

Marching towards peace, FARC-EP begins turning in arms – UN Mission in Colombia

2 February 2017 – More than 200 men and women of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) marched today to demobilization camps, two months after a peace deal that ended the Western Hemisphere's longest running conflict, United Nations monitors coordinating the process reported.

The UN Mission in Colombia reported that the Transitional Point of Normalization of Pandores, department of La Guajira, in northern Colombia, according to figures from tripartite Monitoring and Verification Mechanism, composed of the Government, the FARC-EP and coordinated by the UN Mission.

Members of the FARC-EP – some of them pregnant or breastfeeding – walked about nine kilometres from four pre-grouping points near to the Pandores transitional point, where the FARC-EP camp will be located and where the separation of forces will take place, a task which the UN Mission will verify.

"As a UN Mission, this moment is crucial because it means we will continue to verify the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities through our participation in the Tripartite Mechanism, and we will be able to begin the operational part of the verification of the laying down of arms," explained the Deputy Head of Observers of the Mission, José Mauricio Villacorta.

According to the Mission, the women and men marching today join more than 6,300 FARC-EP members who began mobilizing on Saturday, 28 January, to zones and points using 36 travel routes in 14 departments of the country, according to preliminary figures from the Colombian Government's High Commissioner for Peace, on one of the country's largest logistics operations.

FARC-EP members were received today at the Pandores site by High Commissioner for Peace Sergio Jaramillo, FARC-EP leader Ivan Márquez, Colombian authorities and Mr. Mauricio Villacorta, in a symbolic act to highlight the parties' commitment and the imminent start of the laying down of arms, which the UN Mission will verify, to enable the transition to civilian life.

"This shows that we are bringing the agreement to reality," said Mr. Jaramillo, who added: "This is a moment of joy."

Iván Márquez, who headed the FARC-EP negotiating team in Havana, Cuba, where four years of negotiations on the eventual peace accord took place, stated: "Something good is happening in Colombia: it's peace [...] This peace is irrepressible, unstoppable; let us go forward."

"To date, we have focused on the planning and preparation phase so that the

Mission can carry out the tasks of registering and storing weapons,” said Mr. Mauricio Villacorta.

Once FARC-EP members are in the camps the first step for the laying down of arms is the registration of arms and weapons. Unstable armaments – such as gunpowder, grenades and anti-personnel mines – will be destroyed in site. After 180 days, the UN Mission in Colombia is set to remove all the weapons from the camp.

In early October 2016, Colombian voters narrowly rejected the historic peace accord between the Government and the FARC-EP. That deal led to a cessation of hostilities and agreements on key issues such as political participation, land rights, illicit drugs and victims’ rights and transitional justice. The two sides signed a new agreement in late November.

Days of ISIL are numbered, says UN envoy as nation prepares for unified Iraq

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2 February 2017 –

The military campaign to oust Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) terrorists from Iraq is nearly won, the humanitarian crisis is expected to continue for months, if not years, the United Nations top official for the country said today.

“Three months after the Mosul military operation started, combat operations in the eastern part of Mosul have come to an end,” the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Iraq, Ján Kubiš, told the UN Security Council during a briefing.

He said that the Iraqi forces, with significant support from its international partners, especially the United States, will remain engaged in complex urban operations, in particular inside the old city in western Mosul.

“Yet, in the rather short foreseeable future, the liberation operations in Iraq are coming to an end – the days of the so-called ISIL in Iraq are counted,” added Mr. Kubiš, who is also the head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

According to an advance summary of the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan submitted by relief aid partners in December, at least \$985 million is required this year to reach the 5.8 million most vulnerable Iraqis. Of this,

\$331 million is being sought specifically for the Mosul response.

Already a lot is being done. Over 1.4 million displaced Iraqis have returned to their homes, including one million in the past 12 months.



Ján Kubiš, Special Representative for Iraq and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), addresses the Security Council meeting on the situation concerning Iraq. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

In the post-Da'esh period, Iraq will need continuous, substantial and sustainable support and assistance from the international community, including its regional partners, he stressed, warning that any abrupt scaling-down of engagement or support would mean repeating mistakes of the past – mistakes that have had grave consequences for stability and security, well beyond the borders of Iraq, even globally.

