

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."

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.

Research shows link between temperature rise and human influence, says head of UN climate panel

23 March 2017 – Speaking today at a United Nations forum to invigorate political momentum on climate change, the head of a major UN panel on climate change underlined that human influence on the climate system cannot be disputed.

“[Research has] demonstrated the link between cumulative past, present and future carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions and a given temperature rise,” Hoesung Lee, the chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), stressed in his keynote address at the UN General Assembly High-Level action event today.

“Bigger emissions now mean higher temperature in the future,” he added.

In his address, Mr. Lee drew examples from the Fifth Assessment Report (AR5) issued by the IPCC in 2014 and said that since then, warming has continued and global mean temperature rise has reached more than one degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels in 2015 and 2016.

Such observed warming led at the centre of the climate model projections assessed in the Report, he explained.

Underscoring that climate change threatened development, impacted economic growth, made poverty eradication efforts all the more difficult and severely underlined food security, Mr. Lee said that rising temperatures also had a very detrimental impact on the environment.

“Oceans are continuing to warm, acidify and lose oxygen,” he said, “Warm water coral reefs are already under pressure and 90 per cent would suffer significant risk from global warming of 1.5 degree Celsius.”



Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Hoesung Lee

addresses the UN General Assembly. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

Touching upon the Sixth Assessment Report (AR6), which will be completed with a synthesis report in 2022, said Mr. Lee that it will be ready in good time for the first global stocktaking under the Paris Agreement on climate change the following year.

He also said that scientific research has illustrated that efforts to address climate change and pursuit of sustainable development can support each other, he cited the following example: "If food waste was a country, it would be the world's third biggest emitter of greenhouse gases [therefore] reducing food waste globally can help fight poverty and hunger while stabilizing the climate."

He also said that in its subsequent reports, the IPCC seeks to improve its scientific understanding of the economics of addressing climate change, such as of the benefits on health from clean air or the impact on energy security, balance of payments and jobs from energy efficiency.

In his remarks he further mentioned that researchers are on working on new methods to better observe and understand the climate, these will be crucial to help improve weather forecasts and climate projections.

"This science underpins the IPCC's policy-relevant assessments and is essential for sustainable development planning," he noted, calling for continued support the vital research.

Concluding his address, Mr. Lee highlighted that the expression "business as usual" is often seen for not taking action on climate.

"Business will be very far from usual in a world of no mitigation, which could see temperatures rise by an average 40 or more over the century," he said stressing that economic development cannot be pursued by relying on high-carbon technology.

"Actions to limit climate change have a positive impact on the domestic economy and help improve human well-being, and adaptation reduces vulnerability, supporting inclusive and equitable development."

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is an international body for assessing the science related to climate change. It was up in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and UN Environment Programme (UNEP) to provide policymakers with regular assessments of the scientific basis of climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for adaptation and mitigation.

Security Council and region must 'speak with one voice,' end suffering in South Sudan – UN chief

23 March 2017 – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today stressed the need for the leadership of South Sudan to achieve an immediate cessation of hostilities, restore the peace process and ensure unrestricted humanitarian access in order to pull the world's youngest country back from the abyss, and back from a widening famine.

"All the optimism that accompanied the birth of South Sudan has been shattered by internal divisions, rivalries and the irresponsible behaviour of some of its leaders," Mr. Guterres said during a Security Council briefing.

"As a result, a country that had seen a brief glimmer of hope for a better future has plunged back into darkness. We have to do everything in our power to change this," he stressed.

South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in 2011 but a political face-off between President Salva Kiir and First Vice-President Riek Machar plunged the country into full blown conflict in December 2013.

Providing a detailed overview, Mr. Guterres said civilians continue to be subjected to horrendous attacks, including rape and the recruitment of children. More than 1.9 million people are displaced internally, more than 220,000 of whom are seeking safety in protection sites of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). Some 1.6 million people have sought refuge in neighbouring countries.

"The humanitarian crisis continues to deepen. One hundred thousand people are enduring famine, one million are on the verge of that fate, and 5.5 million may be severely food insecure by this summer," he explained.

Moreover at least 7.5 million people across South Sudan – almost two thirds of the population – need humanitarian assistance. Three years of conflict have eroded livelihoods and disrupted farming, including in the Equatorias, the country's breadbasket.



Wide view of the Security Council Chamber during its meeting on South Sudan.
UN Photo/Manuel Elias

The UN chief also said that violence has spread to include previously stable areas of northern Jonglei.

Noting that the peace process remains at a standstill, Mr. Guterres said that Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous, who

returned yesterday from a trip to South Sudan, emphasized the critical importance of an inclusive political process in ensuring the well-being of the country's people.

Mr. Guterres warned that despite the alarm sounded by the UN and the international community over this crisis, the Government has yet to express any meaningful concern or take any tangible steps to address the plight of its people.

"On the contrary, what we hear most often are denials – a refusal by the leadership to even acknowledge the crisis or to fulfil its responsibility to end it," he said.

Mr. Guterres underscored the need to ensure unrestricted humanitarian access, including freedom of movement for UNMISS and a future Regional Protection Force, which was authorized by the Security Council in August 2016.

"But no such force, and no amount of diplomacy, can substitute for the lack of political will among those who govern the country," emphasized Mr. Guterres, noting that there is a strong consensus that South Sudanese leaders need to do more to demonstrate their commitment to the well-being of the country's people, who are among the poorest in the world.

"If there is to be any hope of those leaders changing their current calculations, greater pressure is needed. This means first and foremost that the region and the Security Council must speak with one voice," he stated.

He also warned that the dangers of South Sudan's trajectory should not be underestimated. "Atrocity crimes have occurred with impunity, and the potential for serious deterioration remains very real. Credible mechanisms for accountability are a must," he said.