

[Children's suffering worsening as violence escalates in Gaza – UNICEF](#)

Highlighting the devastating impact of the humanitarian crisis and increasing violence on children in Gaza, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has called on all parties with influence on the ground to ensure that children are protected.

"The escalating violence in Gaza has [exacerbated the suffering of children](#) whose lives have already been unbearably difficult for several years," Geert Cappelaere, the Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa at UNICEF, said in a statement Friday.

Mr. Cappelaere underscored that in addition to the physical injuries, children are showing signs of severe distress and trauma.

"Yesterday, our UNICEF Special Representative visited a 14-year-old boy who suffered a gunshot wound, causing a severe injury close to his heart. He is now home recovering after being in hospital for two weeks. It is hard for him to be optimistic through the pain, but when he gets better, he wants to be a doctor, like the ones who helped him survive," he said.

According to the UN agency, over the past five weeks, five children were killed and hundreds more injured in largely peaceful protests. In all, half of the region's children depend humanitarian assistance, and one in four needs psychosocial care.

In addition, power cuts and shortages in fuel in Gaza have disrupted water and sanitation services, with reports that nine out of 10 families do not have regular access to safe water. Medicines and health equipment are also in short supply, straining an already fragile health system.

Against this dire background, Mr. Cappelaere reiterated the call on all parties to protect children and keep them out of harm's way.

"Children belong in schools, homes and playgrounds – they should never be targeted or encouraged to participate in violence."

[UN chief 'optimistic' over peace efforts to denuclearize Korean](#)

Peninsula

The UN chief expressed optimism on Thursday that the full denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula could become a reality, following last week's historic joint declaration from the leaders of the north and south, which eased months of rising tension over North Korea's nuclear programme.

In an interview with the BBC's flagship morning radio show, the Today programme, during his current visit to London, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#), said that after talking to South Korea's President Moon Jae-in on Monday that "things are on track for a meaningful negotiation and I believe it's in everyone's interest."

The Republic of Korea's leader, met his counterpart in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Kim Jong Un, at a historic summit on the border between the two countries last Friday, in which they agreed to work towards a lasting peace and strengthen inter-Korean ties.

Mr. Guterres was also asked if he was worried that the United States is reportedly considering withdrawing from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), involving Iran and the five Permanent Members of the Security Council plus Germany and the European Union,

The JCPOA, signed in 2015, limits Iran nuclear development programme, in exchange for the lifting of sanctions, and the UN chief described it as "an important achievement".

"The JCPOA was an important diplomatic victory and I think it will be important to preserve it," he said. "But I also believe that there are areas in which it will be very important to have a meaning dialogue because I see the region in a very dangerous position."

"If one day there is a better agreement to replace it it's fine, but we should not scrap it unless we have a good alternative," said the Secretary-General.

"I don't see how Syria can be reconstructed with the support of the international community if there is no political solution in which all groups of Syrian society feel represented" – UN Secretary General António Guterres

On Syria, the UN chief said that there was a "risk of fragmentation" of the entire country after more than seven years of brutal civil conflict.

"I don't think that anybody can win the war...On the other hand, I don't see how Syria can be reconstructed with the support of the international community if there is no political solution in which all groups of Syrian society feel represented," he said.

“We need to have a political solution that all Syrians feel comfortable with, and that requires a level of dialogue that until now has not been possible,” he said, adding that “we have not yet had the leverage to create the conditions for that to happen.”

He said that he had “not given up” on making warring parties in Syria accountable for their use of chemical weapons.

“I still believe that we need to insist, and we are looking for avenues that might allow, to create a mechanism of attribution agreed by the Security Council, that will be able to define who’s responsible for any chemical attack, creating the conditions for accountability.”

He added that “the re-establishment of a mechanism of accountability in Syria is very important and I will not give up on that.”

[‘Standing up for our right to truth,’ UN celebrates press freedom](#)

With journalism under increasing attack worldwide, top United Nations officials on Thursday joined a growing chorus of calls for the better protection of media workers.

Marking [World Press Freedom Day](#) via video message, UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) described “how journalists and media workers shine a light on local and global challenges and tell the stories that need to be told,” and said: “Their service to the public is invaluable.”

“Laws that protect independent journalism, freedom of expression and the right to information need to be adopted, implemented and enforced. Crimes against journalists must be prosecuted,” he stressed, calling on governments to strengthen press freedom, and to protect journalists in the vital work they do.

“Promoting a free press is standing up for our right to truth,” he added.

Only 10 per cent of the 930 cases of killings of journalists between 2006-2016 have been officially resolved, according to the most recent [World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development Report](#), published by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and its partners.

During last year, 79 journalists were assassinated worldwide while going about their work.

Earlier this week, nine journalists were among those killed in a terrorist

attack in Afghanistan. Following an initial terrorist blast in the capital Kabul, that killed many civilians, a second explosion targeted media workers arriving on the scene to cover the attack. In a separate incident on the same day, another Afghan journalist was killed.

This brings the total number of journalists murdered so far this year to 32 – with nearly eight months remaining.

UNESCO's chief, Audrey Azoulay, pledged – in her message for the Day – that her agency was “committed to defending the safety of journalists and fighting against impunity for crimes committed against them.”

“The ideal of a State under the rule of law calls for well-informed citizens, transparent political decisions, public debates on topics of common interest and a plurality of viewpoints that shapes opinions and undermines official truths and dogmatism,” she said. “This shaping and informative power, mainly falls to the press and the media in general, under all their guises and through various mediums.”

