

Sustainable Development Goals critical for better future for all – deputy UN chief Amina Mohammed

28 February 2017 – Delivering her first address as the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, Amina Mohammed underlined that Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are essential for a safe and secure future that brings prosperity, opportunity and human rights for all.

“Around the world, success in achieving the SDGs will ease global anxieties, provide a better life for women and men and build a firm foundation for stability and peace in all societies, everywhere,” said Ms. Mohammed at the opening of the 2017 Economic and Social Council segment on Operational Activities for Development.

Ms. Mohammed, earlier today, was administered the oath of office by Secretary-General António Guterres at a ceremony at the UN Headquarters in New York.

“Success will require a bolder approach to financing and partnerships. Nothing will be achieved without engaging all actors,” she added, urging all countries to rethink systems, approaches, redefine traditional planning, delivery and monitoring.

She also said that the UN too needed to be “fit for purpose” to help its Member States implement 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

“We must innovate, and revamp our approach to partnership and financing, with a focus on the long haul. We must empower youth to participate in and shape the political and economic lives of their countries and communities; to be the agents of peace and development,” she noted.

Further in her remarks, the deputy UN chief also highlighted that despite much progress, Africa continued to remain vulnerable, and therefore needs to be a UN priority.



Opening of the 2017 Economic and Social Council segment on Operational Activities for Development. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Noting that efforts should be stepped to support the least developed, landlocked and small island developing states to reduce vulnerability and build resilience, she added that “It is critical that, across the world, we focus on those furthest behind first. Because in all regions, the rising tide of optimism and empowerment, has not yet reached everyone.”

She also underlined the need to address growing inequalities around the globe

as well as combat gender discrimination which continues to limit the opportunities and potential of women and girls in all countries.

Looking ahead, Ms. Mohammed said that focus would be based on broadly three principles: strengthening impartial leadership of the UN development system for coherence and integration at all levels; addressing the trust deficit to entail accountability and transparency at all levels; and being responsive to national priorities.

“Solutions from the past will not, alone, meet the challenges of the future,” she underlined.

The UN Deputy Secretary-General also spoke of the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) process that established a sequenced approach to the review of the UN development system as well as on the empowerment of Resident Coordinators and implementation of standard operating procedures for UN Country Teams.

Noting that the world has a unique, once-in-a-generation opportunity to deliver a better future for all humanity, she stressed: “The task ahead is challenging, but nothing is impossible when we work together.”

Opening the segment, ECOSOC Vice-President Cristián Barros said the Council would contribute to the implementation of the QCPR in three ways: by laying the foundation for its work after the receipt of comprehensive proposals requested from the Secretary-General in the QCPR; by discussing concrete steps that the UN development system can initiate immediately to enhance system-wide coherence and efficiency; by reflecting on adjustments needed to improve impact of support provided to different groups of countries to deliver on the 2030 Agenda.

As a result of the deliberations in the general Assembly on the QCPR, Mr. Barros said there is now growing recognition among Member States that the UN development system is at a “critical juncture” where important decisions will need to be made for the Organization to effectively support delivery of the 2030 Agenda.

This is why the new QCPR resolution of the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare proposals for their consideration in the course of this year on the system’s functions and capacities.

“These options will enable Member States to make decisions on the changes required at different levels for the kind of transformation we need to bring the UN development system up to speed with the level of ambition of the 2030 Agenda,” he said.

[Russia, China block Security Council action on use of chemical weapons in Syria](#)

28 February 2017 – With ‘no’ votes from permanent members Russia and China, the United Nations Security Council today failed to adopt a resolution that would, according to press reports, have imposed sanctions against parties using chemical weapons in war-torn Syria.

While nine of the Council’s members voting in favour, Bolivia joined Russia and China in rejecting the text, as Egypt, Ethiopia and Kazakhstan abstained. A negative vote – or veto – from one of the Council’s five permanent members means a resolution cannot be adopted.

