

Children paying the heaviest price as conflict in Yemen enters third year – UN

27 March 2017 – As the escalation of the conflict in Yemen enters its third year this week, the top United Nations humanitarian official has called on the parties to the conflict to commit to political dialogue and resolve the situation or risk an unending manmade crisis.

In a statement, Stephen O'Brien, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs underscored that in addition to wrecking the country's economy, killing thousands and displacing millions, the fighting has brought Yemen to the brink of a famine.

“During my third visit to Yemen only weeks ago, I saw the terrible and terrifying evidence of looming famine,” said Mr. O'Brien.

“In the hospital ward, the complete stillness of the tiny malnourished child whose eyes focus on nothing. The grim realization that these patients were the fortunate ones who could access a hospital and might survive.”

Underscoring that UN and its partners are already providing life-saving assistance in all of Yemen's 22 governorates, reaching almost 6 million people every month, Mr. O'Brien urged parties to the conflict to expedite immediate, timely, and unimpeded humanitarian access as well as facilitate commercial activities – critical to reversing prevailing massive food insecurity and ensuring that people's basic needs can be met.

Nearly 19 million Yemenis – over two-thirds of the population – need humanitarian assistance and, according to UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), seven million are facing starvation.

“Most of all, the Yemeni people need the parties to commit to political dialogue, or this man-made crisis will never end,” noted Mr. O'Brien.

“In the meantime, together we can – we must – avert this famine, this human catastrophe.”



A boy sits amid rubble, all that remains of his home – which was destroyed in an air strike – in Okash Village, near Sana'a, the capital of Yemen. Photo: UNICEF/Hamoud



Children hold shrapnel from exploded artillery shells while standing on a street damaged by blasts in Sana'a. Photo: UNICEF/Hamoud



A boy stands atop a large piece of exploded artillery shell, which landed near his home in the village of Al Mahjar, a suburb of Sana'a. Photo: UNICEF/Hamoud

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***Number of children injured, recruited in conflict nearly doubled in one year* UNICEF**

As with most crises, it is the children who are bearing the brunt of the suffering.

Families are having to resort to extreme measures to support their children as coping measures have been severely eroded, turning Yemen the poorest country in the region into one of the largest food security and malnutrition emergencies in the world, noted United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in a new report, *Falling through the Cracks* today.

According to UN verified data, in the past year alone, the number of children killed increased from 900 to more than 1,500; those injured nearly doubled from 1,300 to 2,450; children recruited in fighting neared 1,580 (compared to 850 last year); and 212 schools were attacked (up from 50 last year).

Also, Yemen's health system is on the verge of collapse, leaving close to 15 million men, women and children with no access to health care. This is all the more concerning given an outbreak of cholera and acute watery diarrhoea in October 2016 that continues to spread, with over 22,500 suspected cases and 106 deaths.

The war in Yemen continues to claim children's lives and their future, said Meritxell Relaño, UNICEF Representative in the war-torn country.

We need to act now to pull families back from the brink. The risks for generations to come are extremely high.

[UN agency chief urges stronger cooperation to aid refugees' transfer from Greek islands](#)

27 March 2017 – The head of the United Nations refugee agency today noted the need for more accommodations on the Greek mainland to help improve conditions at reception centres on the Greek islands.

The effort is one of eight recommendations issued by the UN refugee agency, or UNHCR, to move from an emergency response to longer-term sustainability where asylum-seekers and refugees have access to care and support.

The situation in Greece can be managed, said Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees. But to achieve this, firm commitment is needed on all sides.

Mr. Grandi called on European Union Governments to provide strong support for Greece: More solidarity and responsibility sharing across Europe is needed.

The High Commissioner also renewed his call to the Greek Government for clear coordination structures, with well-defined roles and responsibilities for all actors.

As of 20 March, only 10,000 asylum-seekers had left Greece for other European countries.

The UN agency said that it has been working with the Greek Government over the past months to find alternative sites for temporary housing, as well as to help some refugees who were to remain in Greece to more easily integrate to the country's social culture.

Progress in reception conditions will also help prevent and fight sexual and gender based violence, to which many vulnerable asylum-seekers, including women and children, are exposed in the sites.

More attention is needed to the length and quality of the asylum procedures and reception conditions on the islands, said the High Commissioner.

This will allow for more and faster transfers to the mainland and prevent sites on the islands from falling back into the dire conditions and the overcrowding we have witnessed in the past months, he added, noting that UNHCR supported some 7,000 of the more than 10,000 transfers organized since June 2016.

The UNHCR recommendations also include accelerating the pace of reuniting people with their families and building self-reliance among refugees.

[UN appalled at killing of aid workers in South Sudan](#)

26 March 2017 – Six aid workers from a national non-governmental organization were killed when their convoy was ambushed yesterday while travelling along

the Government-controlled area on the Juba-Pibor road, the United Nations mission in the country (UNMISS) has said.

Their bodies were found on the road by other members of the convoy who were some way behind.

The United Nations condemns this appalling and pointless loss of life, said the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for South Sudan and the head of UNMISS, David Shearer in a news release issued by the mission.

This cold-blooded killing is utterly reprehensible, not least, because these aid workers were dedicated to alleviating the ongoing suffering of the people of South Sudan, he added, urging the Government to investigate and apprehend the killers.

