

UN aid 'pushed to limits' as 320,000 more civilians may flee west Mosul

20 March 2017 – Humanitarian agencies are bracing for the possibility that in coming weeks about 300,000 to 320,000 civilians may flee the western districts of Iraqi's Mosul city where Government forces are fighting to oust the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) terrorists, a senior United Nations aid official in the country has said.

That is in addition to some 180,000 civilians who have already fled the fighting in western Mosul since mid-February.

The humanitarian operation in western Mosul is far larger and far more complex than in the east, said the Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, Lise Grande, in a news release issued yesterday by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The main difference, she explained, is that tens of thousands of families stayed in their homes in the east, but in the west, tens of thousands are fleeing.

We've been planning and preparing for the Mosul operation for months. But the truth is that the crisis is pushing all of us to our limits. We're going to be doing the best we can to ensure the people who need assistance receive it, said Ms. Grande.

Humanitarian agencies are deeply worried that civilians are at grave risk in western Mosul. The use of explosives in the densely populated Old City is likely to cause extensive damage, and people fleeing are telling humanitarian workers that it's very difficult to enter or leave the Old City, said Ms. Grande.

Families are at risk of being shot if they leave and they are at risk if they stay. It's horrible. Hundreds of thousands of civilians are trapped and they are in terrible danger, she said.

RELATED: Relief operations in western Mosul reaching 'breaking point'

The main supply route into western Mosul has been cut since mid-November. Families fleeing the city are reporting that shelves are empty and that the only food available is what they already have at home. Water and electricity supplies have been cut and medicines are running out.

Under the leadership of the Government of Iraq, a massive national effort is underway to address the crisis. Civilians fleeing the western districts in the city are being accommodated in 17 camps and emergency sites near the city. The Government and partners are rushing to construct and expand 10 of these.

Every day, more space is becoming available, said Ms. Grande.

It's a race against time. So far, families are receiving support and being sheltered. But if the number of people leaving the city increases faster than we can construct new plots, the situation could deteriorate very quickly.

Since 17 October, over 330,000 people have been displaced by the Mosul crisis, over 70,000 of whom have returned to their homes. Humanitarian agencies have been working around the clock to provide life-saving support to more than 1.3 million people from eastern and western Mosul including families who have stayed in their homes, and those who have fled.

Ahead of International Day, UN and Smurfs team up to promote happiness and sustainable development

18 March 2017 – Every person no matter how big, small or blue can make the world more peaceful, equitable and healthy, the United Nations today told young people at a special ceremony for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that included the Smurfs and a handover of the key to Smurfdom.

Voice actors from the upcoming animated movie Smurfs: The Lost Village joined 1,500 students from the international Model UN conference to celebrate the upcoming International Day of Happiness, which focuses on personal well-being, and the SDGs, which include decent work for all, education and health services.

In a special blue carpet presentation, the United States stars of the movie Demi Lovato, who voices Smurfette, Joe Manganiello who is Hefty and Mandy Patinkin or Papa Smurf honoured three young students promoting the SDGs in their communities with a symbolic key to the Smurfs Village in recognition of their work.

On behalf of all Smurfdom, thank you for your work in awakening everything, in your community, through you social media, all over the world, in the ways that you have chosen to encourage people everywhere to make this world a better place for those who are so vulnerable in every way imaginable, Mr. Patinkin told Karen Jerath, Sarina Divan and Noor Samee.

VIDEO International Day of Happiness 2017 – Small Smurfs Big Goals

Ms. Jerath, who is 20 years old, invented a containment device that could prevent offshore oil spills and ensure the protection of marine life. She was

joined by Ms. Divan, 17, who expanded a UN Foundation girl empowerment initiative at her high school and beyond, and Mr. Samee, also 17, a UNICEF blogger and advocate on social justice issues.

Given a giant key with the SDG multi-coloured logo by UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, Cristina Gallach, the students were told “the world needs you to continue.”

