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Some 25,000 people displaced by military attacks in western Aleppo – UNICEF



A woman and children wait outside a medical centre in Al-Radwanieh village, rural Aleppo, Syria. Photo: UNICEF/Khouder Al-Issa

1 August – About 25,000 people, including more than 12,000 children, have been displaced last night from a neighbourhood in western Aleppo City by intense military attacks initiated by armed opposition groups, a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) official in Syria said today, calling on the warring parties to do their utmost to protect all civilians.

"Twenty-five thousand people have fled instantly last night from this area, with whatever they could leave the door with," said Kieran Dwyer, Chief of Communications for UNICEF in Syria, in an interview with the *UN News Service* via Skype from Damascus.

He said that armed opposition groups launched a major military offensive late yesterday afternoon and evening, attacking through the densely populated western part of Aleppo City. Intense fighting, involving airstrikes and the use of heavy weapons, artillery and mortars, has continued through the night, and throughout the day today, he added.

Mr. Dwyer said that in the affected neighbourhood, people already displaced multiple times had put up temporary shelters in uncompleted high-rise apartment buildings. UNICEF and its partners had been helping them to get water, food, health services, and education so that they could settle for the time being.

Then, the fighting erupted, forcing many of them flee to parks, mosques, and wherever "they can feel a bit safe," he said, adding that emergency kitchens have been set up, and for its part, UNICEF is running emergency water trucks.

Asked if more people would be displaced, he said that "we don't know what the dynamic in fighting is going to result in."

We are watching and responding at every turn.”

Meanwhile, the eastern part of Aleppo city has been completely cut off from humanitarian aid since early July, he said, noting that UNICEF and all partners are calling for immediate access to the area, where 300,000 people, including over 120,000 children, are in need of nutrition, food, clean water, and health services.

The health system in Aleppo has been devastated, with four military attacks on hospitals last week alone, noted Mr. Dwyer, warning that with only 30 doctors left to serve 300,000, the situation in eastern Aleppo is “dire.”

Regarding the idea of setting up ‘humanitarian corridors’ that would allow aid to be delivered without hindrance, and civilians to flee the besieged areas safely, Mr. Dwyer said that such arrangements must be run by the UN humanitarian team and partners.

If civilians decide to leave, they must be protected at every step, and if they decided to stay, they should be protected from attacks and violence, he added.

In New York today, Farhan Haq, the Secretary-General’s Deputy Spokesperson, reiterated that the UN calls on all parties to the conflict to allow safe, unimpeded and impartial humanitarian access in line with international humanitarian law.

The UN remains deeply concerned over the plight of people trapped in Aleppo, as reports indicate that intense fighting has continued in the last days, and that many stores have closed as food runs low, the spokesperson said.

Meanwhile, he added, an inter-agency convoy delivered food, nutrition, health, water, sanitation, hygiene and other emergency items for 71,000 people in need to the hard-to-reach area of Al Houla, in Homs governorate yesterday. Surgical items were removed from health kits during the loading.

Mr. Haq also said that the UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura visited Teheran on Sunday, and held discussions with Iranian Assistant Foreign Minister Hossein Jaber Ansari on the means of pushing forward the political settlement to the crisis in Syria.

Also, on Sunday, Deputy Special Envoy Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy met with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem and Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad, the spokesperson said, explaining that the meeting was part of regular, ongoing consultations between the Special Envoy’s Office and the Syrian Government.

Mr. Ramzy informed Syria’s Foreign Minister of the Special Envoy’s intention to reconvene the intra-Syrian talks towards the end of August, with a focus on the political transition, according to the UN spokesperson.

South Sudan: UN Mission strongly condemns 'unspeakable acts' of abuse, sexual violence

1 August – The United Nations in South Sudan today condemned unequivocally reports of widespread sexual violence, including rape and gang rape, of women and young girls, by soldiers and unidentified armed men, stressing that such acts constitute grave violations of international human rights law and may be regarded as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

“These incidents have been reported from a number of locations, including areas in the vicinity of the Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites near UN House, and also in other neighbourhoods of Juba,” said the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in a press statement.

