



In the headlines:

- Aid has not reached 'a single soul' in Syria's besieged areas in December, says UN advisor
- General Assembly demands all States comply with UN resolutions regarding status of Jerusalem
- UN peacekeeping operations will keep aiming to reduce their environmental impact – Security Council
- UN tribunal for former Yugoslavia leaves behind culture of accountability, says Guterres
- UNICEF airlifts six million doses of vaccines to children in Yemen
- Deadly war weapons endanger lives of over 220,000 children in eastern Ukraine – UNICEF
- Afghan parties must agree on 'convincing peace process' to end 40 years of conflict, says UN envoy
- Conflict casts shadow on fight to end hunger in some regions – UN agriculture agency
- Strengthen measures to counter threats posed by returning foreign terrorist fighters, Security Council urges
- Security Council to consider set of elements in peacekeeping reviews

Aid has not reached 'a single soul' in Syria's besieged areas in December, says UN advisor

21 December – The list of people requiring life-saving medical help in Syria is getting shorter not because they were evacuated, but because they died, a senior United Nations advisor warned Thursday.

“In many months we reached only 10 or maximum 20 per cent of people in besieged areas. In December, we haven't reached a single soul,” Jan Egeland, Special Advisor to the UN Special Envoy, told journalists in Geneva after meeting with countries that have influence on the warring parties inside Syria, where war has raged for nearly seven years.

Mr. Egeland said that inside “what is left of Syria,” nearly 14 million people need humanitarian assistance and well over half of them get help every month. Things are much more complicated for the 3.4 million people surviving in besieged areas and so-called “hard-to-reach” places, including Eastern Ghouta, Foah, Kafraya and Yarmuk.

The international humanitarian task force has helped “dozens and dozens” of aid convoys reach previously inaccessible areas, but many other places still remain out of bounds, he said, calling for improved aid access to the country's most vulnerable communities in 2018.

Mr. Egeland said although the number of people living in these front-line areas has fallen by nearly a half since 2016, humanitarian access has not improved.



A street in Douma, Eastern Ghouta, Syria. Photo: UNICEF/Amer Al Shami

He expressed hope that upcoming ceasefire talks in Astana with Russia, Turkey and Iran, would improve access for aid workers, before calling for a political solution to the “quagmire” that Syria has become.

Just outside Damascus, conditions remain dire in Eastern Ghouta, an opposition-held area where 400,000 people are still under siege, amid ongoing mortar attacks by rebels into the Syrian capital.

Food is now only available “to the most affluent,” Mr. Egeland said, warning that the list of people requiring life-saving medical help is getting shorter all the time – “not because we are evacuating them, but because they are dying.”

He said these include a nine-month old infant born in Eastern Ghouta with a cleft-palate who died a week ago from severe acute malnutrition.

General Assembly demands all States comply with UN resolutions regarding status of Jerusalem



Panels in the General Assembly Hall showing the final count for the resolution on ‘the status of Jerusalem, during the resumed 10th Emergency Special Session on Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. UN Photo/Manuel Elias

21 December – By an overwhelming majority, Member States in the United Nations General Assembly on Thursday “demanded” that all countries comply with Security Council resolutions regarding the status of Jerusalem, following an earlier decision by the United States to recognize the Holy City as the capital of Israel.

Through a resolution adopted by a recorded vote of 128 in favour to nine against, with 35 abstentions, the 193-member Assembly expressed “deep regret” over recent decisions concerning the status of Jerusalem and stressed that the Holy City “is a final status issue to be resolved through negotiations in line with relevant UN resolutions.”

Action in the Assembly today follows a failed attempt by the Security Council on Monday adopt a similar text reflecting regret among the body’s members about “recent decisions regarding the status of Jerusalem,” with a veto from the United States, a permanent member of the Council.

Ahead of that failed resolution, Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, told the Security Council that the security situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory had become more tense in the wake of US President Donald Trump’s decision on 6 December to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Subsequently, Yemen and Turkey, in their respective capacities as Chair of the Arab Group and the Chair of the Summit of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation, requested the President of the General Assembly to “urgently resume” the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly in accordance with the so-named ‘Uniting for peace’ procedure.