“Never be afraid to speak up and to make this world a wonderful, beautiful, hopeful, optimistic place full of freedom, joy, justice and dignity, good food, good water, good opportunities for people everywhere, forever,” said Mr. Patinkin.

The “Small Smurfs Big Goals” campaign was created to encourage people to visit SmallSmurfsBigGoals.com to find out how to contribute to achieving the SDGs, and to share information, ideas and images on social media.

As part of today’s festivities, the UN Postal Administration unveiled a special edition stamp sheet featuring the Small Smurfs Big Goals campaign.

The stamps, which feature images of the Smurfs and the SDG logos, were presented by UN Assistant Secretary-General for Management, Stephen Cutts, and the Belgian Ambassador to the United Nations, Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve.

The event, held at the UN General Assembly in New York, was organized by the UN, UNICEF and UN Foundation, ahead of the International Day of Happiness marked annually on 20 March.

In 2015, the UN launched 17 SDGs that seek to end poverty, reduce inequality, and protect our planet – three key aspects that lead to well-being and happiness.

Along with New York, celebrations were held around the world to mark the campaign and the SDGs.

On Monday, the film cast along with the UN, UNICEF and UN Foundation will be at the Empire State Building to turn the iconic tower blue in honour of the International Day of Happiness and the Small Smurfs Big Goals campaign.

[Security Council extends mandate of UN mission in Afghanistan for one year](#)

17 March 2017 – The Security Council today extended the mandate of United Nations assistance operation in Afghanistan until 17 March 2018, stressing

the political mission's role in supporting an inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process.

Unanimously adopting a new resolution, the 15-member Council also requested the Secretary-General to conduct a strategic review of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and report back on the results of this exercise by July 2017, in order to ensure effective support for the Mission.

On the human rights front, the Council requested continued support efforts to strengthen the protection of children affected by armed conflict, and reiterated the importance of accelerating the establishment of a fair and transparent justice system. In that vein, the Council emphasized the importance of ensuring access for relevant organizations to all prisons and places of detention in Afghanistan.

Further in the text, the Council reiterated its support for the Government of Afghanistan, and in particular to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF), in their fight against terrorism and violent extremism, calling upon the Afghan Government, with the assistance of the international community, to continue to address the threat posed by the Taliban as well as by Al Qaida, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) affiliates and other terrorist groups.

[UN forum in Paris to spotlight mobile learning for refugees and displaced persons](#)

17 March 2017 – Education experts and government officials will gather at the Paris headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) from 20 to 24 March, to discuss ways of expanding the use of mobile technologies to “reach people where they are” and improve education opportunities for refugees and displaced persons and others in emergency situations.

This year's edition of Mobile Learning Week, on the theme “Education in Emergencies and Crises,” will introduce participants to projects such as ‘Teachers for Teachers’, a portal that connects instructors around the world through WhatsApp, a mobile messaging service.

Through this network, peers offer psychosocial and professional support and advice for challenges that instructors face in what the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) called “perhaps the toughest classroom in the world”: one that includes refugees learners.

Mobile learning involves the use of mobile technology, either alone or in

combination with other information and communication technology (ICT), to enable learning anytime and anywhere.

There are 180 students in the class of the primary school teacher Romans Manyiel Garang, who will be part of a panel discussion during Mobile Learning Week. He teaches in the Kakuma Refugee Camp, in Kenya, where he started in 2015, equipped with a secondary school degree and no previous teaching experience.

Tools such as the 'Teachers for Teachers' portal allow him to be in touch with a larger community of instructors and receive support and feedback from peers, as well as exchange problem-solving techniques.



Mobile learning in the Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya. Photo: UNHCR

"Comparing my ideas with others helps me grow as a teacher," Mr. Garang told UNESCO, adding: "I have a lot I can share to help teachers overcome their challenges."

