

## Syria negotiations may not yield breakthrough, but momentum needs to be maintained – UN envoy

22 February 2017 – A day before negotiations on the crisis in Syria kick off in Geneva, the United Nations Special Envoy for the war-torn country acknowledged that while he is “not expecting a breakthrough,” the proactive momentum needs to be sustained, and the top United Nations relief official told the Security Council that the country’s humanitarian needs would remain critical for a long time.

“As has been stated so many times already, there is no humanitarian or military solution to this conflict,” the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Stephen O’Brien, told the Security Council today.

“A genuine political commitment to peace will be needed if 2017 is to offer any different prospect than the death and destruction of the past six years,” he added, emphasizing the need for fighting to stop.

The conflict, now into its sixth year, has left hundreds of thousands of women, men and children dead and millions more dependent on aid both within the country and beyond Syria’s borders.

However, humanitarian actors continue face myriad challenges in reaching those most in need.

In particular, Mr. O’Brien voiced serious concerns over continued attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, which have further limited humanitarian access to those areas, as well as leading to further displacements that in turn add to the humanitarian needs.

He also underlined that the conflict has taken its worst toll on children: thousands have been killed and maimed or have lost their parents to the violence. Many more have suffered physical and psychological trauma, forced into early marriages and lag years behind in school.

The formal education system has lost about 150,000 education personnel and one in three schools in the country have been damaged, destroyed or rendered inaccessible, and 5.82 million children and youth from pre-school to secondary school-age are in need of education assistance inside Syria.

Concluding his briefing, the UN relief chief urged: “The eyes of all of Syria, and the eyes of the world, are looking to Geneva [where intra-Syrian negotiations will be held].”

“Millions of battered and beleaguered women, men and children depend on meaningful action and the constructive engagement by the Syrian parties and their allies [...] to assure Syrians that an end to the conflict may finally be

within reach.”

*I am not expecting a breakthrough, but I am determined to keep the momentum – UN envoy*

Also today, speaking to the press in Geneva, the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, said is critical that the momentum provided by the negotiations “outpace” those that wished to see the negotiations come to nothing.

“There are spoilers, we have seen it all the time during the last talks and perhaps they may even be attempting or tempted to [do] something before or during the talks to provoke one side or the other to walk out,” he warned.

“I am not expecting a breakthrough, but I am expecting and determined for keeping a very proactive momentum,” said Mr. de Mistura, highlighted the need to “outpace” those wished to “spoil” the negotiations and see that it come to nothing.

“There is a rush between us and the spoilers [...] we have to outpace those few but clear spoilers with momentum on the political track,” he added.

On the eve of the UN-facilitated negotiations between the parties to the conflict in Syria, Mr. de Mistura said he would be continuing to push for a resolution to the conflict based on Security Council Resolution 2254 that endorsed a road map for peace process in war-battered Middle East nation, including non-sectarian governance, a new constitution and free and fair elections.

Also, the UN envoy said that while the ceasefire remained fragile, it was largely holding and noted that “we would not have been able to have these talks if there was a breakdown of the cease-fire.”

Mr. de Mistura added that the bottom line remains that it is “delicate moment” and that there are fragile incidents but these need to be controlled and need to be taken care of.

In conclusion, he noted that one should not focus too much on the rhetoric and even dismissive statements but instead to “look for the substance, for what would happen during the talks and at the end of the talks,” he said.

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## [Central African Republic: Four UN peacekeepers wounded in ambush by armed group](#)

African Republic has reported that its troops on patrol were ambushed yesterday outside of Ippy in Ouaka prefecture.

During the exchange of fire with the FPRC's (*Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de Centrafrique*) coalition, four peacekeepers were wounded, including one severely, according to the Office of Spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, which added that the attackers fled the scene after the incident.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, plunged the country of 4.5 million people into civil conflict in 2013.

In a news release issued earlier this month, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSCA) had stressed that two factions of the ex-Séléka armed group, namely the FPRC coalition and UPC *Mouvement pour l'Unité et la Paix en Centrafrique*, represent a threat for civilian populations and that UN peacekeepers will respond in case of violence.

The spokesperson's office said that peacekeepers prevented a hostile crowd – including members of the FPRC – from entering a camp for internally displaced persons in Ippy, which is some 70 miles from the city of Bambari, earlier yesterday. Some people in the crowd fired at peacekeepers, who returned fire, killing two FPRC members.

MINUSCA reiterated its resolve to use force to protect civilians in accordance with its mandate and calls on all armed groups to immediately cease hostilities and to resolve any dispute through dialogue within the framework of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation, the office added.

