

Fresh violence in Central African Republic's western town displaces thousands, UN office says

3 February 2017 – Condemning attacks on civilians and non-governmental organizations in a town in Central African Republic (CAR)'s Ouham-Pendé province, a senior United Nations humanitarian official has called for protecting civilians as well as for unhindered relief access to the affected areas.

According to the office of the Humanitarian Coordinator in CAR, outbreak of violence between two armed groups in the town of Bocaranga reportedly killed and injured civilians as well as displacing some 9,000 people are sheltering in forests about 15-20 kilometres away from the town.

In the clashes, international non-governmental organization compounds were attacked and pillaged and at-least one office was burnt down. Moreover, shops and markets were “systematically pillaged,” as was one church.

“I urge all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law and to ensure the protection of civilians,” said Michel Yao, the Acting Humanitarian Coordinator in the country.

“Attack against aid workers is a crime against humanity,” he added.

Prior to the latest flare-up of violence there were already 15,000 persons from Kouï (located about 35 kilometres east of Bocaranga) who were displaced the town due to the violence that occurred there last September.

These displacements come on the back of already more than 400,000 persons displaced due to conflict.

The humanitarian needs in CAR are increasing while financial resources remain scarce.

In January, together with the Government, the humanitarian community in CAR launched a \$400 million response plan for the 2017-2019 period to meet the basic needs of 2.2 million people.

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. Despite significant progress and successful elections, CAR has remained in the grip of instability and sporadic unrest.

Refugees fleeing danger are 'not dangerous themselves' – UN agency chief

3 February 2017 – The head of the United Nations refugee agency today warned developed countries against politicizing the issue of refugees, stressing that the move risked undermining the principle of international solidarity with those fleeing war and persecution.

“These are people that flee from danger, they’re not dangerous themselves,” UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi told reporters in Lebanon’s capital, Beirut following a four-day visit to Syria, where he witnessed first-hand the massive destruction caused by nearly six years of conflict.

“We have serious concerns, and these are not new concerns, we’ve had them for some time, that the refugee issue in the industrialized world – in Europe, the US, Australia – is very politicized. It shouldn’t be,” Mr. Grandi said, urging rich countries to show generosity to refugees, rather than regarding them as a threat.

According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Mr. Grandi is the first senior UN official to visit Syria since Turkey and Russia brokered a ceasefire last month.

Mr. Grandi said that the recent decision by the United States to suspend its refugee resettlement programme would negatively impact the most vulnerable individuals.

“Resettlement means taking refugees from places like Lebanon, where they are already refugees, selecting the most vulnerable and taking them to other places,” he said. “If we weaken that programme, as has been done in the United States, this is a very dangerous weakening of the international solidarity for refugees.”

UNHCR estimates that 20,000 refugees in precarious circumstances might have been resettled to the US in the 120 days covered by the suspension set out in an Executive Order signed one week ago by President Donald Trump.

Mr. Grandi expressed his hope that the US would resume resettlements following its internal review of the programme.

As for the situation in Syria, he described progress in his discussions with the Government on humanitarian access in hard-to-reach areas, and expressed hope that some aid convoys could reach parts of Homs in the coming days.

On the issue of refugees returning to Syria, the High Commissioner said that while many were keen to go home, the political and security situation in the country currently made it impossible for large numbers to do so.

“People need to return eventually to Syria, and we all agree that that’s the ideal solution. But we need to be patient,” Mr. Grandi said. “More progress needs to be made politically, then economically and infrastructure-wise in order for conditions to be there to have large returns.”

[Adhere to safeguards, avoid measures that push back refugees, UNICEF, UN rights experts urge Europe](#)

3 February 2017 – As Europe Union leaders gather today in Malta to discuss new measures on migration, including increased cooperation with Libya, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and UN rights experts underlined the need to ensure that children are protected and that migrants should not be pushed back to places where their safety is at risk.

Emphasizing the need to prevent exploitation and trafficking of children, UNICEF called on the European Union (EU) and its member States to “adhere fully to the principle of *non-refoulement* as sending children back into harm’s way or returning boats to Libya without a proper plan to protect them, would only add to their hardship.”

It also called for committing resources to strengthen child protection programmes in Libya and for investment in reception and care centres in the country.

“These centres should provide education and health services, and should never be used to detain children based on their migration status,” the agency added.

It also called for additional support to credible resettlement and family reunification programmes so that desperate refugees and migrants do not have to turn to smugglers and risk their lives.

According to the UN agency, a record number of refugee and migrant deaths in the Mediterranean have been reported over the past three months, including an estimated 190 children.



Tripoli Red Crescent teams salvage another body of a migrant, found floating in the sea water in Libya. Photo: Mohamed Ben Khalifa/IRIN

“The growing number of children lost at sea underscores the acute danger of the journey from North Africa to Italy, as well as the pressing need for governments on both sides of the Mediterranean to do more to keep them safe,”

said UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Justin Forsyth.

“The decisions taken at the summit could literally mean the difference between life and death for thousands of children transiting or stranded in Libya. They need urgent action now.”

Also today, a group of human rights experts cautioned the EU against supporting a system in which migrants are pushed back to places where they may be at risk of torture, and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

In a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), François Crépeau, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants; Nils Melzer, Special Rapporteur on torture; Urmila Bhoola, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery; and Sètondji Roland Adjovi, Chair of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, stressed that any engagement with third countries needs to be in line with international human rights standards.

“The EU member States cannot balk from their responsibility and are accountable for any human rights violation under such an agreement,” noted the release.

While the experts commended the EU for any action directed at saving lives, they, however, expressed concern that “by agreeing to a deal with Libya, whereby migrants trying to flee human rights violations are being pushed back to those same conditions, the principle of *non-refoulement* will be violated.”

They raised the concern that limiting departures from Libyan coasts meant “accepting and legitimizing” the human suffering prevailing there and pushing people back to conditions where migrants suffer arbitrary detention, torture, ill-treatment, unlawful killings, trafficking and enforced disappearance. Migrants are also at a risk of labour exploitation and vulnerable to other forms of contemporary slavery, migrant women, in particular, remain at high risk of rape and other sexual violence.

The rights experts further noted measures must allow migrants to disembark immediately at the nearest port where their lives and freedoms would not be threatened, providing them with information, offering care and support, processing their asylum claims equitably.

“From what we know on the conditions in Libya, this country cannot be a port of disembarkation,” they stressed.

Independent experts and Special Rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva based UN Human Rights Council – an inter-governmental body responsible for promoting and protecting human rights around the world – 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.

[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.

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[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.