Practical and psychosocial support offered by programmes such as 'Teachers for Teachers' are among the many ways educators, students and ministries of education are using cheap and widely available mobile technologies to expand and improve educational programmes to displaced people, whose numbers, according to UNHCR, surpassed 65 million in 2015.

This accounted for an average of 24 individuals being forced out of their homes per minute during every single day of 2015. Nearly 21.3 million of these people are refugees, and over half of these refugees are under 18 years old.

"We have to reach people where they are," said Mark West, the UNESCO coordinator of the five-day mobile learning event. "Our work indicates that mobile technologies offer unique advantages for making education accessible to displaced people and others on-the-move. Mobile Learning Week is where solutions and cutting edge ideas are shared."

The meeting in Paris will be structured in five parts: the symposium, which will include more than 70 breakout presentations; a total of 16 workshops, which aim to support learners, teachers, and systems; the strategy labs, to help guide the development of projects; the policy forum, which will bring together government officials and members of the private sector to examine how governments can facilitate the acquisition of essential digital skills, particularly for disadvantaged or displaced learners; and side events such as art exhibitions and demonstrations.

One of these side events, the Family Tent, which will be set up outside UNESCO for the duration of the conference, will show participants the living conditions of refugees.

Mobile Learning Week 2017 is organized by UNESCO in partnership with UNHCR

and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). This is the 7th edition of the meeting.

[Toll on refugee and migrant children continues to mount one year after EU-Turkey deal – UNICEF](#)

17 March 2017 – The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) warned today that one year after the Balkan border closures and the European Union-Turkey Statement, which were aimed at stopping mass migration flows, refugee and migrant children face greater risks of deportation, detention, exploitation and deprivation.

“While there has been a major decrease in the overall numbers of children on the move into Europe since last March, there has been an increase in the threats and distress refugee and migrant children endure,” said Afshan Khan UNICEF Regional Director and Special Coordinator for the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in Europe.

UNICEF staff in Greece report deep levels of distress and frustration among children and their families, including one child as young as eight attempting self-harm. Despite recent improvement in living conditions some unaccompanied children in shelters, suffer psychosocial distress, with high levels of anxiety, aggression and violence and demonstrating high risk behaviour such as drugs and prostitution.

War, destruction, the death of loved ones and a dangerous journey exacerbated by poor living conditions in camps around Greece or the lengthy registration and asylum procedures, can trigger post-traumatic stress disorders.

“It has become a vicious circle – children flee suffering, and they end up either fleeing again, or facing de facto detention, or just utter neglect,” underscored Ms. Khan.

In response, UNICEF, in collaboration with the Greek Government and non-governmental organization partner, are prioritizing appropriate care for refugee and migrant children to meet their mental health and psychosocial needs. Imminent transfers back to Greece in line with so-called ‘Dublin regulations,’ are likely to add even greater strain to the situation facing children and further pressure to existing services.

RELATED: ‘Refugees need protection, not rejection,’ UN says in wake of EU-Turkey deal

Instead of stemming the flow, border closures and the EU-Turkey statement,

have led to children and families taking matters into their own hands and embarking on even more dangerous and irregular routes with smugglers, as UNICEF and partners warned a year ago.

Even in 2017 nearly 3,000 refugees and migrants – with about a third children – have arrived in Greece despite the full implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement and strict border control. Many continue to slip through borders into Bulgaria, West Balkans and Hungary, said UNICEF.

Children stranded in Greece and West Balkans have already lost nearly three years of education and now face several hurdles like different languages and education systems and yet another year without schooling. UNICEF is supporting the Ministry of Education's strategy to integrate stranded refugee and migrant children in Greek schools. However only 2,500 children out the 15,000 school age children so far that benefit from the national scheme in Greek language.

Despite significant efforts – from government and partners – about half of the 2,100 unaccompanied children are still living in substandard conditions, including nearly 200 unaccompanied children in facilities with limited movement early March (178 in reception and identification centres on the Islands and 16 in “protective custody” in police cells).