

Yemen: 'Time is running out' to head off devastating famine, warns UN food agency chief

As conflict continues to rage in Yemen, leading to widespread economic hardship and a rampant inflation, the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) is sounding the alarm over soaring food prices that are affecting millions of Yemenis.

"My primary concern is the innocent children, women and men of Yemen, and I urge all parties to end the fighting and support efforts to build peace," said David Beasley, WFP Executive Director, in a [statement](#) on Wednesday. "Only an immediate cessation of hostilities will give the humanitarian community the sustained access it needs to provide the food and other vital assistance needed to save Yemeni lives," he added.

Yemen is facing one of the world's deepest humanitarian crises with 22.2 million people in need of life-saving assistance, including food, safe water, nutritional support and basic medical care, according to the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA).

The [country's economy has taken a nose dive](#) since conflict between government forces and their allies, to quell Houthi rebels, escalated in 2015. There has been a 180 per cent depreciation of the Yemeni Riyal in three years. The cost of basic food items has increased by 35 per cent in the past 12 months, leaving many families unable to feed themselves, leading to the world's largest hunger crisis, with 18 million people – two in three Yemenis – not knowing where their next meal will come from.

International food assistance, most of which is provided by WFP with 6 to 7 million persons reached every month across the country, has been critical in preventing the country from descending into a full-blown famine, but, according to Mr. Beasley, "in the face of growing obstacles and risks, we are now reaching the limit".

Though the agency intends to scale up its capacity in order to reach up to 8 million people per month, the Head of WFP warns that "if the conflict continues to intensify and economic conditions further deteriorate, we could well see the number of severely food-insecure Yemenis increasing to 12 million", he said, explaining that "with limited access, escalating insecurity and further damage to the country's infrastructure" the organisation's ability to deliver assistance to this number of people would be "extremely challenging".

Noting that the targeting of humanitarian workers or humanitarian assets and infrastructure "should have no place in Yemen or anywhere in the world", Mr. Beasley denounced "a spate of attacks, unwitting or otherwise" on WFP's workers, trucks, warehouses and the silos holding the grain, which are

“neutral and should be off limits to anybody involved in this conflict.”

Mr. Beasley also highlighted the fact that “with multiple major humanitarian emergencies across the globe”, the financial brunt of the Yemen crisis is becoming “a major challenge for the international community.”

Warning that “time is running out for aid agencies in Yemen to prevent this country from slipping into a devastating famine,” the Head of WFP called for new entry points for humanitarian and commercial food imports and a free-flow of commercial and humanitarian food inside the country.

“I urge all parties to the conflict to meet their obligations to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure and take active steps to respect international humanitarian law by ending the conflict and bringing the peace that Yemen so desperately needs”.

South Sudanese soldier who shot UN peacekeeper on Saturday, will face court martial: UN mission chief

The South Sudanese soldier who shot and wounded a UN peacekeeper on Saturday is facing a court martial, said David Shearer, head of the UN Mission in South Sudan ([UNMISS](#)), during a press conference in the capital, Juba.

Speaking on Wednesday, Mr. Shearer said that the peacekeeper, a Nepalese national, had been travelling with a convoy to collect water when the shooting occurred. The peacekeeper, he added, is recovering at a hospital in Juba. The authorities have assured UNMISS that the shooting was an “isolated incident.”

The targeting of UN peacekeepers in South Sudan, said Mr. Shearer, is a result of insecurity in the country, which is still ongoing, despite the signing of a revitalized peace agreement a week ago.

He welcomed the reduction in the level of fighting since last year, but said that there have been allegations of ceasefire violations, including flare-ups of fighting in southern Central Equatoria, which are being investigated by ceasefire monitors.

Mr. Shearer reiterated calls, first made following the shooting of the peacekeeper, for the local authorities and the Government of South Sudan to “establish command and control over the armed forces to ensure this kind of unruly behavior does not occur again.”

He also echoed comments on the progress of the peace process – delivered to the [UN Security Council](#) on Tuesday – by [Jean-Pierre Lacroix](#), the head of UN Peacekeeping Operations, and [Nicholas Haysom](#), outgoing [UN Special Envoy](#) for Sudan and South Sudan.

From his vantage point on the ground, Mr. Shearer agreed that the peace accord is an important step on the long road to peace, but said there was still a lack of trust between the “warring factions” – the national army loyal to the government of President Salva Kiir, and forces loyal to main political opposition leader, former Vice-President, Riek Machar.