This procedure, under Assembly resolution 377 (1950), is a pathway around a Security Council veto. By it, the Assembly can call an emergency special session to consider a matter “with a view to making appropriate recommendations to members for collective measures,” if the Security Council fails to act or if there is lack of unanimity among the Council’s permanent members, China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, and the United States.

Since the tenth such meeting, the Assembly has temporarily adjourned the emergency special session and authorized “the President of the General Assembly [...] to resume its meeting upon request from Member States,” allowing for speedy consideration by the body of urgent issues.

The most recent resumed emergency session was in 2009 when the Assembly called a meeting on East Jerusalem and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Resolutions in the Assembly are non-binding and do not carry the force of international law as do measures agreed in the Security Council.

Today's resolution demanded that "all States comply with Security Council resolutions regarding the Holy City of Jerusalem, and not recognize any actions or measures contrary to those resolutions."

The General Assembly further affirmed that "any decisions and actions which purport to have altered the character, status or demographic composition of the Holy City of Jerusalem have no legal effect, are null and void and must be rescinded in compliance with relevant resolutions of the Security Council."

In that regard the Assembly also called upon all States to refrain from the establishment of diplomatic missions in the Holy City of Jerusalem, pursuant to Security Council resolution 478 adopted in 1980.

Reiterating its call for the reversal of the negative trends that endanger the two-State solution, the Assembly urged greater international and regional efforts and support aimed at achieving, without delay, a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

UN peacekeeping operations will keep aiming to reduce their environmental impact – Security Council

21 December – The Security Council on Thursday said that United Nations peacekeeping missions will continue to consider ways to reduce the environmental impact of their operations, in line with relevant UN resolutions and mindful of the goals set out in international accords on the environment, including the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Through an agreed press statement, the 15-member Council reaffirmed the basic principles of peacekeeping, while stressing that it remains cognizant of the possible environmental impact of the peacekeeping operations it mandates.

The Council underscored the importance that peacekeeping operations endeavor to minimize their impact on the sustainability of the ecosystems where they are deployed, based on sound consideration of the risks, benefits and costs.

Mindful of the goals set out by the international agreements on the environment, including the Paris Agreement, the members of the Security Council expressed willingness that UN peacekeeping missions, in full conformity with the established mandates, continue consideration for the reduction of their environmental impact.

The members of the Council underlined the importance to comprehensively address the environmental impact of peacekeeping operations, in close coordination with the relevant parties involved, including troop and police contributing countries, also through meetings of the Security Council's Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations and of the relevant bodies of the General Assembly.

In addition, the Council recognized that consideration for environmental management includes taking into account the impact of peacekeeping operations on the historical and cultural heritage in the areas of deployment and how segments of the population may be differently affected by environmental degradation.

The Council encouraged UN Member States to incorporate, as appropriate, environmental guidelines into their national training programmes for military and police personnel in preparation for deployment to UN peacekeeping operations.



A peacekeeper with the UN mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) drops paper into a recycling bin at the Mission. Recycling of metal, plastic, paper and glass helps cut back on the waste which would have otherwise ended up in landfills. Photo: Logan Abassi/MINUSTAH

UN tribunal for former Yugoslavia leaves behind culture of accountability, says Guterres

21 December – The United Nations tribunal dealing with atrocities committed during the Balkans wars of 1990s has been a pioneer in creating the contemporary architecture of international criminal justice, and “gave a voice to victims,” Secretary-General António Guterres said Thursday.

“The creation of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in 1993 was a ground-breaking moment,” said Mr. Guterres in his keynote address at the closing ceremony of the court in The Hague, Netherlands.

Recalling that it had been close to half a century since the Nuremberg and Tokyo war crimes trials and the 1948 Genocide Convention entered into force in 1951, Mr. Guterres said no international criminal tribunal that would recognize individual criminal responsibility for such a crime had yet been established.

“The creation of this Tribunal demonstrated a newfound and serious commitment by the international community that those responsible for perpetrating the most serious crimes of international concern should be held accountable for their actions,” he said.

