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UN chief urges Venezuelans to ease tensions and engage in negotiations

7 August – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres is closely following recent developments in Venezuela, his Spokesperson told reporters today.

“In this critical moment for the future of the country, he urges all Venezuelans to make all possible efforts to lower tensions and engage in political negotiations,” underscored Stéphane Dujarric, when asked about the latest developments in the South American country.

The Secretary-General and other top UN officials have been calling for calm in Venezuela since late July when, according to media reports, clashes erupted between security forces and protestors opposing the Constituent Assembly elections.

According to media reports, President Nicolás Maduro declared victory in elections for a Constituent Assembly convened by him. The new body could replace the current legislative body, the National Assembly.



Protesters in La Castellana, a neighborhood in eastern Caracas.
Photo: Helena Carpio/IRIN News

Yemen: Senior UN relief official voices concern at reports of airstrikes on civilians



The city of Sa'ada in the Sa'ada Governorate has been heavily hit by airstrikes during the conflict in Yemen. Photo: OCHA/Philippe Kropf (file)

7 August – Expressing a deep concern about reports of airstrikes on civilians in Yemen's Sa'ada Governorate, a senior United Nations relief official has urged all parties to the conflict and those who influence and support them to uphold their responsibility under international humanitarian law to protect civilians.

“All parties to the conflict continue to show a disregard for the protection of civilians and the principle of distinction between civilians and combatants in the conduct of hostilities,” said Jamie McGoldrick, the Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen, in a statement issued over the weekend by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Attacks on a house in As Safra District and on a private vehicle in Razih District on Friday have reportedly resulted in the deaths of at least 12 civilians, including women and children and the injury of 10 more people.

While these new incidents are still being investigated by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), they are an example of the brutality in which the conflict is being conducted, Mr. McGoldrick stated.

“As I have said before, even wars have rules and such rules must be respected,” he added.

Meanwhile, UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric told reporters at UN Headquarters today that there had been a delay in the delivery of fuel needed for the UN's humanitarian operations in the country but UN team has got assurances that fuel will be moving this week from Aden to the capital, Sana'a.

“We ask authorities for a mechanism to help ensure regular delivery of aviation fuel for UN operations,” Mr. Dujarric said.

UN health agency working to boost malaria prevention and control in north-eastern Nigeria

7 August – The United Nations health agency estimates that if more funds are secured, up to 10,000 lives in Nigeria could be saved by November through targeted steps in malaria prevention and control.

To manage malaria in the Borno state of north-eastern Nigeria, the World Health Organization (WHO) and its partners are strengthening surveillance systems to monitor cases and outbreaks; increasing people's access to care in clinics and to health facilities; spraying insecticides and distributing bed nets as part of vector control; and administering malaria drugs to children under five every month from July to October.

Following more than eight years of conflict in Borno, some 3.7 million people need humanitarian assistance – and all are at risk for malaria. WHO estimates that through October, 8,500 people are infected weekly – with more expected.



The World Health Organization (WHO) and partners take on malaria in north-east Nigeria. Photo: WHO Nigeria/L. Ozor

“The most effective way to reduce deaths in emergencies in fragile States, especially those facing malnutrition, is by boosting malaria prevention and control, however, this is often not viewed as the top priority during an emergency

response,” said Dr. Pedro Alonso, Director of WHO's Global Malaria Programme. “We are working with our WHO colleagues and many partners to change this.”

WHO estimates that over half of recorded deaths there are due to malaria – comprising more than all other diseases combined, including cholera, measles and hepatitis E. The vulnerable population, consisting of 58.8 per cent children, stands at risk of disease outbreaks.

With more than 60 per cent of health facilities only partially functioning, many people have not had access for years to regular health services, including vaccinations and basic medicines. In addition to security concerns, deadly malnutrition is rising in parts of the state.

Tackling health emergencies

“Malaria, malnutrition, fragile States and civil strife often feed each other,” said Dr. Alonso, adding: “Wherever we have a humanitarian crisis in a malaria endemic country, we can almost always be sure that malaria is the number one killer.”

