

Chemical attack, if confirmed, would be largest in Syria, UN Security Council told

5 April 2017 – Briefing an [emergency meeting](#) of the Security Council following the reports of alleged chemical weapons use in Khan Shaykhun, southern rural Idlib, Syria, a senior United Nations official for disarmament affairs said that while many details are not yet fully known, new information continues to come in on the incident.

[However,] if confirmed, this would constitute the single largest chemical weapons attack in Syria since the [attack on eastern Ghouta](#) in August 2013, said Kim Won-soo, the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

Reports have stated that the attack was carried out through an airstrike on a residential area [but] the means of delivery of the alleged attack cannot be definitively confirmed, at this stage, he noted.

In his briefing, Mr. Kim informed the 15-member Council of reports indicating presentation of symptoms after the attack, including respiratory problems, vomiting, fainting and foaming at the mouth, and miosis (pupillary constriction).

This was visible in videos on social media, said to have been taken at the scene of the attack, he noted.

According to the UN World Health Organization (WHO) at least [70 people have died and hundreds more have been affected](#) in Khan Shaykhun.

In a statement, WHO noted that : The likelihood of exposure to a chemical attack is amplified by an apparent lack of external injuries reported in cases showing a rapid onset of similar symptoms, including acute respiratory distress as the main cause of death.

Some cases appear to show additional signs consistent with exposure to organophosphorus chemicals, a category of chemicals that includes nerve agents, it added.

The statement also noted that emergency rooms and intensive care units in Idlib are overwhelmed and reporting shortages in medicines required to treat injured patients and that many patients have been referred to hospitals in southern Turkey.

SEE RELATED: [‘Clear and convincing’ evidence of chemical weapons use in Ghouta in August 2013](#)

Also in his briefing, the UN High Representative informed the meeting on the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact

Finding Mission (FFM) and the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM).

Yesterday, the UN Secretary-General as well as officials from the OPCW and the [Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria](#) expressed grave concern over the reports and reiterated their condemnation of any chemical weapons use.

Humanitarian needs have never been greater in Syria, says UN chief Guterres at international conference

5 April 2017 – Speaking at a major international conference on Syria, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres called on the international community to increase support for the victims of the conflict in the war-ravaged country as well as for the neighbouring ones that are sheltering millions of refugees.

“The need for humanitarian aid and the protection of Syrian civilians has never been greater [and] the humanitarian appeal for a single crisis has never been higher,” said Mr. Guterres at the *Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region*.

“UN agencies and our partners are determined to reach everyone in need, through all possible means,” he underscored.

The two-day conference started yesterday with thematic sessions on the humanitarian needs and challenges within the country and on ways to [strengthen resilience](#) of refugees and host communities in the context of the crisis.

It will also assess the status of implementation of commitments made at a conference in London last year as well as identify additional support to Syrians inside the country and in the neighbouring ones, as well as to the respective host communities.

In its seventh year, the conflict in Syria remains the largest humanitarian challenge in the world with 13.5 million men, women and children inside Syria in need of urgent assistance. There are now more than 5 million Syrian refugees living in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, and many more have made the dangerous journey to Europe and farther afield.

More to follow...

Recent attacks show pirates off Somalia's coast still a potent threat – UN agency

4 April 2017 – Noting that recent attacks on commercial ships off the coast of Somalia highlight the continued threat of piracy, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)) has urged ships to follow advice of navies and that of the International Maritime Organization while planning passage through the region.

“After three attacks, following a lull of five years, it is clear that Somali pirates are resurgent and intent on continuing attacks on commercial shipping,” said UNODC Executive Director, Yury Fedotov, in a [news release](#) today.

“I urge the international community to be vigilant, to work in close partnership and to hold the Somali pirates accountable,” he added.

Over the course of last month, Motor Tanker (a merchant ship designed for the bulk transport of oil) *Aris 13*, fishing vessel *Asayr 2* and cargo ship *Al Kaushar* were attacked by Somali pirates. While the crews of *Aris 13*, and *Asayr 2* were released, *Al Kaushar's* crew are reportedly still held hostage by the pirates.

According to UNODC, large parts of the Somali coast remain beyond the reach of law enforcement authorities and thus called on ships planning passage off the country to follow the advice of navies and the International Maritime Organization ([IMO](#)).

The UN agency added that it continued to support the trials of piracy suspects in the region and to the Somali maritime law enforcement agencies as they extend their reach around the Somali coast.

