

Iraq: UN fears new wave of displacement as fighting escalates in Mosul and Hawiga

3 February 2017 – The United Nations refugee agency and its partners are coordinating plans to respond to a potential mass displacement of Iraqis from western Mosul, the latest battleground the Iraqi forces are seeking to retake from Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) terrorists.

“As many as 250,000 Iraqis could be displaced from their homes with the anticipated escalation of conflict in densely-populated western Mosul,” Matthew Saltmarsh, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told reporters in Geneva.

The military operations to oust ISIL began on 17 October last year in eastern Mosul, which, according to UN agencies on the ground, is now under the Government control.

Mr. Saltmarsh said UNHCR has seven camps completed and two under construction. UNHCR is currently able to provide some 11,000 families, or 66,000 people, with shelter as part of the Mosul response, a figure which should expand to 20,000 families, or 120,000 individuals, in the near-term, once land is allocated.

The refugee agency continues to seek additional land for new camps, reception and transit areas, to assist people closer to Mosul. By the end of March, it is anticipated that the Government of Iraq, working with UNHCR and its partners, could potentially host 41,155 families, or 246,930 people, in camps and emergency sites.

Some 161,178 people have been displaced from Mosul and surrounding areas since the military offensive began in October, but nearly 30,000 of them have returned to their places of origin.

Returnees are keen to resume their lives and told UNHCR that the re-opening of schools and government offices was a factor in their decision to return. In some areas, security and the lack of food and water remain a concern. Some returnees continue to rely on emergency relief items, including kerosene, which they received while in camps.

UNHCR is also assisting increasing numbers fleeing Hawiga, 130 km south-east of Mosul, due deteriorating living conditions and the expected intensification of military operations.

Inter-agency planning estimates predict that up to 114,000 individuals could be displaced from Hawiga. So far, 82,128 people have fled since August 2016. Until recently, people had been leaving Hawiga in smaller numbers but hundreds are now fleeing eastwards daily towards Salah al-Din and Kirkuk.

UNHCR's 2016 Mosul emergency response appeal for \$196 million was 57 percent funded. For 2017, it is seeking \$578 million for its work with Iraqi internally displaced persons and Iraqi refugees in the region. UNHCR has distributed emergency items, including quilts and blankets, to more than 178,000 people, and provided nearly 53,000 people affected by the Mosul conflict with protection assistance.

[UN report details 'devastating cruelty' against Rohingya population in Myanmar's Rakhine province](#)

3 February 2017 – In a report issued today, the United Nations human rights arm said that the widespread human rights violations against the Rohingya population by Myanmar's security forces in the country's northern Rakhine state indicate the very likely commission of crimes against humanity.

The flash report – issued today by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) based on its interviews with people who fled Myanmar after attacks on a border post in early October, the ensuing counter military operations and a lockdown in north Maungdaw – documents mass gang-rape, killings, including of babies and young children, brutal beatings, disappearances and other serious human rights violations by the country's security forces.

"The devastating cruelty to which these Rohingya children have been subjected is unbearable – what kind of hatred could make a man stab a baby crying out for his mother's milk. And for the mother to witness this murder while she is being gang-raped by the very security forces who should be protecting her," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, noting the report suggests the recent level of violence to be unprecedented and added:

The gravity and scale of these allegations begs the robust reaction of the international community High Commissioner Zeid

"What kind of 'clearance operation' is this? What national security goals could possibly be served by this?"

OHCHR noted that more than half of the women its human rights team interviewed reported having suffered rape or other forms of sexual violence. Many other interviewees reported witnessing killings, including of family members and having family who were missing.

Houses deliberately set on fire, people pushed inside burning houses – report

The report also cites consistent testimony indicating that hundreds of Rohingya houses, schools, markets, shops, madrasas and mosques were burned by the army, police and sometimes civilian mobs. Witnesses also described the destruction of food and food sources, including paddy fields, and the confiscation of livestock.

It also noted that several people were killed in indiscriminate and random shooting – many while fleeing for safety.

Army or Rakhine villagers locked an entire family, including elderly and disabled people, inside a house and set it on fire, killing them all

“Numerous testimonies collected from people from different village tracts...confirmed that the army deliberately set fire to houses with families inside, and in other cases pushed Rohingyas into already burning houses,” the report states.

“Testimonies were collected of several cases where the army or Rakhine villagers locked an entire family, including elderly and disabled people, inside a house and set it on fire, killing them all.”

Many witnesses and victims also described being taunted while they were being beaten, raped or rounded up, such as being told “you are Bangladeshi and you should go back” or “What can your Allah do for you? See what we can do?”

