

Dozens killed and injured by new airstrikes in western Yemen, UN coordinator condemns 'outrageous' toll

Reports from Yemen's Hajjah Governorate indicate that scores of civilians have been killed following airstrikes that hit residential areas over the past two days. Medical sources suggest that at least 22 have died, with more than 30 injured during the aerial bombardment.

"We condemn these deaths and injuries unequivocally and we share our deep condolences with the families of the victims," said UN Humanitarian Coordinator in the country, Lise Grande. "It is outrageous that innocent civilians continue to die needlessly in a conflict that should, and can be solved", she added.

Reportedly, the attacks took place in Kushar district, and took the lives of 10 women and 12 children. Among the 30 injured, at least 14 were under-18. Many of the injured children have been sent to hospitals in Abs district and in Sana'a for treatment and several require possible evacuation to survive.

In [her statement](#), Ms. Grande added that "a higher percentage of people in Yemen are hungry and suffering, than in any other country." The province of Hajjah is one of the worst impacted, with more than a million people going hungry and thousands of new cholera cases being reported on a regular basis.

"We fear that thousands of civilians are trapped between the parties [to the conflict] and lack the basic services they need to survive," lamented Ms. Grande.

"We're doing everything we can to reach the people who need help in Hajjah and throughout the country," she explained, noting that in Hajjah specifically, humanitarian organisations have distributed emergency supplies, provided access to safe drinking water and dispatched emergency mobile medical teams.

"We desperately want to help people but we are facing serious problems," said the Humanitarian Coordinator. "We need access, visas, specialized equipment and approvals for our programmes," she added, asking all parties to the conflict to help humanitarians do their life-saving work.

Since conflict escalated in 2015, Yemen has been facing the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Nearly four in five Yemenis in the country depend on humanitarian assistance and protection to survive. About 10 million people are on the brink of famine and starvation, and 7 million people are malnourished.

The [2019 Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan](#) requires US\$4.2 billion to assist more than 20 million Yemenis including 10 million people who rely entirely on

humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs every month. To date, the response is only [4 per cent funded](#).

UN rights expert calls for end to ‘purgatory’ of ‘international inaction’ facing Myanmar’s remaining Rohingya

A humanitarian crisis fuelled by the suppression of basic human rights is continuing across Myanmar’s Rakhine state, a UN Human Rights Council-appointed expert [said on Monday](#), in an appeal for alleged atrocities there to be referred to the International Criminal Court ([ICC](#)).

Presenting her latest report to the 47-Member body in Geneva, [Yanghee Lee](#), Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, highlighted several areas of concern across the country, including grave abuses linked to the mass exodus of some 700,000 Rohingya Muslims from Rakhine in August 2017, which was sparked by separatist violence against police posts.

A separate [Council-appointed probe](#) last year called for the prosecution of top Myanmar military commanders for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

In reply, Myanmar’s Kyaw Moe Tun, Permanent Representative of the Republic to the UN in Geneva, rejected the Special Rapporteur’s update.

Rohingya ‘torched their own houses’ officials claim

Among her findings, Ms. Lee noted that just last week she had received a report that 24 Rohingya houses in the town of Buthidaung in Rakhine, had been burned down, which officials explained afterwards by saying that the owners had torched the properties themselves.

Under the terms of a 2018 UN led agreement between Myanmar and Bangladesh – which hosts more than a million Rohingyas in exile – Myanmar has agreed to create conditions conducive to the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation of Rohingya refugees.

Today, the conditions of this Memorandum of Understanding have not been met, the Special Rapporteur said.

The deal “expires in a few months”, she added, insisting that there was “nothing to indicate that conditions have improved for the Rohingya who

remain in Myanmar”.

Staying with Rakhine state, the Special Rapporteur maintained that clashes between the separatist Arakan Army and the Myanmar military had forced 10,000 people to flee since November.

“Allegations exist of fighters dressing as civilians and using civilian vehicles, landmine use, forced recruitment and forced portering, and arrest and detention of civilians suspected of being associates or sympathisers of the Arakan Army,” Ms. Lee said. “It does not appear that the situation will improve in the immediate future.”

Given the gravity of the situation, she appealed for the [UN Security Council](#) to take the international lead on the matter.

“I still firmly believe that the situation in Myanmar must be referred to the ICC by the Security Council...Victims must not be forced to wait in the purgatory of international inaction,” she said.

Exploitation of gems, timber, high on list of alleged rights violations

Allegations of misuse of Myanmar’s natural riches constituted one of the biggest areas of the Special Rapporteur’s investigations, particularly in the gemstones and timber sectors.

