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## **UN rights experts urge Member States to 'go beyond statements,' take concrete actions to help Rohingya**

**26 September** – A month on from counter-terror operations following attacks on police outposts in Myanmar's Rakhine province, seven United Nations rights experts have called on the Government to stop all violence against the minority Muslim Rohingya community as well as on the global community to "go beyond" statements and take action to save them.

"There have been credible allegations of serious human rights violations and abuses committed against the Rohingya, including extrajudicial killings, excessive use of force, torture and ill-treatment, sexual and gender-based violence, and forced displacement, as well as the burning and destruction of over 200 Rohingya villages and tens of thousands of homes," said the experts (see end for list) in a news release issued today by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).



A boy leans against UNHCR tarpaulin, waiting to be distributed at Kutupalong refugee camp. Photo: UNHCR/Paula Bronstein

In the news release, the experts, including the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, recalled the briefing last week by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, in which she urged the international community to learn along with the country's Government, the possible reasons behind the current exodus from Myanmar to Bangladesh.

"No one chooses, especially not in the hundreds of thousands, to leave their homes and ancestral land, no matter how poor the conditions, to flee to a strange land to live under plastic sheets and in dire circumstances except in life-threatening situations," stressed the experts.

According to estimates, more than 430,000 people have crossed into Bangladesh since the violence erupted.

Further in the release, the experts also called on Myanmar authorities to ensure unfettered access to humanitarians to the affected locations and displaced people as well as for rights monitors, including the Human Rights Council Fact-Finding Mission for an independent and impartial assessment of the situation on the ground.

They further urged the state Counsellor to personally meet the Rohingya.

Concluding the news release, the rights experts also called on UN Member States to “go beyond statements and start taking concrete action” to stop the military and security forces from what they noted “accomplishing their so-called ‘unfinished business’ of getting rid of the Rohingya minority from Rakhine state.”

Meanwhile, the humanitarian crisis across the border, in Bangladesh continues to worsen by the day.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), one of the UN humanitarian entities involved in the response, reported that despite every effort by those on the ground, the massive influx of people seeking safety has been outpacing capacities to respond, and the situation for these refugees has still not stabilized.

“Many of those who have arrived recently are deeply traumatized [and] despite having found refuge in Bangladesh, they are still exposed to enormous hardship,” Adrian Edwards, a UNHCR spokesperson, said at a media briefing in Geneva today, urging for a redoubling of the international humanitarian response in Bangladesh.

UNHCR along with other UN agencies, including the World Food Programme (WFP), UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (WHO) are also on the ground and assisting in the response efforts.

WFP and UNICEF are distributing food and therapeutic nutrition interventions (such as high-energy biscuits) and have set up child-friendly spaces. WHO is providing critical medical supplies for over half of the 38 mobile medical teams covering refugee settlements and camps.

The UN human rights experts noted above include Yanghee Lee, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar; Agnes Callamard, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Fernand de Varennes, Special Rapporteur on minority issues; Leilani Farha, Special Rapporteur on adequate housing; Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, Special Rapporteur on the rights of internally displaced persons; Mutuma Ruteere, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; and Ahmed Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council – the highest intergovernmental forum in the UN system on rights issues – to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.



## Global 'learning crisis' threatens future of millions young students – World Bank report



A young boy points to the letter F, with his teacher's help in a classroom in rural Nepal. Photo: Aisha Faquir/World Bank

**26 September** – Schooling without learning is a terrible waste of precious resources and of human potential, the World Bank said today, warning in a new report that millions of young students in low and middle-income countries face the prospect of lost opportunity and lower wages in later life because their primary and secondary schools are failing to educate them to succeed.

Warning of 'a learning crisis' in global education, the World Development Report 2018: 'Learning to Realize Education's Promise' said that schooling without learning is not just a wasted development opportunity, but also a great injustice to children and young people worldwide.

"This learning crisis is a moral and economic crisis," World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim said in a press release on the

report's launch.

The report argues that without learning, education will fail to deliver on its promise to eliminate extreme poverty and create shared opportunity and prosperity for all. Even after several years in school, millions of children cannot read, write or do basic math.

"When delivered well, education promises young people employment, better earnings, good health, and a life without poverty. For communities, education spurs innovation, strengthens institutions, and fosters social cohesion. But these benefits depend on learning, and schooling without learning is a wasted opportunity. More than that, it's a great injustice: the children whom societies fail the most are the ones who are most in need of a good education to succeed in life," underscored Mr. Kim.