However, malaria is preventable and curable, and increased efforts over the last 15 years have drastically reduced related mortality rates by more than 60 per cent, averting six million deaths.

Following a visit, WHO malaria experts commissioned a modelling exercise that concluded that joint actions could be prevented up to 10,000 deaths in Borno state alone.

In early July, the first of four monthly rounds of mass drug administration reached more than 880,000 of the 1.1 million under-age-five children targeted.

WHO hopes for \$2.5 million to mobilize the emergency intervention and is relying on the existing polio vaccinator infrastructure to carry out the operation, which faces Boko Haram security threats.

“We will give one curative dose of antimalarial drugs to a defined population, in this case children under-five,” said Dr. Alonso. “In Borno state, we are giving an antimalarial drug to a child, whether they have malaria infection or not, to ensure they are cleared of parasites at that point and to protect them for four weeks. It's a necessary temporary fix to reduce malaria deaths for the next six months.”

WHO has trained community health workers to offer rapid and read diagnostic tests, provide treatment and advise on prevention.

“We will not know the full impact of our efforts until November, but we are confident that taking these steps will go a long way in reducing deaths and suffering of people from malaria so they can get on with their lives,” said Dr. Wondi Alemu, WHO Representative in Nigeria.

'Don't turn a blind eye' to dire situation of children in DR Congo's Kasai region – UNICEF



In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a nurse from the Kabea Kamwanga hospital treats a malnourished and malaria-infected child with medicines donated by UNICEF (May 2017). Photo/UNICEF/UN064905

7 August – The world must not turn a blind eye to the dire situation of children and families in the Grand Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said today, stressing that nothing can justify terrible acts of abuse against women and children.

“Children and women tell us of terrible acts of abuse. Many children have been recruited by armed forces, drugged and caught in the violence. Nothing can justify these actions,” said Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF Regional Director for West and Central Africa, in a statement.

Over the past 12 months, more than 1.4 million people – including 850,000 children – have been forced from their homes, and their lives turned upside down by widespread acts of extreme violence. More than 200 health centres have been destroyed, and one in four health centres is no longer functioning normally. An estimated 400,000 children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition.

Children have lost a year of education, as hundreds of schools have been targeted and looted, teachers killed or fled for safety. Teachers are not able to go to work, while parents are scared to send their children to school.

She urged all parties to the conflict to protect children, end grave violations against children, and preserve schools and health services.

“Humanitarian actors must have unhindered humanitarian access to affected populations so that we can reach all those in need of assistance,” she said.

UNICEF is responding to the escalating humanitarian needs, “but unless this violence stops, our best work will never be enough,” she said. “The lives of many thousands of children are at risk.”

Colombia: UN Mission team ambushed; one wounded in attack

7 August – A team from the United Nations Mission in Colombia was ambushed on Sunday while working to uncover explosives left by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) in the Caloto municipality in the south-west of the country.

While one member of the Peacebuilding Unit (UNIPPEP) was injured during the attack, the rest of the team, made up of observers, members of the Colombian National Police and ex-combatants of the FARC-EP, were unharmed and remain safe in the Veredal Zone of Cauca.

In a communiqué, the UN Mission highlighted the work of the Colombian public forces in the operations of extracting hidden explosives and looked forward to the prompt recovery of the national police officer.

So far it has not been determined who was responsible for the attack.



Observers from the UN Mission in Colombia. Photo: UN Mission in Colombia

On eve of elections, UN experts call on Kenyan authorities to ensure peaceful polls



UN Photo/Staton Winter

7 August – The Government of Kenya should urge all parties to maintain the highest standards of behaviour before, during and after Tuesday's general elections to avoid a repeat of the violence that took place in 2007, three United Nations human rights experts have said.

“We call on the Kenyan authorities to do their utmost to ensure peaceful elections, as well as a free and fair voting process tomorrow,” said the Special Rapporteurs on freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Annalisa Ciampi, on the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst, and on summary executions, Agnes Callamard.

“Respect for people's fundamental rights and freedoms – including the right to vote, freedom of expression, association and assembly – are the key to free and fair elections and public participation,” they noted in a joint statement on the eve of the polls to elect the president and members of parliament, among others.