“Revenues from natural resource extraction needed for vital services and development being diverted to the military and its allies undermines the civilian Government, democratic reforms, the peace process, sustainable development and the realisation of rights,” the Special Rapporteur explained.

Rohingya refugees give Council testimony for first time

For the first time, the Council heard testimonies from two Rohingya refugees, Hamida Khatun from Shanti Mohila and Muhub Ullah from the Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights.

“In August 2017, I fled Burma to Bangladesh when my village was attacked,” Mrs Khatun said. “My Rohingya brothers and sisters were killed, my husband and mother were killed. I’m the only Rohingya woman who could leave Bangladesh to tell you what happened to hundreds of thousands of us.”

In her comments, delivered by Lawyers’ Rights Watch Canada, Mrs Khatun added that she had “three requests for the international community: first, justice including compensation; second, to return home in safety and security including citizenship; and third, access to education.”

Rakhine problem vast and complex, says Myanmar

Myanmar told the Council that the Government had sought sustainable peace and national reconciliation, while the issue in Rakhine state was vast and complex.

“We share the concern over the plight of all affected communities due to the violence triggered by provocative, coordinated attacks of ARSA terrorists against multiple security outposts in October 2016 and August 2017,” said Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun.

“I would like to reiterate Myanmar’s readiness to receive the verified returnees in a voluntary safe and dignified manner in accordance with the bilateral agreements with Bangladesh.”

In response to Ms. Lee’s appeal for an international tribunal to investigate alleged abuses, Mr. Kyaw insisted that his country “will not accept any call for referring the situation in Myanmar to the ICC. The Government of Myanmar established an Independent Commission of Enquiry in July last year. The Commission will investigate...as part of Myanmar’s effort to the address the issue of accountability,” he said adding that the Government “is willing and able to address the accountability issue.”

UN chief sends condolences to families of Malawi flood victims

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has extended his condolences to the families of flood victims across Malawi, where at least 23 have died in recent days, and to the Government and citizens of the country.

In a statement released on Monday, Mr. Guterres said that he was “deeply saddened” by the loss of life and the “significant damage to people’s homes and livelihoods” caused by the heavy rains and subsequent flooding.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)) estimates that the flooding has affected some 115,000 people, particularly in the south of Malawi. In a [factsheet](#) on the floods released on Saturday, [OCHA](#) warned that the number of people affected is expected to rise, as assessment teams reach new areas.

The flooding has had a major impact on power supplies in Malawi: according to media reports, the country’s main utility company, EGENCO, has said that more than 80% of the country’s available hydro-electric capacity is down.

On Friday, Malawian President Peter Mutharika declared a State of Emergency in the areas hit hardest by the rains and flooding, which followed the formation of a “tropical disturbance” over the Mozambique Channel earlier in the week.

Search and rescue teams from Malawi’s Department of Disaster Management Affairs, have been working with local partners to deliver relief to affected

people, including tents, plastic sheets, maize, rice, beans, blankets and kitchen utensils, according to a statement issued by the Ministry of Homeland Security.

The United Nations expressed its solidarity with the Malawian authorities, and committed to support them as they respond to the humanitarian needs of the population: the UN response has involved several main agencies. The World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) has deployed two boats to accompany the assessment and response; the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) is providing drones; and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)), in collaboration with the [WFP](#), will support mapping using satellite imagery.

Annual UN women activists' summit opens with focus on services, infrastructure

A wheelchair-bound Pakistani mother who yearned to visit a park without worrying about ramp access, and a young South Sudanese woman who dreams of having affordable health care, were among the speakers opening the United Nations' largest annual gathering on gender equality and women's rights on Monday.

Addressing the [63rd session](#) of the UN [Commission on the Status of Women](#) (CSW) in a joint speech, Muniba Mazari and Mary Fatiya, both asked for basic social protections to be extended to women and girls around the world, based on need, and in line with their inalienable human rights.

"Being a woman has its challenges. Being in a wheelchair is the cherry on top," Ms. Mazari, who is also the [Goodwill Ambassador for UN Pakistan](#), told several thousand activists, diplomats, and academics gathered in the UN's General Assembly Hall.

Ms. Fatiya, who described going long distances to a school where only two toilets were available for around 600 children, said her ideal world centred around a peace existence, access to healthcare and good infrastructure: "I'm not asking for a luxurious road. I just need it and it's my right to have it."

