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**Syria: 13 million people in desperate need as seventh war-torn winter sets in, UN warns**

A Syrian family tries to keep warm in this unfinished building in the informal settlement of Al-Khalidia Al-Khamisa in Homs. UNICEF/Sanadiki (file)

**8 January** – With millions of desperate people across Syria now facing their seventh winter of war, the United Nations warned on Tuesday that intensified military operations in the country's north are forcing families to flee, in the cold, to areas without enough resources to support them.

“While some parts of Syria are witnessing a welcome reprieve from hostilities, many others face intensified military operations and conflict,” UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric told the regular briefing in New York, noting that more than 13 million people in the country need basic aid and protection.

“The UN is deeply concerned for the safety and protection of tens of thousands of people in southern Idleb and rural Hama in northeastern Syria, where ongoing hostilities have reportedly caused hundreds of deaths and injuries of civilians,” he added.

Since the first of December, fighting has displaced tens of thousands of civilians – already in dire circumstances.

“With the onset of winter, safe shelter is among the biggest concerns, as many families are fleeing into areas that are already at full capacity or into communities with depleted resources,” Mr. Dujarric underscored.

He also expressed alarm by the increasing hostilities in East Ghouta that continue to put civilians in the line of fire, resulting in civilian deaths and injuries and damaging infrastructure.

“We received alarming reports that the only emergency medical centre in Modira in besieged area of East Ghouta was damaged by an airstrike, rendering it inoperable,” he said.

Mr. Dujarrac also announced that Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock will visit Syria from 9 to 12 January. The UN aid chief is expected to meet Government representatives and see first-hand the impact of the conflict on civilians.

“He will assess the humanitarian response and discuss how to improve access and delivery with key interlocutors,” the spokesperson elaborated, adding that it will be Mr. Lowcock's first mission to Syria as Emergency Relief Coordinator.

## Millions of children across Somalia vaccinated against measles in UN-backed campaign

**8 January** – One million children aged six months to 10 years in Puntland and 4.2 million across Somalia were reached during a five-day measles campaign that wrapped up on Sunday, the United Nations has reported.

“It is a priority for WHO [World Health Organization] to continue supporting the Ministry of Health and maintaining the close partnership with the local health authorities and partners to control disease outbreaks like measles and ensure high vaccination coverage for all Somali children,” said Dr. Ghulam Popal, WHO Representative to Somalia.

“It is unfortunate that measles cases are still being reported while there is effective vaccine available,” he added.

The campaign was conducted in partnership with WHO, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Somalia's Ministry of Health.

In 2017, amidst a drought emergency, a total of 23,002 suspected measles cases were reported – alarmingly high compared to previous years. Among those cases, 83 per cent were in children under age 10.

In response to the outbreak, two rounds of vaccination campaigns were conducted in March and April of 2017, reaching 516,934 children aged nine months to five years.

“Together with our partners, UNICEF was able to achieve great results for children and families affected by drought in 2017,” says Jesper Moller, UNICEF's acting Representative.

“However, the crisis is far from over,” he continued. “The threat of famine continues to loom large, and so does disease outbreaks such as measles.”

During the campaign, a support dose of Vitamin A will be administered to eligible children alongside the measles vaccine. Social mobilizers and health workers supported by WHO and UNICEF are also encouraging adults who are not fully immunized, or not sure of their immunity status, to get vaccinated as well.

“The only way to protect children from this deadly disease is through mass vaccination campaigns. And we will remain vigilant and sustain our emergency efforts in 2018,” Mr. Moller concluded.

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease that is transmitted via droplets from the nose, mouth or throat of infected persons. Routine vaccination for children, combined with mass immunization campaigns in countries with low routine coverage, are key public health strategies to reduce global measles deaths, says WHO.



Mothers and their children in a queue waiting to receive measles vaccinations as part of a UNICEF-supported immunization campaign at the Beerta Muuri camp for internally displaced persons in Baidoa, Somalia. UN Photo (file)

## PODCAST: 'UN can save the world' say veteran staffer, still passionate for peace at 90

**8 January** – He was one of the very first UN staff members, and 72 years on, Robert Kaminker is still advocating for peace and the power of the Organization to ultimately “save the world.”

Although he retired in the early 1980s, his enthusiasm for explaining how the UN works and how the world body can help people everywhere lead better lives, has never waned.

At 90, he is still hosting a weekly radio show in his native south-western France, called *L'ONU vous concerne*, or 'The UN Matters.'

In it, he explains how the work of global agencies, impacts the daily lives of listeners in the rural community he serves, around the town of Périgueux.



Robert Kaminker at the Security Council chamber in UN Headquarters in New York. Photo: UN News/Matt Wells

He began his 36-year UN career, which spanned four continents, on the same day that the first ever UN General Assembly meeting took place, on January 10, 1946, in London.

That first job was in the French typing pool at the UN's first but temporary home in the UK capital; but in a matter of months, he found himself on board an aircraft carrier, bound for the United States along with other members of that first generation of UN employees.