The attack is the single worst incident targeting aid workers in the African country since the outbreak of hostilities in December 2013. It comes at a time when humanitarian needs have reached unprecedented levels.

[Such attacks] not only put the lives of aid workers at risk, they also threaten the lives of thousands of South Sudanese who rely on our assistance for their survival, said Eugene Owusu, the Humanitarian Coordinator for South Sudan, stressing that security of relief workers has to be ensured so that they are able to provide relief to those with immense needs across the nation.

The conflict has taken a devastating toll on the people of South Sudan: around 7.5 million people are in need of relief and protection, and the humanitarian crisis has deepened further with localized famine declared in parts of the country.

No safety when attacks met with silence

At least 79 aid workers have been killed in South Sudan since December 2013, including at least 12 this year. The last two months alone have seen a sharp increase of attacks on humanitarians and looting of supplies intended for people suffering from the famine.

On 14 March, one health worker and a patient were killed in an attack on a humanitarian convoy that was responding to a cholera outbreak in Yirol East (in the central part of South Sudan). Earlier, on 10 March, staff of an international non-governmental organization were detained by non-state armed individuals during fighting in Mayendit town (also in central South Sudan). They were released four days later.

Every time an attack of this nature happens, we say that it must never happen again. And yet it does [...] there is no safety when attacks are met with silence and inaction, said the Humanitarian Coordinator, underscoring that the impunity that has prevailed for such crimes must end, and that perpetrators must be brought to justice.

I implore all those in positions of power to step up to their

responsibilities and stop this, as they are ultimately accountable for what happens under their watch.”

[On International Day, UN chief Guterres calls on all to stand in solidarity with detained staff](#)

25 March 2017 – On the International Day of Solidarity with Detained and Missing Staff, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres highlighted the challenges that UN staff face and urged everyone to ensure that they have the safety they need to help those most in need around the globe.

“We are still awaiting news of the fate of two members of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a sanctions-monitoring body established by the Security Council,” said Mr. Guterres in a message.

“We are doing everything possible to find and help them.”

Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalan, of the Group of Experts, went missing in the Kasai Central region in the DRC on 12 March along with four Congolese nationals.

Noting that the latest case highlighted the perils that UN staff and partners often face while serving the world's people, the UN chief said that last year, seven UN staff were abducted by non-state actors and four were kept as hostages.

“Fortunately, all were ultimately released safely,” he said, but added that more than 20 UN civilian personnel remain in detention, of whom, six are being held without the UN having received any explanation for their arrest.

“The Department of Safety and Security and I continue to monitor all of these cases and seek the immediate release of our colleagues,” he added.

Mr. Guterres also noted that only 92 UN Member States are party to the 1994 Convention on the Safety of UN and Associated Personnel, and that only 30 have ratified the 2005 Optional Protocol, which extends protection to UN personnel delivering humanitarian, political or development assistance.

Urging all countries that have not joined these instruments to do so without delay, the UN chief called on everyone to stand in solidarity with all detained staff and to “pledge to work together to ensure that all UN staff have the safety they need to help the world's most vulnerable”.

The International Day of Solidarity with Detained and Missing Staff Members is marked each year on 25 March, the date of the abduction of Alec Collett, who was taken by armed gunmen in 1985 while working for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). His remains were finally found in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley in 2009.

[Hoping to build with 'incremental, constructive steps' – UN envoy for Syria](#)

25 March 2017 – Speaking to the media in Geneva yesterday, United Nations Special Envoy for Syria said that he is not expecting miracles, breakthroughs or breakdowns but is hoping to build on the previous rounds of talks on the war-ravaged country with some incremental, constructive steps.

“All invitees and delegations who were present here [...] are feeling that it was worth it to come and all came. None of them has threatened to leave [...] which is a sign of maturity and of responsibility particularly in difficult moments like this one,” said UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura at a media stakeout at the UN Office at Geneva (UNOG), yesterday.

Underscoring the importance attached to the fifth round of the talks, Mr. de Mistura added that he has been particularly attentive, trying to engage with and having support from all the regional players, interlocutors and stakeholders.

He further mentioned that the discussions that took place earlier in Riyadh (capital of Saudi Arabia), Moscow (Russia) and Ankara (Turkey) conveyed a strong feeling of the need to build on the fourth round of the Geneva talks, which took place from 23 February to 3 March.

“Hence, our expectation and the stronger suggestion to the guarantors of the Astana process that they do retake the situation in hand and that hopefully there will be new Astana meeting as soon as possible in order to control the situation which at the moment is worrisome,” added the UN Special Envoy.

He also informed the media that the meeting yesterday focused into substance and that the agenda had been established and strongly supported by the Security Council.

Mr. De Mistura further noted that given the importance of the current round of intra-Syrian talks and in view of the tensions within the country, he would be travelling to Syria to meet with members of the Arab League as well as bilateral meetings on the situation.

“Meanwhile the talks will continue under the chairmanship of Ambassador Ramzy [Ezzeldin Ramzy, the Deputy Special Envoy for Syria,] but I felt it was important to engage as many regional players as possible and they all happen to be in one room,” said the UN Special Envoy.