

Think of those fleeing Syria and elsewhere not with fear but with open arms and open heart – UN agency chief

1 February 2017 – Expressing shock at the scale of the devastation in war-ravaged city of Aleppo, the top United Nations refugee official today made an impassioned plea for the world to stand in solidarity with those suffering from the effects of conflict there in Syria, as well as in other places such as Iraq, Somalia and Yemen.

“There are people here, some of them are returning to these ruins, who need help, immediate help. They are cold, they are hungry, they need to work to earn some money, they need the elementary things in life in this very ancient city,” said Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, presently in Aleppo as part of his mission to Syria.

Stating that despite following the crisis closely, nothing prepared him for immensity of the destruction, and the sights in the war-torn country will weigh very heavily on the conscience of the world for generations.

“When you see children’s clothes hanging out of windows, kitchens cut in half by shells and rockets, the real lives of people interrupted by war as it was happening [...] You drive for miles and miles you see destroyed civilian houses, destroyed schools, destroyed hospitals. Everything has been ruined,” he added.

Drawing attention to the plight of those who fled such places, he stressed: “This is what refugees from Syria, who are now denied entry [to the United States], have fled from.”

“And it is not just here in Aleppo, although this is massive. Refugees from Somalia, refugees from Yemen, refugees from Iraq – they all flee from destruction like this, from devastation like this.”

Appealing to the global community for accelerated and immediate for humanitarian assistance, High Commissioner Grandi said: “All the Syrian people need help. We cannot abandon them because the crisis is not over.”

“How can we turn them back? How can we not consider giving them protection? At least, for the time while the conflict is continuing, this is what they are escaping from – millions of them,” he said, adding: “The world has to go back to solidarity, has to think again of these people – not with fear, not with suspicion, but with open arms, with an open mind, with an open heart.”

US measures suspending refugee resettlement should be lifted, says UN chief Guterres

1 February 2017 – Reacting to the recent suspension by the United States of its longstanding refugee programme, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today said resettlement is often “the only possible solution” for people fleeing conflict and persecution, and that the US policy, which bars entry of Syrians into the country, “should be removed sooner rather than later.”

Asked about the impact of the Executive Order signed by President Donald Trump on 27 January, that, among things, halts the entire US refugee programme for 120 days, bars entry of refugees from seven mostly Muslim countries for 90 days and suspends entry of Syrians until further notice, the UN chief said resettlement is “a must [...] and the United States has always been at the forefront of refugee protection. Syrians are those that at present have the most dramatic needs.”

Mr. Guterres, speaking to the press at UN headquarters just after returning from a trip to Ethiopia for the African Union Summit, emphasized: “In my opinion, the US policy is not the way [...] to best protect the US or any other country, in relation to the serious concerns that exist about the possibility of terrorist infiltration. I don’t think this is the effective way to do so and I think these measures should be removed sooner rather than later.”

Noting that the measures “violate our basic principles,” he said they are not effective if the objective is to avoid terrorist entering the US.

More to follow...

Probationers of Indian defence accounts service call on President

A group of probationers of Indian Defence Accounts Service (2015 batch) called on the President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee today (January 2, 2017) at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Syria: UN, Security Council welcome Astana talks and look forward to intra-Syrian negotiations

1 February 2017 – The United Nations and the Security Council have welcomed the international talks on Syria held in the Kazakh capital of Astana, and, in separate accounts to the press, said they look forward to the resumption of the intra-Syrian negotiations.

Speaking to journalists earlier today in what was his first press conference in New York since taking office in January, Secretary-General António Guterres said the UN presence in Astana was essential to the resumption of talks in Geneva expected to begin later this month.

“Our presence in Astana was an absolute must, in order to guarantee that after Astana we could have Geneva, and in Geneva you could discuss the key political aspects that are essential to be on the table,” Mr. Guterres said.

The two-day talks in Astana were the first time that the Syrian opposition participated in the discussions alongside representatives of the Syrian Government.

The closed-door meeting – convened by Iran, Russia and Turkey, with a representative from the United States attending as an observer – resulted in an agreement on how to monitor the ceasefire effort started in December 2016.

In a statement released late last night, the Council called the international meeting in Astana “a step towards a strengthened ceasefire.”

The Council’s 15 members said they hoped it would lead to fewer violations, and noted the need for “secure safe and unimpeded” humanitarian access in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

They also expressed hope that the meeting would lead to progress in reaching a political settlement and to efforts to prevent and suppress terrorist activities by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, also known as ISIL or Da’esh, the Al-Nusra Front and others.

The members “look forward” to the resumption of intra-Syrian talks, they said, and encouraged the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, to re-convene the negotiations “as soon as possible.”

Speaking to journalists yesterday following his briefing to the Council, Mr. de Mistura said he had asked the Council to postpone the UN facilitated talks from 8 February until 20 February, in order to give the country’s opposition more time to unite and participate as one group.

“We want to give a chance to this Astana initiative to actually implement itself,” the Special Envoy said.

The talks in Geneva are guided by the UN Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), which endorsed a roadmap for a peace process in Syria, including issues of governance, constitution and elections.

UN envoy strongly condemns attack on UN team near Nigeria-Cameroon border

1 February 2017 – Strongly condemning an attack against a United Nations monitoring team near the Nigeria-Cameroon border that resulted in the death of five persons, the UN envoy for West Africa and the Sahel region, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, called on both countries to take swift action to bring the perpetrators to justice.

According to preliminary reports, at around 14:00 hours, yesterday, an unknown armed group attacked a UN Technical Monitoring Team, killing five individuals – a UN independent contractor, three Nigerians nationals and one Cameroonian national – and injuring several others.

The team was conducting a field mission in the vicinity of Hosere Jongbi, near Kontcha, Cameroon, about 700 kilometres north of the capital Yaoundé, as part of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission mandate.

In a news release issued by the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Mr. Chambas reiterated the vital role of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission in accomplishing the border demarcation, in compliance with a judgment of the International Court of Justice, and in contributing to stability and security in the region.

He also offered his condolences to the families of those killed in the attack and wished a speedy recovery to those injured.

The Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission was established by the UN Secretary-General, at the request of Presidents of Cameroon and Nigeria, in 2002, to settle border issues between the two West African neighbours.

The Mixed Commission's mandate includes demarcation of the land boundary and delimitation of the maritime boundary between the two countries; withdrawal of troops and transfer of authority in the Lake Chad area, along the land boundary and in the Bakassi Peninsula; addressing the situation of populations affected by the demarcation activities; and development of recommendations on confidence-building measures aiming at promoting peaceful cross-border cooperation.