Media reports suggest that the draft resolution would have established a sanctions regime, a committee and an expert panel to hold accountable those using and producing chemical weapons in Syria. The text would also have imposed sanctions on a number of individuals and entities linked to the use of chemical weapons in cases where responsibility was established by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM).

The Council came together on 19 December to unanimously adopt a resolution demanding that all parties to the Syrian conflict ensure immediate and unhindered access for the monitoring of evacuations from eastern Aleppo.

But today’s decision comes after the Council’s two most recent failed attempts to take action on Syria: on 8 October, Russia vetoed a resolution that would have called for an end to military flights over Aleppo; and on 5 December, a measure calling for a seven-day ceasefire in the beleaguered city failed to pass after negative votes by both China and Russia. In the past five years, Russia has vetoed seven Council texts on the Syrian conflict, while China has vetoed six of those seven.

[Speech: “This is Russia’s seventh veto on Syria in five years.”](#)

Thank you Mr President.

I am appalled that Russia has vetoed this resolution today and I am surprised and disappointed that China has chosen to join them – at complete odds with the principles of non-proliferation that both China and Russia claim to

support so strongly.

As permanent members of this Council and as Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, Russia and China have a clear responsibility to take action against the use and proliferation of chemical weapons. By vetoing this resolution today, they have undermined the credibility of this Council and of the international rules preventing the use of these barbaric weapons.

In Security Council resolution 2118 we all agreed – Russia and China included – that any use of chemical weapons by anyone in the Syrian Arab Republic will lead to this Council imposing measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Thanks to those vetoes today, we have failed to do so.

This wasn't a political text. It was a technical resolution in response to an impartial and factual report by the Security Council-mandated Joint UN-OPCW Investigative Mechanism. It was a report we all called for. It was an investigation we all supported.

But instead of backing the resolution, we have seen yet again that Russia is prepared to abuse its veto power to stand by a regime that has no regard for its own people. That has no regard for the most basic rules of war or international treaties; a regime that has indiscriminately bombed and besieged its own people. A regime that has turned chemical weapons on its own population, killing six year old children like Mohammed.

This is Russia's seventh veto on Syria in five years. What further evidence do we need that Russia will always prioritise the Asad regime over the protection of the Syrian people? Well, today we have learnt that they will plunge to new depths; that they would rather cover up for Asad than prevent the further use and proliferation of chemical weapons.

The Russians will say this resolution is based on weak or flawed evidence. But the JIM was a fully independent UN mechanism which Russia created. Russia agreed the methodology the JIM would apply. And yet when they came up with an answer Russia didn't like, all of a sudden, there's a problem.

Russia's answer is that Syria should conduct its own investigation. The idea that the guilty party should investigate itself is absurd and it is clearly recorded that the JIM's investigation has been obstructed by the Syrian regime.

Russia will claim the JIM doesn't meet a legal standard of evidence. Well, it was never intended to. As we all agreed in SCR 2235 it was meant to examine the available evidence in an impartial manner and come to a conclusion.

Russia will claim that we should be focusing on Daesh's use of chemical weapons. But we already have robust and comprehensive measures in place to combat Daesh. The draft resolution would have reaffirmed our commitment to those measures and reiterated our condemnation of Daesh.

Russia will say that supporting this resolution will disrupt the Syrian political process. Well, this is simply not true. The United Kingdom remains committed to working with Russia, and everyone else, through the UN to help

the Syrian people reach a lasting political settlement.

But not taking action against chemical weapons use undermines confidence in the international community's ability to tackle flagrant violations of international law. It undermines confidence and trust of ordinary Syrians affected by these horrific attacks. This is no way to build the right conditions for successful political talks.

Despite Russia and China's actions Mr President, I want to reiterate our thanks to the JIM for their work and to international partners who helped the JIM. Because of that tireless work, we know without doubt that the Asad regime and Daesh used toxic chemicals as weapons against civilians in Syria.

Those responsible for such attacks remain free and unpunished to this day. Today we had a chance to step up and begin to end that impunity. Instead, Russia and China have let down the people of Marea, the people of Talamenes, Sarmin and Qaminas, and the wider international community that seeks justice for those horrific attacks.

