

Rights expert urges UN Member States to halt Israel's illegal settlements in West Bank

3 February 2017 – A United Nations human rights expert has called on the Security Council and the General Assembly to explore effective diplomatic and political measures to ensure Israeli compliance with Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), which affirms that all Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory constitute a flagrant violation of international law.

“The settlement announcements by the Israeli Government, only a month after the clear direction of the international community, are a defiant and troubling repudiation of resolution 2334,” said Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk, who is mandated by the UN Human Rights Council to monitor and report on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967.

“If Israel understands that the international community will take no meaningful steps to enforce the Council’s resolution, it will continue to intensify its settlement project undeterred,” the Rapporteur warned in a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

“And if the international community intends to preserve what remains of a viable two-state solution, it must not assume that resolutions, critical statements and international conferences alone will change state behaviour in these circumstances,” he stressed.

The human rights expert’s appeal comes as, according to the press release, the Israeli Government approves the construction of over 6,000 new settlement homes in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, and as the Israeli Knesset moves closer to adopting the ‘Settlement Regularization Bill,’ which will legalize the homes of more than 4,000 settlers in dozens of illegal outposts built on private Palestinian lands throughout the West Bank.

“Continued settlement activity poses a grave threat to Palestinians’ right to self-determination,” the Rapporteur noted.

“The policies and practices of the Israeli authorities that suggest an advance towards *de facto* annexation of parts of the West Bank are increasingly alarming,” the expert said. “Annexation of occupied land likewise is a grave breach of international law,” the Rapporteur stated.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

Early cancer diagnosis, better trained medics can save lives and money – UN

3 February 2017 – Early cancer diagnosis saves lives and cuts treatment costs, the United Nations health agency today said, particularly in developing countries where the majority of cancer cases are diagnosed too late.

New guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO), released ahead of World Cancer Day which is marked annually on 4 February, tries to inform the public about the different symptoms of cancer so that they can get care and to provide safe and effective treatment.

“Diagnosing cancer in late stages, and the inability to provide treatment, condemns many people to unnecessary suffering and early death,” said Dr. Etienne Krug, Director of WHO’s Department for the Management of Noncommunicable Diseases, Disability, Violence and Injury Prevention.

“By taking the steps to implement WHO’s new guidance, healthcare planners can improve early diagnosis of cancer and ensure prompt treatment, especially for breast, cervical, and colorectal cancers,” he stressed.

Each year, 8.8 million people die from cancer, mostly in low- and middle-income countries, according to WHO figures. The figure is so high that it accounts for two and a half times more people killed than those who die from HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria combined.

It is estimated that by 2030, more than two-thirds of all cancer-related deaths will be in developing countries.



A Sri Lankan expert, trained at the IAEA laboratories in Seibersdorf, Austria, checking the iodine-131 dose to be given to thyroid cancer patients at the Nuclear Medicine Unit in Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. Photo: IAEA

Early detection can also cut the cost of treatment. In 2010, the total annual economic cost of cancer through healthcare expenditure and loss of productivity was estimated at \$1.16 trillion.

According to WHO, studies in high-income countries have shown that treatment for cancer patients who have been diagnosed early are two to four times less expensive compared to treating people diagnosed with cancer at more advanced stages.

More radiotherapy machines and training are needed

The third step to WHO's early diagnosis is strengthening and equipping health services and training workers, according to the guidance released today.

There is an estimated shortage of 5,000 radiotherapy machines throughout the world, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has said.

Among African countries, for example, 80 per cent of the estimated population of one billion is without access to radiotherapy and related cancer services.

Speaking at an event in Vienna, Austria, related to World Cancer Day, the Director-General of the IAEA, Yukiya Amano, today discussed the UN agency's work to make radiotherapy and nuclear medicine more widely available.

"To meet the cancer needs of developing countries, we need around 10,000 additional radiation oncologists, 6,000 medical physicists, 3,000 dosimetrists and 20,000 radiation therapists," Mr. Amano said.

Reducing early deaths from cancer and other chronic disease by one-third is stipulated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which the international community agreed to try to reach by 2030.

Given the need for greater equipment and training, Mr. Amano noted that he is considering devoting the IAEA Scientific Forum in September to exploring the benefits of nuclear medicine and radiation technology for human health.

Improving access to effective cancer treatment in developing countries has been one of his key priorities since taking lead of IAEA in 2009, Mr. Amano said. He outlined a number of successes the UN agency has had in Africa, particularly.

