

# Millions at risk if Syria's war moves to last redoubt of Idlib, warns senior aid official

Aid access to embattled Syrians may soon improve following recent military gains by the Government, but the war "cannot be allowed to go to Idlib", the head of the UN's Humanitarian Task Force said on Thursday.

Speaking in Geneva, [Jan Egeland](#) confirmed that fighting in the south-west had largely ended and that Syria's last remaining sieges – in the Shia towns of Foah and Kefraya – have also been lifted.

The potentially positive development means that there should be "no need to negotiate" with the Government of Syria for aid convoy access, the UN Special Adviser said.

Progress should also be quicker because the lorries will no longer have to cross active front lines, he explained.

"Hopefully, we are seeing the beginning of the end to the big war," he said, adding that "there are signs" the UN and humanitarian partners would finally get access to civilians that they have been trying to reach "for a very long time, and that some of the cruel practices of the war are coming to an end".

However, the "tremendous worry" is that the conflict will move to Idlib province and other non-government-controlled areas in Syria's north-west, Egeland cautioned.

"This area is screaming for diplomatic solutions," he said. "It is yearning for the best diplomats, the best military negotiators to sit down between each other and come to agreements, knowing that there wouldn't be another Idlib to be evacuated to."

Idlib and other areas, including Afrin and Azaz, are home to some 4 million people, including 3 million women and children, according to Egeland, who is also Special Adviser to the UN Special Envoy for Syria.

Around 1.4 million of that number have fled from previous conflict hotspots including Aleppo, Eastern Ghouta and the south-west governorates of Dera'a, Sweida and Quneitra.

*This area is screaming for diplomatic solutions – UN Special Adviser Jan Egeland*

"A small minority" of those in Idlib "would be seen as terrorists", Egeland added, but this was "no excuse for sending the war" to women and children.

Insisting that “this is no tsunami” but rather a “man-made crisis from A to Z”, Egeland appealed to the international community to support the “humanitarian lifeline” which helps some 2 million people every month.

“That lifeline has to be expanded because there will be new people in need,” he said. “There is some fighting happening continuously and finally there has to be protection of civilians, including hospitals and others.”

In a bid to prevent further bloodshed after more than seven years of conflict that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and forced millions to flee, Egeland said that he hoped that countries with influence on the belligerents will be encouraged to reach a political settlement that would spare Idlib.

He singled out the Russian Federation, Turkey and Iran as having “big influence” in Idlib, as well as Western countries and those Gulf countries who also wield influence with armed opposition groups.

“We will push [them] ...to say: learn from Eastern Ghouta, learn from Aleppo, learn from Ar-Raqqa,” Egeland said. “There must be talks, there must be agreements, this war must end not in a bloodbath, but by agreements.”

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## Nicaragua must end ‘witch-hunt’ against dissenting voices – UN human rights experts

Following weeks of civil unrest in Nicaragua, a group of 11 UN independent human rights experts urged the Government on Thursday to stop the violent repression of protestors, which has left at least 317 people dead and 1,830 injured, stressing that “no one should be detained for the exercise of their human rights”.

“We are appalled that many human rights defenders, journalists and other opposition voices are being criminalised and accused of unfounded and overly punitive charges such as ‘terrorism’,” the UN experts said, warning that this is “creating an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty among different communities and among civil society representatives in the country.”

Street protests against social security reforms began in April and were immediately [violently suppressed](#) by security forces and groups affiliated with the governing party. One hundred days later, the protests have “decreased in number and intensity following the removal of roadblocks by the Government” according to the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR), but the UN experts said that dissident voices – ranging from rural community leaders and students, to journalists and Catholic Church

leaders – are still being subjected to intimidation, threats, collective detention.

“We deplore what appears to be a smear campaign aimed at discrediting or vilifying human rights defenders as ‘terrorists’ and ‘coup-mongers’, and apparent attempts to undermine the opposition,” the human rights experts’ [statement](#) read.

“We are also deeply concerned that new legislation adopted earlier in July by the Nicaraguan Congress to target money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, could provide the authorities with increased leeway for arrests and criminal proceedings against protesters, and be misused,” the UN experts stressed.

“Impunity, violence and repression have never been a breeding ground for peace and stability and will certainly, on the contrary, plunge the country into deeper social and political unrest,” the experts warned.

They reminded the Government of the importance of keeping a clear and up-to-date record of the names and locations of people who have been deprived of their liberties and stressed that those who face legal proceedings must be guaranteed their right to a fair trial, with all the guarantees of due process.

“We exhort the Government of Nicaragua to immediately demobilise paramilitary groups and to investigate the extrajudicial executions, killings and reports of enforced disappearances with due diligence, without delay and through the use of effective, impartial and independent procedures,” the statement read.

“We also urge the Government to refrain from engaging in practices of criminalisation against human rights defenders and other activists, including through the inappropriate use of national security and counter-terrorism legislation,” said the independent experts, requesting that full access into detention centres and other locations be granted to human rights groups so they can continue assessing the situation in the country.

