

Terrorist attack on Kabul hotel ‘a moral outrage’ – UN envoy for Afghanistan

21 January 2018 – Condemning a terrorist attack on a hotel in the Afghan capital, Kabul, the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in the country ([UNAMA](#)) has said that the attack may amount to a war crime.

“There is simply no justification for this egregious attack, which is specifically prohibited by International Humanitarian Law and may amount to a war crime,” said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Afghanistan and the head of UNAMA, in a [statement](#).

At least six civilians, including one woman were killed and at least three others injured in the attack which took place on Saturday night, local time.

The Intercontinental Hotel was scheduled to hold a technology conference on 21 January, organized by Afghanistan’s Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. Also at the hotel, guests had gathered for a wedding ceremony.

According to UNAMA, in claiming responsibility, the Taliban stated that five attackers entered the hotel to target Afghan officials and foreign nationals.

“It is a moral outrage that the Taliban entered the hotel with the intention of killing civilians,” said Mr. Yamamoto, underscoring that all parties to the armed conflict in Afghanistan “are bound to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law, at all times.”

In the statement, he also expressed his condolences to the loved ones of those killed and wished a full and speedy recovery to those injured.

UN chief urges vigilance against anti-Semitism and discrimination of all kinds

20 January 2018 – Warning that hate is on the rise and that Nazi symbols, mindsets and languages are back, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has called for vigilance against anti-Semitism and discrimination of all kinds.

[We must stand together against the normalization of hate](#), said the Secretary-General, speaking at the Park East Synagogue in New York, on Saturday.

We must reject those who fail to understand that as societies become multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural, diversity must be seen as a source of richness and not a threat, he underscored.

In his remarks, the UN chief cited examples from around the world showing the rise of the neo-Nazi threat as well as the growing concern that such groups are trying to rebrand themselves and present themselves as kinder or gentler to win wider favour.

They are less crude and more dangerous, warned Mr. Guterres.

He said that such groups sometimes seek to falsely claim that they have no problem with Jews, their target is the other group, the other religion, the other minority, cautioning that whenever and wherever the values of humanity are abandoned, everyone is at risk.

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Recalling the theme of this year's Holocaust Remembrance Day that highlights the importance of education as a shared responsibility, the Secretary-General called on leaders across the board to step up.

Words matter, he stressed, adding:

It matters what leaders say. It matters what kind of example is set by public officials from mayors to ministers to heads of state. As Rabbi Schneier has said, all of us have a responsibility to act against indifference.

Concluding his remarks, the UN chief urged everyone across the globe to stand up to hatred and to work together to build a world of pluralism, mutual respect and coexistence for all.

[Syrian children succumb to freezing temperatures while crossing into](#)

Lebanon – UNICEF

20 January 2018 – At least 12 Syrians, including two children, lost their lives to the bitter cold in eastern Lebanon as they tried to enter the country, the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) reported Saturday, warning that there are fears more could be trapped along the route.

More children could be among the dead as residents in the area and the Lebanese authorities continue to look for people who are reportedly trapped in the mountains in freezing temperatures and snow, said Geert Cappelaere, the UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, in a [statement](#).

Syrian people continue to risk their lives and the lives of their children in a desperate search for safety and shelter, he added.

The tragic incident occurred near the Masha' border crossing between Lebanon and Syria.

In the statement, Mr. Cappelaere also said that UNICEF has been distributing blankets, warm clothes, and fuel to heat schools to help families cope with the harsh winter in Syria and other countries in the region.

However, funding constraints are challenging its ability to continue the assistance.

So far, UNICEF has received only half of the funding needed for winter response, and if urgent funding is not received, it will not be able to reach nearly 800,000 children with winter assistance, said the UN agency.

Underscoring that the death of the two Syrian children is a reminder that much more needs to be done, Mr. Cappelaere calling for an end to brutal conflicts and increased support for vulnerable children.

We have no excuse. We cannot continue failing children, he said.

One-in-four Iraqi children impacted by conflict, poverty; education key for lasting peace – UNICEF

19 January 2018 – More than four million children have been impacted by extreme violence in Iraq, many robbed of their childhood and forced to fight on the frontlines, the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) said Friday.

"Last year alone, 270 children were killed," [said](#) UNICEF Regional Director Geert Cappelaere following a recent visit.

"Some will bear the physical and psychological scars for life due to exposure to unprecedented brutality," he added, pointing out that over one million children were forced to leave their homes.

Today, Iraq hosts one of UNICEF's largest operations in the world, responding with humanitarian and development assistance to the needs of the most vulnerable girls and boys across the country.

