

Two years on, Yemen conflict targets children, food trucks and even fishermen's boats – UN

24 March 2017 – The conflict in Yemen is raging, the United Nations human rights chief today warned, urging those fighting to work towards a ceasefire and to allow humanitarian aid to get through to millions of people in need.

“The violent deaths of refugees fleeing yet another war, of fishermen, of families in marketplaces – this is what the conflict in Yemen looks like two years after it began...utterly terrible, with little apparent regard for civilian lives and infrastructure,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said.

In the past month alone, at least 106 civilians were killed, mostly by air strikes and shelling from war ships, the High Commissioner’s Office (OHCHR) said in a press release.

Of particular concern is fighting in and around Al Hudaydah, which has left thousands of civilians trapped and blocked deliveries of humanitarian aid, as was the case last month in the port city of Al Mokha in the hard-hit Taizz Governorate.

One of the worst incidents there was on 10 March, when a ship carrying at least 70 people was shot by what appeared to be an Apache helicopter overhead, killing at least 33 people and severely wounding 29 others, including children.

OHCHR also reported at least four incidents of fishermen being targeted by missiles and airstrikes.

Meanwhile, the Popular Committees affiliated with the Houthis and former President Saleh have continued to encircle densely populated areas in Taizz Governorate, preventing civilians from leaving and restricting humanitarian access to Taizz city, according to OHCHR.

“Two years of wanton violence and bloodshed, thousands of deaths and millions of people desperate for their basic rights to food, water, health and security – enough is enough,” Mr. Zeid said ahead of the infamous 26 March anniversary.

“I urge all parties to the conflict, and those with influence, to work urgently towards a full ceasefire to bring this disastrous conflict to an end, and to facilitate rather than block the delivery of humanitarian assistance.”

The UN High Commissioner has also called for an international, independent investigative body to look into hundreds of reports of serious violations in the country.

Hundreds of thousands trapped in Mosul with 'worst yet to come' – UN agency

24 March 2017 – An estimated 400,000 Iraqi civilians are trapped in Mosul's Old City as fighting intensifies and people continue to flee, the United Nations refugee agency representative today warned.

"The worst is yet to come," said Bruno Geddo, the Representative of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Iraq.

Speaking by phone, Mr. Geddo said the fighting in the west has been more intense than in the less densely populated east of the city, where the battle ended in January.

"People are stuck between a rock and a hard place," he added. "There's fighting shelling, bombing."

When people try to flee, extremists shoot them. Some have tried to leave during prayers or under cover of fog at first light but were killed, Mr. Geddo said.

Meanwhile, life in the Old City is becoming impossible with a lack of food, clean water or fuel, Mr. Geddo said.

Meeting with civilians at the UNHCR transit and reception centre at Hammam al-Alil, outside of the city centre, Mr. Geddo said the number of people moving through has "surged" in recent days with up to 12,000 people arriving daily.

Some 340,000 people have been displaced since the fighting in Mosul started last October. Of those, about 72,000 have returned home.

VIDEO: Desperate to flee fighting, thousands of displaced Iraqis from west Mosul are arriving in Hammam al-Alil camp, a few kilometres south of the city. Many spend their first night in a reception centre awaiting their tents. Others are transferred to nearby camps to reunite with other family members. *Credit: UNHCR*

The UN representative called on all those fighting to allow civilians to leave areas of conflict for safer zones, and no one should be forced to come back home.

"Liberating Mosul is necessary but not sufficient," Mr. Geddo said. "We equally have to get it right with the protection of civilians and in the humanitarian response."

Child rights must be at the centre of Syria peace talks – UNICEF

24 March 2017 – Those participating the intra-Syrian peace talks in Geneva must put the rights of children at the centre of all their deliberations as children throughout the Middle Eastern country continue to come under attack, a senior United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) official has said.

Those meeting in Geneva this week should put the rights of children at the centre of all their deliberations – the right of every boy and girl to be protected, the right to receive life-saving humanitarian assistance no matter where they are and the right to an education, UNICEF Regional Director Geert Cappelaere said in a said issued yesterday, ahead of the resumption of the Geneva talks.