Since 2007, when the country plunged into bloodshed over disputed election results, “Kenya had made significant progress in strengthening democracy, human rights and the rule of law,” they said, noting it had taken important steps towards peacefully resolving tensions in the context of elections.

“However, in the light of recent incidents of political violence, the rise of hate speech and prevailing tensions, we emphasize the importance of all those involved in the process to commit themselves to peaceful conduct during and after elections,” they said.

“We also call on their supporters to remain peaceful and refrain from any incitement to violence,” added the experts.

The Special Rapporteurs welcomed the Government's commitment not to shut down the internet, urging the authorities to ensure that media and civil society could report on and scrutinize the poll unhindered.

They also highlighted the responsibility of security forces to facilitate the holding of peaceful demonstrations, and to hold constructive dialogue with protesters in an effort to defuse any tensions.

On anniversary of Hiroshima bombing, UN chief calls for intensified effort on nuclear disarmament



Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome). Photo: UNESCO/G. Boccardi

6 August – With the presence of some 15,000 nuclear weapons on earth, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today urged all States to intensify their efforts in the shared pursuit of a nuclear-weapons-free world.

“Our dream of a world free of nuclear weapons remains far from reality,” said Mr. Guterres in his message delivered on his behalf by High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu at an annual memorial held in Hiroshima, Japan, for the victims of the atomic bomb dropped on the city today in 1945.

“The states possessing nuclear weapons have a special responsibility to undertake concrete and irreversible steps in nuclear disarmament,” Mr. Guterres stressed, warning against the continued presence of some 15,000 nuclear weapons and dangerous rhetoric

regarding their use.

He went on to state that the world looks to Hiroshima, as the city – built on “resilience and hope” – has come back from the tragic event 72 years ago. “Your determination for peace is an inspiration to the world,” Mr. Guterres said.

On a positive note, he highlighted a major development in 2017, in particular the adoption last month of the treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons by UN Member States.

This outcome was the result of a global campaign focused on the unconditional unacceptability of the use of nuclear weapons, the Secretary-General noted, acknowledging the invaluable contribution made by Hiroshima's message of peace and the heroic efforts of *hibakushas*, or survivors of the atomic bombs.

They have reminded the world of the devastating humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, he said, expressing UN support for a global effort towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

UN Security Council toughens sanctions on DPR Korea over ballistic missile launches

5 August – In response to the launches of ballistic missiles of possible intercontinental range by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the United Nations Security Council today moved to strengthen sanctions on the Northeast Asian country's exports.

In a resolution adopted unanimously, the 15-member body strongly condemned the DPRK's ballistic missile launches on 3 July and 28 July, which the country has stated were of “intercontinental” range.

The Council reaffirmed previous Council decisions that the DPRK not conduct further launches using ballistic missile technology, nuclear tests, or any other provocation.

The Council moved to significantly strengthen the sanctions on the DPRK, imposing a full ban on the export of coal, iron and iron ore from the DPRK. Previously these items could be exported for livelihood purposes, for a limited amount.

The Council also prohibited countries from increasing the total number of work authorizations for DPRK nationals. It banned new joint ventures or cooperative entities with DPRK entities or individuals as well as additional investments in existing joint ventures.

Member States are requested to report to the Security Council, within 90 days of the adoption of this resolution, on concrete measures they have taken to effectively implement this resolution.

The Council also designated several additional individuals for a travel ban and assets freeze, as well as designating entities for an assets freeze.

On the political front, the Council calls for resumption of the Six-Party Talks and reiterated its support for the commitments set forth in the Joint Statement of 19 September 2005 issued by China, the DPRK, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, and the United States.

The commitments included that the goal of the Six-Party Talks is the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner, and that the United States and the DPRK respect each other's sovereignty and exist together peacefully.



