

[Russian invasion not a green light for Iranian nuclear weapon: US State Dept](#)

Fri, 2022-02-25 23:22

WASHINGTON D.C.: The US will continue to engage with Russia over efforts to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, even though Moscow's invasion of Ukraine had made it a "pariah on the world stage," State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Friday.

Price said US officials would now only engage with Russia counterparts on issues of "fundamental to our national security interest."

That includes the talks to revive a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, including Russia, Price said.

"The fact that Russia has now invaded Ukraine should not give Iran the green light to develop a nuclear weapon," Price added.



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IAEA says Ukraine nuclear power plants running safely, no 'destruction' at Chernobyl
Iran to sell oil to South Korea if nuclear deal is sealed

UN: More Syrians need aid now than at any time during war

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Fri, 2022-02-25 22:05

UNITED NATIONS: More Syrians need humanitarian assistance now than at any time since the country's civil war began in 2011, the UN's deputy humanitarian chief said Friday, a sign that "the world is failing the Syrian people."

Assistant Secretary-General Joyce Msuya told the UN Security Council that this week's assessment of humanitarian needs found that 14.6 million Syrians will depend on assistance this year, a 9 percent increase from 2021 and a 32 percent increase from 2020.

"This cannot be our strategy," she said, stressing that Syria now ranks among the 10 most food insecure countries globally, with 12 million people having limited or uncertain access to food.

Msuya said Syria's economy is spiraling further downward, food costs keep rising, and people are going hungry. The cost of feeding a family of five with only basic items has almost doubled over the past year.

Families are now spending on average 50 percent more than they earn, which has meant borrowing money to get by, she said. This has forced "unbearable choices," including pulling children, especially girls, out of school and increasing child marriages.

"Female-headed households, older persons without family support, persons with disabilities, and children are disproportionately impacted," Msuya said.

She urged donors to respond generously to the UN's upcoming humanitarian appeal for Syria for 2022, which will be geared toward "increasing resilience" and access to basic services, including water.

"We need more funding and we need to scale up early recovery programming alongside our life-saving work," Msuya said. "But most importantly, Syrians need peace."

Geir O. Pedersen, the UN's special envoy for Syria, told the council that militarily, "any of a number of flashpoints could ignite a broader conflagration."

He cited as examples mutual shelling, skirmishes, and incidents involving improvised explosive devices across frontlines in the northwest, northeast and southwest as well as violence across international borders. There also have been drone strikes in the northeast, Israeli strikes in the south and in the capital Damascus, and security incidents on the Syrian-Jordanian border which the Jordanian government says are related to drug smuggling.

"It is plain that there is a stalemate, that there is acute suffering and that a political solution is the only way out," Pedersen said.

He announced that a 45-member committee representing the Syrian government,

the opposition and civil society will resume talks in Geneva on March 21 on draft constitutional reforms, and the co-chairs have agreed to future sessions in May and June.

Syria's conflict that began in March 2011 has killed half a million people and displaced half the country's pre-war population of 23 million, including more than 5 million refugees mostly in neighboring countries. Though fighting has subsided in recent months, there are still pockets controlled by the Syrian opposition, where millions of people live.

A 2012 road map to peace in Syria approved by representatives of the United Nations, Arab League, European Union, Turkey and all five permanent Security Council members calls for the drafting of a new constitution. It ends with UN-supervised elections with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, eligible to participate. A Security Council resolution adopted in December 2015 unanimously endorsed the road map.

At a Russia-hosted Syrian peace conference in January 2018, an agreement was reached to form a 150-member committee to draft a new constitution. A smaller 45-member body would do the actual drafting, including 15 members each from the government, opposition and civil society. It took until September 2019 for the committee to be formed.

Pedersen said he is concerned that Russia's invasion of Ukraine this week could make it more difficult to get the "international diplomacy" needed for a political process to implement the road map and bring peace to Syria, which is a close ally of Russia.



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Suffering in Syria is at its highest level since crisis began: UNRussia's invasion of Ukraine prompts Syria to cut spending

[Hunger striker's release highlights plight of Palestinian prisoners](#)

Fri, 2022-02-25 21:56

RAMALLAH: The joy of freed Palestinian prisoner Hisham Abu Hawash was matched only by the delight of his family and friends, as well as the hundreds worldwide who followed his 141-day hunger strike.

Abu Hawash was released on Feb. 24 after spending 16 months in Israeli detention.

The 40-year old construction worker from Dura, Hebron, was first arrested by Israeli forces on Oct. 27, 2020 and placed under a six-month administrative detention order.

Later, the order was arbitrarily extended to Feb. 27, 2022.

Israel released Abu Hawash at the end of his sentence amid growing Palestinian public anger, as well as criticism from international human rights organizations, the EU and UN.

However, Abu Hawash's case is just one of many. Of the 4,500 Palestinian political prisoners held by Israel, 540 are being detained without trial. Among them are 41 women and 140 children under 18.

Israeli prison authorities imposed strict punitive measures on Palestinian prisoners following the escape of six inmates from Gilboa prison in September 2021.