Without a clear response to these flagrant abuses of international law, the Asad regime is only going to be emboldened to preserve its chemical weapons capabilities and to continue to use those chemical weapons. We should all be concerned by reports of further chemical weapons use in Syria, most recently in Aleppo and East Hama last year.

And in response to these vetoes, Daesh too will surely only be encouraged to continue using chemical weapons – something that Russia claims to oppose. And the longer term credibility and utility of the Chemical Weapons Convention will also suffer.

But the United Kingdom will not let Russia's actions today stop us from working with international partners to see justice for the victims, and to prevent the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere. This includes the international, impartial and independent mechanism on Syria agreed by the General Assembly last year. We must be able to demonstrate that the international system works, and that we are able to bring those responsible for using chemical weapons to account. Anything less is not an option.

Thank you.

Speech: "Will we take action against those who use chemical weapons in Syria? It's that simple."

Thank you Mr President.

This Council is about to be asked a simple question. Will we take action against those who use chemical weapons in Syria? It's that simple.

Will we take action on behalf of those whose lives have been destroyed by these senseless weapons?

Will we take action for people like Mohammed Abdul-Razzuk Alhashash?

Thanks to the testimony of those on the ground, we know that Mohammed was admitted to hospital at 1:30 PM on the 21st of April 2014. A couple of hours earlier a Syrian regime helicopter had dropped two containers on his home town of Talmenes, exposing him and many others to a yellow toxic gas.

After the attack Mohammed was unable to breathe. He lost consciousness. On arrival at hospital he was intubated under mechanical ventilation. His face was red. Pink foam poured from his mouth. His pupils were dilated. His lungs were crackling. His heartbeat and breathing stopped. CPR was performed but all attempts to revive him failed. Mohammad died at two o'clock. He was six years old.

Mohammed is why we are here today. We are here in this Chamber to begin to bring justice for him, for his family and for the hundreds, if not thousands of other Syrians whose stories are all too similar to his own.

This isn't about politics. At its core this isn't really about the JIM or the OPCW. Forget the acronyms. This isn't even about Syria. This is about taking a stand when children are poisoned. It's that simple. It's about taking a stand when civilians are maimed and murdered with toxic weapons; weapons used in complete disregard for the international rules and norms that we all claim to uphold.

So in a moment when we are asked to vote on this resolution, I hope that all members of this Council will lift their hands in favour of this text – and do so with Mohammed in their minds.

Thank you.

[People fleeing war more likely to find shelter in poorer countries, says UN refugee agency](#)

28 February 2017 – Most of the 3.2 million people driven forcibly from their homes in early 2016 found shelter in low- and middle-income countries, according to a new study by the United Nations refugee agency.

“The biggest contributors providing a safe haven to the world’s uprooted people are poorer communities,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi in a news release yesterday.

More than half the new refugees in the first half of 2016 fled Syria’s conflict, with most staying in the immediate region – Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt, according to the UN Refugee Agency’s (UNHCR) Mid-Year Trends 2016 report.

Other sizable groups fled Iraq, Burundi, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan, the UN agency reported.

For example, relative to the sizes of their populations, Lebanon and Jordan host the largest number of refugees, while in terms of economic performance the biggest burdens are carried by South Sudan and Chad.

“Today we face not so much a crisis of numbers but of cooperation and solidarity,” Mr. Grandi said.

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Of all countries, Turkey sheltered the greatest number of refugees, hosting 2.8 million by mid-2016. It was followed by Pakistan (1.6 million), Lebanon (one million), Iran (978,000), Ethiopia (742,700), Jordan (691,800), Kenya (523,500), Uganda (512,600), Germany (478,600) and Chad (386,100).

Speaking earlier this month, he criticized the politicizing of refugees in Europe, the United States, and other industrialized countries and regional blocks.

“These are people that flee from danger, they’re not dangerous themselves,” he had said.