The Tribunal sat for more than 10,000 days of trial, and heard testimony from nearly 5,000 people. Ninety individuals were sentenced for their crimes, including genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Former Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic conducted his own defence in a five-year-long trial before the Tribunal, which ended without a verdict when he died in 2006.

“Beyond these numbers, the Tribunal gave a voice to victims,” the Secretary-General said, noting that people who had experienced atrocious violence and tragic losses were given the opportunity to tell their stories in court, to place their experiences on the record, and to see the perpetrators of crimes against them held accountable.

The Tribunal leaves behind one of its most important legacies: the immense archives documenting what happened in Sarajevo, Foca, Vukovar, Suva Reka, Srebrenica and elsewhere.

“These records ensure that the world will not forget, that history cannot be re-written, and that the victims’ voices will continue to resound down the decades,” he said.

The Tribunal has been a pioneer in creating the contemporary architecture of international criminal justice, and pushed international expectations of accountability beyond what was anticipated in 1993.

“Accountability has taken root in our collective consciousness,” he said, explaining that it is common practice for the UN Security Council to call for the perpetrators of atrocities to be held accountable, and similarly this is reflected on the statements of heads of state; in the work of journalists; in the efforts of national courts; and in public opinion.

The Tribunal also inspired the establishment of entities for ensuring accountability both at the international and national levels.

Indeed, without the UN tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda, there might never have been a permanent International Criminal Court, the central institution of the international criminal justice system today, Mr. Guterres said.

But the future is not only the fight against impunity, it is also the pursuit of truth and reconciliation.



Secretary-General António Guterres delivers the keynote speech during closing ceremony of ICTY at The Hague. Photo: UNRIC/Christophe Verhellen

The genocide in Srebrenica will continue to haunt the global conscience. Just as the whole international community, including the UN, has had to acknowledge their share of responsibility for the massacre, so must the various communities of the former Yugoslavia build on the legacy of the Tribunal and deepen their efforts towards trust and full reconciliation.

“Accepting the undeniable truth and facts of past tragedies is crucial for building a better and common future,” he said.

UNICEF airlifts six million doses of vaccines to children in Yemen



21 December – A plane chartered by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) landed in Sana’a, Yemen, on Thursday, delivering nearly 6 million doses of essential vaccines to protect millions of children at risk of preventable diseases, including the current diphtheria outbreak that has reportedly infected over 300 people and killed 35.

“Vaccinating children in Yemen now is critical to protect them from preventable diseases and death. It is vital that vaccines and other lifesaving supplies for children continue to flow into Yemen and across the country unimpeded. They are a lifeline for millions of children,” said Meritxell Relaño, UNICEF Representative in Yemen.

On 25 November 2017, a shipment of vaccines is delivered to the Sana’a International airport, bringing in 15 tonnes of BCG, Penta and PCV vaccine supplies to protect Yemeni children from diseases such as diphtheria and tetanus. UNICEF/UN0147212/Madhok

Most diphtheria cases and deaths are among children.

Since 2015, the southern Arabian nation has been in a conflict between forces loyal to President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi and those allied to the Houthi rebel movement.

The country is in the grips of the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, with restrictions on fuel and food imports further complicating emergency response.

The restrictions add to the misery of children in Yemen who already face the triple threat of diseases, malnutrition and violence.

UNICEF reiterates its call on all parties to allow unhindered humanitarian access to all of Yemen’s land, sea and air ports and to facilitate the distribution of lifesaving assistance for children inside the country.

Deadly war weapons endanger lives of over 220,000 children in eastern Ukraine – UNICEF



A child walks past the front gate of a house damaged by shelling in Avdiivka, Donetsk Oblast in eastern Ukraine. Photo: UNICEF/Gilbertson VII

21 December – Landmines, unexploded ordnance and other explosive remnants of war threaten the lives of over 220,000 children in eastern Ukraine, the United Nations Children's Fund has warned, calling on all parties to the conflict to immediately end the use of the lethal weapons and allow mine clearance activities to begin.

“It is unacceptable that places where children could safely play less than four years ago are now riddled with deadly explosives,” said Giovanna Barberis, the head of UNICEF operations in the country, in a news release Thursday.