Qadoura Faris, director of the Palestinian Prisoners Club, told Arab News that inmates face daily problems caused by the prison administration, which is seeking to destroy their collective efforts over the years to improve living conditions in detention.

He said that this process follows an Israeli committee's recommendation to "make the prisoners' lives difficult."

Israel has arrested almost 1 million Palestinians since its occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in 1967, Faris said.

"No sun has risen since the beginning of the Israeli occupation without daily arrests," he added.

Detentions are part of a systematic plan to sap Palestinian communities' will

to resist and also to create fear, Faris said.

Despite the relative calm in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, human rights organizations say that even something as minor as a Facebook post can lead to arrests and a trial if Israeli authorities view it as incitement.

Israeli security targets Palestinians aged from 19 to 25 in order to deter them from protests and activism, while fines imposed on prisoners by Israeli courts swell the Israeli budget.

Meanwhile, the struggle of dozens of Palestinian prisoners continues from behind bars, even as dozens are enrolled with universities and are pursuing studies at all academic levels.

Some have contested legislative elections while serving time.

The education initiative was led by Marwan Barghouti, a senior Fatah leader serving five life sentences in an Israeli prison for leading the second Palestinian intifada from 2000 to 2004.

While Palestinians consider those behind bars in Israel "freedom fighters," many Israelis describe them as "terrorists," saying they tried to kill Israelis and should die in prison.

The issue touches almost every family and neighborhood, and most Palestinians believe that the Palestinian Authority should make prisoners' freedom a top priority.

Prisoners and their families hoped the election of US President Joe Biden would kick-start the Israel-Palestine peace process, and that prisoner releases would be a crucial issue in any negotiations.

However, as these hopes fade, it appears only an expected prisoner swap between Hamas and Israel can deliver freedom to those, including the infirm, women and children, who have spent more than 20 years behind bars.



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Tunisia withdraws 'Death on the Nile' over Israeli actress Gal Gadot

[Suffering in Syria is at its highest level since crisis began: UN](#)

Author:

Fri, 2022-02-25 00:27

BEIRUT: A record number of people in Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance more than a decade into a devastating civil war, the UN said. At least 14.6 million people in Syria are in need of humanitarian aid, up from 13.4 million last year, the UN's humanitarian agency OCHA said in a report.

"Suffering in Syria is at its highest level since the crisis began," said the UN deputy regional humanitarian coordinator for the Syria conflict, Mark Cutts.

"The UN and its partners are reaching 7 million people every month, but more

support is required,” he said in a post on Twitter.

The war in Syria is estimated to have killed nearly half a million people and displaced millions more since it began with a brutal crackdown on anti-government protests in 2011.

The country is also grappling with an economic crisis compounded by Western sanctions, the COVID-19 pandemic and a sharp fall in the value of the Syrian pound.

Over three quarters of households – 76 percent – are unable to meet their most basic needs, an increase of 10 percent from last year, OCHA said.

Syria’s internally displaced population makes up 37 percent of the people requiring humanitarian assistance, the report said.

People who have never been displaced or who returned to their place of origin before January 2021, are also increasingly unable to meet basic needs, OCHA said, calling it an “indication” of the growing scale of the crisis.

In 2021, 9.2 million vulnerable residents were estimated to be in need, according to OCHA.



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Russia’s invasion of Ukraine prompts Syria to cut spending UN group condemns France for failure to repatriate children from Syria camps

UN expert urges Sudan forces to stop shooting anti-coup protesters

Author:

Fri, 2022-02-25 00:04

KHARTOUM: A UN expert has urged Sudanese forces to stop firing live ammunition and tear gas at anti-coup protesters in a crackdown that has killed more than 80 people.

Demonstrations have continued in the northeast African country since army chief Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan led a military takeover on Oct. 25, sparking international condemnation and suspension of aid.

The putsch derailed a fragile power-sharing agreement between the army and civilians negotiated after the 2019 ouster of longtime President Omar Bashir. "Firing live ammunition on the people is a huge violation against human rights," said the UN expert, Adama Dieng.

"I'm concerned about the violations (committed by) the authorities and the use of live ammunition against protesters," he said, putting the toll at 82 dead and 2,000 wounded.

Both the UN and the US have made similar appeals before, with Washington threatening further "consequences" if violence continues. A Sudanese man shot dead on Sunday was the latest fatality.

The Senegalese envoy has been in Sudan for the past four days, meeting with leaders, diplomats and civil society members in a bid to shed light on the crackdown.

"I am calling for fair, independent and professional investigation on the violence against protesters," he told journalists in Khartoum.

Dieng also expressed concern about sexual violence and ongoing raids against anti-coup groups as well as the fate of around 100 detainees who "have never met their lawyers."

As he spoke, an AFP correspondent reported that security forces fired more tear gas at demonstrators protesting the coup.

Sudanese authorities have said they arrested several police and soldiers who fired at demonstrators with Kalashnikov rifles, disobeying orders.



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UN expert in Sudan to verify rights violations after coup Sudan's fate in the balance as democratic transition hits a road bump