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In Afghanistan, Security Council reiterates support for efforts to restore peace and progress



Security Council President Ambassador Kairat Umarov of Kazakhstan (left) is greeted by President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan at the Presidential Palace in Kabul. Photo UNAMA/Fardin Waezi

15 January – The United Nations Security Council, during a weekend mission to Afghanistan, reiterated its support for the Central Asian country's efforts to restore peace, stability and progress.

Council members aimed to get a first-hand account of progress made by the Afghan National Unity Government, with the assistance of the international community, in addressing a wide range of interconnected challenges and to learn how the Security Council could further assist efforts on the ground.

According to the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA), despite assurances of continued international assistance for its security and development needs, Afghanistan remains a country undergoing conflict, which threatens the sustainability of its achievements.

DPA says peace negotiations between the Afghan Government and armed opposition groups are the only alternative for ending the conflict and the region and the broader international community have a stake and a role to play to help to create the conditions for peace.

The Council's visit, from 13 to 15 January, was the first one since 2010 and came ahead of the Kabul Process meeting, scheduled for February 2018, where the Government is expected to present its plans for a more structured peace and security process, coordinated with the wider region.



In the capital, Kabul, the delegation held meetings with senior officials, including Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah.

The delegation also met with the leadership of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the Resolute Support Mission of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

According to a note issued by UNAMA, discussions during the visit focused on the political, security, socio-economic and human rights situation in the country, with all parties underlining the importance of an inclusive Afghan-led and -owned peace process for long-term stability and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Council members also reiterated their support for the Government's reform initiatives, particularly to counter corruption and accelerate regional cooperation.

They expressed concerns about the security environment in Afghanistan, including the presence of Al-Qaeda, Taliban and ISIL-Khorasan Province-affiliated fighters, as well as about the nexus of terrorism and organized crime. All parties reiterated the need for greater international and regional security cooperation.

The delegation was briefed on the preparations for the upcoming parliamentary and district council elections in 2018. Council members underscored the importance of continued progress on electoral reforms and towards the holding of free and fair, as well as timely, credible and inclusive parliamentary and presidential elections in 2018 and 2019, respectively. They reiterated the need to increase women's participation in the election.

Need for regional and integrated security and development approach

Council members emphasized the need to adopt a regional and integrated security and development approach, which Kazakhstan is proposing as the path to sustainable development, durable peace and stability in the region.

Discussions in Kabul stressed the need to view Afghanistan not as a threat to security in the region but as an important partner. It is critical to integrate the economies of Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, including Central Asian States, through enhanced interaction and connectivity, by implementing regional infrastructure, trade, investment, transit and transportation projects.

Afghan authorities expressed hope for the rapid implementation of those projects.

Led by Kazakhstan, the delegation included representatives of the United States, Bolivia, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Kuwait, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Sweden, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and China.

Kazakhstan, the first Central Asian country elected to the Security Council, holds the body's presidency in January 2018.



Progress against hunger, poverty hinges on empowering indigenous women – UN agriculture chief



Huave women in Mexico carrying maize cobs. Photo: FAO/R. Grisolia

15 January – Empowering indigenous women – who have higher malnutrition rates than any other social group and typically earn far less than men – is key to successfully fighting hunger and extreme poverty, the United Nations agriculture chief has said.

“Indigenous women face a triple discrimination – poverty, gender and ethnicity, both within and outside their communities – making them highly vulnerable,” Jose Graziano da Silva Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) told the Forum on Indigenous Women in Mexico City this past Friday.

They confront far higher rates of poverty, chronic malnutrition and illiteracy while having the least access to health care and political life, he said to the participants from a dozen countries.

About five per cent of the global population and 15 per cent of the world's poorest, or some 370 million people, self-identify as indigenous. In Latin America and the Caribbean region, 15 per cent of the approximately 45 million indigenous peoples face insecurity and extreme poverty.

Indigenous women in the region encounter higher poverty and malnutrition rates than any other social group, and typically earn four times less than men, according to FAO's new **Regional Atlas of Rural Women**.

The situation is even worse for women in the more than 5,000 indigenous groups, spread across over 90 countries around the world.

“Their social and economic empowerment is not only an excellent way to support them, but a necessary condition to eradicate hunger and malnutrition in their communities,” underscored Mr. da Silva.

He noted that the UN's decision to begin a Family Farming Decade in 2019 offers a platform to focus on rural livelihoods – where most indigenous peoples work.

The FAO-organized three-day forum aims to develop public policy recommendations to empower indigenous women, strengthen their decision-making and recognize their rights.

