Condemning violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state, UN chief urges restraint

1 September – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today urged restraint and calm in Myanmar's Rakhine State, cautioning that the situation may otherwise lead to a humanitarian catastrophe.

In a statement from his spokesperson, the Secretary-General expressed deep concern about reported violence since 25 August attacks on police posts.

“The Secretary-General is deeply concerned by the reports of excesses during the security operations conducted by Myanmar’s security forces in Rakhine State,” according to the statement.

Mr. Guterres stressed the responsibility of Myanmar authorities to provide security and assistance to all those in need and allow the UN and its partners to extend humanitarian support, in country and in Bangladesh, where some people are fleeing. He encouraged authorities to ensure that people seeking aid have access to the UN and other partners.

“The current situation underlines the urgency of seeking holistic approaches to addressing the complex root causes of violence,” the spokesperson said, reiterating the need to implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine led by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Released earlier this week, the report outlines recommendations for how to overcome political, socio-economic and
humanitarian challenges in that area of western Myanmar.

**Iraq: ISIL targeting civilians to 'avenge' loss of Tal Afar, UN envoy says**

1 September – Iraq: ISIL targeting civilians to 'avenge' loss of Tal Afar, UN envoy says

Fighters from the Islamic State (ISIL) are indiscriminately targeting civilians to avenge for their loss of Tal Afar, the top United Nations political representative in Iraq today said, condemning the latest attack in Baghdad.

“Da'esh terrorists have shown absolute disregard for human life,” said Ján Kubiš, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Iraq, using the Arabic acronym for ISIL.

“However, the patience and resilience of the Iraqi people have defeated the terrorists' aim in breaking their unity,” he added.

At least 125 civilians were killed and another 188 injured in terrorist related acts in Iraq during the month of August, according to the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI). The casualty figures show that Baghdad was the worst affected area, and do not include casualty figures from ongoing fighting in Anbar province.

The overall casualty figures are lower than in previous months, where violence spiked above 2,000 in October 2016.

In a separate statement, Mr. Kubiš said that “hopeful days lie ahead for Iraq,” noting military victories against terrorists, including in the northern Iraqi city of Tal Afar which Iraqi forces yesterday declared liberated from ISIL.

Mr. Kubiš said this Eid al-Adha, thoughts and prayers go to all the martyrs and fighters in the liberating forces, and to those who provide support and are affected – including the millions of displaced Iraqis.

“Oh this Eid, the Feast of Sacrifice that Muslims celebrate worldwide, the Iraqi people who have sacrificed dearly deserve to live in peace, dignity and prosperity,” he said.

The senior UN official added that sustainable peace in the country can only be secured through inclusive solutions, addressing grievances, needs and aspirations of the Iraqi people.
Casualties from cluster munitions double in 2016; Syrians most-affected – UN-backed report

1 September – Even as countries continue to ratify and implement the international treaty prohibiting the use of cluster munitions, casualties from these notorious weapons doubled in the past year, with civilians accounting for nearly all the victims, according to a United Nations-backed civil society report.

The annual monitoring report released yesterday at the UN Office at Geneva by the Cluster Munition Coalition revealed that the use of cluster munitions in war-torn Syria and Yemen has caused even more civilian casualties. Moreover, in those two countries, conflict and insecurity are hampering clearance of the deadly weapons.

Of nearly 1,000 victims identified in 10 countries, almost all were from Syria, according to the Cluster Munition Monitor 2017.

“The humanitarian devastation caused by cluster munitions is particularly acute in Syria, where use has continued unabated since mid-2012,” the report's main editor and coordinator of the Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor initiative Jeff Abramson told journalists in Geneva, warning that the real figure is therefore much higher.

Fellow report editor Loren Persi explained: “The vast majority of those casualties occurred in Syria and mostly during attacks, there was really unrelenting use of cluster munitions in Syria and Syria has been the reason for the majority of cluster munition casualties since 2013, definitely. Actually in 2016, almost 90 per cent of the casualties occurred in Syria.”

Mr. Abramson stressed that the only sure way to end this insidious menace “is to have all States embrace and adhere to the international ban on these weapons.”

The threat from cluster munitions is rarely short-lived, according to the report, which records casualties in places where the weapons have not been used for decades.

More than 100 people were known to have been killed or injured by previously unexploded cluster munition submunitions, the deadly landmine-like remnants left over from earlier attacks, including in South-East Asian countries such as Lao People's Democratic Republic. There, all of the 51 new casualties in 2016 were the result of remnants from cluster munitions used in the 1960s and 1970s.