Violence is not only killing and maiming children; it is destroying schools, hospitals, homes and roads. It is tearing apart the diverse social fabric and the culture of tolerance that hold communities together.

"In one of the schools that UNICEF recently rehabilitated in the western parts of Mosul, I joined 12-year-old Noor in class. She told me how her family stayed in the city even during the peak of the fighting. She spoke of her fear when she was taking shelter. She lost three years of schooling and is now working hard to catch up, learning English with other boys and girls," Mr. Cappelaere



Geert Cappelaere speaks with children at Al-Sanadeed school for girls in East Mosul, and Al-Huda school in West Mosul, where UNICEF had carries out rehabilitation works. Photo: UNICEF/UN0156685/Anmar

Poverty and conflict have interrupted the education for three million children across Iraq. Some have never been inside a classroom.

Over a quarter of all children in Iraq live in poverty, with children in southern and rural areas most affected over the past decades.

"As Iraq prepares for elections and the International Summit for Iraq, there is no better moment to prioritize the interests of children, stop the violence and break the cycle of poverty and deprivation," stressed Mr. Cappelaere.

UNICEF appealed to authorities in Iraq and the international community to end all forms of violence so children and their families can live in safety and dignity; continue providing humanitarian and recovery assistance, including to those in camps and informal settlements; and massively step up immediate and long-term investments in education.

"The children of Iraq, like all children around, the world have the right to learn and aspire to a better tomorrow. The children of today are tomorrow's teachers, doctors, engineers and scientists. Investing in them now is an investment in Iraq's future," he underscored.

The International Summit for Iraq, hosted by Kuwait from 12-14 February, offers an opportunity for Iraq and the international community to strengthen

commitments to the country's children – specifically by increasing budgets allocated to supporting children.

“Member States and the private sector should turn financial pledges into concrete commitments for children. This is fundamental for rebuilding a peaceful and prosperous Iraq away from the vicious cycles of violence and intergenerational poverty,” emphasized Mr. Cappelaere.

Central Africa's iconic mammals threatened by poachers, armed groups – UN environment wing

19 January 2018 – Elephants, giraffes, rhinos and other magnificent mammals targeted in wildlife conservation areas of Central Africa are under threat of extinction, caught in the crosshairs of armed groups and highly-militarized poachers, the United Nations environment wing warned on Friday.

“The importance of [engaging local communities in fighting poaching](#), and of enhancing their alternative livelihoods, has now been widely recognized across various national, regional and global fora” said Bianca Notarbartolo of the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)).

“But such commitments have yet to be matched by enough effective implementation,” she added.

UNEP's warning comes in the wake of the release last month by the non-governmental organization Traffic of a report reflecting the grim reality the negative impact of armed groups on wildlife in Central Africa.

As recently as three decades ago, thousands of elephants strode majestically across the wildlife conservation areas of Central Africa. Today, their population has been decimated, according the 2017 report.

In the 1980s, the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Garamba National Park was home to 20,000 elephants. That number has dwindled to an estimated 1,100 – 1,400 today.

The situation appears even grimmer for the giraffes. In many African societies, the flywhisk, usually made from the animal's tail, is a symbol of authority. The flywhisk from the Kordofan giraffe is particularly prized, putting this species in danger from poachers and other armed groups. Consequently, only about 40 giraffes remain in the Garamba Park.

Some of the armed non-State groups and militia operating in the restive region include Sudan's Janjaweed militia, Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army,

Central African Republic's rival Anti-Balaka and Seleka fighters, as well as Sudan's People's Liberation-In Opposition and poachers – making conservation a dangerous undertaking.

Chimpanzees have also not been spared from the onslaught. The population of eastern chimpanzees in eastern the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) has declined by 80 to 98 per cent, mainly because of poaching for bushmeat – attributed to demand for protein, particularly intense around artisanal mining and logging camps.

The dual effect of insufficient nutrition, coupled with mining pollution is likely to exacerbate the threat to the region's biodiversity, resulting in a downward spiral that could jeopardize future livelihoods of numerous local communities.

In May 2016, UNEP and other UN partners launched the [Wild For Life](#) campaign, which has been raising awareness, promoting the enactment and enforcement of laws, and increasing support for efforts by local communities to halt the illegal trade in wildlife. Elephants and Rhinos are among the species targeted by the campaign.

“Strengthening the role of local communities in wildlife management should be at the centre of any strategy to combat illegal trade in wildlife and to secure wildlife and biodiversity for the future,” stressed Ms. Notarbartolo.