruz, from the Government, echoed: "I feel very committed to this process because I want our children and grandchildren to live in a conflict-free country."

Mr. Cruz was twice injured in combat with the FARC-EP and bears a large scar on his chest while Ms. Fajardo joined the rebel group to escape the killings of left-wing *Unión Patriótica* political affiliates.

In early October 2016, Colombian voters narrowly rejected the historic peace accord between the Government and the FARC-EP. That deal led to a cessation of hostilities and agreements on key issues such as political participation, land rights, illicit drugs and victims' rights and transitional justice. The two sides signed a new agreement in late November.