

Haitian Government, UN and partners launch two-year plan aimed at saving lives, building resilience

7 February 2017 – The United Nations together with relief organizations in Haiti have launched a two-year, \$291 million response plan with the Government to reach more than 2.4 million people across the island that was struck by a devastating hurricane last October.

With more than 98 per cent of Haitians exposed to two or more types of disasters, and over half of its population living in poverty, Hurricane Matthew has once more demonstrated Haiti's weakened ability to cope, recover and adapt to shocks from natural disasters, noted Mourad Wahba, the Humanitarian Coordinator for Haiti, in the plan's foreword.

The two-year Haiti Humanitarian Response Plan, launched yesterday, is built on lessons learnt that the transition from a relief-focused type of operation like one that follows a disaster like an earthquake to a longer-term development approach in fragile countries should be seen as a convergence process rather than sequential since the humanitarian and development needs occur simultaneously.

According to estimates undertaken by the Humanitarian Country Team, some 2.7 million Haitians will require humanitarian, protection or early recovery assistance in 2017, of which 2.4 million will be targeted countrywide. The October hurricane severely exasperated pre-existing humanitarian, socio-economic and environmental vulnerabilities and disparities.

Under the plan, humanitarian interventions with a focus on improving access to lifesaving services to those affected by Hurricane Matthew, cholera, and other diseases, as well as on protecting the most vulnerable will be scaled up.

At the same time, actions to promote resilience and access to durable solutions will be implemented, targeting those displaced due to the 2010 earthquake, Hurricane Matthew, as well as those repatriated or voluntarily returned from neighbouring Dominican Republic.

Also, the Humanitarian Country Team will continue to support Government-led efforts to strengthen disaster preparedness and response at the national and decentralized levels.

The specific objectives include:

- Strengthening affected population's resilience through timely life-saving assistance, improved access to basic services and immediate livelihood restoration;
- Ensuring a rapid and effective response to cholera outbreaks and other

waterborne diseases;

- Ensuring protection and promotion of the achievement of durable solutions for persons coming back from the Dominican Republic, those displaced still living in camps and people affected by Hurricane Matthew; and
- Strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus and supporting local emergency preparedness and response capacity.

Afghanistan: UN condemns deadly suicide attack in Kabul near Supreme Court

7 February 2017 – The United Nations condemned today’s suicide attack outside the Supreme Court complex in the Afghan capital, Kabul, and stressed that those behind the deadly bombing must be held to account.

“We express our condolences to the families of the victims and convey our solidarity to the Government and people of Afghanistan,” said a statement issued by his spokesperson.

According to media reports, at least 20 people were killed and more than 40 were reportedly injured in the suicide bombing, which took place outside the Afghan Supreme Court complex.

“Indiscriminate attacks against civilians, including employees of the judicial institutions, are violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and cannot be justified,” said the statement, adding: “Those behind today’s bombing and other such despicable acts must face justice.”

INTERVIEW: UN marks 20 years of work to improve protection of children affected by conflict

7 February 2017 – The senior United Nations advocate for children caught up in conflict is reaching out to parents, elders, and the entire international community to keep children away from armies and militias – a UN role that over the past two decades has helped more than 115,000 child soldiers regain their youth.

“My role is to reach them, to try to convince them that they are the ones who can make a difference on the ground,” the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Leila Zerrougui, told *UN News* on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of her office’s mandate.

Ms. Zerrougui noted that as a UN envoy, she could not advance the mandate without the support of the 193-member UN General Assembly, the Security Council, and regional organizations.

Just as important, however, has been the role of civil society actors, who are often on the frontlines of a conflict, working to aid communities and confronting the same difficulties.

“We can support initiatives, we can propose ideas, we can help, we can bring a voice, but we cannot solve the problem without those who are directly involved,” said Ms. Zerrougui. “Member States, civil society, fighting parties, and of course, those who can make a difference because they are supporting or they have the leverage.”

VIDEO: Marking #20YearsForChildren in Armed Conflict, UN envoy Leila Zerrougui underscores the importance of helping children affected by armed conflict. Credit: UN News

The Office of the Special Representative works to eliminate six grave violations: recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming of children, sexual violence against children, attacks on school and hospitals, abduction of children, and denial of humanitarian access.

