

One million Ukrainian children now need aid as number doubles over past year – UNICEF

17 February 2017 – As the volatile conflict in eastern Ukraine enters its fourth year, one million children are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance – nearly double the number this time last year, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) reported today.

“This is an invisible emergency – a crisis most of the world has forgotten,” said UNICEF’s Representative in Ukraine, Giovanna Barberis, in a news release.

“Children in eastern Ukraine have been living under the constant threat of unpredictable fighting and shelling for the past three years. Their schools have been destroyed, they have been forced from their homes and their access to basic commodities like heat and water has been cut off,” she stated.

The release attributed the increase – an additional 420,000 girls and boys – to the continued fighting and the steady deterioration of life in eastern Ukraine, where some 1.7 million people have been internally displaced, and many families have lost their incomes, social benefits and access to healthcare, while the price of living has sharply risen.

Hundreds of daily ceasefire violations put children’s physical safety and psychological well-being at risk. The situation is particularly grave for the approximately 200,000 girls and boys living within 15 kilometres on each side of the ‘contact line’ in eastern Ukraine, a line which divides government and non-government controlled areas where fighting is most severe.

RELATED: Thousands of children out of school as classrooms shelled in eastern Ukraine – UNICEF

In this zone, 19,000 children face constant danger from landmines and other unexploded ordinance and 12,000 children live in communities shelled at least once a month. Thousands of children are regularly forced to take refuge in improvised bomb shelters.

Teachers, psychologists and parents report signs of severe psychosocial distress among children including nightmares, aggression, social withdrawal and panic triggered by loud noises.

More than 740 schools – one in five in eastern Ukraine – have been damaged or destroyed.

UNICEF once again calls for all sides to immediately recommit to the ceasefire signed in Minsk in August 2015 and to respect international humanitarian law, including allowing unrestricted humanitarian access.

UNICEF is appealing for \$31.3 million to provide health and nutrition support, education, clean water, hygiene and sanitation as well as protection for children and families affected by the conflict. So far, about 10 per cent of the appeal has been funded.

INTERVIEW: Governments should think twice before putting children in detention – UN expert Manfred Nowak

17 February 2017 – Despite progress in the realization of children's rights, as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which entered into force on 2 September 1990, too many commitments remain unfulfilled. This is particularly true for children deprived of liberty, who often remain invisible and forgotten.

To address this situation, the United Nations General Assembly, by resolution 69/157 adopted on 18 December 2014, invited the Secretary-General to commission an in-depth global study on children deprived of liberty.

In October 2016, Manfred Nowak of Austria, an independent expert, was selected to lead the study.

Mr. Nowak is professor of international law and human rights at the *University of Vienna* and Secretary-General of the European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation in Venice. He was previously the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and a member of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.

He spoke with *UN News* on his new mandate. The excerpts from the interview follow.

UN News: What is the definition of children deprived of liberty?

Manfred Nowak: It concerns the right to personal liberty. Whenever I put you in a particular place, and lock the door, then I deprive you of your right to personal liberty. Most people think about prisons and jails. But in reality, there are many more places where adults and children are being detained. In the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture of 2002, the United Nations provided a definition. [Deprivation of liberty means any form of detention or imprisonment or the placement of a person in a public or private custodial setting which that person is not permitted to leave at will by order of any judicial, administrative or other authority.] This instrument created the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and national preventive mechanisms that inspect prisons, psychiatric hospitals, police lockups, and also special detention facilities for children and young persons.

UN News: Can you briefly explain the context in which your mandate was created?

Manfred Nowak: There are many children deprived of liberty, and it is a very serious problem because you destroy the lives of children if you lock them away. Unfortunately, that's the case in too many countries. In some States, the minimum age of criminal responsibility is very low. When I was UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, I found many kids of nine, ten and eleven years old locked away in prisons. There are many unaccompanied minors, migrant and refugee children in Europe and other areas of the world who are deprived of liberty and put in migration detention centres. Other kids are held in special institutions for children with disabilities, street children, orphans, drug users, or children who are regarded as difficult to educate. In the context of armed conflicts, there are child soldiers and children involved in terrorism and other national security crimes. Then we have children, in many countries, who live with incarcerated parents in prison.

UN Independent Expert Manfred Nowak talks to UN News about his new mandate.