He'd lost Jewish relatives to the Nazi concentration camps during The Second World War, and that first UN job provided essential support for his family back in France, where severe rationing left millions in need.

In an interview for the *UN News* podcast series, *The Lid Is On*, Robert spoke to Matt Wells about the early pioneering years as the UN took shape, and to explain why he's still tirelessly advocating on its behalf:

“The first few years, most of the people who worked alongside of me, were people who were absolutely convinced that the war that we had gone through, should never occur again, and that the UN was the hope.”

## UN announces special probe into attacks on peacekeepers in eastern DR Congo

**6 January** – The United Nations is launching a special investigation into attacks on peacekeepers in restive eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), one month after 15 'blue helmets' were killed and dozens wounded in the deadliest single assault on a UN mission in nearly a quarter century.

According to a UN spokesperson, Secretary-General António Guterres on Friday announced the appointment of veteran UN peacekeeping official Dmitry Titov of Russia to lead a Special Investigation into recent attacks on peacekeepers and bases in the Beni territory of North Kivu Province, in the DRC.

The probe will include a focus on the 7 December attack on a base of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) in Semuliki that killed 15 Tanzanian peacekeepers and wounded 43



Ceremony in Beni, Democratic Republic of the Congo, paying tribute to the 14 UN peacekeepers who were killed in early December 2017 during an attack on the UN mission's base in Semuliki. Photo MONUSCO/Alain Coulibaly.

others. One blue helmet remains missing.

The UN said the special probe will examine the circumstances surrounding these attacks, evaluate MONUSCO's overall preparedness and response to the events and provide recommendations on how to prevent such attacks from occurring in the future or when they do occur, from having such lethal consequences.

The investigation team will head to the DRC early in January and will also visit relevant countries in Africa's Great Lakes region. Alongside officials of the United Nations, the team will also include two military officers from Tanzania.

Having joined the United Nations in 1991, Mr. Titov served as Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions in the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) from 2007 – 2017. He also served as Africa Director in DPKO's Office of Operations.

## Western Sahara: UN chief urges easing of tensions in Guerguerat area



Peacekeepers with the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) consult a map as they drive through vast desert areas in Smara, Western Sahara. UN Photo/Martine Perret

**6 January** – Deeply concerned over rising tensions near Guerguerat in the buffer strip in southern Western Sahara between the Moroccan berm and the Mauritanian border, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on Saturday called for maximum restraint in the area.

According to a statement from a UN spokesperson, the Secretary-General underlined that the withdrawal of Frente Polisario (Polisario Front) elements from Guerguerat in April 2017, together with the earlier withdrawal of Moroccan elements from the area, was critical to creating an environment conducive to the resumption of dialogue under the auspices of his Personal Envoy Horst Kohler.

“[Mr. Guterres] calls on the parties to exercise maximum restraint and to avoid escalating tensions. Regular civilian and commercial traffic should not be obstructed and no action should be taken, which may

constitute a change to the status quo of the buffer strip,” the statement concluded.

Western Sahara is located on the north-west coast of Africa bordered by Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria. The colonial administration of Western Sahara by Spain ended in 1976. Fighting later broke out between Morocco and the Polisario Front. A ceasefire was signed in September 1991.

The UN mission, known by its French acronym, MINURSO, was deployed that year to oversee a ceasefire and a UN settlement plan; however, disagreements between the Government of Morocco and the Polisario Front prevented the holding of the anticipated referendum on the territory's future.

A revised settlement plan proposed by the United Nations after seven years of diplomatic consultations was rejected by one of the parties in 2004.

In 2017, the UN Security Council affirmed its full support for the commitment of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy towards a solution to the question of Western Sahara.

In this context, the Council requested Mr. Kohler to relaunch the negotiating process with a new

dynamic and a new spirit leading to the resumption of a political process with the aim of reaching a mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara in the context of arrangements consistent with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations.

The Council also emphasized the importance of the commitment of Morocco and the Polisario Front to continue the process of preparation for a fifth round of negotiations while also encouraging the neighbouring countries, Algeria and Mauritania, to make important contributions to this process.

## UN Security Council condemns 'heinous and cowardly' terrorist attack in Kabul



A view of Kabul, the centre of Afghanistan's social and political life.  
Photo UNAMA/Fardin Waezi.

**6 January** – The United Nations Security Council has strongly condemned the “heinous and cowardly” terrorist attack that took place in Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, on 4 January, killing at least 15 people and leaving some 25 others wounded.

In a press statement issued late Friday, the members of the Council expressed their deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims and to the Afghan Government. They also wished a speedy and full recovery to those who were injured in the attack, for which the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) has claimed responsibility.

News reports suggest that a suicide bomber attacked a market in the eastern part of Kabul late on Thursday evening, killing at least 20 people and wounding more than a dozen others.

Reaffirming that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security, the Council underlined the need to hold perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism accountable and bring them to justice.

The 15-member body went on to urge all States, in accordance with their obligations under international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, to cooperate actively with the Government of Afghanistan and all other relevant authorities in that regard.