Violence follows a long-standing pattern of violations and abuses – OHCHR

According to the UN human rights wing, the violence since 9 October follows a long-standing pattern of violations and abuses; systematic and systemic discrimination; and policies of exclusion and marginalization against the Rohingya that have been in place for decades in northern Rakhine state, the report notes.

OHCHR also noted that after the repeated failure of the Government of Myanmar to grant it unrestricted access to the worst-affected areas of northern Rakhine state, High Commissioner Zeid deployed a team of human rights officers to the Bangladeshi border with Myanmar, where an estimated 66,000 Rohingya have fled since 9 October 2016.

It further noted that according to reports, operations by security forces in the area have continued into January 2017, although their intensity and frequency may have reduced.

Perpetrators and those who ordered them must be held accountable – UN rights chief

Calling on the international community for robust reaction given the gravity and scale of the allegations, High Commissioner Zeid stressed:

“The Government of Myanmar must immediately halt these grave human rights violations against its own people, instead of continuing to deny they have occurred, and accepts the responsibility to ensure that victims have access to justice, reparations and safety.”

“The killing of people as they prayed, fished to feed their families or slept in their homes, the brutal beating of children as young as two and an elderly woman aged 80 – the perpetrators of these violations, and those who ordered them, must be held accountable.”

Violations of children’s rights ‘totally unacceptable’ – UNICEF

Also today, expressing serious concern at the level of violations of children’s rights as documented in the report, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) called for thorough investigations into the allegations and prosecution of the violators.

“Such violations of children’s rights are totally unacceptable,” the UN agency said, underscoring: “Every child has the right to protection, irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, religion or nationality, in every circumstance [...] child victims need and deserve support.”

International collaboration on wheat rust can curb threat to global supplies – UN agency

3 February 2017 – As new data shows that wheat in Africa, Asia and Europe is increasingly threatened by fresh groups of wheat rust, the United Nations agricultural agency is highlighting the need for early detection and rapid action to keep the fungus under control.

Two studies produced by scientists in collaboration with the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) show the emergence of two new groups – or races – of both yellow rust and stem rust last year in various regions of the world.

“These new, aggressive rust races have emerged at the same time that we’re working with international partners to help countries combat the existing ones, so we have to be swift and thorough in the way we approach this,” said FAO Plant Pathologist Fazil Dusunceli.

Wheat rusts spread rapidly over long distances by wind. If not detected and treated on time, they can turn a healthy looking crop, only weeks away from harvest, into a tangle of yellow leaves, black stems and shriveled grains.

It's more important than ever that specialists from international institutions and wheat producing countries work together to stop these diseases in their tracks, Mr. Dusunceli said.

That would involve work such as continuous surveillance, sharing data and building emergency response plans to protect their farmers and those in neighbouring countries.

Wheat is a source of food and livelihoods for over 1 billion people in developing countries, according to FAO.

Some of the most vulnerable regions are also the highest producers of wheat. Northern and Eastern Africa, the Near East, and West, Central and South Asia alone account for some 37 per cent of global wheat production.

The most recently identified race of stem rust pathogen called TTTTF hit the Italian island of Sicily in 2016, causing the largest stem rust outbreak in Europe in decades.

In addition, farmers in the mainland Italy, Morocco and some Scandinavian countries are battling a yet-to-be-named race of yellow rust, while Ethiopia and Uzbekistan fights outbreaks of yellow rust AF2012.

Preliminary assessments are worrisome, but it is still unclear what the full impact of these new races will be on different wheat varieties in the affected regions, said Mr. Dusunceli. That's what research institutions across these regions will need to further investigate in the coming months.

The FAO-supported reports have been highlighted in the journal *Nature* following their publication by *Aarhus University* and the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT).

[World must ensure youth engagement at all levels, including in design of national plans, UN Forum hears](#)

2 February 2017 – Opening amid backlash against globalization and a marked shift towards marginalization in some parts of the world, a United Nations forum heard an outpouring of optimism and strong belief in collective action by youths and UN Member States for people, planet, peace and shared prosperity.

“Young people are stepping up to engage with the 2030 Agenda [for Sustainable Development], support its implementation, advocate for the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs), and hold their Governments accountable,” said a Statement issued by the President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava, wrapping up the 2017 Youth Forum.

The Statement noted that the 6th annual Forum, held on 30 and 31 January at UN Headquarters in New York, had opened against the backdrop of a backlash against globalization, increasing inequality and a marked shift towards nationalism and isolation in many parts of the world. Nevertheless, the event witnessed an outpouring of optimism and strong belief in collective action by young people and UN Member States.

