

Syria: UNICEF calls for unimpeded aid access to children in besieged Deir ez-Zor

23 January 2017 – The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) today called for unimpeded and unconditional access to children in the besieged city of Deir ez-Zor, noting that they have not received regular humanitarian aid for more than two years.

UNICEF calls on all parties to the conflict in Syria to immediately lift all sieges and allow unimpeded and unconditional access to children in Deir ez-Zor and in all the 15 areas under siege across the country, said Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF’s Regional Director, in a statement.

According to UNICEF, children in Deir ez-Zor have come under intense attack in the past week, and indiscriminate shelling has reportedly killed scores of civilians and forced others to remain in their homes. The escalation of violence threatens the lives of 93,000 civilians, including over 40,000 children who have been cut off from regular humanitarian aid for over two years.

In addition, food prices have skyrocketed to levels five to ten times higher than in the capital, Damascus, and chronic water shortages are forcing families to fetch untreated water from the Euphrates River, exposing children to the risk of waterborne diseases.

Nothing justifies the use of siege and the untold suffering that it unleashes on children. The children of Syria have already paid the highest price for a war that is not of their making, Mr. Cappelaere said.

Secretary-General Guterres approves updated UN whistleblower protection policy

23 January 2017 – Approving an updated United Nations whistleblower policy today, Secretary-General António Guterres is seeking to enhance protection for individuals who report possible misconduct or cooperate with duly authorized audits or investigations.

As part of his reform agenda, Mr. Guterres has made it a priority for the UN to have a whistleblower protection policy that meets the highest possible

standards, and the updated plan aims to ensure the Organization functions in a more open, transparent and fair manner. UN Staff and management both agreed on the policy, contained in a bulletin that was just issued, which meets best practices.

According to UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric, the major changes include the following elements:

1. The Ethics Office and Office of Internal Oversight Services will now be able to take preventive action where a risk of retaliation has been identified (instead of staff being required to identify a specific retaliatory act before they can request protection);
2. The policy affords protection from retaliation to whistleblowers who report wrongdoing committed not only by staff but also by contractors, non-UN peacekeepers and others;
3. Staff now have the right to seek review of Ethics Office determinations; and
4. Complainants will be notified of disciplinary measures taken against staff members found to have retaliated against them.

Mr. Dujarric noted that the Secretary General has also tasked an internal working group to examine whether the policy on protection against retaliation should be further expanded to also provide more protections for consultants and individual contractors. The UN chief has given the working group a deadline of 30 June 2017 to come back with their recommendations on this.

Until this matter is decided, the Secretary-General has asked that the Ethics Office continue its practice of providing assistance to consultants and individual contractors who seek protection against retaliation. To include this category of individuals within the policy would have resource implications, Mr. Dujarric added.

The Secretary-General is in favour of enhancing the independence of the Ethics Office by having it report directly to the General Assembly, instead of through the current arrangements, which provide for it to report to the Secretary-General, explained the UN spokesperson, noting that the Secretary-General has requested the Ethics Office to urgently examine this issue and to report its advice. Such a change in reporting line would require the General Assembly's approval, he added.

**The Gambia: UN, ECOWAS, AU hail
'goodwill' of former President Jammeh;
commit to work for his dignity and**

security

22 January 2017 – The United Nations, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) have commended the goodwill and the statesmanship of the former President of The Gambia, Yahya Jammeh, who decided to facilitate an immediate and orderly transition process and transfer of power to President Adama Barrow.

In a joint declaration late yesterday, UN, ECOWAS and AU pledged to work with the Government of The Gambia to ensure that it assures and ensures the dignity, respect, security and rights of former President Jammeh, as a citizen, a party leader and a former Head of State as provided for and guaranteed by the 1997 Gambian Constitution and other Laws of The Gambia.

The same also extended to the former President's immediate family, cabinet members, government and security officials, and party supporters and loyalists.

The declaration noted that former President Jammeh will temporarily leave the country, without any prejudice to his rights, to assist the peaceful and orderly transition and transfer of power and the establishment of a new government,.

Furthermore, the three organizations also said that they would work with the Government to ensure that no legislative action is taken against the former President and his entourage, as well as to prevent seizure of assets and properties lawfully belonging to them, and urged the authorities to take all necessary measures to ensure that there is no intimidation or harassment of former regime members and supporters.

They also pledged to work with Gambian authorities on national reconciliation to cement social, cultural and national cohesion.

The joint declaration further noted that the UN, ECOWAS and AU will work to ensure that host countries that offer African hospitality to former President Jammeh and his family do not become undue targets of harassment, intimidation and all other pressures and sanctions.

It added that the three organizations would also work the Government to ensure that former President Jammeh is at liberty to return to The Gambia at any time of his choosing in accordance with international human rights law and his rights as a citizen of The Gambia and a former head of state.

The joint declaration further noted that ECOWAS will halt any military operations in the country and will continue to pursue peaceful and political resolution of the crisis.

UN agency urges support for small farmers to help them not just get by, but thrive and feed others

22 January 2017 – Highlighting growing challenges, such as climate change and natural resource scarcity, facing small farmers in developing countries, the head of the United Nations agricultural agency called for information technology tools that can help boost their resilience as well as feed a growing world population.

“Millions of small family farmers need technical and financial assistance to be more resilient and adapt to the impacts of climate change,” said José Graziano da Silva, the Director-General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

“They must be able to stay on their land, produce their own food and also have access to markets,” he added.

In his remarks at the G20 agricultural ministers meeting in the German capital, Berlin, Director-General Graziano da Silva noted that rural areas around the world will also be key in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development given that this where poverty and hunger are most concentrated.

At the same time, these increases in agricultural yields in these regions are required to feed a world population set to cross the 9-billion mark by 2050, and these will greatly depend on small family farmers, according to FAO studies.

Turning to the importance of information and communication technologies to build efficiency, resilience and inclusion of poor family farmers, the FAO Director-General spoke about the agency’s digital strategy that aims to support them through knowledge sharing and bottom-up learning.

As part of this strategy, the UN agency is working with Google to make high-resolution satellite data an everyday tool to monitor and manage natural resources, promote sustainable and strengthen food security. It is also engaging with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) – the UN system’s weather agency – to improve weather forecasts for farmers, as well as exploring ways to provide small farmers with microclimate forecasts.

Mr. Graziano da Silva said that these efforts would be aimed at countries that do not have national meteorological services established and urged for support so that meteorological data, available at global level, can be translated at a local level to benefit farmers, pastoralists and fisherfolks.

Also in his remarks, the senior UN official hailed the G20 for its continuing focus on the issue of water scarcity and on antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

According to FAO estimates, almost 2.1 billion people live in the dry areas of the world and that some 260 million people, most of them in rural areas, lack access to safe drinking water.

Inviting G20 Members to participate in the Global Framework for Water Scarcity – launched by FAO and its partners at the recent UN Climate Conference in Marrakech, Morocco – that seeks to help countries and communities improve the efficiency of their water use and increase their resilience to drought.

On antimicrobial resistance, the head of FAO called on G20 support to the UN agency's efforts to promote responsible use of antibiotics in the agricultural sector to prevent the spread of resistance.

Antimicrobial resistance occurs when microorganisms (such as bacteria, fungi, viruses and parasites) change, developing resistance, as they are exposed to antimicrobial drugs (such as antibiotics, antifungals, antivirals, antimalarials and anthelmintics) used to treat the infections they cause. As a result, the medicines become ineffective and infections persist, become harder to treat and increase the risk of spreading.