

Humanitarian actors need safe, unhindered access to help Yemen avert famine – UN aid chief

1 March 2017 – The people of crisis-torn Yemen urgently need humanitarian assistance and protection, especially in the north of the country where there is a threat of famine, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator warned today.

The overriding need, said Stephen O'Brien, is for all parties to the conflict to provide immediate and safe access so that humanitarian actors can provide what is needed to stave off famine.

"This will require [...] all parties to stop gamesmanship or efforts to support their side of the fight by producing bureaucratic impediments and delays, or doubts about inspection mechanisms so that commercial shipment can be restored and food and medicines, and crucially, fuel, so water can be pumped out of the aquifers and cereals, the main foodstuff in the remotest areas of the country, can be processed," he explained.

Briefing reporters at UN Headquarters in New York via telephone from the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, Mr. O'Brien recalled that he had headed directly to Yemen from the Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region, which had generated more than \$670 million in pledges to help sustain critical relief operations over the next two years and beyond across four counties where millions are in need of aid.

He said that along with Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Yemen is among the countries, which, for the first time in modern history, could fall into simultaneous famine. "The common factor between the four potential famines is that they are all in the context of man-made conflicts which have become protracted crises in the absence of a resolution of the underlying causes and an unwillingness of the parties to [...] find their way to a political track."

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Briefing alongside Jamie McGoldrick, the Resident Coordinator in Yemen, Mr. O'Brien highlighted the difficulties faced by relief agencies to bring aid to the communities that need it and reported that yesterday, he and his team were unable to reach the city of Taiz, because it had been stopped at military checkpoint even after assurances had been received.

"It was very disappointing but illustrative. If I could not get through, it would be much more difficult for caravans that require safe and unrestricted access to reach all people in need wherever they are," he said.

In this regard, he reported that he spoke with the Houthi authorities on his return to Sana'a and had been assured that effort would be made to open the

routes for the flow of food and other humanitarian supplies.

He went on to explain that the country's population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is growing and compounding the challenges of access, food insecurity and health care concerns.

As he continues his visit, Mr. O'Brien s, who is also the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, said he would meet with Houthi authorities and make clear the expectation that the UN and all humanitarian implementing partners – international and local – should have immediate, safe and unimpeded access to people in need, at all times, help avert a famine, and to help mobilize resources necessary at the pledging conflict in April in Geneva.

AUDIO: Continuing conflict in Yemen has left millions without adequate access to food and water, and the international community needs to do everything it can “now” to fund a major relief effort, says UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien.

[Speech: Home Secretary speech to Community Security Trust annual dinner](#)

Thank you very much Lloyd [Dorfman] for that kind introduction. It's a pleasure to be here tonight.

And when I walked around and said hello I was struck by how kind and welcoming everybody was, so thank you.

I must say, this venue has seen some very distinguished guests in its time.

Did you know that our Queen had ice skating lessons here as a child?

And, it was once used as a concert space for the Beatles, and for a time it was the home of British boxing.

A huge thank you to you Gerald [Ronson] as the Community Security Trust would not be the success it is without you and your determination. Thanks also to David Delew and to the staff of CST. And in particular, I want to pay tribute to the thousands of volunteers for their amazing commitment to keep the community safe – some of whom are outside, protecting us all on this cold, wet evening.

Since CST was established in 1994, the charity has fought hate and prejudice. It is a valued and trusted government partner which administers over £13 million of government grants for security guards and equipment at hundreds of Jewish schools, synagogues and other Jewish venues.

There are now over 5 and a half thousand security volunteers throughout the UK who have been trained by CST and day in, day out, these volunteers work with the government, the police, other religious groups and local communities to keep people safe and to fight hate crime.

And we only need to look at recent events – bomb hoaxes and the desecration of Jewish graves in America and the evacuation of the Jewish museum in north London this week following a bomb threat, to know how important this type of work is every day.