Cultivating leadership

Although indigenous women are key actors in protecting biodiversity, adapting to climate change and varying nutritious diets, they are often forgotten in development plans.

“They have fundamental roles in the spiritual, social and family arenas and are seed guardians – critical carriers of specialized knowledge,” underscored Mr. da Silva.

“With political will, we can put an end to discrimination against indigenous women,” he affirmed.

In strife-torn Afghanistan, people need support 'more than ever' says senior UN aid official



War-affected Kunduz civilians in Afghanistan receive humanitarian aid. Photo: UNAMA

15 January – Amid continuing violence in Afghanistan, the United Nations and the humanitarian community has appealed for \$430 million to provide assistance to some 2.8 million people across the country who have been affected by conflict and natural disasters as well as families returning home after years in Iran and Pakistan.

“In many parts of Afghanistan, violence continues unabated and people need support more than ever,” said Toby Lanzer, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Afghanistan, underlining the needs in the country.

“Today I call on international donors to stand by 2.8 million people whose lives have been ruined by conflict or natural disaster, and to help people returning to Afghanistan from neighbouring countries.”

According to a news release issued by the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the plan includes activities of more than 150 national and international humanitarian organizations as well as the UN to deliver assistance to families and communities in need.

There are however, substantial challenges, including difficult access conditions as well as increasing violence against aid workers. Last year, armed clashes were the highest in a decade and civilian casualties remained near record levels.

In addition to more than two million people directly affected by the conflict including almost half a million displaced, 2017 also saw about 500,000 Afghans returning to their homes after seeking refuge in Iran, Pakistan or other countries.

The 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan focuses only on providing life-saving emergency assistance such as food and shelter, medical treatment and nutrition interventions for malnourished child to people caught up in current or very recent disasters.

Besides the 2.8 million people the plan is designed for, another 8.7 million people are estimated to live with high level of needs as a result of long-standing and unresolved issues such as lack of jobs and livelihoods, long-term displacement, an underfunded healthcare system or the effects of climate change.

“Humanitarian emergency assistance cannot provide a solution for such chronic needs, like land for housing or jobs and vocational training to lift them out of poverty and fragility,” read the news release, underlining the need to improve the underlying conditions.

UN condemns twin suicide attacks in Baghdad

15 January – Strongly condemning two terrorist attacks in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has underscored the Organization’s support for the country in its fight against terrorism.

In a statement attributable to his spokesperson, Secretary-General Guterres reiterated that the “UN will continue to stand by the Government and people of Iraq in their efforts to fight terrorism and rebuild their country.”

According to media reports, at least 35 individuals were killed and another 90 injured when suicide bombers detonated two explosives in a busy square in the city during the morning rush hour.



Secretary-General António Guterres. UN Photo/Mark Garten (file)

Earlier today, Jan Kubis, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq and the head of the UN Assistance Mission in the country (UNAMI) also denounced the attack and said that despite a defeat on the battlefield, terrorist groups continue to pose a threat, in particular to ordinary citizens.

“I urge greater vigilance by the authorities and unity among the Iraqi people to thwart the aims of terrorists like Da’esh [the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant or ISIL] who seek to derail the country’s recovery after a long conflict,” said Mr. Kubis in a tweet by UNAMI.

Both the Secretary-General and his Special Representative for Iraq expressed their sympathies to the families of the victims and wished those injured a speedy recovery to those injured.

OECD-UN forum on strengthening collection and use of migration data kicks off in Paris



Migrants being registered at Agadez Transit Center in Niger. Photo: IOM

15 January – International organizations, policy experts, statisticians and civil society came together on Monday at a United Nations-supported forum in Paris to answer the global call for more accurate and timely information on migration flows and examine how improved data collection can feed into better policymaking.

Organized jointly by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the first International Forum on Migration Statistics will also explore innovations in data collection and strengthening capacity in developing countries to produce and improve migration statistics.

“It is important that we speak today about the fundamental need for better migration data,” said William Lacy Swing, the Director-General of the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM), at the Forum.

“We also need urgently, however, to engage a dialogue on a Global Action Plan – a plan to ensure the availability to policymakers and others comprehensive national, regional and global data and statistical analysis of trends in migration – a phenomenon as old as humankind and, today, one of the defining phenomena of our time.”

Running through Tuesday, the Forum will explore improvements the production and use of migration data and overcoming challenges in the sector, as well as also delve deep into specific themes.

Also on the agenda is a specific plenary session is devoted to exploring how public opinions on migration and migrants are formed, and how these can change by facing well-communicated facts.

