

UN chief Guterres pledges commitment to achieving world free of nuclear weapons

24 January 2017 – Disarmament can play an important role in ending existing conflicts and preventing the outbreak of new strife, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said today, pledging to actively pursue the abolition of all weapons of mass destruction and the strict regulation of conventional weapons.

“I am committed to achieving a world free of nuclear weapons,” the Secretary-General declared in a video message to the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament, which opened the first segment of its three-part 2017 session yesterday.

Recalling that upon taking office he had described a world of new and old conflicts woven in a complex, interconnected web, Mr. Guterres said today that those conflicts have precipitated gross violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

As such, while disarmament can play an important role in ending existing conflicts and preventing the outbreak of new strife, disarmament and arms control processes provide the breathing space for confidence to be built, stability to be strengthened and trust to be established.

“This was true during the Cold War and it is true now,” continued the UN chief, stressing that the need for breathing space is more urgent than ever as global tensions are rising, “sabres have been rattled and dangerous words spoken about the use of nuclear weapons.”

As the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating body, “the world looks to the Conference to provide rationality and diplomatic solutions, to promote security through peaceful action, and to create the instruments we need to develop confidence, trust and international stability,” Mr. Guterres told the 65-member panel, adding: “You have a responsibility to all States and all peoples. Now is the time to live up to it.”

“I encourage you to work hard to find compromise and to make the most of your partners in civil society and academia. The United Nations will be your ally and assist however we can,” he concluded.

The Conference on Disarmament, established in 1979 as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community, is not formally a UN body but reports annually, or more frequently as appropriate, to the UN General Assembly. Michael Møller, the Director-General of the UN Office at Geneva, serves as Secretary-General of the Conference, as well as Mr. Guterres’ personal representative to the body.

Currently, the consensus-based body focuses primarily on the following issues: cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament; prevention of nuclear war, including all related matters; prevention of an arms race in outer space; effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons; new types of weapons of mass destruction and new systems of such weapons including radiological weapons; comprehensive programme of disarmament and transparency in armaments.

[In Helsinki, UN appeals for nearly \\$5B to help Syrians and host communities](#)

24 January 2017 – The United Nations and partners today appealed at an aid conference in Finland for \$4.63 billion to help people inside Syria, those who fled and the communities hosting them.

“Unless these additional funds are promptly secured, the UN and its partners will have to scale back life-saving assistance, not only for Syrians but also refugees and host communities, with catastrophic consequences,” said Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O’Brien.

“It will force families to try to survive with inadequate food intake; it will stop short nutrition programmes to bring babies back to health; it will mean families having to sleep without even plastic sheeting to protect them,” added Mr. O’Brien, who also heads the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) which co-organized the conference alongside the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Hosted by Finland, the *Helsinki Conference on Supporting Syrians and the Region* focuses on key humanitarian priorities: saving lives, protection, and building resilience, according to a press release from the organizers.

“The international community must send a clear message that it stands with them and provides the urgently needed support,” Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, said in reference to displaced Syrians and host communities in remarks ahead of the funding appeal.

Some 13.5 million people urgently need protection and life-saving aid, according to OCHA, including 2 million children under the age of five.

Within Syria, there are 13 besieged areas with some 650,000 men, women and children cut off from aid.

Those people who have been able to flee to neighbouring countries continue to

struggle, along with their host communities, to meet the challenges of the political, economic and social spill-over from the Syria crisis.

“As millions have fled Syria, we have seen extraordinary generosity and solidarity on the part of host countries and communities and they must not be left to cope alone,” said Helen Clark, Administrator of UNDP. “UN agencies and NGO partners are committed to helping governments and host communities build resilience in the face of this crisis. We’ve made important strides, but we need more support.”

The Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) for 2017 and 2018 launched today aims to assist over 4.7 million refugees from Syria and 4.4 million people hosting them in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.

The appeal is in addition to the \$3.4 billion that the 2017 humanitarian response plan.

[UN, partners voice deep concern about 750,000 civilians as battle sets to begin in western Mosul](#)

24 January 2017 – A hundred days after the start of military operations to retake Mosul from Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) militants, humanitarian partners are expressing deep concern about the plight of the estimated 750,000 civilians who are currently living in the western sections of the city where fighting is expected to start in coming weeks.

Up until now, eastern Mosul has been the main battleground. To date, 180,000 people have fled the city’s eastern sections; more than 550,000 civilians have stayed in their homes.

“We are relieved that so many people in the eastern sections of Mosul have been able to stay in their homes. We hope that everything is done to protect the hundreds of thousands of people who are across the river in the west. We know that they are at extreme risk and we fear for their lives,” said Lise Grande, Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, in a statement signed also by other humanitarians from UN agencies and the civil society.