“Those who signed the agreement have, in the past, been former friends but have also been former foes. From my discussions with them, suspicion is still quite widespread. So, a lot of work needs to be done to encourage trust between the parties, as well as between the parties, and the people of South Sudan. And that’s something that we all need to help with.”

Mr. Shearer will travel to UN Headquarters in New York, to take an active part in discussions during the General Assembly high level week which begins on Monday, and expand on how UNMISS can best support the implementation of the peace agreement.

Make the guns fall silent.

‘Immediately and everywhere’: South Sudan envoy

Warring parties in South Sudan must demonstrate their willingness to a peaceful end to their conflict by “making their guns fall silent. Immediately and everywhere,” said [Nicholas Haysom](#), outgoing [UN Special Envoy](#) for Sudan and South Sudan, on Tuesday.

Mr. Haysom’s comments were delivered during a briefing to the Security Council on South Sudan, led by [Jean-Pierre Lacroix](#), the head of UN Peacekeeping Operations.

Mr. Haysom said that two years ago, when he took up his post, South Sudan was trying to implement the original version of the peace agreement that has now been revitalized, and formally agreed only last week, in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, between President Salva Kiir and his former Vice-President, Riek Machar.

The two years-long rivals signed a “[landmark](#)” agreement on 12 September at the main UN office in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, following 15 months of negotiations led by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD,

an eight-country trade bloc in Africa) and the Governments of Sudan and Ethiopia.

Since 2013, the country has suffered devastating civil conflict that has seen tens of thousands killed, multiple human rights abuses and millions displaced or forced to flee across the border.

Mr. Haysom said that the important question facing the Security Council is how the international community and UN should respond to the new agreement and that, whilst the agreement is not perfect, it could still be an effective platform for peace.

Mr. Lacroix described the new agreement as “an important milestone in a crisis now entering its fifth year,” saying that the need for peace in South Sudan is so urgent that “we must seize this as an opportunity and work together to make the agreement a basis for lasting peace.”



UN Photo/Cia Pak

Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, briefs the Security Council on situation in Sudan and South Sudan on 18 September 2018.

Mr. Haysom told the Security Council that he has advised the parties to the South Sudanese conflict that simply signing a peace treaty will not lead to the automatic support of the international community, noting that previous agreements have been violated within hours of the relevant parties committing to peace.

An assessment of the sustainability of the agreement, he said, is necessary. This assessment includes its enforceability, political accountability and trust levels: with trust currently very low between the two parties, confidence building measures are needed to build faith in the peace process, following years of intercommunal violence.

In addition, potential donors will not be willing to fund the peace process unless there is financial transparency, and accountability for the past misuse of public funds.



UN Photo/Evan Schneider

Nicholas Haysom, the Secretary General's Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan, addresses the Security Council meeting on 26 October 2017.

In his briefing, Mr. Lacroix also stated that trust is crucial, and that this would allow all South Sudanese stakeholders, including women, to meaningfully engage in the full implementation of the agreement.

However, renewed fighting had already been reported within days of the signing in Addis Ababa, in several regions of South Sudan, with both sides in the conflict mobilizing reinforcements to support operations to secure territory.

This fighting, said Mr. Lacroix, has worsened the already dire humanitarian and human rights situation in the country.

Almost 2 million people are displaced within South Sudan, and another 2.5 million have been forced to live in neighbouring countries. A key hallmark of the conflict includes sexual violence, threats and harassment.

Mr. Lacroix and Mr. Haysom both supported the proposal of IGAD to enable Sudan, Uganda, Djibouti and Somali troops to join the Regional Protection Force (RPF) deployed in South Sudan.

These soldiers would be tasked with, among other things, the protection of the opposition leaders once they return to the country to take part in the transitional government.

The [UN Mission in South Sudan](#), [UNMISS](#), will continue to perform its mandate to contribute to a secure environment, with an emphasis on protecting

civilians.

Bring the United Nations closer to the people, urges Assembly President in her inaugural speech

The new session of the United Nations General Assembly opened on Wednesday with its President pledging to use her year in office to bring the world body closer to the people and strengthen their sense of ownership and support for the UN.

In her [first keynote address](#) to what is the 73rd session of the 193-member General Assembly, President María Fernanda Espinosa, said that the need for stronger global leadership in the service of multilateralism, to ensure more peaceful, equitable and sustainable societies, would underpin her work.