Other topics include use Big Data for migration, as well as building the capacity for emerging economies and developing countries to produce migration statistics.

According to IOM, the Forum aims to become a bi-annual event for producers and users of migration-related data to share their views, identify gaps and highlight needs for training and capacity building.

Policies concerning migration must be grounded in data

In a related statement, Mr. Swing also underscored that accurate and complete migration data is critical for sound policies concerning it.

“We are finding that without access to reliable, comprehensive and global data, managing migration policy becomes a game of blind man’s bluff,” he stressed. in a recent statement, underscoring the importance of data for sound policies.

However, he added, despite efforts by Governments and the international community, “significant gaps” in migration data remain globally.

National population censuses – traditionally the main source of data on migration – are infrequent and cannot therefore provide timely information. Furthermore, migrants, especially those on irregular status, often are absent from household surveys, or are hard to track through administrative data sources.

In the statement, Mr. Swing noted the that the volume of data available today is larger than at any point in human history. While there are incredible possibilities of the use of this so called “Big Data” – data generated, often inadvertently, by users on digital devices, web-platforms or other “smart” sources – there are also significant challenges, in particular those over privacy, ethical and human rights given the way they are generated or collected.

“Concerns over the use of Big Data for any purpose, including research, need to be identified and adequately addressed by policy-makers, for instance through the creation of a regulatory system setting out conditions and limits to access to and use of certain kinds of data,” suggested Mr. Swing.



PODCAST: Tea and empathy – Refugee ZamZam Yusuf’s extraordinary journey

15 January – Somali refugee ZamZam Yusuf has a message for any neighbours who think she doesn’t have the right to call Leicester, in the English Midlands, home.

“I would like to offer you a cup of tea” at my house, says the 30-year-old mother-of-four, who came to United Nations Headquarters in New York in January, as world leaders prepare to debate the first-ever Global Compact for Migration.

Her university, De Montfort, in the United Kingdom, has taken the academic lead in furthering the UN’s Together campaign on behalf of the millions who are on the move, whose basic rights are being denied.

A summit in New York on 9 January aimed to raise awareness and encourage debate on the current challenges faced by refugees in local communities. Led by De Montfort, the universities shared ideas for practical ways they can use skills, experience and voluntary power on their campuses to support those in need in their local areas.

Too often, said UN chief António Guterres – launching his 2018 report, *Making Migration Work for All* – their positive contribution is being overshadowed by the plight of a “desperate minority” forced to live in the shadows by countries that violate their rights.

ZamZam came in to our the Lid is on studio in New York to describe her extraordinary journey – just one of the millions that are being taken each year, in search of a better life.

In Colombia, UN chief meets with ex-combatants, expressing hope for future and peace process

14 January – On the second day of an official visit to Colombia, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on Sunday expressed hopes for the future and for the peace process in the South American country.

“I am extremely happy to see the enthusiasm and commitment of the authorities, of the communities, and of the ex-combatants to the process of peace building in Colombia,” Mr. Guterres said in a statement to the press from Mesetas, Meta, where he visited a territorial area for the training and reintegration of former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) combatants.

“I had the opportunity to visit a FARC camp and to see the ex-combatants build their future and develop new activities – activities of peace – with great enthusiasm,” he said.

Mr. Guterres said that “the communities also believe that it is possible for this region to achieve not only peace, but also prosperity and good living conditions for all its inhabitants” and that the Colombian Government will play a key role in providing the security, administration, healthcare system and infrastructures they need, and in helping the local farmers get better access to the market.



ZamZam Yusuf at UN Headquarters in New York. Photo: UN News/Matt Wells



On the second day of a visit to Colombia, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres travels to Mesetas, Meta. Photo/UN Verification Mission in Colombia

“What we see here is an extraordinary transformation, and it gives me great hope for the future and for the peace process in Colombia,” he stressed, reaffirming the UN's full support and solidarity with the Colombian people in this historic moment of their lives.

The purpose of Mr. Guterres' visit to Colombia is to take stock of achievements that followed a peace agreement between the Government and the FARC in November 2016, which ended 50 years of conflict.

The UN chief also seeks to reinvigorate the implementation of the peace deal, including the process of reintegrating former rebel combatants into society, and ensure that Colombians are committed to stay the course.

His visit also comes ahead of legislative elections in March and presidential elections in May, and at a time when a temporary ceasefire agreement between the Government and another rebel group, the National Liberation Army (ELN), has just expired.

Deep concern about violent events involving ELN

Back in the capital, Bogotá, the UN chief spoke to reporters before wrapping up his two-day visit and expressed his concern about the violent events that took place following the expiration of a temporary ceasefire between the Government and the ELN.