### *Learning crisis is widening social gaps, not narrowing them*

According to the World Bank, this learning crisis is widening social gaps instead of narrowing them. Young students who are already disadvantaged by poverty, conflict, gender or disability reach young adulthood without even the most basic life skills.

The report recommends concrete policy steps to help developing countries resolve the crisis by using stronger learning assessments as to what works and what doesn't to guide education decision-making; and mobilizing a strong social movement to push for education changes that champion 'learning for all.'

While not all developing countries suffer from such extreme learning gaps, many fall far short of levels they aspire to.

Leading international assessments on literacy and numeracy show that the average student in poor countries performs lower than 95 per cent of those in high-income countries. Many high-performing students in middle-income countries – young men and women who achieve in the top quarter of their groups – would rank in the bottom quarter in a wealthier country, explained the World Bank.

The report, which was written by a team directed by World Bank Lead Economists Deon Filmer and Halsey Rogers, identifies what drives these learning shortfalls – not only the ways in which teaching and learning breaks down in too many schools, but also the deeper political forces that cause these problems to persist.

The report notes that when countries and their leaders make 'learning for all' a national priority, education standards can improve dramatically. For example, from a war-torn country with very low literacy rates in the 1950s, South Korea achieved

universal enrolment by 1995 in high-quality education through secondary school – its young people performed at the highest levels on international learning assessments.

“The only way to make progress is to ‘find truth from facts.’ If we let them, the facts about education reveal a painful truth. For too many children, schooling does not mean learning,” said World Bank Chief Economist Paul Romer.

After extensive consultations with governments, development and research organizations and the private sector in 20 countries, the report offers the three policy recommendations: assess learning, so it can become a measurable goal; make schools work for all children; and mobilize everyone who has a stake in learning.

## The only world safe from use of nuclear weapons is a world completely free of them – UN chief



Sculpture depicting St. George slaying the dragon. The dragon is created from fragments of Soviet SS-20 and United States Pershing nuclear missiles. UN Photo/Milton Grant

**26 September** – The only world that is safe from the use of nuclear weapons is a world that is completely free of them, Secretary-General António Guterres said today as the United Nations marked the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

“A world free of nuclear weapons is a global vision that requires a global response,” Mr. Guterres told a high-level General Assembly meeting held in commemoration of the International Day, observed annually on 26 September.

Although the goal of such a world is universally held, he said, it has lately been subject to numerous challenges, including a series of provocative nuclear and missile tests conducted by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

He added that the States possessing nuclear weapons have a special responsibility to lead by taking concrete steps, including those agreed at various review conferences of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

Expensive campaigns to modernize nuclear weapons – combined with the absence of planned arsenal reductions beyond the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) between Russia and the United States – make it difficult to see how disarmament can make progress, Mr. Guterres said, warning against misguided assertions that prevailing security conditions do not permit disarmament initiatives.

“It is true that we live in challenging circumstances, but this can be no excuse for walking away from our shared responsibility to seek a more peaceful international society,” he said.

The General Assembly declared 26 September as the International Day devoted to furthering the objective of the total elimination of nuclear weapons through a resolution adopted in December 2013.

Also addressing the event was Assembly President Miroslav Lajcak, who noted that thousands of nuclear warheads still exist and they are being stored across three different continents. More than half of the world’s population lives in countries which have nuclear capabilities, or are member of nuclear alliances, he added.

Since the designating the International Day, the world has witnessed three nuclear tests.

“One nuclear test is one too many. Six nuclear tests in the 21st century is, frankly, alarming. So too is the reckless rhetoric we are witnessing. It can bring us all to the verge of a cliff, which we cannot afford to fall off,” he said.

Last week, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was opened for signature. Not everyone agrees that this was the right step to take, but it demonstrates a determination, which is beyond dispute, he said.



“We can live in a nuclear-free world, as long as we all believe that it is possible. And as long as we are all willing to work to make it possible,” he concluded.

## Amid cholera outbreak in north-east Nigeria, UN steps up aid, warns pregnant women most vulnerable



New patient being admitted and washed with chlorinated water in the cholera treatment centre run by the Borno state Ministry of Health in northern Nigeria and supported by UNICEF and UNFPA. Photo: OCHA/Yasmina Guerda

**26 September** – Large-scale displacement and a health system in tatters as a result of persistent violence by the Boko Haram terrorist group have left many – most worryingly, pregnant women and their unborn babies – vulnerable to cholera in the wake of an outbreak in August, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has warned.