As you rightly said Lloyd [Dorfman], keeping our country safe is the first responsibility of any government, but terrorism remains a significant threat to us all.

As [Max Hill, the new independent reviewer of terrorism legislation](#) said at the weekend, Britain faces a level of terror threat not seen since the IRA bombings of the 1970s.

Since 2011, the number of terrorist attacks has increased globally, leading to a rise in the number of deaths and injuries. The most significant threat to the UK and our interests comes from Daesh.

There have been terrorist attacks on our doorstep in France, Germany and Belgium and attacks on British people overseas too.

The murder of 30 British nationals in Sousse in Tunisia in June 2015 represented the greatest loss of British life in a terrorist incident since the London bombings in 2005.

And as you've said, we've seen terrorists target Jews specifically in recent years including in Paris, Brussels, Toulouse and Copenhagen.

Just last month a 16-year-old girl was charged with terrorism offences in Denmark after she was caught planning to blow up a Jewish school.

And Daesh literature continues to identify the Jewish community as a 'desirable and legitimate' target.

But those who seek to do us harm do not all fit one profile and the senseless murder of our colleague Jo Cox last summer is a reminder of this. Her killer was Thomas Mair, an extreme right-wing terrorist.

Indeed, the UK faces a threat from the extreme right-wing which despite being fragmented, should not be ignored.

Far right and extreme right wing groups have become increasingly sophisticated in the ways they use social media for recruitment and promotion and we have seen that around a quarter of the people referred to our deradicalisation programme Channel last year were referred because of links to far right extremism.

But it's essential that you all feel safe where you live, work and spend your leisure time.

That is why at this very dinner in 2015, David Cameron announced over £11.5 million of new money to provide for security measures at Jewish schools, colleges, nurseries and other locations.

That is why last year, Theresa May continued the funding, announcing £13.4 million for that same purpose for 2016 to 2017.

And that is why today I would like to announce our continued support. We will be continuing the funding of the Jewish community protective security grant for 2017 to 2018.

We will provide £13.4 million for security measures in the Jewish community in the coming year.

This money will go towards security guards and protection at independent and state Jewish schools, nurseries, synagogues and community sites.

And we will continue to listen to the funding needs of the community going forward.

But however friendly and professional security guards are, I'm sure you would all prefer to go to your local synagogue or drop your child at school without being greeted by one and this is a future that we are all working towards.

In the meantime, I look forward to continuing the positive and productive relationship between the Home Office and CST.

But security measures alone are not enough.

We must deal with those who promote hatred, intolerance and violence.

That's why in 2015 this government introduced our [Counter Extremism Strategy](#) which focuses on four pillars: building partnerships with all those opposed to extremism, countering extremist ideologies, disrupting extremists and building cohesive communities. All these areas of work challenge extremism in all its forms – from Islamist to the far right.

And in December [I banned National Action](#), a terrorist group with homophobic, antisemitic views whose members had celebrated the murder of Jo Cox. Proscribing the group will prevent its membership from growing; its poisonous propaganda from spreading and it will protect vulnerable young people at risk of radicalisation from its toxic views.

My message is clear – hideous organisations like this one have absolutely no place in a Britain that works for everyone.

But in the event of an attempted attack, we have a prompt and local armed response ready.

Over recent years the Home Office has worked with the police and other emergency services to develop a strong, police-led capability to deal with large-scale firearms attacks in the UK.

We are providing £144 million over 5 years to uplift our armed policing capability and capacity so we can respond more quickly and effectively to a firearms attack. In addition, several forces are also funding their own armed uplift, bringing the total increase to approximately 1,500 armed officers. This will improve our response to any terrorist incident and help keep our communities safe.

But we must also do more to tackle hate crime and anti-Semitism.

As recent CST statistics have shown, there was a rise in the number of antisemitic hate crime incidents recorded last year. 1,309 were recorded – that's 36% more than the year before.

The most common type of incident involved verbal abuse randomly directed at visibly Jewish people in public as they went about their daily business.