“All parties to the conflict must immediately end the use of these gruesome weapons that have contaminated communities and put children in constant danger of injury and death,” she added.

According to UNICEF, a child has become a conflict-related casualty every week, on average, between January and November this year along eastern Ukraine's contact line – a 500-kilometre strip of land dividing Government and non-government controlled areas, where fighting is most severe.

Landmines, explosive remnants of war and unexploded ordnance were the leading cause of these tragedies, accounting for approximately two-thirds of all recorded injuries and deaths during the period. In most cases the casualties occurred when children picked up explosives such as hand grenades and fuses.

Many more children have been left with lifelong disabilities.

Aleksey, a 14-year-old boy, badly injured in one such incident recently told UNICEF: “I picked it up and I think I pressed something, and it just exploded. There was a lot of blood and the fingers were hanging. I was so scared that I started shaking. I almost collapsed.”

In an effort to make children aware of the dangers, UNICEF and partners have been conducting mine risk education programmes since 2015, reaching over 500,000 children across the region. The UN agency has also provided psychosocial support to 270,000 children affected by the ongoing conflict.

However, persisting funding gaps have severely hampered the response.

With just mere days left in the year, UNICEF's emergency appeal to support children and their families in eastern Ukraine is only 46 per cent funded, while its child protection programmes including mine risk education and providing psychosocial support for children has an even larger funding gap of 73 per cent.

Afghan parties must agree on 'convincing peace process' to end 40 years of conflict, says UN envoy

21 December – The United Nations envoy for Afghanistan on Thursday highlighted the need for the country to achieve a political settlement with the armed opposition, pointing to an upcoming February meeting between the parties as an opportunity not to be missed.

“We must use the upcoming winter months, when conflict levels tend to decrease, to advance on this issue before the cycle of violence is renewed next spring,” Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, told the Security Council.

“I once again call on the Taliban to express a clear willingness to begin negotiations towards a political settlement, and to start the initial dialogue,” he said.

In that context, he highlighted the significance of the ‘Kabul Process’ meeting, to be held on 1 February 2018, where the Government is expected to present a strategic concept for reaching the settlement, as an opportunity that must not be missed.

The so called Kabul Process spells out a transition to greater Afghan responsibility and ownership, in both security and civilian areas.

Mr. Yamamoto, also the head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), informed the 15-member Council of the holding of the parliamentary elections next year, followed by presidential elections in April 2019.

Timely, credible and accepted elections, he elaborated, are vital to maintain constitutional order and keep faith in the representative system of Government.

Above all, the security and women’s political participation are vitally important the three key factors, added the UN envoy.

Also in the briefing, Mr. Yamamoto spoke of the country’s regional relationships and expressed concern over increased military activities between Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan, and called on the two countries to find ways to collaborate more effectively to address the issues that affect the populations of both countries.

In closing, the senior UN official said that the Organization remains committed to advancing peace and prosperity in the country.

“I truly hope that empathy for the ongoing suffering of millions of Afghans will move us all to make the efforts necessary to achieve peace and realize the important opportunities that lie beyond a much needed peace agreement,” he said.



Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), briefs the Security Council on the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Conflict casts shadow on fight to end hunger in some regions – UN agriculture agency



In Iraq, displaced civilians and their livestock flee fighting. Conflict in some countries in the Near East and North Africa is sparking spikes in hunger. Photo: FAO Cengiz Yar

21 December – Conflict and protracted crises in a handful of countries in the Near East and North Africa are hindering efforts to eradicate hunger in the region by 2030, according to a United Nations report published Thursday.

“When countries in the region are suffering from an escalation of conflicts, the aim to tackle the region’s deepest concerns of malnutrition, water scarcity and climate change becomes more challenging but at the same time more urgent,” said Abdessalam Ould Ahmed, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), at the report’s launch in Cairo, Egypt.

The 2017 edition of the Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) highlights in particular how an ongoing intensification of violence is opening a

wide “hunger gap” between countries being affected by conflicts and those that are not.

Mr. Ould Ahmed pointed to “the growing need to implement long-term and comprehensive policies and practices to achieve zero hunger by 2030,” adding that that “only through improved cooperation and solidarity will the region be able to end conflicts and violence and get back to development.”