Since the fighting erupted in the capital, Juba, on 8 July, the UN has continued to receive reports of this kind of inhumane behaviour, despite calls to all parties for its cessation. Deadly clashes between rival factions loyal to President Salva Kiir and First Vice-President Riek Machar have sent thousands of civilians fleeing city. UNMISS compounds and civilian protection sites have been attacked.



UNMISS Chinese Battalion and UNPOL FPU from Nepal tirelessly continue to provide protection of civilians and maintain security in the UN House base, Jebel area, in Juba. Photo: UNMISS/Eric Kanalstein

Protection of civilians – including the most vulnerable – remains the core priority of UNMISS, the Mission underscored.

“Currently, UNMISS is engaged in the active protection of approximately 200,000 civilians in various locations throughout the country,” the statement continued. “During and immediately following the conflict, the Mission’s uniformed personnel in Juba were committed to providing security for the PoC sites and other UN facilities citywide.”

To improve the security of vulnerable communities and groups, such as women and children residing in the UNMISS PoC sites the Mission has intensified its patrols in and around the protection sites along with in the wider Juba city area.

“As an enhanced protection measure, UNMISS is working with community leaders and protection partners to coordinate peacekeeper escorts of women and young girls leaving protection sites to collect food and non-food items at scheduled times of the day,” UNMISS elaborated in the statement.

On media allegations that UNMISS peacekeepers did not do enough to protect the victims, the statement continued “The UN takes very seriously the allegations that peacekeepers may not have rendered aid to civilians in distress. The UNMISS Force Headquarters is looking into the specific allegations, in line with its established protocols.”

UNMISS reinforced its message to all peacekeepers that should incidents of abuse be committed in their areas of security responsibility, “they have an individual and joint duty to act, to prevent harm to innocent civilians.”

Within its limited resources, UNMISS does its best to fulfil its mandate to protect civilians threatened across the country – despite severe restrictions on its movements, the Mission stressed.

The UN mission also urged the country’s security leadership to protect its civilians and ensure accountability for any crimes committed by its own forces.

“UNMISS notes the commitment given by military leadership to bring alleged perpetrators to account for their actions and it

will continue its engagement to see that these commitments are upheld,” the statement said.

Meanwhile, UNMISS Human Rights and Women Protection Advisers continued to document human rights violations, noting more than 100 separate cases of sexual violence and rape against unarmed innocent civilians – including gang rapes and sexual abuse of minors since the July conflict outbreak.

When completed, these reports will be forwarded for follow-up action to the UN Secretary-General, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

UNMISS again called on all parties to take personal responsibility for the immediate sanctioning of the men – in and out of uniform – who were responsible for the unspeakable violence against civilians, and continued to closely monitor that steps are being taken to stop the heinous acts of inhumanity and bring the perpetrators to justice.

UNMISS reported that as the lead UN agency on sexual and gender-based violence, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) is coordinating the response to ongoing sexual violence – reporting that the PoC referral system and clinical management of rape services were in place and that UNFPA provided post-rape kits and an additional 7100 ‘dignity kits’ for distribution among the most vulnerable women and girls. For uninterrupted delivery of services, training sessions on clinical management of rape continues as well.

Yemen: Focusing on local suppliers, UN agency reaches thousands more in need of food aid



WFP provides food vouchers to 55,000 people in hard-to-reach district of Taiz city, Al Qahira, Yemen. Photo: WFP

1 August – The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has recorded a nearly five-fold increase in the number to whom it has provided assistance in hard-to-reach areas across war-torn Yemen, through an innovative, locally driven voucher initiative.

This month, in the hard-to-reach Taiz governorate district of Al Qahira alone, the agency successfully provided 55,000 people with much-needed assistance through the innovative use of food vouchers using a local supplier’s network.

“Expanding our voucher assistance through a local supplier into Al Qahira is a major breakthrough that allows us to reach every person who needs our assistance,” said Purnima Kashyap, WFP Country Director in Yemen, in a news release issued by the agency today.

“This approach capitalizes on the presence of markets that are working in the areas where we use it, so as well as helping vulnerable families, it also gives a much-needed boost to the local market,” she added.