The UN Security Council unanimously adopts a resolution on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and the intercontinental ballistic missile programme (ICBM) by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). UN Photo/Kim Haughton

UN officially notified of US intention to withdraw from Paris climate pact



Flags outside the UN Secretariat building. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

4 August – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today received a notification from the delegation of the United States expressing the country's intention to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on climate change as soon as it is eligible to do so, his spokesman has confirmed.

The notification came two months after President Donald Trump announced his intention to leave the accord.

“As the Secretary-General said in a statement on 1 June 2017, the decision by the United States to withdraw from the Paris Agreement is a major disappointment for global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote global security,” said UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric in a note sent tonight to correspondents.

Under article 28 of the Paris Agreement, a Party may withdraw at any time after three years from the date on which the Agreement has entered into force for that Party, and such withdrawal takes effect upon expiry of one year from the date of receipt by the Depositary of the notification of withdrawal. The United States accepted the Paris Agreement on 3 September 2016 and the Agreement entered into force for the United States on 4 November 2016. This means that the US must stay in the pact until at least 2019.

The communication says the US intends to exercise its right to withdraw, unless it identifies suitable terms for reengagement.

The Secretary General welcomes any effort to reengage in the Paris Agreement by the United States, Mr. Dujarric said.

“It is crucial that the United States remains a leader on climate and sustainable development. Climate change is impacting now. He looks forward to engaging with the American government and all other actors in the United States and around the world to build the sustainable future for our children and future generations,” he added.

The Spokesman said that the Secretary-General is the depositary of the Agreement, and will circulate the text of this communication as a notification, in English and French, early next week.

New UN human rights office to open in Liberia in early 2018

4 August – Although Liberia has made significant progress since the civil war ended, precarious human rights conditions have prompted the United Nations to open an office there early next year to monitor and report on the situation.

“Liberia has progressed dramatically since my last visit just after the brutal civil war,” said UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Andrew Gilmour after wrapping up a three-day visit to Liberia.

After commending the efforts of the Government and the Liberian people, he noted that the human rights gains are “still precarious, hence the vital need for the UN to continue our support.”

With the main purpose of the visit to establish a UN Human Rights Office in the country, an agreement was signed with the Government



Benson Street in downtown Monrovia, Liberia. Photo: Morgana Wingard/UNDP

for the new office to open in early 2018.

“What we have learned in country after country is that neither peace nor development can be properly sustainable unless they are firmly grounded in human rights,” said Mr. Gilmour.

He expressed his appreciation to Foreign Minister Marjon V. Kamara, with whom he signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the new office, set to open early in 2018.

This office will conduct human rights monitoring and reporting, as well as provide technical assistance to State institutions, the Independent National Commission for Human Rights, civil society and other partners.

Mr. Gilmour highlighted the primary role of the Government in promoting and protecting human rights in Liberia.

During his visit, the senior UN human rights official met with Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, cabinet ministers, several leaders of civil society organizations, and foreign ambassadors.

Underlining Liberia's international human rights obligations, Mr. Gilmour expressed serious concern over the continued prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM) and urged the Government to do far more within its power to discourage this and other harmful traditional practices, including trial by ordeal, accusations of witchcraft and ritualistic killings.

He discussed the plight of lesbian, gay and transgender people, saying that their unbearable discrimination and abuse must be confronted. He also raised trepidations surrounding the rights of people with disabilities.

While acknowledging Government efforts to address sexual violence, he stressed that the appalling frequency of rape in Liberia, including of young girls, is partly due to widespread impunity for this crime.

After visiting Monrovia Central Prison, Mr. Gilmour praised the work of the wardens but remarked on the very serious overcrowding and insufficient food, which he attributed to a high number of people held in pre-trial detention owing to the slowness of judicial procedures.

Concluding his stay, Mr. Gilmour visited the Palava Hut Memorial for victims of the civil war. He expressed the importance of transitional justice for national reconciliation and called for it to be a paramount concern for the new Government following the October elections – while warning against what some term a worrying rise in hate speech as election season approaches.

“True peace is never possible if people feel that their desire for justice has not been met. Abominable war crimes were committed in this country, and the perpetrators of the worst crimes should now understand that justice will catch up with them,” stressed the Assistant Secretary-General.