“The threat of Somali piracy has never gone away: it has been suppressed by the good work of the shipping industry and their security teams, navies, and UNODC's support to the trial and imprisonment of 1,300 pirates,” expressed Alan Cole, the head of Maritime Crime Programme at UNODC.

Central African Republic: Security

Council pledges support for President's efforts to stabilize country

4 April 2017 – The United Nations Security Council today expressed its support for the efforts of President Faustin Archange Touadera of the Central African Republic (CAR) to restore State authority as well as for the African Union-led mediation initiative to find a political solution to the situation in the crisis-torn country.

In a [Presidential Statement](#) issued today, the 15-member body renewed its support for CAR President Touadera and welcomed his significant role to stabilize the country, promote peace and reconciliation, advance plans for disarmament, enable long-term development, and build the capacity of state institutions and basic service delivery, with the support of regional and international partners.

The Council also acknowledges the African Initiative for a Peace and Reconciliation Agreement between the Government and all armed groups in the CAR, which is aimed at sustainably promoting reconciliation and inclusive governance.

On the security front, the Council expressed concern at the ongoing clashes between armed groups, in particular around Bambari in the Ouaka prefecture, and, most recently, in Bakouma in the Mbomou prefecture, which have caused heavy civilian losses and significant population displacement.

The Council strongly condemned violence perpetrated by armed groups and their attempts to forcefully gain control of territory and resources, and urged all armed groups, in particular FPRC and UPC, to immediately stop all violence and honour their commitment to the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation process.

The Council also renewed its support to the Secretary-General's Special Representative Parfait Onanga-Anyanga and to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic ([MINUSCA](#)) in the implementation of its mandate.

Recalling the UN's zero tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse, the Council urged all authorized non-UN forces to take adequate measures to prevent and combat impunity for sexual exploitation and abuse by their personnel.

A 'different' Darfur has emerged since 2003; exit strategy for AU-UN mission being considered

4 April 2017 – The African Union (AU) and the United Nations are actively discussing with the Government of Sudan how best to configure a strategy for AU-UN peacekeeping to eventually leave Darfur, the head of that operation said today.

“In view of the current circumstances in Darfur, a pragmatic reconfiguration of UNAMID [the AU-UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur] will become necessary and the AU and UN will have to focus on how best that could be done without compromising the gains thus far made,” the Joint Special Representative, Jeremiah Mamabolo, told the Security Council.

He said that from 5 to 17 March, UNAMID received an AU-UN strategic review team, which met with the Government of Sudan in Khartoum and Darfur, and travelled throughout the Darfur region. UNAMID awaits the outcome of these deliberations.

The three strategic priorities established by the Council in 2014 continue to provide a framework within which UNAMID implements its mandate to protect civilians, mitigate inter-communal conflicts and mediate between the Government and the non-signatory armed movements.

“The Darfur of today is a very different place from what this region was in 2003, when the armed conflict began, and from that of a year ago,” Mr. Mamabolo said, noting that fighting between Sudanese Government forces and the main three non-signatory armed movements has considerably diminished.

VIDEO: Briefing the Security Council, Joint Special Representative Jeremiah N. Mamabolo urges African Union and UN to focus on the best strategy for their joint mission without compromising the gains that have been made.

The past three months have also witnessed a continued reduction in the number of inter-communal security incidents, in particular as a result of the more effective involvement of the native administrations and the impact of security measures by State Governments, leading to an increased number of peace agreements.

Further, UNAMID has not seen any new displacement in 2017. Cooperation with the Government has noticeably improved in terms of humanitarian access. UNAMID and the UN country team have repeatedly been able to visit previously off-limits areas in Jebel Marra while UN humanitarian partners are commencing regular helicopter flights to Golo.

However, efforts by the AU High-level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) to get

warring parties to sign a cessation of hostilities agreement and start direct negotiations towards an inclusive peace agreement to end the conflict have remained inconclusive, Mr. Mamabolo said.

Although Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid al-Nur (SLA/AW) is no longer capable of mounting and sustaining significant military operations, it continues to refuse to join the peace process and seems to want to continue to fight, he explained.

"We would like to appeal to this Council and those with influence and leverage on him to persuade him to recognize the importance of a political settlement and desist from bringing more suffering to the very people that he professes to represent," Mr. Mamabolo said.