On 10 January, Mr. Guterres' Special Representative for Colombia, Jean Arnault, told the UN Security Council that attacks against oil pipelines by the ELN just resumed.

“Convinced of the importance of the negotiations between the Government of Colombia and the National Liberation Army (ELN) for the peace of Colombia and the progress of its population, I express my deep concern in the face of the violent events of recent days and a possible escalation of confrontations to the detriment of the political process and the situation of the communities in the areas affected by the conflict,” he said.

Rapid progress must be made in compliance with the new agenda items agreed upon between the government and the ELN, he said, calling for the cessation of armed actions and the resumption of a serious and constructive dialogue with a view to meeting as soon as possible the expectations generated by the commitment of the parties to reach a solution to their conflict through political means.

In that regard, he recalled the wish publicly expressed last week by the UN Security Council that the parties resume their efforts to agree on a renewal and strengthening of the ceasefire.

“I instructed my Special Representative in Colombia to take all necessary actions to facilitate the return of the parties to the table, and reaffirm the commitment of the United Nations with a just solution to the conflict between the parties for the benefit of the entire society,” he said.

A bloody start to 2018 in Syria; Over 30 children killed in two weeks – UNICEF



Ru'a, 18 months, rides on her grandfather's motorbike as he drags it across Mesraba in East Ghouta, Syria. Photo:UNICEF/2018/Amer Almohibany

14 January – Only in the first 14 days of the year, more than 30 children have been killed in escalating violence in Syria's East Ghouta, where an estimated 200,000 children have been trapped under siege since 2013, the top United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) official in the Middle Eastern country said Sunday.

“At a time when most parents are filled with the New Year's hope for their children's future, mothers and fathers in Syria are left grieving for the children they have lost,” said Fran Equiza, UNICEF Representative in Syria in a statement.

“It is shameful that nearly seven years into the conflict, a war on children continues while the world watches. Millions of children across Syria and in neighbouring countries have suffered the devastating consequences of unabating levels of violence in several parts of the country,” he added.

UNICEF received information from inside East Ghouta that people are taking shelter underground in fear for their lives.

Two medical facilities came under attack in the past days in East Ghouta, and most health centres had to close because of the violence. Schools have been reportedly closed in and around East Ghouta at a time when children elsewhere in Syria are sitting for their mid-term exams.

“While we saw a small glimmer of hope at the end of last year with the evacuation of 17 children in urgent need of medical attention, increased violence in and around east Ghouta turned hope into despair for the remaining 120 children who continue to suffer in silence waiting for urgent medical evacuation,” Mr. Equiza said.

In Idlib, to the northwest of the country, heavy violence reportedly killed and injured scores of children and women and displaced an estimated 100,000 civilians in the past few weeks. The maternity and paediatric hospital in Ma'arrat An Nu'man was attacked three times taking it out of service and killing at least one patient and two medical staff.

“We must be able to reach children in need of humanitarian assistance, urgently and without restrictions, wherever they are in Syria. The various parties to the conflict can make that happen by immediately allowing humanitarian workers to reach them with life-saving assistance,” he said.

Bangladesh: UN agencies working to vaccinate half a million children against diphtheria



UNICEF is on the ground in Bangladesh, immunizing Rohingya refugee children to fight the spread of disease, and delivering life-saving nutrition to the tens of thousands of children who are malnourished. Photo: UNICEF/Brown

14 January – As part of an intensified response to the current diphtheria outbreak, United Nations agencies are working to vaccinate more than 475,000 children in Rohingya refugee camps, temporary settlements and surrounding areas in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar.

“All efforts are being made to stop further spread of diphtheria. The vaccination of children in the Rohingya camps and nearby areas demonstrates the health sector's commitment to protecting people, particularly children, against deadly diseases,” said Bardan Jung Rana, ai Representative to Bangladesh of the World Health Organization (WHO).

UN estimates show that some 655,000 people have fled Myanmar to Bangladesh since August 2017.

Diphtheria is an infectious disease caused by a bacterium which primarily infects the throat and upper airways, and produces a toxin affecting other organs. The diphtheria toxin causes a membrane of dead tissue to build up over the throat and tonsils, making breathing and swallowing difficult. The disease is spread through direct physical contact or from breathing in the aerosolized secretions from coughs or sneezes of infected individuals.

Between 8 November 2017 and 11 January 2018, as many as 31 deaths and 3,954 suspected cases of diphtheria have been reported from Cox's Bazar. Nearly 10,594 contacts of these suspected cases have been put on diphtheria preventive medication.