Children laying down their guns

The greatest achievement of working on this mandate for the past 20 years is that “everyone is aware of the plight of children in armed conflict,” Ms. Zerrougui said.

Grave violations against children

- Recruitment and use of children
- Killing and maiming
- Rape and sexual violence in conflict
- Attacks on schools and hospitals
- Abduction of children
- Denial of humanitarian access

“Because people are aware that opened doors then to strengthen the protection, to prevent the violation, to put in place tools, mechanisms, a legal framework,” she noted. “That allowed us today to say, for example, that we have consensus that children should not be recruited, should not be used in conflict, particularly by government forces. And where we have this consensus, we have less and less Governments that use children.”

In fact, there are seven countries currently listed in the Secretary-General's latest report that use child soldiers – Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Yemen. Some militias and armed groups in those countries are also listed, as are some in the Central African Republic, Colombia, Iraq, Mali, Nigeria, and Syria.



Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Leila Zerrougui in South Sudan meeting with children affected by the 2014 conflict. Photo: Office for Children and Armed Conflict/Stephanie Tremblay

Ms. Zerrougui's office, in cooperation with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other partners, is working with the Governments of those countries to end the practice. They are among the 27 Governments and non-State actors that have signed action plans with the UN to end recruitment.

In the DRC, where the recruitment of child soldiers known as "kadogo" is endemic, the Government has taken "robust action and is well on its way to making its armed forces child-free," according to the Office.

"We have changed how we look at children. We don't recruit them anymore, it's in our blood. The change is irreversible," an army general recently told the UN peacekeeping mission in DRC (MONUSCO).

In 2014, the Office and UNICEF launched the Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, which aims to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers by Government armies. Since 2000, the work of the Office and partners has led to the release of more than 115,000 child soldiers.

In addition to freeing child soldiers and ending their recruitment, the Office of the Special Representative has made progress in tackling the use of schools by the military, and stopping attacks on schools and hospitals.



Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Leila Zerrougui (centre) in Khartoum, Sudan, for the signing of an Action Plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in the Sudanese armed forces. Photo: Office for Children and Armed Conflict/Stephanie Tremblay

Children with their own children

Progress has also been made on tackling conflict-related sexual violence, a topic that the Office works on alongside the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura.

"Girls are always affected by conflict in each and every context," Ms. Zerrougui said, noting the use of girls as sex slaves, bush wives, and domestic servants.

Until Ms. Zerrougui's mandate, girls were largely invisible in conflicts because unlike child soldiers, who are predominantly boys, they did not have guns, and because rape and pregnancy were reasons for their communities to stigmatize them.

"We try to speak to those on the ground who are involved to not forget this issue," she said. "To ensure that these victims are not victimized twice. Because they were themselves victims as girls. And also because they end up dealing with children. The most heartbreaking thing is when you see a girl that is still a child with her own children."

Ideals and values that inspired the creation of International Criminal Court still hold true – UN adviser

7 February 2017 – The setting up of the International Criminal Court (ICC) was a "reckoning" for those who had long disregarded the lives and dignity of their people, the United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide has said and warned that withdrawing from the tribunal could have grave implications for victims seeking redress for serious human rights violations.

"The establishment of the Court signified a global commitment to protect victims, when national judicial mechanisms lacked the capacity, willingness or jurisdiction to prosecute those responsible for the most serious crimes," wrote Special Adviser Adama Dieng in an opinion piece published in *The East African*.

Since the adoption of the Rome Statute in 1998, more than half of the world's States have joined the Court, 34 among them are African nations – the biggest regional block to date . In July this year, the Court's founding Statute will mark the 15th anniversary of its entry into force.

Highlighting the significance of the Court, Mr. Dieng said that the fact that most of the cases in the continent were submitted by African States themselves, reaffirming their belief that it would strengthen the rule of law and respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of the African people.

However, he added that despite the ICC's achievements, it is increasingly coming under threat, with recent announcements by Burundi, South Africa and the Gambia to withdraw from the Rome Statute.

"Other States have threatened to do so, if certain conditions are not met," he wrote, noting that key among the concerns raised by these countries included the "lack of fairness in the prosecution decisions of the Court,

perceived by some to disproportionately target African leaders.”