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## **FROM THE FIELD: A mountain of indigenous knowledge in Peru**

The Suri alpaca, an animal which is similar to a llama, is known for its soft coat which makes high quality but delicate yarn.

In recent years the Suri yarn has lost popularity because it’s harder to spin, dye, knit and weave. As a result, local communities have turned towards more profitable alpaca yarns.

Now, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), those communities are becoming reacquainted with the traditional knowledge and techniques needed to work Suri, and crucially, learning how to market their goods from a remote location.

On [International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples](#) marked annually on 9 August, artisans and herders in the Andes, are now faced with a new challenge, keeping up with increased demand for their Suri fibre.

[Read the full story here.](#)



SGP-GEF-UNDP Peru/Enrique Castro-Mendivil

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## [UN urges protection of indigenous peoples' rights during migration](#)

In his [message](#) on the Day, he noted that “some are subject to displacement or relocation without their free, prior and informed consent”, adding that “others are escaping violence and conflict or the ravages of climate change and environmental degradation” and that many migrate in search of better prospects and employment for themselves and their families.

Mr. Guterres stated that while migration is an opportunity, “it also carries inherent risks”, citing the unsafe and unsanitary conditions many end up living in, especially in urban areas. For example, in Latin America, around 40 per cent of all indigenous peoples live in urban areas, with the numbers reaching as high as 80 per cent in some countries in the region. Many lack access to public services and often face discrimination.

“Indigenous women and girls experience disproportionately high rates of trafficking and other forms of violence,” he explained, adding that “indigenous youth are faced with complex questions regarding their identity and values”.

For indigenous peoples whose territories are divided by international borders, the Secretary-General called for cooperation across these borders so that their identity, occupations and traditional practices can be safeguarded.

Referring to the [Global Compact](#) for migration, which UN Member States have committed to adopt later this year, Mr. Guterres said “this will establish an international framework for regional and global cooperation” and “provide a platform to maximize the benefits of migration and support vulnerable migrant groups, including indigenous peoples”.



United Nations

He called for the full realization of the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), “including the rights to self-determination and to traditional lands, territories and resources”.

“It is essential that the rights and identities of indigenous peoples are protected,” Mr. Guterres stressed. “And, wherever they live,” he added, “let us ensure that indigenous peoples enjoy recognition for their contributions and the opportunity to thrive and prosper in peace on a healthy planet”.

There are an estimated 370 million indigenous people in the world, living across 90 countries. Although they make up less than 5 per cent of the world’s population, they account for 15 per cent of the world’s poorest.

Audrey Azoulay, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), also focused on migration and movement in her [message](#), explaining that migration influences the way of life of many indigenous peoples, whether these be nomadic pastoral societies, or hunter-gatherer peoples who travel several hundred square kilometres, in order to benefit from the unique resources of their ecosystem and to preserve a delicate balance.

“However, indigenous peoples are now increasingly exposed to forced migrations, which are often the result of environmental disasters or social and political conflicts,” she said, warning that as they are driven from their territories, indigenous peoples see their lifestyles and cultures disintegrate and vanish, often without any prospect of returning.

As such, UNESCO is working with indigenous peoples to help them to meet the challenges ahead, in line with the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development in a number of ways, including in collaboration with the local authorities and the UN [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO) of the United Nations, to pilot a study programme for pastoral societies, paving the way for the establishment of educational systems adapted to transhumant peoples.

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## [Former Chilean President Bachelet put forward by UN chief as next High Commissioner for Human Rights](#)

She has twice been President of Chile, and on Wednesday, ground-breaking politician and women's rights champion, Michelle Bachelet was nominated by the United Nations chief [António Guterres](#) for the key post of High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The Secretary-General [nominated](#) Ms. Bachelet after consulting widely with the Chairs of the regional groups of Member States. Her name now goes forward for consideration and approval by the 193-member UN General Assembly.

Ms. Bachelet just ended her second four-year term as President earlier this year, having already held the post between 2006 and 2010. She was the first woman to be elected to Chile's highest office. After her first term, she came to New York as the first ever Executive Director of the UN gender equality office, [UN-Women](#).

She also held key governments posts earlier in her political career as Chile's Minister of Defence, and Minister of Health.

The High Commissioner, is the [principle official](#) who speaks out for human rights across the whole UN system, strengthening human rights mechanisms; enhancing equality; fighting discrimination in all its forms; strengthening accountability and the rule of law; widening the democratic space and protecting the most vulnerable from all forms of human rights abuse.

The job is currently held by [Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini](#), who steps down from the unique role, calling governments and leaders to account for human rights abuses, at the end of this month. He served a single term, beginning in 2014.

Headquartered in Geneva, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) is mandated to promote and protect the universal exercise and full realization of human rights, across the world, as established in the [UN Charter](#).