WHO, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other health partners are working with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to establish fixed locations for immunization in the Rohingya camps to continue to provide life-saving vaccines to children, in line with Bangladesh's childhood immunization programme.

Nearly 150,000 children aged six weeks to seven years received pentavalent vaccine (that protects against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, haemophilus influenza type b and hepatitis B), and nearly 166,000 children aged 7 to 17 years were given tetanus and diphtheria (Td) vaccine, during a three-week vaccination campaign that ended on 31 December.

Two more rounds of vaccination with a diphtheria-containing vaccine, at intervals of one month, are planned to fully protect the children in camps and surrounding areas.

“Children are particularly vulnerable to diphtheria. Volunteers are making door-to-door visits in the Rohingya settlements to ensure all children receive vaccination,” said the UNICEF Country Representative Edouard Beigbeder.

“The massive influx within a very short time has heavily affected basic services in the settlement areas. They have no choice but to live in a very congested environment, which is impacting their health and quality of life,” he added.

To limit the spread of diphtheria to communities living near the Rohingya camps and settlements, nearly 160,000 children in 499 schools of Teknaf and Ukhiya sub-districts are also being vaccinated.

This initiative began on 1 January. Vaccination was initiated on a day when children attend school in large numbers to avail themselves of free books provided by the government at the start of the academic year.

WHO has released \$1.5 million from its Contingency Fund for Emergencies to scale up the response to diphtheria among the Rohingya population in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, over the next six months.

The funds are being used to support immunization; provide essential medicines and supplies; improve capacities for laboratory testing, case management and contact tracing; and engage with communities.

In Bogotá, UN Secretary-General Guterres expresses full support for peace process in Colombia

13 January – In an official visit to Colombia, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on Saturday met with the country's President in the capital, Bogotá, where the UN chief said it is the duty of all the citizens of the world to support the peace process there.

“We see more and more conflicts arising, and old conflicts with no solutions in sight; and that is why what happens in Colombia is of fundamental symbolic importance for the world,” Mr. Guterres told a press conference at Palacio de Nariño, Colombia's presidential palace, following a meeting with President Juan Manuel Santos.

The purpose of Mr. Guterres' visit is to take stock of achievements that followed a peace agreement between the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) in November 2016, which ended 50 years of conflict.

The UN chief also seeks to reinvigorate the implementation of the peace deal, including the process of reintegrating former rebel combatants into society, and ensure that Colombians are committed to stay the course.

“This mission is clearly a mission of solidarity with Colombia and with the Colombian people in a historical moment and of enormous importance for Colombia, for Latin America and for the world,” Mr. Guterres said.

His visit also comes ahead of legislative elections in March and presidential elections in May, and at a time when a temporary ceasefire agreement between the Government and another rebel group, the National Liberation Army (ELN), has just expired.

The UN chief said he was impressed by Colombia's commitment to not only building peace but also guaranteeing the presence of the State throughout the Colombian territory, including the presence of administration, security, public services, education, and health in creating a development framework for civil society and for the private sector, all of which is an enormous challenge.

“It is something that is not done miraculously, from one moment to another. But I want to reaffirm here the full commitment of the United Nations in supporting the Colombian government in this project of enormous importance, to build peace but at the same time to build an inclusive democracy, capable of ensuring that the entire national territory benefits from development,” he stressed.

Peace is the only answer

“There is no justification for armed violence. Peace is the only answer that today can solve the problems of poverty, the problems of development and the problems of equality and democracy,” the UN chief said.

For his part, President Santos thanked the Secretary-General for his visit and the continuing support of the United Nations and the UN Verification Mission in Colombia, which is currently monitoring compliance with the agreements established in the peace agreement.

The President highlighted the effort of Colombia to end the conflict and reiterated, to Mr. Guterres, his Government



UN Secretary-General António Guterres (left) meets with Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón in Bogotá on 13 January 2018. UN Photo: Héctor Latorre/UN Verification Mission in Colombia

determination to continue moving in that direction.

“It is a process, we are the first to recognize the challenges that we are facing, the most important has to do with the issue of security in rural areas, which suffered so long in the armed conflict ... As I always say, peace is like a cathedral and must be built brick by brick,” he said.

On Saturday, Mr. Guterres were to meet with officials of the Government and Armed Forces, as well as with FARC-EP leadership and the Catholic Church.

On Sunday, 14 January, the Secretary-General will travel to the Department of Meta, where his agenda will include, among other activities, a visit to a territorial area for training and reintegration of former FARC-EP combatants.