

Adapting to increased military pressure, ISIL shifts to 'dark web,' UN Security Council told

7 February 2017 – The terrorist group, known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), is on the defensive militarily in several regions, but is also adapting to military pressure by resorting to covert communications such as the 'dark web,' the top United Nations political affairs official warned today.

"Although its income and the territory under its control are shrinking, ISIL still appears to have sufficient funds to continue fighting," Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman said, briefing the Security Council on the UN Secretary-General's fourth report on the threat the group poses to international peace and security efforts to "check and roll it back."

Mr. Feltman noted that ISIL relies mainly on income from extortion and hydrocarbon exploitation, even though resources from the latter are on the decline. UN Member States are concerned that ISIL will try to expand other sources of income, such as kidnapping for ransom, and increase its reliance on donations, he stated.

"ISIL is adapting in several ways to military pressure – resorting to increasingly covert communication and recruitment methods, including by using the 'dark web,' encryption and messengers," he warned.

While the previous reports on the subject have focused on South East Asia, Yemen and East Africa, Libya and Afghanistan, the fourth report zeroes in on Europe, North Africa and West Africa.



Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman briefs the Security Council on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

It notes that ISIL has conducted a range of attacks in Europe since declaring in 2014 its intent to target the region. Some of these attacks were directed and facilitated by ISIL personnel, while others were enabled by ISIL providing guidance or assistance or were inspired through its propaganda.

While the military offensive in Libya has dislodged ISIL from its stronghold Sirte, the group's threat to Libya and neighbouring countries persists. Its fighters – estimated to range from several hundred to 3,000 – have moved to other parts of the country.

Ultimately, it is the spread and consolidation of peace, security, development and human rights that will most effectively deprive terrorism of the oxygen it needs to survive

ISIL has increased its presence in West Africa and the Maghreb, though the group does not control significant amounts of territory in the region. The reported pledge of loyalty to ISIL by a splinter faction of Al-Mourabitoun led by Lehbib Ould Ali may elevate the level of the threat.

ISIL-affiliate Boko Haram is attempting to spread its influence and commit terrorist acts beyond Nigeria, and remains a serious threat, with several thousand fighters at its disposal. It is, however, plagued by financial difficulties and an internal power struggle, and has split in two factions, Mr. Feltman reported.

While the fourth report also notes some of the measures taken by Member States and the United Nations, it stresses the need to develop sustained, coordinated responses to the grave threat posed by ISIL and associated groups and entities.

Mr. Feltman said that there are 19 universal counter-terrorism conventions and protocols, as well as related regional instruments on international terrorism, and relevant UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

“But we need to do more, as Member States continue to face significant challenges to ensure effective international cooperation,” he said, warning that foreign terrorist fighters leaving the conflict could pose a grave risk to their homeland or to the countries they are travelling to or transiting through, such as Iraq and Syria’s neighbours, as well as countries in the Maghreb.

“Ultimately, it is the spread and consolidation of peace, security, development and human rights that will most effectively deprive terrorism of the oxygen it needs to survive,” he concluded.

[Israeli legislation on settlements violates international law, says UN chief Guterres](#)

7 February 2017 – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today deeply regretted the adoption by Israel’s legislative body, the Knesset, of the so called “Regularisation bill,” saying the measure contravenes international law and will have “far-reaching legal consequences” for the country.

A statement from the UN spokesperson noted that the bill reportedly provides immunity to settlements and outposts in the occupied West Bank that were built on privately-owned Palestinian land.

“The Secretary-General insists on the need to avoid any actions that would derail the two-state solution,” the statement said, adding that all core issues should be resolved between the parties through direct negotiations on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions and mutual agreements.

“The United Nations stands ready to support this process,” it concluded.

Senior UN official urges Libya to protect migrants from conflict-related sexual violence

7 February 2017 – The highest United Nations official tasked with advocating against the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war urged today Libyan authorities to protect migrants from rape and other human rights violations.

In a statement, Zainab Hawa Bangura, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, called on the Libyan Government and on the international community as a whole to protect migrants who are living or passing through Libya.

“In the course of their journey, women and girls but also men and boys face grave human rights violations, including conflict-related sexual violence, committed by parties to the Libyan conflict, as well as smugglers, traffickers and other criminal groups,” said Ms. Bangura, who is also an Under-Secretary-General.

She noted also that migrants face sexual violence in official and unofficial detention centres, some being held “for days, weeks or months.”

In addition, Ms. Bangura voiced increasing concern about the “systematic use of sexual violence” by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Libya, a phenomenon which the office of the Special Representative has been investigating in Iraq and Syria.

“Testimony from women and children recently released from ISIL as a result of the military operation in Sirte reveals a pattern of rape and sexual slavery, particularly against migrants,” Ms. Bangura said, noting that some of the survivors are pregnant.

She voiced alarm also that most of the women and children are being detained in Al Jawiya prison in Misrata “in precarious conditions including

overcrowded cells, lack of adequate access to food, water and medicine, and absence of women guards as an important protection measure.”