“Studies show that cholera infections during pregnancy can lead to sudden loss of the foetus, premature delivery, stillbirth and an increased mortality and morbidity, both for the baby and the mother,” said Homsuk Swomen, a UNFPA reproductive health specialist in Maiduguri, north-eastern Nigeria, one of the worst affected areas by the Boko Haram violence.

Due to the ongoing conflict, many pregnant women are malnourished, aggravating their vulnerability to cholera and the consequences if they fall ill.

Furthermore, the “traditional role” played by women and girls in the region is making them all the more susceptible to the disease.

According to Sylvia Opinia, a UNFPA expert in gender issues, it is usually women and girls who care for sick family members, clean latrines, fetch and handle untreated water, and prepare food for the family.

“We need to understand that cholera is not gender neutral,” she underscored.

On its part, the UN agency is working with local health staff, community and social workers in the camps to impress upon them the need to include women and girls in education messages on the disease, and especially targeting pregnant women with those messages. It is also engaging health workers to identify vulnerable women and girls, including pregnant women, for referral to appropriate care.

But funds are needed.

Last Sunday, the UN and partners launched a \$9.9 million appeal to respond to the current outbreak in Borno state (north-east Nigeria) and to prevent further outbreaks in high-risk areas. A Cholera Response and Prevention Plan has been developed to address the immediate needs of 3.7 million people that could be affected by the outbreak.

In related news, the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN health agency, concluded an oral cholera vaccination campaign around Maiduguri this weekend, inoculating some 844,000 people in affected areas.

According to WHO, it takes those immunized about a week to develop the immune response that should protect against the disease, and most individuals vaccinated should be protected for up to six months.

As of 25 September, 3,934 suspected cases of cholera including 54 deaths have been reported in and around Maiduguri. About 14 million people are affected by the crisis in north-eastern Nigeria (Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states), of whom 6.9 million need health assistance.

## Mali: Security Council strongly condemns deadly attack on UN peacekeepers

**26 September** – The United Nations Security Council has strongly condemned the attack by unknown assailants against a UN mission convoy in the region of Gao, northern Mali, on 24 September, that left three Bangladeshi peacekeepers dead and injured four others.

Through a press statement, the Council expressed deepest condolences and sympathy to the families of the victims, the Government of Bangladesh and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), according to a statement.

Calling on the Malian Government to swiftly investigate the attack and bring the perpetrators to justice, Council members underlined that “attacks targeting peacekeepers may constitute war crimes under international law.” Moreover, they stressed that involvement in planning, directing, sponsoring or conducting attacks against MINUSMA peacekeepers constitute a basis for sanctions designations pursuant to Council resolutions.

The members of the Council went on to reaffirm that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security, and underlined the need to bring perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of the reprehensible acts of terrorism to justice.

Reiterating full support for MINUSMA and the French forces that support it, the Council also reiterated “strong support” for Mission chief Mahamat Saleh Annadif, and recognized the determination of the Group of Five Sahel States (G5) – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger – to address the impact of terrorism and transnational organized crime, including through the conduct of cross-border joint military counter-terrorist operations.

The Council members went on to express their concern over the security situation in Mali along with the transnational dimension of the terrorist threat in the Sahel region. They urged the Malian parties to fully implement the 2015 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation without further delay, noting that its full implementation and the intensification of efforts to overcome asymmetric threats can contribute to improving the security situation across the country.

## Warring parties in South Sudan show ‘little interest’ pushing peace process forward, UN envoy warns



Some 17,000 people who fled to a UN protection of Civilians site in Wau, South Sudan following recent violence, have access to water, and are putting up basic structures to shield from the hot sun. UN Photo/Nektarios Markogiannis

**26 September** – A window of opportunity for compromise over the 2015 peace agreement by warring parties in South Sudan is narrow, the United Nations envoy for the country said today, stressing the urgency to find a political solution and for international support to the process.

“The parties have shown little interest in engaging in serious negotiations on the way forward, despite the various initiatives aimed at finding a political solution to the conflict,” David Shearer, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for South Sudan, told the Security Council.

With only a few months remaining in the transitional period stipulated under the peace agreement, external momentum to support peace is not keeping pace with developments in the country, he added.



UN convoy in Kidal, Mali. Photo MINUSMA/Marco Dormino

He urged the international community to show a **unity of purpose** to support an implementable peace process that leads to credible elections in due course, but only after a period of transition marked by inclusivity and stability.

Political mediation through the high-level revitalization forum of the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) must be the central conflict resolution strategy, he said.

IGAD comprises Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda.