The increase has been made possible through the Commodity-Voucher through Traders’ Network (CV-TN) project that allows WFP to supply food commodities to families through a contracted local retailer in exchange for vouchers.

Since the launch of this way of delivering assistance earlier this year in Sana’a city, the project has expanded to other parts of Yemen including Aden and Taiz, enabling agency to reach more than 600,000 people compared to only 120,000 in February.

According to the agency, humanitarian organizations had been struggling for months to deliver assistance to conflict-affected people inside Taiz governorate, and despite joint efforts and extensive negotiations, reaching the people in need had been unpredictable and difficult to guarantee.

Furthermore, when access was made available, the number of people that could be reached was limited due to a short window of opportunity.

Each voucher gives a one-month supply of wheat grain, pulses, vegetable oil, salt and sugar as well as Wheat Soya Blend (WSB), a protein-rich blended food provided by WFP through the local supplier. The monthly entitlement is enough to cover the needs of a family of six people.

“Expanding the programme [...] is an effective way of addressing access challenges as well as speeding up the delivery of food assistance,” said Ms. Kashyap.

WFP plans to expand its voucher reach to the Al Mudhaffar district of Taiz governorate.

The programme has offered additional benefits as well.

For instance, it has helped create new employment opportunities and is helping the commercial sector back on its feet.

“The retail market was closing down because people did not have the money to buy food on a regular basis, but giving food vouchers to the households and allowing them go to retail markets, they are able to buy food,” said Ms. Kashyap in an interview with *UN Radio*.

“We have found that many of the markets are [now] able to employ more people because demand has increased and staff are needed to cater to it,” she noted.

The WFP Country Director further added that the agency has monitoring and overseeing practices to ensure that the programme is reaching its beneficiaries. She explained that random site visits are conducted to assess effectiveness and telephone calls are made to the beneficiaries to confirm the receipt of the food packets as well as to take their feedback.

The agency, however added that additional funds are required to be able to reach a targeted one million people across Yemen through the voucher system by the end of this year.

It further noted that a recent study found that more people in the country are slipping into hunger. Out of the country’s population of 25 million, 14 million people are food insecure and close to seven million people are ‘severely food insecure,’ a level of need that requires urgent food assistance.

UNICEF working at ‘full strength’ in north-east Nigeria, despite attack on aid convoy



A nutrition screening for children in the Dalori camp for internally displaced people, in the north-eastern city of Maiduguri in Borno State, Nigeria. Photo: UNICEF/Andrew Esiebo

1 August – Despite an attack on a humanitarian convoy in which one of its staff members was injured, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is scaling up its response to provide assistance to thousands of conflict-affected children in Nigeria’s Borno state, which has borne the brunt of violence by Boko Haram insurgents.

The agency estimates that 244,000 will suffer from severe acute malnutrition this year in Borno state alone and if they are not reached with treatment, one in five of them will die.

“We cannot let this heartless attack divert any of us from reaching the more than two million people who are in dire need of immediate humanitarian assistance,” said UNICEF Nigeria Representative, Jean Gough, in a news release issued by the agency.

“The violence has disrupted farming and markets, destroyed food stocks, and damaged or destroyed health and water facilities. We absolutely have to reach more of these communities,” she stressed.

Last week, unknown assailants attacked a humanitarian convoy returning from Bama in Borno state to the state capital Maiduguri after delivering desperately needed humanitarian assistance. The convoy included staff from UNICEF, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

An IOM contractor was also injured.

UNICEF said that is already working at full strength in Maiduguri and has called on donors and humanitarian organizations to scale-up the response to the emerging disaster in the state.

“Our teams were finding people living on the brink of disaster,” said Jean Gough, “The violence has disrupted farming and markets, destroyed food stocks, and damaged or destroyed health and water facilities.”

Before the attack, security conditions had been improving in several areas but as a result of the attack, travel by UN staff to high risk areas has been temporarily suspended.

However, despite the temporary suspension, UNICEF plans to scale-up its response in Borno state. At the beginning of the year, the agency had appealed for \$55 million for its emergency work, of which \$23 million has so far been received.