The protection of civilians, the avoidance of steps that could incite sectarian tensions, and the prevention of looting and revenge attacks in Mosul and other liberated areas of the country “constitute first steps in the process of national and community-based reconciliation, in building a new and truly unified Iraq,” he said.

Since 2003, Iraq has lost more than half of its ethnic and religious minority population. Special attention should therefore be paid to arrangements that address the specific security and other concerns of minorities to enable returns to their homes.

The National Alliance Initiative, submitted to UNAMI by the largest parliamentary bloc, on the way forward in post-Da'esh Iraq is a good starting point in the Iraqi-owned and led, but UN-facilitated, process of national settlement and reconciliation, he said.

UNAMI is currently working with various groups, including the Sunni and Turkmen components, Kurdistan region of Iraq, civil society, minority communities, tribal leaders, and youth and women groups with the aim of soliciting their views and vision on how to build a post-ISIL united Iraq, based on the principles of equality and citizenship.

He emphasized that “for national reconciliation to succeed, it must be supported by grassroots initiatives.”

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UN health agency stepping up efforts to provide trauma care to people in Mosul

Urgent scale-up in funding needed to stave off famine in Somalia, UN warns

2 February 2017 – A senior United Nations humanitarian official in Somalia today warned that without a massive and urgent scale up of humanitarian assistance in the coming weeks, famine could soon be a reality in some of the worst drought-affected areas in the African country.

“This is the time to act to prevent another famine in Somalia,” said the Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, Peter de Clercq, during the launch of the latest food security and nutrition data in the nation’s capital, Mogadishu.

Somalia experienced the worst famine of the twenty-first century in 2011, with the loss of more than a quarter million lives.

“If we do not scale up the drought response immediately, it will cost lives, further destroy livelihoods, and could undermine the pursuit of key State-building and peacebuilding initiatives,” he warned, adding that a drought – even one this severe – does not automatically have to mean catastrophe “if we can respond early enough with timely support from the international community.”

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According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Somalia is in the grip of an intense drought, induced by two consecutive seasons of poor rainfall. In the worst affected areas, inadequate rainfall and lack of water has wiped out crops and killed livestock, while communities are being forced to sell their assets, and borrow food and money to survive.

The Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU) and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET) – managed by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) – have found that over 6.2 million, or more than half of the country’s population, are now in need of assistance, up from five million in September.

This includes a drastic increase in the number of people in “crisis” and “emergency” situations from 1.1 million six months ago to a projected three million between February and June this year.



Another distressed Somali family made destitute by drought, arrives in Doolow, a southern town near the border with Ethiopia, hoping to find food, water and aid. Photo: UNICEF Somalia

The situation for children is especially grave. Some 363,000 acutely malnourished children are in need of critical nutrition support, including life-saving treatment for more than 71,000 severely malnourished children.

The levels of suffering in the country, triggered by protracted conflict, seasonal shocks and disease outbreaks, are typically hard to bear, but the impact of this drought represents a threat of a different scale and magnitude.

"The situation we are starting to see today in many rural areas, particularly Bay, Puntland, is starting to look worryingly like the run-up to famine in 2010-2011," said Richard Trenchard, the FAO Representative for Somalia.

"Labour prices are collapsing; local food prices are rising; food availability is becoming patchy; animal deaths are increasing; and malnutrition rates are rising, especially among children. Together, these are all signs that we are entering a phase that can lead to catastrophe."

Global food prices up in January; cereal prices keep rising despite improved supplies – UN

2 February 2017 – Global food prices rose notably in January, led by sugar and cereals, even as markets remain well supplied, United Nations monthly figures show.

According to a press release from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the January Food Price Index – which measures the monthly change in international prices for five major food commodity groups: major cereals, vegetable oils, dairy, meat, and sugar – averaged 173.8 per cent in January, its highest value in almost two years, marking a 2.1 per cent increase from its revised December value and 16.4 per cent above the year-earlier level.