NENA countries include, Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

In the region’s countries directly impacted by conflict, 27.2 per cent of all people were chronically hungry, or undernourished, during the 2014-16 period. That’s six times higher than the share of the population that was undernourished in countries not affected by strife – 4.6 per cent.

Meanwhile, “severe food insecurity,” another metric used by FAO to measure hunger, in conflict-affected countries is now double that in non-conflict countries.

In Syria, violence has provoked a 67 per cent reduction in the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) and severely undermined food security. About 70 to 80 per cent of Syrians now need humanitarian assistance, while 50 per cent require food assistance.

In Iraq, where violence has led to for 58 per cent decline in GDP, 30 per cent of the population needs humanitarian assistance while nine per cent requires food assistance.

Yemen is also being wracked by conflict, leading to a situation in which 70 to 80 per cent of the population are in need humanitarian assistance and 50 per cent require food assistance.

Libya is another hot spot where conflict is undermining food security; there, six per cent of the population are in need of food assistance, according to the report.

Strengthen measures to counter threats posed by returning foreign terrorist fighters, Security Council urges



The aftermath of a bombing attack in Iraq (file photo). Photo: IRIN

21 December – “Gravely concerned” over risks posed by foreign terrorist fighters returning from conflict zones, the United Nations Security Council on Thursday called on Member States to strengthen their efforts to counter the threat through measures on border control, criminal justice, information-sharing and counter-extremism.

In a unanimously adopted resolution, the 15-member Council called on UN Member States to strengthen measures to prevent the transit of terrorists, including ensuring that identity documents were not forged, as well as employing evidence-based risk assessments, screening procedures, and the collection and analysis of travel data to identify individuals who posed a terrorist threat, in accordance with domestic and international law, without resorting to profiling based on discrimination.

The Council also called upon Member States to notify other countries of the travel, arrival, deportation or detention of individuals whom they had reasonable grounds to believe were terrorists as well as to take appropriate action in regards to suspected terrorists and their accompanying family members who entered their territories, including by considering appropriate prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration measures in compliance with domestic and international law.

While emphasizing that Member States were obliged to bring to justice anyone who participated in terrorist acts, the Council stressed the importance of assisting women or children associated with foreign terrorist fighters who might be victims of terrorism.

It also underlined the need for tailored prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies for family members that might have abetted terrorist acts in varied roles.

Further in the resolution, the Council welcomed measures being taken to strengthen travel security, including the approval of a new Global Aviation Security Plan by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and monitoring procedures, calling for continuous upgrading of such procedures in line with developing threats.

Outlining UN efforts to address returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters, the Council urged strengthened cooperation between all counter-terrorism bodies on the issue.

Security Council to consider set of elements in peacekeeping reviews



Wide view of the Security Council. UN Photo/JC McIlwaine (file)

21 December – The United Nations Security Council on Thursday expressed its intention to consider a set of elements when reviewing mandates and configuration of peacekeeping missions.

Adopting a presidential statement, the Council outlined several elements related to peacebuilding and sustaining peace that would benefit the peacekeeping reviews, and expressed its intention to consider these elements “when and where relevant and on a case by case basis.”

Such elements include assessment of mandate implementation in all its dimensions, including cooperation of the host state; utilization of dedicated good offices and technical expertise within the missions to support national political processes; and existence of clearly defined goals and objectives guided by specific agreed upon milestones towards peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

When reviewing peacekeeping mandates, the Council will also consider elements, such as the conduct of periodic strategic and integrated analysis of the opportunities, risks and challenges faced by national and local authorities to build and sustain peace, as well as clarity on roles and responsibilities of UN peacekeeping operations, UN country teams and other relevant actors, including entities of the UN peacebuilding architecture and the UN agencies, funds and programmes for the delivery of prioritized support to a country.

In addition, peacekeeping reviews must take into account existence of an exit strategy that seeks to help lay the foundation for long-term and sustainable peace.

The Council took note of the intention expressed by the Secretary-General to conduct reviews of peacekeeping missions, requesting him to include, in his relevant reports, analysis of how recommendations on these elements are implemented.