There are many different reasons why children are deprived of liberty, but we simply don't know how many children [are locked away around the world]. We have no real estimate, but suspect that more than a million children are kept in detention, despite the fact that the Convention of the Rights of the Child says in principle, children should not be detained, and detention should be a measure of last resort.

But in reality, many children are locked away for many years. In order to shed light on the phenomenon of children deprived of liberty, we need to gather data. We request Governments, different UN agencies, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders to provide reliable data, from all countries in the world, about how many children are actually deprived of liberty.

We also wish to identify the alternatives and best practices. There are many countries that have done quite a lot to reduce the number of children in detention. Others could learn from them.

UN News: What differentiates this study from other studies on children?

Manfred Nowak: There are two major global studies on children. First is an expert study in 1996 by Graca Machel about children in armed conflict, primarily child soldiers. That study raised awareness about the seriousness of this issue, and led to the creation of the mandate of the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict. Ten years later, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro conducted a global study on violence against children. Again, this raised awareness that so many children are subjected to violence in families, schools and all kinds of circumstances. Again, this became a major issue for the UN.

My study is a third, and a follow-up to those previous two studies. In principle, locking children up amounts to structural violence against

children. It should only be allowed as an exceptional measure and only for a very short period of time. I hope this global study will raise awareness of a hidden subject of serious violations of the rights of children.

UN News: What are some challenges in conducting this study?

Manfred Nowak: This study is not about naming and shaming of countries. It is not an exercise that says that's a good country, that's a bad country. We are trying to collect data. We hope that governments will cooperate. Of course, there are always governments that are not happy to provide data. But the real challenge is that data are not simply available. So, the process of conducting this study should raise awareness within governments that it is necessary to know how many children are deprived of liberty.

I'm working in close cooperation with UNICEF [the United Nations Children's Fund], which has offices in some 160 countries. They will assist governments in collecting those data. Collecting data is also in the interest of Governments because they can learn from others and from best practices in order to reduce the number of children in detention. It is also more cost-effective to provide them with social care or put them in small homes with foster parents rather than institutionalizing them.

UN News: You were UN Special Rapporteur on Torture from 2004 to 2010. How does your experience as the Special Rapporteur help fulfil your new mandate?

Manfred Nowak: One of the main reasons why I was chosen is that I have six years of experience as Special Rapporteur on Torture. During those six years, I carried out 18 official fact-finding missions to countries in all different regions of the world. If you want to investigate torture, you have to go into closed institutions, police lockups, prisons, and psychiatric institutions. So I spent most of my time in closed institutions. I didn't only look for torture and other forms of ill treatments. I also looked at the conditions of detention. In many countries, the conditions of overcrowded, dirty prisons and other detention facilities are only to be defined as "inhuman and degrading." Children who are locked up may be traumatized for the rest of their lives. These children need social care and love. They don't need to be incarcerated.

UN News: When do you expect to complete the study and what contributions will this study make to the protection of child rights?

Manfred Nowak: I'm very confident that as soon as I get the budget to fully start working on the study, it will really have an impact. It will create awareness that so many children who are in reality deprived of liberty should not be there. It will have preventive effects in future. I hope that in the future Governments will think twice before putting children in detention for whatever reasons. It is important to get children involved who have been detained. We want those children to speak out. We want to also show there are best practices in all regions and there are viable alternatives.

It took about two years to select the independent expert who leads the study. Developing methodologies takes much longer. So honestly speaking, I will not

be able to finalize the study until the summer of 2018. It also depends how quickly governments will provide comparative data. While I intend to submit an interim report, the General Assembly will hopefully extend the two-year deadline for the final submission of the global study.

UN News: What kind of childhood did you live, and what influence if any, did that have on your becoming a lawyer?

Manfred Nowak: I had a very happy childhood with my parents and with my siblings. I grew up in different areas of Austria. My childhood experience did not lead to becoming a lawyer. My father was a chemical engineer, and my mother had studied English and German and became a teacher in high school. My father wanted me to study at a technical university, and I wanted to study filmmaking. I did different studies, including law, which was purely by incident. My interest in human rights grew toward the end of my various studies.

[‘No time to lose’ as humanitarian catastrophe looms in Somalia – UN agencies](#)

17 February 2017 – Amid worsening of an already devastating drought in Somalia, United Nations agencies have underlined that only a massive and immediate scale-up of humanitarian assistance can help the country avoid falling into another catastrophe.

According to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the UN World Food Programme (WFP) some 6.2 million people – almost half the country’s population – are either severely food insecure or in need of livelihood support.

