

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...

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.

[Expressing concern about planned Israeli settlements, UN urges return to negotiations](#)

1 February 2017 – The recent announcement by the Israeli Government to

advance 5,000 settlement units in the occupied West Bank could be an “obstacle” to peace, the spokesperson for the United Nations Secretary-General today said.

In a statement, Stéphane Dujarric, reiterated that unilateral actions threaten to unravel plans for a two-State solution between Israelis and Palestinians.

“We once again warn against any unilateral actions that can be an obstacle to a negotiated two-state solution,” Mr. Dujarric said.

He added that the UN calls on both parties to return to “meaningful negotiations” based on relevant Security Council resolutions and in accordance with international law, and is ready to support that process.

[US travel ban a ‘significant setback’ for those needing international protection – UN rights experts](#)

1 February 2017 – Expressing concern that a new Executive Order by the United States President Donald Trump is in breach of the country’s human rights commitments, a group of United Nations rights experts have called on the US to live up to its human rights obligations and provide protection for those fleeing persecution and conflicts.

“Such an order is clearly discriminatory based on one’s nationality and leads to increased stigmatization of Muslim communities,” said the UN Special Rapporteurs on migrant, François Crépeau; on racism, Mutuma Ruteere; on human rights and counter-terrorism, Ben Emmerson; on torture, Nils Melzer; and on freedom of religion, Ahmed Shaheed, in a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

“The US recent policy on immigration also risks people being returned, without proper individual assessments and asylum procedures, to places in which they risk being subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, in direct contravention of international humanitarian and human rights laws which uphold the principle of non-refoulement,” they warned.

The Executive Order, signed by President Trump on 27 January bars all nationals from seven Muslim-majority countries – Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen – from entering the US for the next 90 days.

It also stops the entire US refugee programme for 120 days, indefinitely bans

Syrian refugees, and halts the planned entry of more than 50,000 refugees in the US fiscal year 2017, which began in October 2016 and will end in September 2017, according to the news release.

In the midst of the world's greatest migration crisis since World War II, this is a significant setback for those who are obviously in need of international protection

Noting that "in the midst of the world's greatest migration crisis since World War II, this is a significant setback for those who are obviously in need of international protection," the rights experts stressed: "The US must live up to its international obligations and provide protection for those fleeing persecution and conflicts."

"The US is also involved in conflicts such as those in Iraq and Syria and its responsibility must extend to offering refuge to those fleeing from the conflicts," they added.

According to the news release, the Executive Order also applies to those who come from the countries listed "whether or not they have valid visa documents or are in transit."

It also affects those who have dual nationality, who either have a passport from one of those countries or are travelling from one of those countries. Furthermore, those currently residing in the US may be able to fly to the US but entry is not guaranteed.

"This is deeply troubling, and we are additionally concerned that such persons travelling to the US will be subject to detention for an undefined period of time and then ultimately deported," the human rights experts said.

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.