“Let us proceed together, building a world more equal and free, more sustainable and respectful of nature, and more inclusive and supportive,” she said.

Ms. Espinosa, who was elected the President of the General Assembly in June, succeeds Miroslav Lajčák, the President of the 72nd session. She is only the fourth woman to hold that position in the history of the world body, and the first woman ever from Latin America and the Caribbean region.

Let us proceed together, building a world more equal and free, more sustainable and respectful of nature, and more inclusive and supportive – *Assembly President Espinosa*

In her address, the Assembly President outlined her seven priorities – identified in consultation with Member States – that will shape the year-long session: promoting gender equality; promoting and implementing the new global compacts on migration and refugees; advocating for decent work; protecting the environment; focusing on rights of persons with disabilities; supporting the UN reform process; and facilitating dialogue.

“I am also prepared to facilitate quick and effective responses of the General Assembly to emergency situations as they arise,” she added, noting that “unfortunately, they will arise.”

Concluding her remarks, Ms. Espinosa also pledged that she will uphold good practices in her Office, ensuring its geographical representation, gender parity, and total transparency in its administrative and financial

management.

She also assured that she will observe, “with absolute responsibility”, the Code of Ethics for the President of the General Assembly, and will abide strictly by the precepts of the United Nations Charter and the Assembly’s Rules of Procedure.

World needs the General Assembly to show the value of international cooperation – UN chief Guterres

UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) also [addressed](#) the new General Assembly, congratulating President Espinosa on assuming the office and noting the important issues that lie ahead.

“We need action for peacekeeping, gender parity, financing for the 2030 Agenda [for Sustainable Development], empowerment for the world’s young people, urgent steps to end poverty and conflict, and much else,” he said, calling on world leaders to come to the high-level week beginning on Monday, “ready to be bold and ready to forge solutions for our global challenges.”

The Secretary-General also underscored the importance of international cooperation and for the Assembly to show the true value of working together.

“The Secretariat and I are committed to supporting you,” he said.

Eritrea: Peace deal prompts hope of internal reforms, to improve fundamental human rights

The peace agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia has raised hopes that improving human rights will be front and centre on Eritrea’s path forward, according to a United Nations Special Rapporteur on Tuesday.

On 9 July, leaders of both countries signed a Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship, raising expectations that the end of the “no war, no peace” stalemate between them, would positively impact Eritrea’s internal human rights situation.

The thaw in relations between the neighbouring countries, who fought a bloody, unresolved war in the late 1990s, began earnestly in June, when Ethiopia’s newly-elected leader, Abiy Ahmed, made peace overtures to his counterpart.

Eritrean authorities must urgently embrace and implement bold measures to strengthen protection of and respect for human rights, justice and accountability – *UN Rapporteur*

Yet, repression reportedly continues within Eritrea.

“During the past 17 years, the Government of Eritrea has maintained [tight control](#) over the country, stifling any form of public debate and participation,” said Sheila B. Keetharuth, Special Rapporteur on the situation of [human rights in Eritrea](#).

Eleven government officials who had criticised the President in an open letter, along with 10 independent journalists, were arrested in 2001 – silencing public political discourse and the independent press – setting off a period of sweeping oppression throughout the country.

“I have received reports that the former Minister of Finance,” Ms. Keetharuth continued, “who recently wrote two books on the current state of affairs in the country, including the rule of law, has been arrested in Asmara during the morning of 17 September.”

If confirmed, the arrest, on the eve of the 2001 clampdown anniversary, would question the will for genuine reform, “especially regarding respect for fundamental rights and freedoms,” the expert asserted.

According to Ms. Keetharuth, while comprehensive domestic reforms would be required for a free, fair, democratic society with all human rights entitlements, the Government can take immediate action towards that end in three concrete, urgent areas.

Firstly, the families of prisoners who have disappeared in Eritrean jails should be informed about the fate of their loved ones. Secondly, implementing the 1997 Constitution would provide a natural basis for a national legal framework and a society governed by the rule of law. And thirdly, the Government could inform new military conscripts that they would not have to serve beyond the 18 months stipulated by Eritrean law.

“The achievement of peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia must be duly celebrated,” stated Ms. Keetharuth. “However, Eritrean authorities must urgently embrace and implement bold measures to strengthen protection of and respect for human rights, justice and accountability,” she concluded.

Special Rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The unpaid positions are honorary, and independent from any government or organization.