

Mine action is at 'the nexus' of peace, security and development: UN official

Despite international efforts, the number of people killed or injured by landmines and other explosive hazards has risen following years of decline, the Security Council heard on Friday.

Alexandre Zouev, UN Assistant Secretary-General for [Rule of Law and Security Institutions](#), said the number of casualties has surpassed 8,500; citing information from the latest annual report by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

He said this “unfortunate trend” was the result of ongoing conflicts, as well as difficulty in accessing contaminated areas during active combat.

“That figure represents over twice as many victims as four years ago. Over 2,000 of those victims were killed; nearly a quarter of them were children,” he said.

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The Council met to take stock of developments since the adoption last year of its first stand-alone resolution on mine action.

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[Resolution 2365](#), tabled by Bolivia, highlights the importance of including mine action in the early stage planning for peacekeeping operations and humanitarian response.

Sacha Sergio Llorenty Soliz, the country’s UN ambassador, listed how it can improve the lives of people in communities emerging from conflict.

“For example: the use of land for farming, the return of girls and boys to school, re-establishing water and electric supply, is only possible after an exhaustive clean-up,” he said.

As Mr. Zouev explained, mine action is vital not only for saving lives but as a precursor for peacebuilding, stabilization and sustainable development.

And with nearly 60 peacekeepers killed last year in incidents involving explosive devices, it is also critical to the safety of UN personnel on the

ground.

“Moreover, mine action helps prevent explosive material from being harvested for use by armed groups,” he said.

“This makes mine action a vital element of the nexus between peace and security and development, and a cornerstone in preventing any relapse into future conflicts.”

[‘Bleakest period yet’ in Occupied Palestinian Territory: UN human rights expert](#)

Reports of the indignities faced by people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory have “[painted the bleakest picture yet](#)” of the human rights situation there, a United Nations expert has said.

[Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk](#) was in Amman, Jordan, this week where he met with civil society and other representatives to gather information for his latest report, which will be presented to the General Assembly in October.

Mr. Lynk monitors the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory but has been prohibited by Israel from travelling there.

“This is my third mission to the region since I assumed the mandate in May 2016, and the reports I received this week have painted the bleakest picture yet of the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory,” he said in a statement issued on Friday.

The rights expert listed concerns such as Israeli settlement expansion in the West Bank and the ongoing crisis in Gaza.

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“After years of creeping Israeli de facto annexation of large swathes of the West Bank through settlement expansion, the creation of closed military zones and other measures, Israel appears to be getting closer to enacting legislation that will formally annex parts of the West Bank. This would amount to a profound violation of international law, and the impact of ongoing settlement expansion on human rights must not be ignored,” he said.

Mr. Lynk also reported that the situation continues to worsen in Gaza, which has been crippled by a blockade for more than a decade. Furthermore, an electricity crisis that began last June has yet to be resolved.

“Residents are deprived of their most basic rights, including the rights to health, to education, and most recently, in attempting to exercise their right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, they were deprived of the right to life,” he said, referring to recent demonstrations along the border fence, in which more than 100 Palestinians were killed and thousands wounded.

The UN expert was also worried about how funding cuts will affect the work of [UNRWA](#), the UN agency that assists Palestinian refugees.

Nearly one million people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory depend on it for health care, education and social service

[FROM THE FIELD: Weaving profits in Azerbaijan](#)

Artisans in Azerbaijan who practice the traditional art of carpet making are being provided with new business opportunities thanks to a project supported by the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)).

Weaving carpets is a skill that has been passed down through the generations and in the central Asian country is largely the work of women.

Although Azerbaijan is located on the ancient trading route known as the Silk Road, many artisans, especially those living in mountainous areas, are finding it increasingly difficult to get their carpets to market.



ABAD/Elkhan Ganiyev

Small and Medium sized enterprises, like the carpet weavers of Azerbaijan, account for 60-70 per cent of global employment, according to the UN.

As the International Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Day is marked across the world on June 27, the Azerbaijani authorities, with the support of UNDP, are boosting efforts to help artisans sell their goods.