Wearing a kippah, a sheitel or a star of David is a sign of faith and it's absolutely despicable if there are those who respond to these with aggression or abuse. And they will not get away with it.

In Britain we have some of the strongest legislation on hate crime anywhere in the world and one of the first things I did when I was appointed as Home Secretary was to introduce a new hate crime action plan which focuses on reducing hate crime, increasing reporting and improving support for victims.

I am pleased to see Cressida Dick here this evening. I know that like me, she understands the challenges we face from hate crime and the need to protect communities and I look forward to working with her when she takes up her new post as Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police.

Social media is changing where hate crime happens. It has become an essential tool for coordinated campaigns of antisemitic harassment, abuse and threats.

According to CST research there were 287 antisemitic incidents involving social media in 2016, compared to 185 the year before.

Just last month an internet troll who made antisemitic death threats to the Labour MP Luciana Berger was jailed for 27 months.

And this government is taking action. Last year, as part of our commitment to tackle online hatred we agreed with internet service providers including Google, Facebook and Twitter that they would remove illegal content within 24 hours of it being posted, meaning people are better protected online.

We are also working with internet service providers to demote hateful material so that it doesn't come up at the top of internet searches.

It can't be right that when you type Gena Turgel's name into search engines, instead of her story of surviving the holocaust, you bring up holocaust denial sites.

And of course, it goes without saying that I wish antisemitism was a subject of the past – something for historians to be baffled by and scholars to

debate the origins and demise of, but sadly that's not the case.

But be assured, we are doing what we can to confine antisemitism to the history books.

Our efforts to combat antisemitism have been internationally recognised as best practice and we have a cross-government working group which is devoted to tackling it.

This helps make sure that we are alive to any new issues and concerns the Jewish community might have and that we can respond quickly. My thanks to CST, the Board of Deputies, the Jewish Leadership Council and all the other representatives from the Jewish community who engage so proactively with us on this.

Thanks to Sir Eric's [Pickles] remarkable work, the UK has also become the first European country to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of antisemitism. This means that there is now one definition of it – in essence language or behaviour that displays hatred towards Jews because they are Jews. We have adopted this definition so that culprits won't be able to get away with being antisemitic because the term is ill-defined or because different organisations or bodies have different interpretations of it.

I'm very pleased that Barnet Council has become the first UK local authority to adopt the definition and I urge others to follow their example. Because antisemitism has no place in Great Britain's diverse and tolerant society and we know all too well where it can lead.

Indeed the Holocaust forms an ineradicable element of Jewish consciousness.

And I believe that it is important to have a physical reminder of where prejudice and intolerance can take mankind.

That is why we have committed £50 million for the building of a national UK Holocaust memorial and learning centre. This will ensure that awareness and remembrance of the Holocaust can be maintained as the final witnesses pass away.

Gerald [Ronson] – you've helped turn this idea into a reality and I know the Prime Minister has asked you to help with the public consultation for the ten shortlisted designs for the Holocaust memorial centre. I understand that a booklet with the design options will be given to all of you when you leave here tonight so please have a look and give your feedback. I've seen the options and there are some really interesting ones.

And Gerald [Ronson] – something you said at this dinner last year really sticks with me. You said that Jews are "the canary in the coal-mine. But this is one canary that has no intention of ending up dead in its cage".

This is a pertinent reminder that antisemitism must never be ignored, not least because it can indicate wider problems within society. It is also a reminder that the Jewish community is strong, resilient and resourceful.

Our Jewish community has made an immense contribution to all areas of life in Britain – from the arts – to architecture. From medicine to philanthropy.

And I am proud to be part of a government which is here to offer both practical and moral support to you where and when it is needed.

If you feel threatened we will listen to you and if you are victimised we will defend you.

And we will strive to build a Britain that Jews are proud to call home.

Thank you.