Among her proposals, Ms. Bangura is urging authorities to urgently review the country’s migration policy, to protect escapees from ISIL and provide them with adequate support, to assist all victims of conflict-related sexual violence with adequate medical and other resources, and to investigate and prosecute those responsible for the crimes.

She also reiterated the recommendation of the Secretary-General that all countries give due consideration to recognizing conflict-related sexual violence as a form of persecution that warrants refugee status.

FEATURE: Diplomacy of the conscience – The Holy See at the United Nations

7 February 2017 – Ever since 1964, when it was informally accepted to the United Nations General Assembly, the Holy See has had a permanent seat at international discussions and used its observer status to go on record about matters of peace and human dignity.

“We consider the United Nations not only important but in itself very useful for humanity,” Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, told *UN News*.

He went on to say: “The Holy See, the Catholic Church itself, appreciates and considers the United Nations a very important institution for all the nations to come together and discuss problems and even enjoy together what is common.”

The priorities of the Holy See for the year are similar to key UN goals – among them, the quest for peace, providing assistance to migrants and refugees, and nuclear disarmament.

The Holy See is a nearly 2,000-year old term that refers to the international sovereignty of the Pope, or leader of the Roman Catholic Church. The Vatican City State is the geographic property that ensures that sovereignty.

This makes the Holy See the only religious entity represented among the 193 UN Member States and Palestine, the other non-member observer state.

What’s more, in a diplomatic world where Member States wrangle for a seat on the Security Council or a senior UN job, the Holy See turned down an opportunity for GA Membership in 2004, when Switzerland, the only other Permanent Observer state at that time, gained full membership.

"That was a very hard decision to make. Saint John Paul II was already very sick at the time, in 2004. I remember very well. It was he himself who took the decision that we should remain as a Permanent Observer state," the Archbishop recalled. "The fundamental reason is that so that we could remain neutral."

Holy See: We consider the UN in itself "very useful for humanity" – Archbishop Bernardito Auza

Religion as justification for killing

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, when President Joseph Kabila refused to step down after his second term expired on 19 December 2016, people took to the streets. The demonstrations turned violent.

On New Year's Eve, political leaders reached an agreement – mediated by the Catholic Church, specifically by the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO) – under which presidential elections would be held by the end of 2017, and President Kabila would relinquish control. If successful, this would be the country's first peaceful transition of power since its independence in 1960.



Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo (CENCO) leads mediation at the signing on 31 December. Photo: MONUSCO/John Bompengo

"The United Nations has been very appreciative of what the Bishops were able to achieve," Archbishop Auza said, adding that bringing the parties together and mediating avoided "chaos and possible bloodshed in the whole country."

The Holy See is also active in helping to resolve conflicts in Colombia and Venezuela, where Pope Francis was asked to help mediate in difficult political situations, the Archbishop said.

In Burundi, Mozambique and the Philippines, the Church is active mediating conflicts that pit different religious groups against each other: "The Catholic Church is playing a major role in trying to remedy the impression that religion is a cause of all these conflicts, and also to help other religious leaders understand that their role is very important in trying to prevent wars, conflicts or violence."

Within the UN, the Holy See delivers its messages by addressing the Security Council, the General Assembly and at special events.

For example, in 2014, the Security Council adopted resolution 2178, condemning violent extremism and urging measures preventing travel related to and support for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other foreign terrorist fighters. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Holy See's Secretary of State, told the Council at the time that in order to counter terrorism,

people and countries must achieve social justice for all and mutual cultural understanding.



During a visit in 2008, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI touches the United Nations flag removed from the ruins of the United Nations Headquarters in Baghdad during the 2001 bombing attack, in remembrance of the injured and those who died. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

“The Holy See – which is a sovereign international subject that also represents a world faith community – affirms that people of faith have a grave responsibility to condemn those who seek to detach faith from reason and ‘instrumentalize’ faith as a justification for violence,” Cardinal Parolin said.

Member States of the General Assembly understand the importance of working with religious leaders on international issues. In 2010, the Assembly designated the first week of February every year as World Interfaith Harmony Week. It aims to spread “the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill in the world’s churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other places of worship during that week, based on love of God and love of one’s neighbour or on love of the good and love of one’s neighbour, each according to their own religious traditions or conviction.”

According to Assembly resolution A/RES/65/5, Member States recognize that the moral imperatives of all religions, convictions and beliefs call for “peace, tolerance and mutual understanding.”

Committing to nuclear disarmament in good faith

The Holy See has voiced deep concern about the violent use of atomic energy since 1943. Watch Archbishop Auza’s call for nuclear disarmament.

Archbishop Bernardito Auza of the Holy See: Nuclear disarmament is one of the priorities for the year

The tight rope of forced migration

Arguably, no issue has been more polarizing in recent years as the movement of migrants and refugees. Around the world, more than 65 million people are displaced – the greatest number since the Second World War. A record number of migrants and refugees died in the Mediterranean Sea just this winter, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) announced on Friday.