While 2016 marked the fifth consecutive year the global food price index has fallen, January marked its sixth monthly increase in a row.

Sugar prices surged 9.9 per cent in the month, driven by expectations of protracted supply tightness in Brazil, India and Thailand.

Cereal prices rose 3.4 per cent from December to a six-month high, with

wheat, maize and rice values all increasing.

International prices of rice also rose, in part due to India's ongoing state procurement programme, reducing the quantities available for export.

Vegetable oil prices rose 1.8 per cent, due mostly to low global inventory levels of palm oil coupled with a slow production recovery in Southeast Asia. Soy oil prices, by contrast, eased on expectations of ample global availability.

Dairy prices remained unchanged from December, a marked departure from the 50 per cent increase it posted between May and December last year.

Meat prices were also practically unchanged, with a rise in bovine meat quotations – the result of herd rebuilding in Australia – offset by lower prices of ovine and other meats.

World cereal stocks at all-time high due to record production

Worldwide inventories of cereals are on course to reach an all-time record level by the end of seasons in 2017, according to FAO's latest Cereal Supply and Demand Brief.

Latest figures put global cereal stocks at 681 million metric tonnes, up 1.5 per cent from their December forecasted level and 3 per cent from the previous season. World wheat inventories would likely hit a new record of 245 million tonnes, marking an 8.3 per cent annual increase. Coarse grain stocks are forecast to grow by 0.7 per cent to reach their second-highest level on record, while rice stocks are set to decline slightly although ending the season at a near-record 170 million tonnes.

FAO has also raised its estimate of global cereal output in 2016 by 15 million metric tonnes to 2,592 million tonnes, due primarily to larger-than-expected wheat harvests in Australia and Russia. For rice, excess rains over parts of Viet Nam and inadequate rainfall in Sri Lanka will likely curb rice output.

EU should seek common approach to address tragic loss of life on Mediterranean – UN agencies

2 February 2017 – Ahead of a meeting of the European Council, the United Nations refugee and migration agencies have called on European leaders to take ‘decisive action’ to save lives of migrants and refugees attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea along its central route in hopes of

a better future.

Ahead of a meeting of the European Council, the United Nations refugee and migration agencies have called on European leaders to take decisive action to save lives of migrants and refugees attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea along its central route in hopes of a better future.

To better protect refugees and migrants, we need a strong European Union that is engaged beyond its borders to protect, assist and help find solutions for people in need, said the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in a joint statement today.

Such efforts, they noted, should include building capacity to save lives at sea or on land, strengthening the rule of law and fighting against criminal networks.

The agencies also expressed hope that the meeting, to be held tomorrow, will also help move towards the adoption of a common approach to migration by the European Union.

They also appealed for addressing deplorable conditions for refugees and migrants in Libya and called for concerted efforts to ensure that sustainable migration and asylum systems are established in the country and in neighbouring countries.

This should include a significant expansion of opportunities for safe pathways such as resettlement and humanitarian admission, among others, to avoid dangerous journeys, the noted, urging to shift away from migration management based on automatic detention of refugees and migrants.

In this context, UNHCR and IOM underlined the need for creating proper reception services and building capacity to register new arrivals, support the voluntary return of migrants, process asylum claims and offer solutions to refugees.

Further, stating that they, together with partners on the ground, have made tremendous effort to deliver basic protection not only to refugees and migrants but also to affected local populations, which in some places are also in dire need of assistance, the UN agencies, however, expressed worry that security constraints continued to hinder their efforts.

They also outlined that given the current context, it is not appropriate to consider Libya a safe third country nor to establish extraterritorial processing of asylum-seekers in North Africa.

Expressing hope that humane solutions can be found end the suffering of thousands of migrants and refugees in Libya and across the region, the agencies added: We stand ready to assist and enhance our engagement, conditions permitting.

Last year, 2016, was the worst year in terms of people perishing while

attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea. According to preliminary figures from UNHCR, of the 363,348 people who crossed the sea, 5,079 people – almost 1 in 72 – were lost (died or missing).