The agency has provided two million people with health services and treated 56,000 children for malnutrition in the three conflict-affected states of northeast Nigeria. A quarter of a million people have improved access to clean water, and over 200,000 children have been able to go back to school.

UN rights chief expresses concern about Iraq's fast-tracking of executions

1 August – The United Nations human rights chief today expressed serious concern that Iraq has created a committee to accelerate implementation of death sentences.

The committee, announced by Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi, has been mandated to identify procedural or legislative delays in implementation of death sentences passed by Iraq's courts.

“Given the weaknesses of the Iraqi justice system, and the current environment in Iraq, I am gravely concerned that innocent people have been and may continue to be convicted and executed, resulting in gross, irreversible miscarriages of justice,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said in a news release.



UN Photo/Martine Perret

“Fast-tracking executions will only accelerate injustice,” Mr. Zeid added, urging the Government not to take any actions that may further weaken the administration of justice and diminish the rights of those subject to criminal procedures.

Monitoring by the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Iraq (OHCHR) has revealed a consistent failure to respect due process and fair trial standards, including a reliance on torture to extract confessions.

UNAMI and OHCHR have also noted the lack of transparency, with the authorities failing to provide timely public information on executions.

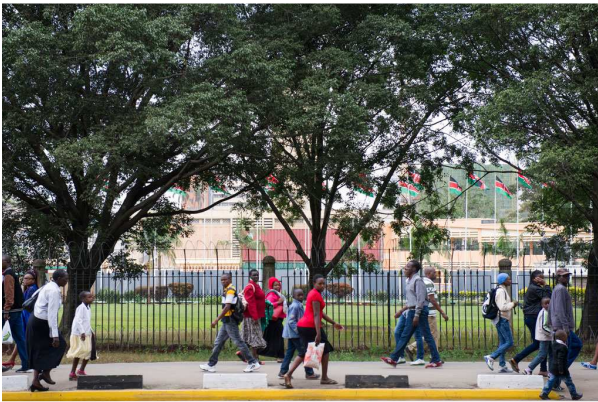
On 6 July, the Iraqi Minister of Justice announced that 45 death sentences have been carried out since the beginning of 2016, three more executions were forthcoming, and amendments to the legal framework to accelerate the implementation of death sentences would be put to the Iraqi Parliament.

On 23 July, the Prime Minister announced the establishment of the committee. An estimated 1,200 individuals are on death row in Iraq, including possibly hundreds who have exhausted appeals processes and have received the final decree of the President.

The Government of Iraq has not publicly confirmed these figures and usually only announces that executions have taken place long after the event.

Mr. Zeid called on Iraq to end the use of the death penalty by establishing an immediate moratorium on capital punishment and to reduce the number of offences for which the death penalty may be imposed.

In wake of renowned lawyer's murder, UN experts urge Kenya to put an end to police impunity



A street scene in Nairobi, Kenya. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

1 August – Voicing deep concern over the continuing pattern of extrajudicial executions in Kenya, United Nations human rights experts have called on the Government to halt police violence and ensure accountability for the perpetrators.

“The recent murder of a well-known lawyer and human rights defender is having a dramatic and detrimental impact on civil society, especially on those active in the field of human rights,” the experts noted in a statement issued late last week, stressing that “this heinous human rights violation should prompt the authorities to take concrete measures to put an end to police impunity.”

The experts’ call came after four police officers were charged with the murder of human rights lawyer Willie Kimani, his client Josephat Mwenda, and their driver; the latest high-profile case in a long list of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings in Kenya.

“The murder of Mr. Kimani, who was renowned for his work with the International Justice Mission, which fights police abuse of power [...] is a dramatic loss for the human rights community in Kenya,” the experts underscored, adding that: “The fact that Mr. Kimani had been working on a police brutality case around the days he was killed is deeply troubling.”

The human rights experts further urged the Government of Kenya to speedily address the apparent structural and systemic motives behind police brutality, which should include, but not be limited to, providing adequate support and capacity to the Independent Police Oversight Authority.