“The reports from inside western Mosul are distressing,” said Ms. Grande, noting that humanitarian partners are unable to access these areas and the prices of basic food and supplies are soaring. Water and electricity are intermittent in neighbourhoods and many families without income are eating only once a day. Others are being forced to burn furniture to stay warm, she added.

“We don’t know what will happen in western Mosul but we cannot rule out the possibility of siege-like conditions or a mass exodus,” said Ms. Grande. “They can be killed by booby-traps and in cross-fire and could be used as human shields.”

The Iraqi security forces have adopted a humanitarian concept of operations putting civilian protection at the centre of their battle plan. Humanitarian partners welcome this approach and renew their collective call on all parties to the conflict to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and ensure they have access to life-saving assistance.

“The world’s attention is fixed on the military campaign in Iraq. But once this is over, there will still be a humanitarian crisis,” Ms. Grande said, noting that as many as three million Iraqis, maybe even four million depending on what happens in Mosul, Hawiga and Tel Afar, may be displaced from their homes as a result of the conflict.

“These families will need to make crucial choices about how to rebuild and re-establish their lives. And we will need to be here to help them. We hope and trust that the international community will not walk away after Mosul. It would be a mistake – a very big one – if this were to happen,” she added.

[More than words, ending Yemen crisis needs results, UN envoy says, concluding mission in capital](#)

23 January 2017 – The United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, today concluded a mission to Yemen with a call for a comprehensive political settlement of the crisis and the restoration of the cessation of hostilities, and underlined the need allow access of civilian commercial aircrafts to and from Sana’a airport.

“It is mandatory that the parties end the violence to ease the suffering of the Yemeni people and pave the way for a peacefully negotiated settlement,” said Mr. Cheikh Ahmed.

In his meetings, Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed urged his interlocutors to enter into detailed discussions on the withdrawal of forces and handover of medium and heavy weapons.

“There is an urgent need for Ansar Allah and the General People’s congress to provide a well elaborated plan on security, withdrawal and handover of medium and heavy weapons,” he said, noting that the plan constitutes an essential

part of the comprehensive peace agreement which is the UN is aiming to implement.

“What we need at this stage is more than words, what we need is commitment and results. Delays in providing the plan will result in delays to achieving peace and allow for more deaths and further economic and humanitarian deterioration,” he added.

Further, the UN Special Envoy called on all relevant actors to take necessary measures to lift restrictions on civilian commercial aircrafts to access Sana’a International Airport.

Restrictions on travel in and out of Sana’a airport have prevented scores of Yemenis from receiving badly-needed medical treatment and have also left many others stranded outside the country.

“This cannot continue,” he stressed, calling on the Government of Yemen to “allow the resumption of commercial flights to Sana’a without further delay and for all parties to ensure the safety of the airport and air traffic.”

Religious leaders deserve full support in quest for peace, says UN adviser on genocide prevention

23 January 2017 – Religious leaders and faith-based organizations have a responsibility to contribute to peaceful societies and the international community must support these grassroots peacemakers in their daily activities, the United Nations official mandated to fight genocide today told an international meeting on religion.

Addressing the third annual symposium on ‘The Role of Religion and Faith-Based Organizations in International Affairs,’ now under way at UN Headquarters in New York, Adama Dieng, the UN Special Adviser for Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, said that religious leaders “have a responsibility to contribute to the building of peaceful, inclusive and cohesive societies that are resilient to conflict, violent extremism and atrocity crimes.”

The Office of Mr. Dieng is one of the sponsors of the symposium, along with the UN Inter-agency Task Force for Engagement with Faith-based Organizations and the Committee of Religious NGOs at the UN. This year’s thematic focus is on just, inclusive and sustainable peace.

Mr. Dieng, who is currently in Doha participating in a meeting on the responsibility to protect, delivered his address via a video message. He said

the primary responsibility for creating sustained peace lies with States, who must promote the values of diversity and manage diversity constructively – however, “collaboration” with religious leaders remains vital.

“They can reach out to and influence large numbers of people,” Mr. Dieng. He added that religious leaders “provide support during emergencies, respond to the needs of marginalized communities, as well as address grievances as soon as they emerge and advocate for the rights of their communities.”

Last year, the UN Security Council passed resolution 2282 (2016) , which calls for a comprehensive approach to transitional justice and accountability to consolidate peace, reduce poverty and prevent countries from relapsing into conflict.

In his video message, Mr. Dieng discussed his recent work with religious leaders on the Fez Plan of Action on the role of religious leaders and actors in preventing incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes. The Plan was named after the Moroccan city where the first steps on a strategy on the role of religious leaders were taken in 2015.

According to Mr. Dieng, the Plan will be launched in New York during the first quarter of this year, followed by meetings on its implementation.

“Implementing the Fez Plan of Action will be a good starting point in enhancing religious actors’ engagement in the prevention of atrocity crimes, as well as enhancing collaboration among religious leaders, Member States and civil society to prevent incitement to violence,” he said.