Archbishop Auza expressed great concern about people forced to flee their homes and about how “societies or nations will just close their eyes or borders to them without doing anything.”



In the first official visit of a Vatican representative to United Nations Headquarters, Archbishop Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, signed the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. The Holy See was the 17th signatory to the convention, which was adopted in July 1951 by a plenipotentiary conference convened at the direction of the General Assembly. Pictured, Archbishop Cicognani (left) with UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie. UN Photo/MB

“The Holy Father explicitly asked me while I was in Rome last month actively to engage in the coming inter-governmental negotiations towards a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration,” the Archbishop said of the international agreement expected to be adopted in 2018, which will set out a range of common principles and agreements among Member States on international migration.

The compact was launched with the adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants by a UN summit on 19 September 2016. The next discussions are expected to be held in March in Geneva as part of the UN International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) International Dialogue on Migration.

Seasoned in diplomacy, the Holy See is aware of the issues surrounding migration and the challenges some Member States have in aiding refugees and migrants.

“It’s sad that we are noticing a rise in a certain type of nationalism – even a certain xenophobia,” Archbishop Auza said, adding that migration “is also being used as a tool for some political parties to gain power.”



Participants at a special event on ending human trafficking, organized by the Permanent Mission of the Holy See and the Santa Marta Group. Ending human trafficking and all other forms of slavery is a key priority for the Holy See. UN Photo/Loey Felipe

“We understand that migration has negative aspects. As the Holy Father has said, I also appeal to the migrants to respect the cultures and the lives and society of those people who receive them. So it is two-way traffic,” he added.

On issues of migration, as with any other issue, the Holy See offers Member States “orientation and spiritual inspiration,” as stated on the Holy See Mission’s website, as opposed to political support or material aid.

“Simply because we may not agree on a particular issue, we do not disrespect one another,” the Archbishop said of working with Member States, the UN Secretariat and its agencies. “We continue to work together. We continue to be friends. We continue to collaborate while respecting and acknowledging the differences.”

This story is part of a feature series that examines the roles that world

religions have at the United Nations and in international diplomacy.

Land urgently needed to avert 'drastic deterioration' in Burundian refugee camps in neighbouring countries

7 February 2017 – Stalled peace talks in Burundi are forcing hundreds to flee every day seeking refuge in neighbouring countries, the United Nations refugee agency warned today, appealing for more support, particularly land to shelter for new arrivals and to ensure protection of children and prevention of sexual and gender-based violence.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), since April 2015, more than 384,000 Burundian refugees have fled to Tanzania (222,271), Rwanda (84,866), Uganda (about 44,000) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (32,650) and its projections indicate that numbers will cross half-a-million by the end of the year.

"Without allocation of new land to extend capacity in existing camps or build new ones, these countries will struggle to provide sufficient shelter and life-saving services in the camp sites," William Spindler, a UNHCR spokesperson, told the media at the regular bi-weekly press briefing in Geneva today.

"Camp facilities also need to be upgraded, including construction of more homes, schools, health centres and better drainage systems to lessen the risk of disease," he added, noting that host countries have been generous with their support but more action is needed to avert a dangerous slide in standards and conditions.

UNHCR also appealed to donor nations to step up their assistance and funding.

Last year, the UN agency received a \$96.1 million in contributions for the Burundi situation, however, it was 53 per cent of the amount needed.

Relief organizations struggling to meet needs

The pressure is most intense in Tanzania, where average arrivals in January reached almost 600 persons daily.



A girl walks past a pile of firewood in Mahama refugee camp, Eastern Province, Rwanda, which is hosting thousands of refugees from Burundi. Photo: UNICEF/Mike Pflanz

Of the three camps hosting refugees, only Nduta – that recently passed its current capacity of 100,000 persons – is taking new arrivals.

According to Mr. Spindler, humanitarian agencies are struggling to provide minimal basic services and fear outbreaks of health emergencies if the crowding gets worse and facilities fail to keep pace.

Similarly, land shortages are also hitting the Lusenda camp in the Democratic Republic of the Congo where risk of fire is rising as shelters are getting closer due to paucity of land.

In Rwanda's Mahama camp (hosting more than 53,000 against its capacity of 50,000), many are living under plastic sheeting in overcrowded communal hangars, waiting to move to a family shelter. In addition to poor hygiene, living conditions present serious protection risks due to lack of privacy.

Even a 'progressive settlement approach' is struggling to cope

Uganda, which presently hosts 44,000 Burundian refugees in total, according to the UN agency runs a "progressive settlement approach" to refugee management and protection.

The country provides refugees with plots of land to build new homes and grow crops, and live among the Ugandan host communities.

However, Mr. Spindler added that significant investments are needed in local infrastructure to ensure that refugees are able to access key basic services.