VIDEO: Special Adviser Adama Dieng explains why withdrawing from the Rome Statute undermines international justice for everyone. Credit: UN News

A candid dialogue will enhance mutual trust and cooperation

Noting the need for a candid conversation between all stakeholders, in particular member States and the Court to identify and address legitimate concerns, he said: “Doing this will enhance mutual trust and cooperation and strengthen the capability of the Court to fulfil its mandate.”

Unfortunately, States that want to pull out of the Rome Statute have made little, if any, effort to present their grievances through the established forums

But, he added that the States that want to withdraw from the Rome Statute have made little, if any, effort to present their grievances through the established forums, such as the Assembly of States Parties – the management oversight and legislative body of the Court, composed of representatives of the States that have ratified and acceded to the Rome Statute.

“To have done so would have presented an opportunity to have an open and frank dialogue, and discuss how to make the Court a better institution, one that is capable of responding effectively to the challenges it was established to address,” he emphasized, and “engaging and advocating for reforms should serve the interests of all stakeholders of the Court.”

Reaffirm the commitment to ensure accountability for appalling crimes

Drawing attention to the ongoing atrocities in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, South Sudan and in other parts of the world, he underlined that the time is not right to abandon the Court.

“Rather, States and non-State members should reaffirm their commitment to strengthen the Rome Statute and ensure accountability for these horrendous crimes,” Mr. Dieng said, appealing urging for them to work collectively to ensure the Court can effectively administer international criminal justice without fear or favour, contribute to the fight against impunity, and promote respect for the rule of law and human rights.

“As someone who witnessed first-hand the horrors in Rwanda, the Former Yugoslavia, Sierra Leone and elsewhere, and who has been closely involved in the delivery of international justice at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, I know too well the consequences when the international community undermines the efforts of international justice,” he said.

“We owe it to the victims of these horrendous crimes to strengthen rather than undermine the International Criminal Court, and to reaffirm our

commitment to the Rome Statute to ‘put an end to impunity for the perpetrators of these crimes and thus contribute to their prevention’.”

AUDIO: The Special Adviser speaking on the need for dialogue between the court, countries, civil society and the victims of atrocities.

[Russia, Turkey, Iran and UN hash out details of monitoring regime for Syria ceasefire](#)

7 February 2017 – The delegations of Russia, Turkey and Iran as well as United Nations representatives held their first meeting yesterday to discuss the establishment of a ceasefire implementation regime in Syria that was decided at the 23-24 January talks held in the Kazakh capital of Astana, a UN spokesperson in Geneva said today.

This meeting was held as a follow-up on the agreement reached in Astana on a mechanism – a group of experts – to monitor the ceasefire, which had been brokered by Russia, Iran and Turkey.

“The participants had discussed the implementation of the cease-fire regime in Syria, and specific measures to facilitate effective mentoring and verification in order to ensure full compliance with the cease-fire, prevent any provocations, and determine all the modalities of the cease-fire,” Yara Sharif, the spokeswoman for the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Syria, told reporters in Geneva.

The participants also discussed confidence-building measures to facilitate unhindered humanitarian access, and the delegations acknowledged their readiness to continue collaboration towards ensuring full implementation of the ceasefire regime in Syria, she stated.

The UN experts who attended the follow-up meeting shared UN experience and best practices related to the monitoring and verification of cease-fire arrangements in other settings, the spokeswoman added.

Ms. Sharif also said that Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura has welcomed the meeting, expressing his hope that their efforts would strengthen the cease-fire on the ground and thus contribute to the UN-facilitated intra-Syrian talks in Geneva towards a political settlement.

Turning to Mr. de Mistura’s visit to the United States, Ms. Sharif said the envoy was appreciative of the opportunity to have conducted a series of successful meetings with the new US Administration. His bilateral meeting

with the new US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was positive, she said, adding that the Special Envoy briefed on the upcoming intra-Syrian negotiations and the context.

Ms. Sharif also said that the invitations to the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva would go out on 8 February. The Special Envoy is of the view that the effectiveness of those negotiations, to be launched on 20 February, can be significantly enhanced through direct negotiations between the Government of Syria and "a united opposition delegation," she noted.

In his briefing to the UN Security Council on 31 January Mr. de Mistura announced the postponement of the UN-supported talks from 8 February to 20 February, explaining that the delay would give time for the ceasefire to solidify, give the Government a chance to consider concessions, and give a chance for the armed groups to come as "one unified opposition."