Meanwhile, the UPC leader, Ali Darassa, left Bambari yesterday following the Mission's calls for him to leave the town, the office said. The Mission has reinforced its police presence in Bambari.

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**Speech: “This is only the meaningful path to long-term peace in Ukraine. And until this path is taken, sanctions against Russia must remain in place.”**

Thank you Mr President and I welcome Foreign Minister Kurz to the Security Council. I'm grateful for your briefing just now. Your chairmanship of the

OSCE, together with Austria hosting the OSCE and parts of the United Nations, shows how central your country is to international cooperation and to the rules-based system.

Sadly, as we heard here yesterday, the rules-based system is under threat. It's a threat that we talk about often in this chamber, but to the residents of cities like Marinka, this threat is a horrifying, daily reality. For the past three years, the people there have lived in fear, subject to the daily, unrelenting dangers that have become the norm on the front line in eastern Ukraine. Residents there speak of daily sniper fire, of daily shelling, the daily scramble for shelter. For nearly three years, they have survived without gas supplies, in the face of plummeting temperatures every winter.

These are the consequences of Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. This is what happens when the rules based system is attacked. We cannot allow this to become the new normal. We must use all of the tools at our disposal in response.

The OSCE has a critical role to play – and I'd like to commend the role of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in particular, working tirelessly under the able direction of Chief Monitor Apakan. It's thanks to the bravery of the OSCE's monitors that we know what's going on in places like Marinka. It's thanks to them that we know that ceasefire violations this year have already reached record highs.

It is unacceptable that the Mission continues to be fired upon and to face restrictions on access. Such actions, so often perpetrated by the separatists, only fuels suspicion that the separatists are concealing activity at odds with the Minsk agreements.

So I hope that we can all be clear today that aggression towards monitors must stop and the Mission must be given unrestricted access to all of Ukraine, including the disengagement areas and those parts of the border with Russia not under Ukraine's control.

As we heard yesterday, the long term solution to the situation in Eastern Ukraine requires Russia to end its destabilising activities in the region, comply with its commitments under the Minsk agreements, withdraw its weapons and personnel, use its considerable influence over the separatists to bring an end to the killing, and return Crimea to its rightful place as part of Ukraine. This is only the meaningful path to long-term peace in Ukraine. And until this path is taken, sanctions against Russia must remain in place.

Beyond Ukraine, we should not lose sight of this Council's need to work closely with the Austrian OSCE chairmanship to resolve other issues affecting the region and help protect fundamental rights and freedoms. These include protracted conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabkh.

We also value the vital role the OSCE plays in risk reduction in the region and we welcome the launch of the Structured Dialogue. We support your focus, Mr Foreign Minister, on youth and radicalisation, where the OSCE with its

cross-dimensional approach to security can add real value.

If the OSCE is to respond to these and other challenges, we must also continue to strengthen the organisation. One way to do that is through strong appointments and I'm pleased that the UK has put forward an excellent candidate for the High Commissioner on National Minorities position in the OSCE as a sign of our continued commitment to the organisation.

We are also pleased that our Ambassador to the OSCE is chairing the OSCE Human Dimension Committee this year and working closely with the Austrian Chairmanship.

In conclusion, Mr President, events in Eastern Ukraine reinforce just how important the OSCE is to international cooperation. The work being done there is vital to the beleaguered residents of Marinka and to all Ukrainians in the East of the country. Sadly events in Ukraine highlight the threats that countries in the OSCE area, and the rules based system as a whole, continue to face. If we are to respond to them effectively, we must continue to strengthen the OSCE, and with it, this Council's cooperation.

Thank you.

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## **OSCE seeks to defuse conflicts, combat radicalization and build trust, UN Security Council told**

22 February 2017 – Multilateral cooperation is the only way to achieve peace, security and stability, and there is no alternative to it, Austria's Foreign Minister told the United Nations Security Council today, underscoring the work of his country in its role as the Chair of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

"As you can imagine, chairing OSCE is not an easy task," said Sebastian Kurz, Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria, citing the difficulty in finding consensus among the regional body's 57 States.

"Austria has taken over the OSCE chairmanship at a critical moment. Everywhere we look, there are grave threats to peace and security," he added.

He said that the Austrian chairmanship will seek to contribute to defusing existing conflicts, create a platform to assist States in their efforts to combat radicalization and violent extremism, and help rebuild trust between the OSCE States.

On the crisis in and around Ukraine, he said the OSCE has demonstrated its crucial role in brokering a ceasefire and its special monitoring mission has helped prevent a worsening of the situation. However, support is needed to increase the number of monitors on the ground, improve the technical equipment for monitoring and extend the operating hours along the contact line between Government and non-Government armed forces, he said.