One of the key messages that came out of the event was the need to ensure youth inclusion and engagement at all levels and in all processes that affect them, including in the design of national plans.

“Young people’s participation should be institutionalized through national Youth Advisory Councils and other mechanisms,” the Presidential Statement said.

The Forum also spotlighted the importance of prioritizing the creation of decent jobs for youth in a changing labour market, including “green” jobs and opportunities in agriculture and industrial development, with special attention to youth in the rural economy and fragile situations.

At the closing of the Forum on Tuesday, Mr. ECOSOC President Shava told youth participants that “you emphasized investment in your education, skills development, including on entrepreneurship, stressing that this should be of high quality and linked to the job market opportunities.”

He called on all countries that will participate in the upcoming high-level political forum to use these messages in their national presentations.

[Heavy fighting in eastern Ukraine extracting heavy civilian toll, UN Security Council hears](#)

2 February 2017 – Briefing the Security Council on the situation in eastern Ukraine, the top United Nations political and humanitarian officials underlined today that continuing fighting in the region, with only short periods of respite, have exasperated human suffering.

“Since 7 January this year, and in particular over the last few days, we have seen a dangerous intensification of the conflict,” Jeffrey Feltman, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs told Council members today.

“The entire length of the ‘Contact Line’ has seen a serious escalation of hostilities, and there is still a risk of further deterioration of the situation,” added Mr. Feltman.

According to reports, there were more than 10,000 explosions in the Donetsk region over 24 hours, and heavy fighting has been reported near Mariupol, Popasna and the Svitlodarsk/Debaltseve areas, both in Government-controlled and non-government controlled areas, along with use of heavy weapons such as multiple-launch-rocket systems which are prohibited by the Minsk Agreements.

Furthermore, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission has recorded damage to civilian houses and a school in populated areas of Avdiivka, raising serious concerns about possible violations of international humanitarian law by all sides.

Since the start of the conflict, almost 10,000 people have been killed (Ukrainian armed forces, civilians and members of armed groups), and over 23,000. Over 2,000 of those killed were civilians.

VIDEO: Secretary-General Guterres expressed “deep concern” over recent intensification of conflict in eastern Ukraine – UN political affairs chief, Jeffrey Feltman, told the Security Council meeting earlier today.

Mr. Feltman also spoke of the statement agreed yesterday at the meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk which laid down urgent measures that both sides should take not only in the Avdiivka-Yasynuvata-Donetsk airport area, but along the entire contact line in order to prevent further ceasefire violations that could in turn spiral out of control.

“This is a positive development, but the test will be in the implementation of the measures,” he said noting that the pattern of successive ceasefire agreements broken by fresh violence left civilians caught in the crossfire and trapped in suffering.

“With every new day of fighting, the conflict becomes more entrenched and difficult to resolve. There is no military solution to this conflict,” he said.

Also briefing the Security Council today, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien highlighted the impact of the conflict to civilians underlined the need for a political solution to the crisis.

“Civilians living on both sides of the frontline [...] are not only traumatized, living a precarious and dangerous existence, but damage to critical services is making survival an issue,” said Mr. O’Brien, adding that damage to critical infrastructure such heating in places such as Avdiivka and the freezing temperatures could trigger large-scale displacement.

VIDEO: UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O’Brien, depicted a grave humanitarian situation in Ukraine, while re-emphasising the need for

unhindered humanitarian access for the vulnerable population.

The latest escalation of violence is exasperating the ongoing needs of an estimated 3.8 million civilians who require various degrees of humanitarian assistance. More than 60 per cent of those (about 2.3 million people) reside in non-Government controlled areas, and over 70 per cent are elderly, children and women.

Further, noting that the while some humanitarian response efforts continue, undue bureaucratic restrictions which have been imposed since July 2015 by the de facto authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk regions have severely affecting humanitarian access.

He also reported that, Government-imposed bureaucratic impediments, particularly in relation to the ban on commercial trade and importation of food and medicines across the 'contact line,' remained a serious constraint to alleviating the humanitarian crisis and that suspension of social payments by the Government have severely affected hundreds of thousands of displaced people.

In his briefing, Mr. O'Brien also alerted the Security Council of the risk of serious environmental impact of the hostilities, he said:

"Damage to the Phenol plant near Novgorodske village means that waste chemicals, including deadly sulfuric acid and formaldehyde, are now at critical levels [and] leakage into the surrounding land and the Seversky Donets River would have disastrous humanitarian consequences in a highly industrialized part of Europe."