UN Mission in Colombia starts verification as FARC-EP begins turning in weapons

1 March 2017 – In a major step for the peace process in Colombia, the United Nations Mission in the country today started the verification of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP)'s laying down of arms.

According to a news release issued by the Mission yesterday, its observers will identify and register all weapons present in FARC-EP camps in the 26 zones where the group's members are currently located and where they will transition to civilian life.

Simultaneously, the Mission will install containers – are already in local sites – in the FARC-EP camps, where these will progressively receive weapons under the constant monitoring of its observers.

The process should conclude on 29 May, 180 days after the final peace agreement came into force.

As a first step of the gradual weapons storage process, the Mission will receive the armaments from the FARC-EP members who are part of the tripartite Monitoring and Verification Mechanism, added the news release.

In parallel and in coordination with the FARC-EP, the Mission will immediately begin the process of planning and verification of the destruction of unstable weapons and munition, mines and explosives.

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Also in the release, the Mission welcomed the parties' decision to initiate the weapons laydown process without further delay, despite logistical

challenges which continue to hamper the successful implementation of the final peace agreement.

“This is a partial but substantive advance in the laying down of arms process, which [we] value as a good starting point towards overcoming implementation delays,” said the UN Mission.

“We trust that this process can be accelerated, as part of a virtuous dynamic of simultaneous progress in the implementation of all aspects of the Peace Agreement. This will inspire confidence to those who were party to the conflict and to Colombian society as a whole.”

The UN Mission also noted that values the decisions announced by the Government today regarding the legal guarantees of FARC-EP members.

“This will be a factor of tranquillity in the complex process of transition to civilian life,” noted the Mission.

Group of Secretaries presents ideas on “Transport and Communications” to PM

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Mental anguish ‘adds weight’ to argument for ending capital punishment – UN rights chief

1 March 2017 – The United Nations human rights chief today reiterated his call to abolish the death penalty as it raises serious issues in relation to the dignity and rights of all human beings, including the right to life and the right not to be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

“International and national bodies have determined that several methods of execution are likely to violate the prohibition of torture, because of the pain and suffering they are likely to inflict on the convicted person,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, at the opening of the biennial high-level panel discussion on the death penalty, which was organized as part of the Human Rights Council’s current session.

“Studies of the severe pain and suffering caused by other methods has continued to extend this list, to the point where it has become increasingly difficult for a State to impose the death penalty without violating international human rights law,” he stated.

He added that the long and highly stressful period that most individuals endure while waiting on ‘death row’ for years, or even decades, and frequently in isolation, for an uncertain outcome, has also been referenced as constituting torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

This “death row phenomenon” has been recognized by the UN Human Rights Committee and other bodies at the international, regional and domestic levels, as well as by the California Supreme Court.

When the authorities fail to give adequate information about the timing of executions, they keep not only the convicted person but also his children and other family members in permanent anticipation of imminent death, he explained.



Opening of the biennial high-level panel discussion on the death penalty, organized as part of the Human Rights Council’s current session. 1 March 2017. UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

“The severe mental and physical suffering which are inflicted by capital punishment on the person concerned and family members should now be added to the weight of the argument,” Mr. Zeid said, explaining that this is another reason why the death penalty should be abolished, besides its capricious and often discriminatory application and its failure to demonstrate any deterrent effect beyond that of other punishments.

The UN rights chief recalled that a former Special Rapporteur has recommended that the Human Rights Council request a comprehensive legal study regarding the emergence of a customary norm according to which the death penalty constitutes torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

It has been 10 years since the General Assembly resolution of December 2007 which urged States to adopt a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, with a view towards its full abolition.

Over this decade, the global trend against capital punishment has become increasingly strong, with almost three out of four countries now having either abolished it or stopped practicing it.

However, the overall number of executions in States that continue to resort to the death penalty has increased in the last two years, and some States in which a moratorium had been in place for many years have recently resumed executions.

“I take this opportunity, once again to urge all States to end use of the

death penalty," Mr. Zeid said.