Citing reports that Wednesday's attack on a school in Ar-Raqqa which is sheltering internally displaced families has killed 53 civilians including 12 children, he said the international community once again failed the children of Syria. "We have been failing them for more than 2,200 days already," he added.

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UNICEF reminds all parties engaged militarily in Syria that it is their responsibility to protect and safeguard the lives of children and their families. Civilian infrastructure including schools and hospitals should be protected, no matter who controls the area," Mr. Geert said.

He said that children are being deprived of their basic right to life and denied their right to an education.

All parties to the conflict and those with influence must redouble their efforts to find a political solution to end a conflict that is leaving nothing but death and destruction in its path," he said.

DPRK's latest ballistic missile and engine test raises risk of regional

arms race – UN Security Council

23 March 2017 – The United Nations Security Council today strongly condemned the ballistic missile launch and a ballistic missile engine test conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) this week in flagrant and provocative defiance of a number of Council resolutions expressly forbidding such activities.

"The launch and engine test are in grave violation of DPRK's international obligations under [numerous] UN Security Council resolutions," said the 15-member Security Council in a statement today.

"The members of the Security Council reiterated that DPRK refrain from further actions, including nuclear tests [...] and comply fully with its obligations under these resolutions," the statement added.

They also deplored all ballistic missile activities, including the most recent launch (on 21 March) and the engine test (on 19 March) and noted that such activities contribute to the country's development of nuclear weapons delivery systems and increase tension in the region and beyond as well as the risk of a regional arms race.

They further regretted that the country is diverting resources to the pursuit of such activities while its citizens have great unmet needs.

Also in the statement, the Council called upon all UN Member States to redouble their efforts to implement fully the measures imposed on the DPRK by the Council, and directed the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006) to intensify its work to strengthen enforcement of relevant resolutions and assist Member States to comply with their obligations under those and other resolutions.

Further, reiterating the importance of maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in North-East Asia at large, Council members expressed their commitment to a peaceful, diplomatic and political solution to the situation and welcomed efforts by Council members, as well as other Member States, to facilitate a peaceful and comprehensive solution through dialogue.

They also emphasised the vital importance that DPRK shows "sincere commitment" to denuclearization.

International, independent probe of

alleged violations in Yemen needed – UN deputy rights chief

23 March 2017 – Describing the situation in Yemen as one of the world's worst humanitarian crises – 'and one that is entirely man-made' – the United Nations human rights deputy chief today urged the national commission of inquiry to fulfill its mandate of investigating all alleged violations of international and Yemeni laws.

"We encourage the Yemeni National Commission to make progress on all aspects of its mandate to investigate all allegations of violations of international law and Yemeni law, including those that go beyond the extent of the Commission's cooperation with OHCHR [the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights]," UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Kate Gilmore told a UN Human Rights Council session in Geneva yesterday.

She said that OHCHR has re-established its engagement with the National Commission on a programme of joint activities and a list of thematic priorities. The first of these activities took place from 21 to 23 February, in Doha, Qatar, which was a capacity-building workshop on international humanitarian law, investigative methodologies and lessons learnt from UN commissions of inquiry.

The de facto authorities in the capital, Sana'a, have officially communicated their intention not to extend cooperation to the National Commission or to any OHCHR team tasked with implementing the Human Rights Council resolution.

In response, OHCHR has urged the authorities to reconsider that decision and called on all parties to follow through on their commitment to cooperate with the National Commission and OHCHR.

She said that calls for an international and independent commission of investigation have been dismissed by some as potentially undermining the National Commission.

However, there are no persuasive reasons to believe that an international and independent investigation could not operate alongside a national commission of inquiry as the existence of one does not exclude the other, she explained.

The National Commission's first publications failed to comply with internationally recognized standards of methodology and impartiality, she pointed out.

Still, Ms. Gilmore argued that the violations allegedly committed in the ongoing conflict are of such gravity that impunity simply cannot be accepted. In the absence of credible mechanisms for national remedy, international and independent alternatives are essential.

"The High Commissioner has no choice but to reiterate his call for an international and independent commission of inquiry into all allegations of

violations of human rights and humanitarian law, regardless of the alleged perpetrators,” she said.

Such an approach would also support the efforts of the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy on Yemen to reach a negotiated and durable settlement of the conflict, she added.