Mr. Kimani had been representing Mr. Mwenda, who filed a complaint with Kenya’s Independent Policing Oversight Authority when a police officer shot at him at a traffic stop following an incident in April 2015. Mr. Mwenda was later accused of various offenses, which his lawyers believe have been fabricated charges to silence him. On 1 July 2016, Mr. Kimani, Mr. Mwenda and Mr. Muiruri were found in a river with apparent signs of torture, one week after they had been abducted by unidentified persons.

The experts also expressed grave concern that the disappearance, torture and executions of the three men have been directly related to Mr. Kimani’s legitimate work, as a lawyer and human rights defender, in the defence of Mr. Mwenda’s rights as a victim of excessive use of force by the police.

“It is vital for human rights defenders to exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms free from intimidation or fear of reprisals; and for the society as a whole to live in a country respectful of the rule of law,” the UN independent experts concluded.

Independent experts or special rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff,

nor are they paid for their work.

Yemeni peace talks extended for another week – UN envoy



In Yemen, internally displaced children stand outside their family tent after the family fled their home in Saada province and found refuge in Darwin camp, in the northern province of Amran. Photo: UNHCR/Yahya Arhab

30 July – With all eyes on Yemeni peace negotiations, the United Nations envoy for the country announced today that the UN-supported talks under way in Kuwait have been extended for an additional week.

“We hope that the delegations can utilize this remaining week to achieve progress on the path towards peace,” said Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Yemen, the Special Envoy, who earlier today presented to the parties a proposal for a political solution that draws on the common ground achieved in the preceding weeks.

He had requested the extension in a letter to the Government of Kuwait, the host of the peace talks, and met with Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, to review the latest developments and the plans for the coming days.

In mid-July, Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed appealed to the parties, stating that “the time has come for you to take definitive decisions that demonstrate to the Yemeni people the sincerity of your intentions and your national obligations.”

Vast swathes of war-torn Yemen – 19 out of 22 governorates – are facing severe food insecurity, and the situation within affected areas is likely to deteriorate if conflict persists, according to a new assessment by the United Nations and partners.

The latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis confirms that over half the country's population is living in 'emergency' or 'crisis' levels of food insecurity, with some governorates seeing as much as 70 per cent of their population struggling to feed themselves.

Following nearly 16 months of conflict in Yemen, the cessation of hostilities was declared on 10 April and has since continued to provide relief from violence in many parts of the country. But serious violations have occurred in Marib, al Jawf, Taiz and in the border areas with Saudi Arabia.

On Friendship Day, Ban says lives can be enriched, future enhanced through unity and camaraderie

30 July – Marking the International Day of Friendship, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today urged everyone to unite in a shared spirit of human solidarity to overcome the crises confronting the global society.

“Friendship is a joy in itself, conferring happiness and a sense of wellbeing,” Mr. Ban said in his message on the Day.

“The accumulation of bonds of camaraderie around the world can contribute to fundamental shifts that are urgently needed to achieve lasting stability,” he added.

The Secretary-General said that by extending hands in friendship and building “ties of trust,” society can weave a protective safety net that can defeat the forces trying to undermine peace, security and social harmony.



Young Children at the ELCRN hostel in Otjimbingwe, Namibia. Photo: Philip Schuler/World Bank

“As understanding and awareness grow, we can build compassion and generate passion for a better world where all are united for the greater good,” he highlighted.

He noted that the choice of greed over the health of the planet and its inhabitants, pursuing a fanatic attachment to an ideology or people having to suffer human rights violations because they are considered somehow less than equal are all betrayals of the heritage of humanity and place the future wellbeing of humankind in peril.

These betrayals, said Mr. Ban, can be overcome through unity and by promoting and defending a shared spirit of human solidarity, challenges such as poverty, violence and human rights abuses can be addressed at their roots.

This spirit of solidarity, the Secretary-General said, is revealed in many ways, from international assistance to political advocacy at the global level and it can take the simple and timeless form of friendship at the individual level.

“On this International Day of Friendship, let us resolve to cherish and cultivate as many warm relationships as possible, enriching our own lives and enhancing the future,” Mr. Ban concluded.

The International Day of Friendship was proclaimed in 2011 by the UN General Assembly with the idea that friendship between peoples, countries, cultures and individuals can inspire peace efforts and build bridges between communities.