"In Ghana, for example, we provided diagnostic equipment for child cancers," Mr. Amano noted. "We helped Nigeria to develop its institutions and infrastructure for fighting cancer, and provided training for dozens of oncology, nuclear medicine and radiotherapy professionals."

He noted also specialist training, including online resources, such as the Virtual University for Cancer Control which enables medical professionals in Africa to train for free, or the Human Health Campus website for professionals in nuclear medicine and related fields.

Iraq: UN fears new wave of displacement as fighting escalates in

Mosul and Hawiga

3 February 2017 – The United Nations refugee agency and its partners are coordinating plans to respond to a potential mass displacement of Iraqis from western Mosul, the latest battleground the Iraqi forces are seeking to retake from Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) terrorists.

“As many as 250,000 Iraqis could be displaced from their homes with the anticipated escalation of conflict in densely-populated western Mosul,” Matthew Saltmarsh, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told reporters in Geneva.

The military operations to oust ISIL began on 17 October last year in eastern Mosul, which, according to UN agencies on the ground, is now under the Government control.

Mr. Saltmarsh said UNHCR has seven camps completed and two under construction. UNHCR is currently able to provide some 11,000 families, or 66,000 people, with shelter as part of the Mosul response, a figure which should expand to 20,000 families, or 120,000 individuals, in the near-term, once land is allocated.

The refugee agency continues to seek additional land for new camps, reception and transit areas, to assist people closer to Mosul. By the end of March, it is anticipated that the Government of Iraq, working with UNHCR and its partners, could potentially host 41,155 families, or 246,930 people, in camps and emergency sites.

Some 161,178 people have been displaced from Mosul and surrounding areas since the military offensive began in October, but nearly 30,000 of them have returned to their places of origin.

Returnees are keen to resume their lives and told UNHCR that the re-opening of schools and government offices was a factor in their decision to return. In some areas, security and the lack of food and water remain a concern. Some returnees continue to rely on emergency relief items, including kerosene, which they received while in camps.

UNHCR is also assisting increasing numbers fleeing Hawiga, 130 km south-east of Mosul, due deteriorating living conditions and the expected intensification of military operations.

Inter-agency planning estimates predict that up to 114,000 individuals could be displaced from Hawiga. So far, 82,128 people have fled since August 2016. Until recently, people had been leaving Hawiga in smaller numbers but hundreds are now fleeing eastwards daily towards Salah al-Din and Kirkuk.

UNHCR's 2016 Mosul emergency response appeal for \$196 million was 57 percent funded. For 2017, it is seeking \$578 million for its work with Iraqi internally displaced persons and Iraqi refugees in the region. UNHCR has distributed emergency items, including quilts and blankets, to more than

178,000 people, and provided nearly 53,000 people affected by the Mosul conflict with protection assistance.

[UN report details 'devastating cruelty' against Rohingya population in Myanmar's Rakhine province](#)

3 February 2017 – In a report issued today, the United Nations human rights arm said that the widespread human rights violations against the Rohingya population by Myanmar's security forces in the country's northern Rakhine state indicate the very likely commission of crimes against humanity.

The flash report – issued today by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) based on its interviews with people who fled Myanmar after attacks on a border post in early October, the ensuing counter military operations and a lockdown in north Maungdaw – documents mass gang-rape, killings, including of babies and young children, brutal beatings, disappearances and other serious human rights violations by the country's security forces.

"The devastating cruelty to which these Rohingya children have been subjected is unbearable – what kind of hatred could make a man stab a baby crying out for his mother's milk. And for the mother to witness this murder while she is being gang-raped by the very security forces who should be protecting her," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, noting the report suggests the recent level of violence to be unprecedented and added:

The gravity and scale of these allegations begs the robust reaction of the international community High Commissioner Zeid

"What kind of 'clearance operation' is this? What national security goals could possibly be served by this?"

OHCHR noted that more than half of the women its human rights team interviewed reported having suffered rape or other forms of sexual violence. Many other interviewees reported witnessing killings, including of family members and having family who were missing.

Houses deliberately set on fire, people pushed inside burning houses – report

The report also cites consistent testimony indicating that hundreds of Rohingya houses, schools, markets, shops, madrasas and mosques were burned by the army, police and sometimes civilian mobs. Witnesses also described the

destruction of food and food sources, including paddy fields, and the confiscation of livestock.