Number of casualties in 2016 more than double the previously recorded high

Overall, the report identified at least 971 new cluster munition casualties globally in 2016, with 860 of these in Syria. This global number is certainly less than the actual total. Disturbingly, the number of casualties in 2016 is more than double the number recorded in 2015 (417), making it the second-highest annual figure since Cluster Munition Monitor reporting began in 2009 (the highest was in 2013).

Since August 2016, two countries have ratified the Convention on Cluster Munitions (Benin and Madagascar), bringing the total number of States Parties to 102. Another 17 States have signed but not yet ratified the convention. Last December, 141 states, including 32 non-signatories to the convention, adopted a key UN General Assembly resolution supporting the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

“Efforts to grow the Convention's membership continue to be central to stigmatize the use of these weapons and to bring an end to the threat they pose. Convention members have a better understanding of the location and scale of contamination, and will more readily share information about it, compared with states outside the convention,” said Amelie Chayer, acting Director of the Cluster Munition Coalition.
Guterres says UN ready to support relief efforts in South Asia countries hit by floods, landslides

1 September – Saddened by the loss of life and the devastation caused by widespread floods and landslides due to torrential monsoon rains in Bangladesh, India and Nepal, Secretary-General António Guterres said today that the United Nations is ready to support ongoing relief efforts.

In a statement issued by a UN spokesperson, the Secretary-General extended his condolences to the Governments and the people of Bangladesh, India and Nepal and saluted the respective Governments’ leadership in responding to the needs of those affected.

Meanwhile on the ground, United Nations humanitarian agencies are working with partners and the respective Governments to bring in clean water, food, shelter and medical aid for some of the estimated 41 million people affected by flooding and landslides in South Asia.

UN allocates $21M to meet urgent needs in newly-accessible areas across Sudan

1 September – The United Nations today allocated $21 million to provide life-saving food support, nutrition, water and sanitation, health and other assistance to thousands of Sudanese in newly accessible areas in Darfur's Jebel Marra area, South Kordofan and Blue Nile.

“Our response will address both the immediate needs through emergency, life-saving assistance and strengthen resilience of the most vulnerable and their communities to future and recurring shocks,” said Marta Ruedas, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Sudan.

The funds come from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the Sudan Humanitarian Fund (SHF), which is comprised of donor funds and overseen by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The funding will allow humanitarian agencies to support vulnerable people in these areas where access was previously limited.

In a statement from OCHA, the UN said that acute watery diarrhoea (AWD) cases and the continuing influx of refugees from South Sudan have been straining available resources and increasing pressure on the limited basic services in the targeted areas where funding is now headed.

The announcement of the funds comes days after the former UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien released $45 million from CERF to Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Chad and Sudan.
Afghanistan: UN mission confirms at least 44 civilians killed, injured in latest airstrikes

1 September – At least 28 women and children were killed and an additional 16 injured in air strikes this week in Afghanistan, the United Nations political mission in the country said in initial findings of its probe into the deaths.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) urged authorities to ensure independent, impartial and prompt investigations of both incidents, and to compensate the victims.

“I am deeply saddened to hear that women and children have once again suffered so terribly from the conflict,” said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA. “This is unacceptable. All parties must live up to their obligations to take all feasible measures to protect civilians.”

The incidents took place in Herat, a western province bordering Iran and Turkmenistan, and in Logar, which is south of Kabul on the eastern side of the country.

UNAMA cited a news release issued by United States Forces in Afghanistan that it is aware of an incident in the Logar area and that they have opened an investigation into it.

The air strikes reportedly targeted Anti-Government Elements who had used a civilian compound to attack aircraft.

The UN mission said that it will continue its independent work to establish the facts as to what happened, including allegations that civilians were used as shields.

More civilians have been killed or injured in aerial operations in the first half of this year than in 2016, according to UNAMA.

Initial figures show at least 232 civilians were injured or killed, a 43 per cent increase over 2016, and the majority of the victims have been women and children.
Myanmar: UN expert urges efforts to break 'worsening cycle of violence' in Rakhine

31 August – A United Nations human rights expert has expressed alarm at the deteriorating situation in Myanmar's Rakhine State, affecting not just the Rakhine Buddhist and Rohingya Muslim populations but also other communities.

“The worsening cycle of violence is of grave concern and must be broken urgently,” said the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, in a news release issued today from the Office of UN High Commissioners for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Tens of thousands of Rohingya Muslims are now reported to be fleeing towards Bangladesh.