Around the world, World Press Freedom Day, established by the UN General Assembly in 1993, is being observed to champion free and accurate reporting.

“We cannot become complacent to these kinds of attacks. They cannot become the new normal,” Assembly President Miroslav Lajčák told an event held at UN Headquarters in New York.

This year's theme for the Day is “Keeping Power in Check: Media, Justice and The Rule of Law.” It highlights the importance of having laws that safeguard press freedom, and gives special attention to the role of an independent judiciary to guarantee press freedom and prosecute crimes against journalists.

UNESCO has partnered with 40 news organizations to launch a campaign that encourages readers to look beyond their usual outlets, and actively engage with alternative news sources. The campaign slogan – ‘Read more. Listen more. Understand more. It all starts with a free press’ – featured strongly during the official global celebration of the Day, in the Ghanaian capital, Accra.

In Afghanistan, Tadamichi Yamamoto, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative, has this message to mark the day.

“The United Nations recognizes that Afghanistan is one of the most dangerous places for journalists to work,” he said, “and we reiterate our determination to protect journalist safety and to fight against impunity.”

In Somalia, UN Special Representative Michael Keating, commended the courage and dedication of the country's journalists who operate in one of the world's most dangerous environments for media workers.

“I salute the hundreds of Somali journalists who risk their lives on a regular basis to do their job,” said Mr. Keating. “A truly free and independent news media is indispensable in all democratic societies, an essential means to hold the powerful to account.”

He added that it was “an essential component for the media to do its job is ending the culture of impunity that, unfortunately, prevails for crimes committed against journalists.”

[UN agencies urge global action as drought looms over Africa’s Sahel region](#)

United Nations agencies have urged greater international support to stave off severe food insecurity in Africa’s western Sahel; a region reeling from the effects of conflict and now threatened by drought and rising hunger.

According to estimates, about five million people in northern Senegal, southern Mauritania and parts of Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad, will require food and livelihood assistance, after having exhausted their food reserves – which may run out by the end of this month.

In normal weather conditions, supplies would last beyond June, into September.

[“We are hearing of people cutting down the number of daily meals and children dropping out of school,”](#) Abdou Dieng, the Regional Director of the UN [World Food Programme](#) (WFP) for West and Central Africa, said in a news release on Thursday.

“Those are telling signs of a looming disaster that the world cannot continue to ignore.”

It is feared the region’s children will be the worst affected, with more than 1.6 million at risk of severe acute malnutrition this year – representing a 50 per cent increase compared with the last major nutrition crisis in the Sahel, in 2012.

Marie-Pierre Poirier, the Regional Director for West and Central Africa at the [UN Children’s Fund](#) (UNICEF) said that it was [“tragic that the same mothers are coming back to the clinics year after year](#) with their children for treatment.”

It is tragic that the same mothers are coming back to the clinics year after year with their children for treatment of severe acute malnutrition

– UNICEF official Marie-Pierre Poirier

This year, the numbers have been the worst, she added.

“We can break this cycle if we invest now in building resilience – making families, communities and national authorities better equipped to prevent and deal with similar shocks in the future,” said Ms. Poirier.

Strengthening resilience is also the top priority for the UN [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO).

[“What will help stabilize the Sahel is support for pastoralists and agro-pastoralists](#), during this lean season and in the future, to cope with shocks that include climate change and conflicts,” said Coumba Sow, the Sub-Regional Coordinator for Resilience for FAO across the region.

To mitigate the impact of the immediate crisis, the three UN agencies have developed a joint response to cover food needs, protect livelihoods and address malnutrition.

They have also prepared longer-term interventions, including improving access to local food resources as well as strengthening health and social services to allow communities and countries at large, to prevent and deal with similar shocks in the future.

Implementing these programmes however, relies on sufficient funding.

Fully funded, the WFP [response](#) (requiring \$284 million) will provide food and nutrition to some 3.5 million people. UNICEF’s [response](#) (\$264 million) will protect almost 1 million children from severe acute malnutrition and provide them access to water and sanitation facilities and education until the end of the year.

The FAO [response](#) (requiring \$128 million, of which \$45 million is urgently needed) will help the situation from further deteriorating for 2.5 million livestock and other farmers, and their families.

[UN chief denounces terror attack on electoral commission HQ in Libyan capital](#)

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has condemned Wednesday’s attack on the electoral commission headquarters in the Libyan capital, Tripoli, and reiterated the world body’s commitment to support the country.

In a [statement](#) attributable to his spokesperson, the UN chief also extended his condolences to the families of the victims and sincere sympathy to the

wounded.

According to reports, at least 12 people were killed and seven wounded when terrorists attacked the High National Election Commission on Wednesday.

In the statement, Mr. Guterres also underscored the UN's commitment to the implementation of the Action Plan for Libya.

The plan, which was [endorsed](#) by the Security Council last October, [aims to bring about peace and stability in the country](#) and end a protracted crisis that has caused immense suffering and contributed to instability beyond the Libya's borders.

Violence between rival groups has plagued the oil-rich North African nation since shortly after the 2011 overthrow of former leader Muammar Gaddafi, leading to a humanitarian and economic crisis.

The Action Plan contains seven main priorities, beginning with reinvigorating an inclusive political process by building on recent positive developments. Other priorities include strengthening national security; supporting migrants; and securing predictable support for humanitarian assistance.

The statement added that the UN Special Representative for Libya, Ghassan Salamé, is working very closely with all parties towards the plan's full implementation.