The annual meeting of the Commission, which dates back to 1947, will bring more than 9,000 representatives from civil society organizations to the UN over the course of the next two weeks. This year's theme is "social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls." Many of the marathon-discussions are expected to also focus on gender equality and the

[2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development.

Gender equality, ‘fundamentally a question of power’

In his opening statement, Secretary-General *António* Guterres said the Commission on the Status of Women could equally be called the “Commission on the Status of Power”.

“Because that is the crux of the issue. Gender equality is fundamentally a question of power,” he said, noting that the world had lost its way, highlighting a pushback on women’s rights.

Mr. Guterres – who called himself a “proud feminist” – said that changing power relations, overcoming gaps and biases, and fighting to preserve gains, necessitates engaging women as equal participants in society.

“When we exclude women, everyone pays the price. When we include women, the whole world wins,” he said.

Similarly, this year’s Commission Chair, Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason of Ireland, said in her speech that “resilience is in women’s DNA and the world needs women’s resilience now more than ever.”

The topics that will be covered over the next two weeks, range from planning urban space and public transport, with women’s safety and mobility in mind, to improving rural women’s access to skilled birth attendants.

Invest to ‘free up time’, opportunity, for women and girls

The President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Inga Rhonda King, also noted, for example, the importance of public services, infrastructure and social protection for recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work – which often falls to women and girls in the family.

Investing here is “critical to free up women’s and girls’ time, support their mobility and women’s access to economic opportunities,” Ms. King said.

Highlighting some of the progress made in recent decades, the head of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, said thanks to investment in infrastructure and access to public services, more girls are in school now than ever before.

She noted the need to close the gaps, however, saying that 71 per cent of the world’s population, still does not have full access to universal social protections.

Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka urged greater leadership on women’s issues, saying women and girls have a vital role to play in shaping the policies delivery of services and infrastructure that impacts their lives.

Among other speakers on the opening day, was Marlène Schiappa, the French Minister of State for Gender Equality, the nation holding the Presidency of the Security Council this month. She said that the involvement of more women in political and peace processes was vital for women’s empowerment, and a

problem that affects the diplomatic community. She urged the Security Council to redouble its efforts to more fully include women in these discussions.

Meanwhile, in the Security Council itself on Monday morning, where Afghanistan was top of the agenda, Storai Tapesht, Deputy Executive Director of the Afghan Women's Network organization, raised concerns about the movement towards striking a peace deal with Taliban extremists.

"We, the women of Afghanistan, have cautious optimism for peace. Yet we are concerned – more than ever – that women's human rights will be compromised in the name of peace."

UN unveils global influenza strategy to prevent 'real' threat of pandemic

A new UN-led plan has been unveiled to tackle the estimated one billion cases of influenza which occur each year, and protect against the "real" threat of a global pandemic, the head of the organization's health agency said on Monday.

Announcing the revised [Global Influenza Strategy for 2019-2030](#), [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) Director-General Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus, warned that the "question is not if we will have another pandemic, but when".

"The threat of pandemic influenza is ever-present," he said, noting that the risk of a new influenza virus transmitting from animals to humans and potentially leading to a pandemic is "real".

Influenza remains one of the world's greatest public health challenges, according to the WHO, which says that the viral respiratory disease is responsible for between 290,000 and 650,000 related deaths a year.

Globalization, urbanization and mobility will result in the next pandemic moving faster and further, the agency maintains, while also underlining that those infected with the virus can face other health threats, such as heart attacks, strokes and severe pneumonia.

Outbreaks highlight pressures on poorer countries

The WHO's 11-year plan focuses on the formulation of robust national programmes and has three goals: reducing seasonal influenza, minimizing the risk of transmission from animals to humans, and limiting the impact of a pandemic.

In addition, WHO is calling for better tools to prevent, detect, control and

treat influenza, such as more efficient vaccines and anti-viral drugs.

Influenza outbreaks tend to emphasise the pressures faced by health systems in low and middle-income countries in particular, WHO says, insisting that investing in influenza-prevention measures will encourage a rapid response to many other infectious diseases.

An outbreak in Madagascar in 2002 had a 2.5 per cent fatality ratio, which is very similar to the 1918-1919 pandemic, WHO says, noting that the cost of pandemic preparedness globally is estimated at \$4.5 billion a year, which is less than one per cent of the estimated cost needed to respond to a “medium-to-severe” pandemic.

“A severe pandemic can result in millions of deaths globally, with widespread social and economic effects, including a loss of national economic productivity and severe economic burdens on affected citizens and communities” WHO says.