Austria will also support all efforts to achieve progress on other conflict situations, including those in Transnistria, Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Turning to radicalization and terrorism, he said more than 10,000 people from the OSCE area have joined the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh). The most vulnerable group to be radicalized is youth, Mr. Kurz said, adding that he has appointed Peter Neumann, an expert on terrorism, as his special representative on radicalisation.

The Austrian chairmanship will also try to resume discussions on conventional arms control in Europe, and seek to launch a structured dialogue on current and future challenges and risks to security in the OSCE area.

Cyber security and social and economic cooperation – two issues discussed in Vienna recently – are areas where everybody stands to gain from more cooperation, and success in these areas will lead to more trust, he stressed.

“The same is true for human rights, the rule of law and democracy. Together we can strengthen the cohesiveness and resilience of our societies to better counter threats to our security,” he said.

In closing, he welcomed the establishment of a UN liaison office in Vienna that would enable even stronger cooperation between the OSCE and the UN.

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## **Tackling hunger crises in South Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria and Yemen requires \$4.4 billion – UN**

22 February 2017 – Sounding the alarm on behalf of more than 20 million people in South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, and north-east Nigeria facing devastating levels of food insecurity, Secretary-General António Guterres joined other top United Nations officials today calling for “strong and urgent” action from the international community to help the already-fragile countries avert catastrophe.

“Famine is already a reality in parts of South Sudan. Unless we act now, it is only a matter of time until it affects other areas and other countries. We are already facing a tragedy; we must avoid it becoming a

catastrophe,&#8221 said the Secretary-General, stressing: &#8220This is preventable if the international community takes decisive action.&#8221

Briefing the press at UN Headquarters in New York alongside the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator, Helen Clark, and by video conference, the Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), Ertharin Cousin, Mr. Guterres said the UN needs at least \$4.4 billion by the end of March to avert a catastrophe.

&#8220Despite some generous pledges, just \$90 million has actually been received so far &#8211 around two cents for every dollar needed. We are at the beginning of the year, but these numbers are very worrying,&#8221 he said: &#8220The lives of millions of people depend on our collective ability to act. In our world of plenty, there is no excuse for inaction or indifference.&#8221

In South Sudan, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners aim to assist 5.8 million people this year; in Somalia, 5.5 million people and in Yemen 8.3 million. In north-east Nigeria, humanitarians are reaching more than two million people with food assistance.

These four crises are very different, but are all preventable. "They all stem from conflict, which we must do much more to prevent and resolve," he said, urging all members of the international community to step up and do whatever is in their power, whether that is mobilizing support, exerting political pressure on parties to conflict, or funding humanitarian operations.

"Saving lives is the first priority, but we are also looking to build longer-term resilience to shocks," Mr. Guterres said, noting that UNDP Administrator and the Emergency Relief Coordinator will set up a steering committee to link the UN Development Group and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee for humanitarian assistance to ensure a coordinated long-term approach.

**VIDEO:** Speaking at a joint press conference on humanitarian crises in Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, United Nations Secretary-General chief Ant3nio Guterres today urged the international community to 'step up' and take 'decisive action' to prevent devastating food insecurity levels from becoming a catastrophe.

Speaking next, Mr. O'Brien, who is also the UN Under-Secretary-General for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, reemphasized the ongoing effort to ensure that development and humanitarian partners will work together to tackle these crises. "We want to help people survive," he said, "but we also want to help them build more durable solutions so they will not be left in vulnerable situations."

He went on to stress that almost 1.4 million children are at imminent risk of death from severe acute malnutrition this year, as famine looms in the four countries, an issue spotlighted yesterday by UNICEF. He said that catastrophe can be averted if action is taken now. The funding noted by the Secretary-General must be made available by the end of March to make a difference. "We

are ready to scale up [...] with brave and committed aid workers already in place.”

Miss Clark noted that the way forward on the four crises would very much reflect the “new way of working” among relief and development agencies agreed by the 2016 UN World Humanitarian Summit, which stressed that “the priority is saving lives and part of saving lives is building resilience for the future.”

For her part, Ms. Cousin said that in each of these four countries, “the plans are in place and the people are prepared to perform the work that is necessary. What we need is the resources and the access.”

“Acting now, before we reach the height of the lean season in these countries will ensure our ability to provide the support that is necessary to avoid what we all see on the horizon, which is a famine in each one of these countries if we fail to act,” she stated.

Carla Mucavi, the Director of UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Liaison Office in New York, and Justin Forsyth, the Deputy Executive Director of the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), also attended the briefing.