“Huge numbers of Somalis have come to the end of all their possible resources and are living hand-to-mouth,” said Steven Lauwerier, the UNICEF Somalia Representative, underlining that there is only a small window of opportunity to arrest the looming humanitarian crisis and save lives.

The situation of children is particularly concerning: close to one million children are estimated to be malnourished this year, including 185,000 severely malnourished and in need of urgent lifesaving support. There are also grave fears that this number could increase to 270,000 over the coming months.

The ongoing drought and other shocks have left communities – that have already been battered by decades of conflict – with little to no resources to fall back on, the two UN agencies said in a joint news release.

Whole villages have lost their crops or seen their livestock die. The prices of water and locally produced food have risen dramatically, and thousands of people are on the move in search of food and water.

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The drought has also led to an increase in waterborne diseases with more than 4,000 cases of Acute Watery Diarrhoea/Cholera this year.

Humanitarian assistance has saved lives in the drought-affected north over the past year, but as the crisis spreads we have no time to lose," added WFP Country Director Laurent Bukera, noting that together with its partners, the UN agency is "moving as quickly as possible" to reach people with lifesaving support.

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The two agencies further noted that humanitarian access remains conqueringly limited in some drought-affected areas of the south, but that WFP and UNICEF are reinforcing their joint efforts to scale up the response in areas that are accessible, where millions of lives are at risk.

The agencies have been responding together to the drought by providing food and water vouchers to hundreds of thousands across the most affected areas of Somalia as well as nutrition assistance.

As additional resources are mobilised, the joint response will continue to expand in the most vulnerable regions.

However, with growing needs, more funds are needed. UNICEF and WFP together still require more than \$450 million to be able to provide urgent assistance required in the coming months.

[Global heat melts Arctic and Antarctic sea ice to record lows – UN agency](#)

17 February 2017 – It should be winter on the Arctic pole "the northern most point in the world" but the equivalent of heatwaves have passed over the region this season melting the sea ice volume to a record low in January, the United Nations meteorological agency said.

"Temperatures in the Arctic are quite remarkable and very alarming," said David Carlson, Director of the World Climate Research

Programme which is co-sponsored by the UN World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Council for Science.

Sea ice extent was the lowest on the 38-year-old satellite record for the month of January, both at the Arctic and Antarctic, according to data cited WMO from both the US National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC) and Germany's Sea ice Portal operated by the Alfred-Wegener-Institut.

The Arctic sea ice extent averaged 13.38 million square kilometres in January, according to NSIDC. This is 260,000 square kilometers below the level in January 2016 – an area bigger than the size of the United Kingdom.

The recovery period for Arctic sea ice is normally in the winter, when it gains both in volume and extent. The recovery this winter has been fragile, at best, and there were some days in January when temperatures were actually above melting point, said Mr. Carlson.

This will have serious implications for Arctic sea ice extent in summer as well as for the global climate system. What happens at the Poles does not stay at the Poles.

In addition, the ice levels at the Antarctic are also at record lows, even thinner than expected for the summer season there.

[UN chief Guterres welcomes the Gambia's rescission of its withdrawal from International Criminal Court](#)

16 February 2017 – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has welcomed the rescission the Gambia's withdrawal from the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

According to statement issued by his spokesperson, Mr. Guterres “welcomes that the Gambia will remain a State Party to the International Criminal Court's founding instrument.”

“[He] remains confident that States Parties will continue to further strengthen the Court through a constructive dialogue,” the statement added.

The notification concerning the rescission of withdrawal was delivered to the UN chief on 10 February.

The Gambia had formally notified the UN chief, who is the depository of the

Rome Statute of the ICC, of its withdrawal from the Rome Statute in November last year – a decision which the Secretary-General deeply regretted, noted the statement.

The statement further noted that over the past two decades, the world has made decisive strides towards building a truly global system of international criminal justice, with the ICC as its centrepiece.

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It added that the Gambia, like so many other African countries, played a major role in the negotiations leading to the adoption of the Rome Statute and was among its first signatories.

The ICC's founding Rome Statute sets out the Court's jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and – as of an amendment in 2010 – the crime of aggression. In addition to jurisdiction, it also addresses issues such as admissibility and applicable law, the composition and administration of the Court, investigations and prosecution, trials, penalties, appeal and revision, international cooperation and judicial assistance, and enforcement.