On the humanitarian situation, Mr. Shearer said the total number of people in need of aid in the country has risen to 7.6 million, citing UN agencies assessment.

The number of people displaced in South Sudan rose to nearly four million during the first half of this year, with two million of them having fled to neighbouring countries – Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Within the national border, some places, such as parts of the Greater Upper Nile region, parts of the Equatorias, and areas south and west of Wau, are inaccessible due to the ongoing government military operations against the SPLA in Opposition.

The splintering of opposition forces also has a negative consequence for humanitarian efforts. For example, the World Food Programme's regular convoys to Yambio – two days' travel from the capital, Juba – now requires 13 separate permissions from armed groups along its route, he said.

Increasingly, civilians and aid convoys are being targeted along major roadways. This year, 18 aid workers have been killed in South Sudan.

Mr. Shearer, also the head of the UN Mission in South Sudan, said the Mission will soon open a permanent presence in Yei and reinforce presence in Torit and Yambio to deter violence and human rights abuses, and build confidence for people to be able to safely return to their homes.

The small Melut protection site in the country's north is closing in coming weeks as people there want to return to their homes, he said. Further downsizing of protection sites in Wau and possibly even Bor are also being considered.

But ultimately, this movement critically depends on how the government and opposition forces behave, he said. Where those forces continue to prey on civilians, the POC sites will remain a necessary refuge, he added.

The deployment of the UN-mandated Regional Protection Force will enable peacekeepers to extend their reach into areas most in need. This includes establishing a permanent presence in Yei, and reinforcing troops in Torit and Yambio in the Equatorias to deter violence and human rights abuses and build confidence among local communities, Mr. Shearer said.



## Civilians pay 'very heavy price' amid unfolding violence in western Central African Republic – UN



A burnt village on the road to Bocaranga, northwest Central African Republic (file). Credit IRIN/DFID.

**26 September** – Since the beginning of September, the humanitarian situation in western Central African Republic (CAR) has deteriorated as armed groups have taken over several localities – particularly Bocaranga and Niem – which has forced thousands of people to flee into the bush where they cannot access aid, the United Nations relief wing reported today.

“Again, civilians continue to pay a very heavy price for clashes between the armed groups,” said the Humanitarian Coordinator in the CAR, Najat Rochdi.

The vast majority of the 15,000 Bocaranga inhabitants and the 8,000 from Niemtook took refuge in the bush, rendering them inaccessible to humanitarian assistance. As these incidents occurred, acts of violence against relief workers also prompted several organizations to

temporarily suspend their activities in the area.

“While fleeing, the population is not only cut off from much needed assistance but is also more vulnerable to the adversity and abuse by armed groups and the destruction of their properties,” added Ms. Rochdi.

The Humanitarian Coordinator warned against a new outbreak of violence in the west, but also in the east of the country, threatening new humanitarian needs.

Ms. Rochdi recalled that the operational capacities of the humanitarian community are already under intense pressure in a context marked by the lagging funding.

“The simultaneous emergence of new outbreaks of tension in several regions will undoubtedly exacerbate the already fragile situation of thousands of displaced people and the communities that are barely recovering from repeated crises,” she stressed.

The persistence of violence in the CAR since the beginning of 2017 and the dramatic rise in needs have led the aid community to revise the Humanitarian Response Plan.

The statement noted that to date, only 30 per cent of the required funding has been secured. If not addressed, this would lead to a quantitative and qualitative reduction of the humanitarian response.

In some regions, a number of actors have had to withdraw because of the financial shortfall –halting the only assistance available to those in need.

Ms. Rochdi called on the international community “not to abandon the [CAR] where half the population needs assistance for its survival.”



## UN envoy condemns killing of Israeli security personnel by Palestinian in West Bank

**26 September** – The United Nations envoy for the Israel-Palestine peace efforts has condemned today's fatal shooting attack by a Palestinian perpetrator against Israeli security personnel in the West Bank, deploring that such an incident undermines the prospect of a peaceful future for both sides.

According to preliminary reports, one Israeli policeman and two security guards were killed, and another was seriously injured in the attack that took place this morning in the Har Adar settlement in the occupied Palestinian territory.

“It is deplorable that Hamas and others continue to glorify such attacks, which undermine the possibility of a peaceful future for both Palestinians and Israelis. I urge all to condemn violence and stand up to terror,” said UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, in a statement.

He expressed condolences to the families and friends of all victims and wished the wounded a full and speedy recovery.



Nickolay Mladenov, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. (file) UN Photo/Loey Felipe