While the world's Muslim communities celebrated Eid al-Adha, the Rohingya remained in a precarious situation, not knowing their future or the fate of their relatives, she said.

Latest estimates from UN sources suggest more than 27,000 people have crossed into Bangladesh in the area around Cox's Bazar, while 20,000 more remain stranded between the two countries. The number continues to grow.

The Special Rapporteur noted concerns over both extremist attacks and the major security operations undertaken in response to the attacks.

“I am concerned that these events will derail efforts to address the root causes of the systematic discrimination and recurrent violence in Rakhine State,” said the Special Rapporteur.

She went on to remind the authorities of their human rights obligations to give equal protection to people from all communities, whether from attacks by extremists or excessive action from the security forces.

“I am saddened to receive reports that, while the authorities are helping Rakhine and other communities living in affected townships evacuate to safer locations, this assistance is not being extended to the Rohingya Muslims,” she said.

Echoing findings in the final report by the Rakhine Advisory Commission led by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Ms. Lee said that if human rights concerns are not properly addressed and if people remain politically and economically marginalized, then northern Rakhine may provide fertile ground for radicalization, with people becoming increasingly vulnerable to recruitment by extremists.

This statement has been endorsed by the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed, and the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Fernand de Varennes.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council 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.
UN chief welcomes release of arrested leaders in Cameroon

31 August – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has welcomed yesterday’s release of several leaders of the English-speaking regions in Cameroon’s South West and North West as well as the dropping of all charges against them.

“The Secretary-General hopes that this positive step will lead to a further lowering of tensions and strengthened political dialogue,” said Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesman for the Secretary-General, in a statement issued overnight.

“The Secretary-General encourages the Cameroonian authorities to pursue their efforts to address the grievances of the Anglophone community and promote measures of national reconciliation in order to find a durable solution to the crisis,” Mr. Dujarric added.

The Secretary-General also reiterated the UN’s readiness to continue to support such efforts, the Spokesman said.

According to media reports, President Paul Biya has ordered the release of the leaders who were arrested late last year and accused of inciting violence during the protests in the North West and South West regions. They pleaded not guilty to the charges which included complicity in hostility against the homeland, secession, and campaigning for federalism.

Syria: Forces battling ISIL 'lose sight of ultimate aim' to free civilians from terror – UN rights chief

31 August – Forces fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) terrorist group in Syria are losing sight of the obligation to protect civilians as the battle to retake Raqqa from ISIL is being waged at the cost of their lives, the top United Nations human rights official warned today.

“Surely the purpose of defeating ISIL should be to protect and assist civilians who have been suffering under their murderous regime,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said in a news release.

“Given the extremely high number of reports of civilian casualties this month and the intensity of the airstrikes on Raqqa, coupled with ISIL’s use of civilians as human shields, I am deeply concerned that civilians – who should be protected at all times - are paying an unacceptable price and that forces involved in battling ISIL are losing sight of the ultimate goal of this battle,” he added.

Between 1 and 29 August, the Coalition reports that it conducted 1,094 airstrikes on and near Raqqa city – up from 645 in July. In July, throughout the whole of Syria, a total of 885 airstrikes were conducted by the Coalition.

The Russian air force, which operates separately from the Coalition, reported publicly that it had carried out 990 combat flights in Syria from 1 to 21 August and that 2,518 aviation strikes had been conducted.

Airstrikes and ground-based strikes on Raqqa have resulted in a large number of civilians casualties. While it is difficult to get a full picture, the Office of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has managed to verify 151 civilian
 deaths in six incidents since 1 August 2017, in each of which more than 20 civilians were reportedly killed.

“So as airstrikes bombard Raqqa, some 20,000 civilians are either trapped, or risk their lives to flee and end up confined in makeshift camps in areas controlled by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces under horrendous conditions until prolonged security procedures are completed, with no oversight on how they are treated and screened,” Mr. Zeid said.

The High Commissioner called on all those with involvement or influence in the conflict to facilitate the rapid, safe departure of civilians wishing to leave Raqqa, and to ensure the protection of those who remain.

OHCHR has also received information about ISIL forcibly conscripting civilians in Deir-ez-Zor, including children.

“Once Raqqa is retaken from ISIL, the next big battle will be Deir-ez-Zor,” Mr. Zeid said, appealing to all the parties involved in the conflict in Syria to fully respect their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law to protect the civilian population and civilian objects.