For more on this ancient artistry:

<https://undp.shorthandstories.com/ancient-artistry/>

<http://www.un.org/en/events/smallbusinessday/>

Veteran public official from Portugal elected to lead UN migration agency

A lawyer and politician from Portugal, with an extensive career in public service, has been elected to head the United Nations migration agency.

António Manuel de Carvalho Ferreira Vitorino of Portugal was elected today by the member States of the [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#) to serve as the agency's Director General, beginning on 1 October 2018. Mr. Vitorino succeeds William Lacy Swing of the United States, who will have served two five-year terms as IOM chief.

Established in 1951, IOM had been an observer to the UN since 1992. Mr. Vitorino is the first Director General elected since the agency joined the UN system as a related organization in September 2016, part of the outcome from the [UN Summit](#) for Refugees and Migrants, which took place at UN Headquarters in New York.

With degrees in law and political science from the University of Lisbon, Mr. Vitorino has served in the Portuguese Government starting with his election to Parliament in 1980. His career in national politics included a term as judge on the Constitutional Court, in addition to appointments as Defence Minister and Deputy Prime Minister under António Guterres, the current UN Secretary-General.

From 1999 to 2004, Mr. Vitorino served as the European Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs, during which he participated in conversations that led to the drawing up of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and the Convention on the Future of Europe.

Outlining his priorities for the agency, Mr. Vitorino told UN News that he envisioned a "very decentralized, flexible organization, very close to the ground", capable of answering the needs of its member States on migration.

Adoption of the [Global Compact](#) on migration was an upcoming challenge, he said, adding also that it was “absolutely necessary” to achieve “concrete action” on the linkages between migration and the [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

IOM is the leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration with over 10,000 staff serving in over 400 offices across more than 150 countries. It provides services and advice to Governments and migrants, such as humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced people.

The agency works with its partners in the international community to help ensure orderly and humane migration management and to promote international cooperation and understanding on migration issues.

[Africa's Sahel must be a top priority for UN peacebuilding efforts, says commission](#)

The vast Sahel region of Africa, which is facing multiple threats and challenges – including destructive climate change, drought, terrorism and organized crime – must continue to be a top priority for United Nations peacebuilding efforts, the [Security Council](#) heard on Friday.

The mutually-supportive relationship with the UN [Peacebuilding Commission](#) was highlighted by Cho Tae-yul, its former chair, speaking first, saying that “the Council emphasized the importance” of its “convening role” with the Commission, to mobilize support in collaboration with UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). He said it was vital to continue advancing the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, known as UNISS.

The Sahel extends from Senegal in the east, to Sudan in the west, below the arid Sahara desert, including Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad.

Mr. Cho also noted other countries in Africa, where cooperation with the Council had proved effective, citing Burundi's socio-economic development, and the Commission's role helping to develop a peacebuilding plan for Liberia as the UN Mission there prepared to withdraw earlier this year.

He also noted that the Commission's convening role has also created space to engage with civil society organizations.

“Last year, in the discussions on Colombia, Solomon Islands and Sri Lanka,

local civil society representatives contributed to the Commission's deliberations by sharing their views on what peacebuilding and sustaining peace, mean in practice," he added.

Additionally, the former chair elaborated that the Commission has been increasingly taking a more regional view of its work, "as the challenges faced by certain countries are intertwined with that of other countries in the region, making it increasingly important to address the issues with a regional, cross-border approach."

Taking the floor, the current chair, Ion Jinga, stressed that the Sahel remained a clear priority for the Commission moving forward, saying that it would be the exclusive focus of the Annual Session later in the year.

"The purpose of this important event will be to discuss ways of mobilizing deeper commitments and partnerships in support of efforts to build and sustain peace in the Sahel under the umbrella of the UN's Sahel Strategy, he said.

He also underscored the importance of synchronizing its calendar with that of the Security Council, flagging that early preparation is "key" to provide strategic advice.

Established in 2005 as part of the UN reform, the Peacebuilding Commission advises both the [General Assembly](#) and the [Security Council](#). In 2016, twin resolutions were adopted on reviewing the peacebuilding architecture.