It also noted that several people were killed in indiscriminate and random shooting – many while fleeing for safety.

Army or Rakhine villagers locked an entire family, including elderly and disabled people, inside a house and set it on fire, killing them all. Report

“Numerous testimonies collected from people from different village tracts...confirmed that the army deliberately set fire to houses with families inside, and in other cases pushed Rohingyas into already burning houses,” the report states.

“Testimonies were collected of several cases where the army or Rakhine villagers locked an entire family, including elderly and disabled people, inside a house and set it on fire, killing them all.”

Many witnesses and victims also described being taunted while they were being beaten, raped or rounded up, such as being told “you are Bangladeshis and you should go back” or “What can your Allah do for you? See what we can do?”

Violence follows a long-standing pattern of violations and abuses – OHCHR

According to the UN human rights wing, the violence since 9 October follows a long-standing pattern of violations and abuses; systematic and systemic discrimination; and policies of exclusion and marginalization against the Rohingya that have been in place for decades in northern Rakhine state, the report notes.

OHCHR also noted that after the repeated failure of the Government of Myanmar to grant it unrestricted access to the worst-affected areas of northern Rakhine state, High Commissioner Zeid deployed a team of human rights officers to the Bangladeshi border with Myanmar, where an estimated 66,000 Rohingya have fled since 9 October 2016.

It further noted that according to reports, operations by security forces in the area have continued into January 2017, although their intensity and frequency may have reduced.

Perpetrators and those who ordered them must be held accountable – UN rights chief

Calling on the international community for robust reaction given the gravity and scale of the allegations, High Commissioner Zeid stressed:

“The Government of Myanmar must immediately halt these grave human rights violations against its own people, instead of continuing to deny they have occurred, and accepts the responsibility to ensure that victims have access to justice, reparations and safety.”

“The killing of people as they prayed, fished to feed their families or slept in their homes, the brutal beating of children as young as two and an elderly woman aged 80 – the perpetrators of these violations, and those who ordered them, must be held accountable.”

Violations of children’s rights ‘totally unacceptable’ – UNICEF

Also today, expressing serious concern at the level of violations of children’s rights as documented in the report, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) called for thorough investigations into the allegations and prosecution of the violators.

“Such violations of children’s rights are totally unacceptable,” the UN agency said, underscoring: “Every child has the right to protection, irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, religion or nationality, in every circumstance [...] child victims need and deserve support.”

[International collaboration on wheat rust can curb threat to global supplies – UN agency](#)

3 February 2017 – As new data shows that wheat in Africa, Asia and Europe is increasingly threatened by fresh groups of wheat rust, the United Nations agricultural agency is highlighting the need for early detection and rapid action to keep the fungus under control.

Two studies produced by scientists in collaboration with the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) show the emergence of two new groups or races of both yellow rust and stem rust last year in various regions of the world.

“These new, aggressive rust races have emerged at the same time that we’re working with international partners to help countries combat the existing ones, so we have to be swift and thorough in the way we approach this,” said FAO Plant Pathologist Fazil Dusunceli.

Wheat rusts spread rapidly over long distances by wind. If not detected and treated on time, they can turn a healthy looking crop, only weeks away from harvest, into a tangle of yellow leaves, black stems and shriveled grains.

“It’s more important than ever that specialists from international institutions and wheat producing countries work together to stop these diseases in their tracks,” Mr. Dusunceli said.

That would involve work such as continuous surveillance, sharing data and

building emergency response plans to protect their farmers and those in neighbouring countries.

Wheat is a source of food and livelihoods for over 1 billion people in developing countries, according to FAO.

Some of the most vulnerable regions are also the highest producers of wheat. Northern and Eastern Africa, the Near East, and West, Central and South Asia alone account for some 37 per cent of global wheat production.

The most recently identified race of stem rust pathogen – called TTTTF – hit the Italian island of Sicily in 2016, causing the largest stem rust outbreak in Europe in decades.

In addition, farmers in the mainland Italy, Morocco and some Scandinavian countries are battling a yet-to-be-named race of yellow rust, while Ethiopia and Uzbekistan fights outbreaks of yellow rust AF2012.

“Preliminary assessments are worrisome, but it is still unclear what the full impact of these new races will be on different wheat varieties in the affected regions,” said Mr. Dusunceli. “That's what research institutions across these regions will need to further investigate in the coming months.”

The FAO-supported reports have been highlighted in the journal *Nature* following their publication by *Aarhus University* and the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT).