

Civilian casualty figure in Iraq tops 1,000 – UN reports

2 March 2017 –

More than 1,000 civilians were killed or injured last month in Iraq, the United Nations mission in the country has announced.

According to the latest figures from the UN Assistance Mission in the country (UNAMI), at least 392 civilians were killed and another 613 were injured in acts of terrorism, violence and armed conflict.

The head of UNAMI, Ján Kubiš, condemned the deliberate targeting of civilians by the Islamic State (ISIL), and saluted the Iraqi security forces for professionalism in pursuing the terrorists while seeking to minimize civilian casualties.

“As the Iraqi security forces stepped up the military operations to liberate the remaining parts of Mosul from Daesh control, the terrorists struck again, targeting civilians with cowardly bombings to ease the pressure on the frontlines,” Mr. Kubiš said referring to ISIL by its Arabic acronym.

“Daesh’s sinister attempts have failed to weaken the resolve of the people and Government of Iraq to rid the country once and for all from the scourge of terrorism,” added Mr. Kubiš, who is also the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq.

The figure of 392 is slightly lower than 403 civilians killed in January, when an additional 924 civilians were injured.

Humanitarian actors need safe, unhindered access to help Yemen avert famine – UN aid chief

1 March 2017 – The people of crisis-torn Yemen urgently need humanitarian assistance and protection, especially in the north of the country where there is a threat of famine, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator warned today.

The overriding need, said Stephen O’Brien, is for all parties to the conflict to provide immediate and safe access so that humanitarian actors can provide

what is needed to stave off famine.

"This will require [...] all parties to stop gamesmanship or efforts to support their side of the fight by producing bureaucratic impediments and delays, or doubts about inspection mechanisms so that commercial shipment can be restored and food and medicines, and crucially, fuel, so water can be pumped out of the aquifers and cereals, the main foodstuff in the remotest areas of the country, can be processed," he explained.

Briefing reporters at UN Headquarters in New York via telephone from the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, Mr. O'Brien recalled that he had headed directly to Yemen from the Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region, which had generated more than \$670 million in pledges to help sustain critical relief operations over the next two years and beyond across four counties where millions are in need of aid.

He said that along with Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Yemen is among the countries, which, for the first time in modern history, could fall into simultaneous famine. "The common factor between the four potential famines is that they are all in the context of man-made conflicts which have become protracted crises in the absence of a resolution of the underlying causes and an unwillingness of the parties to [...] find their way to a political track."

RELATED: Yemen's health system another victim of the conflict – WHO

Briefing alongside Jamie McGoldrick, the Resident Coordinator in Yemen, Mr. O'Brien highlighted the difficulties faced by relief agencies to bring aid to the communities that need it and reported that yesterday, he and his team were unable to reach the city of Taiz, because it had been stopped at military checkpoint even after assurances had been received.

"It was very disappointing but illustrative. If I could not get through, it would be much more difficult for caravans that require safe and unrestricted access to reach all people in need wherever they are," he said.

In this regard, he reported that he spoke with the Houthi authorities on his return to Sana'a and had been assured that effort would be made to open the routes for the flow of food and other humanitarian supplies.

He went on to explain that the country's population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is growing and compounding the challenges of access, food insecurity and health care concerns.

As he continues his visit, Mr. O'Brien, who is also the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, said he would meet with Houthi authorities and make clear the expectation that the UN and all humanitarian implementing partners – international and local – should have immediate, safe and unimpeded access to people in need, at all times, help avert a famine, and to help mobilize resources necessary at the pledging conflict in April in Geneva.

AUDIO: Continuing conflict in Yemen has left millions without adequate access

to food and water, and the international community needs to do everything it can “now” to fund a major relief effort, says UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien.

UN Mission in Colombia starts verification as FARC-EP begins turning in weapons

1 March 2017 – In a major step for the peace process in Colombia, the United Nations Mission in the country today started the verification of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army (FARC-EP)’s laying down of arms.

According to a news release issued by the Mission yesterday, its observers will identify and register all weapons present in FARC-EP camps in the 26 zones where the group’s members are currently located and where they will transition to civilian life.

Simultaneously, the Mission will install containers – are already in local sites – in the FARC-EP camps, where these will progressively receive weapons under the constant monitoring of its observers.

The process should conclude on 29 May, 180 days after the final peace agreement came into force.

As a first step of the gradual weapons storage process, the Mission will receive the armaments from the FARC-EP members who are part of the tripartite Monitoring and Verification Mechanism, added the news release.

In parallel and in coordination with the FARC-EP, the Mission will immediately begin the process of planning and verification of the destruction of unstable weapons and munition, mines and explosives.

RELATED: ‘Historic’ day as last FARC-EP members gather to turn in arms

Also in the release, the Mission welcomed the parties’ decision to initiate the weapons laydown process without further delay, despite logistical challenges which continue to hamper the successful implementation of the final peace agreement.

“This is a partial but substantive advance in the laying down of arms process, which [we] value as a good starting point towards overcoming implementation delays,” said the UN Mission.

“We trust that this process can be accelerated, as part of a virtuous dynamic

of simultaneous progress in the implementation of all aspects of the Peace Agreement. This will inspire confidence to those who were party to the conflict and to Colombian society as a whole."

The UN Mission also noted that values the decisions announced by the Government today regarding the legal guarantees of FARC-EP members.

"This will be a factor of tranquillity in the complex process of transition to civilian life," noted the Mission.

Mental anguish 'adds weight' to argument for ending capital punishment – UN rights chief

1 March 2017 – The United Nations human rights chief today reiterated his call to abolish the death penalty as it raises serious issues in relation to the dignity and rights of all human beings, including the right to life and the right not to be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

"International and national bodies have determined that several methods of execution are likely to violate the prohibition of torture, because of the pain and suffering they are likely to inflict on the convicted person," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, at the opening of the biennial high-level panel discussion on the death penalty, which was organized as part of the Human Rights Council's current session.

"Studies of the severe pain and suffering caused by other methods has continued to extend this list, to the point where it has become increasingly difficult for a State to impose the death penalty without violating international human rights law," he stated.

He added that the long and highly stressful period that most individuals endure while waiting on 'death row' for years, or even decades, and frequently in isolation, for an uncertain outcome, has also been referenced as constituting torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

This "death row phenomenon" has been recognized by the UN Human Rights Committee and other bodies at the international, regional and domestic levels, as well as by the California Supreme Court.

When the authorities fail to give adequate information about the timing of executions, they keep not only the convicted person but also his children and other family members in permanent anticipation of imminent death, he explained.



Opening of the biennial high-level panel discussion on the death penalty, organized as part of the Human Rights Council's current session. 1 March 2017. UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

"The severe mental and physical suffering which are inflicted by capital punishment on the person concerned and family members should now be added to the weight of the argument," Mr. Zeid said, explaining that this is another reason why the death penalty should be abolished, besides its capricious and often discriminatory application and its failure to demonstrate any deterrent effect beyond that of other punishments.

The UN rights chief recalled that a former Special Rapporteur has recommended that the Human Rights Council request a comprehensive legal study regarding the emergence of a customary norm according to which the death penalty constitutes torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

It has been 10 years since the General Assembly resolution of December 2007 which urged States to adopt a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, with a view towards its full abolition.

Over this decade, the global trend against capital punishment has become increasingly strong, with almost three out of four countries now having either abolished it or stopped practicing it.

However, the overall number of executions in States that continue to resort to the death penalty has increased in the last two years, and some States in which a moratorium had been in place for many years have recently resumed executions.

"I take this opportunity, once again to urge all States to end use of the death penalty," Mr. Zeid said.

Mental anguish 'adds weight' to argument for ending capital punishment – UN rights chief

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