As conflicts become more complex, ‘mediation is no longer an option; it is a necessity’, UN chief tells Security Council

Secretary-General António Guterres addresses the Security Council meeting on the maintenance of international peace and security, with a focus on mediation and settlement of disputes.

As war and the mediation of peace have become increasingly complex, innovative thinking is needed to save and improve the lives of millions, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres told the Security Council on Wednesday.

Speaking alongside the UN chief were the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, a member of his High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation, and Mossarat Qadeem, the co-founder of PAIMAN Alumni Trust, a civil society group working to prevent violent extremism in Pakistan.

As speakers at the day-long debate warned that the maintenance of international peace and security faces multiple challenges, Mr. Guterres noted that many internal conflicts feature a deadly mix of fragmented armed groups and political interests, funded by criminal activities, and that peace agreements are becoming more elusive and short-lived.

Archbishop Justin expressed concern that the international rules-based order is struggling, with national interests too often allowed, “even in this chamber”, to overcome the wisdom of those who have lived through war.

UN to convene Yemen talks early next month in Geneva, envoy tells Security Council

“It is time long past for us, together, to call for an early resumption of the political process, two years since the last round in Kuwait,” said Martin Griffiths, referring to the UN-supported peace talks that where first held three years ago in Switzerland before shifting to Kuwait in April 2016.

Since the uprisings that broke out in Yemen in early 2011, the UN has been engaged in helping Yemenis to find a peaceful solution. However, on 26 March 2015, a coalition of countries led by Saudi Arabia intervened militarily at the request of President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi to secure the return of the Government to Sana’a, which had been seized by Houthi militias and allied units of the armed forces.

Three years on, the fighting is still raging, and the ensuing humanitarian crisis has only deepened in a country that was already one of the region’s poorest.

In the Council today, Mr. Griffiths said it is time to “begin the difficult and uncertain journey away from war” and that there is now a chance “to weigh the opportunities for peace” in the war-ravaged country.
As conflicts become more complex, ….

For this reason, the Secretary-General has made diplomacy for peace one of his key priorities, with a focus on prevention and investment in mediation, peacebuilding and sustainable development.

As an example of his commitment, he pointed to the creation of the High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation in September 2017, which aims to allow the UN to work more effectively with regional organizations, non-governmental groups and others involved in mediation around the world.

Mr. Guterres pointed to the work of Board member and former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo – who travelled to Liberia on behalf of the Secretary-General to support the peaceful transfer of power after the 2017 elections – as an example of how the Board can be deployed in the cause of conflict prevention.

He added that the UN is already has a wide range of mediation resources at its disposal, including special envoys and representatives pursuing consultations, good offices and formal talks. An example is the UN Standby Team of Senior Mediation Advisers, a group with expertise on a wide range of issues connected to peace negotiations. The group, part of the UN Mediation Unit, is providing crucial advice in areas of conflict, from the Central African Republic to Yemen and South Sudan.

Archbishop Justin described the Unit as a vital component of the UN’s cross-agency and cross-departmental reconciliation strategy, which is helping to build shared understanding between the UN and its partners.

Mr. Guterres told the Council that the UN recognizes the important role played by religious leaders and young activists.

UN to convene Yemen talks early next month in Geneva ….

Describing the ongoing battle for Hudaydah, a port city on the Red Sea, as “the centre of gravity of the war”, he stressed that the gap between the two sides is being narrowed “in a way that nobody expected”. This issue, he said, “has a better chance of being resolved within the context of a comprehensive political settlement.”

He called on Council members to “urge the parties to resolve this conflict through negotiation rather than through military means”, explaining that he will invite the warring parties to Geneva on 6 September for a round of talks, “These consultations will provide the opportunity for the parties, among other things, to discuss the framework for negotiations, relevant confidence-building measures and specific plans for moving the process forward,” said Mr. Griffiths, requesting the Council’s support.

Having engaged with the parties, as well as with civil society, Mr. Griffiths said he is especially grateful for his meetings with Yemeni women. “I continue to consult them on elements of the peace process. Their voices are a constant reminder that Yemeni families bear the brunt of this conflict”.

“We know what can work. We have talked to all the sides. We have studied the experience of past efforts to resolve this conflict. One hundred days in Kuwait is a valuable guide for us,” he insisted.

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The Director of Operations for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), John Ging, also briefed the Council, painting a bleak picture of the situation on the ground. “You have heard the statistics many times: more than 22 million people — 75 per cent of the population — require humanitarian assistance and protection. Three years of conflict have left 2 million people displaced from their homes; 8.4 million people do not know where their next meal is coming from; and, the worst cholera outbreak in the world occurred in Yemen last year, with 1.1 million cases,” said Mr. Ging.

“The humanitarian situation is indeed shocking, both in scale and severity,” he stated. “The toll of this conflict on civilians and civilian infrastructure is devastating. Incidents in which civilians are killed or injured continue to be reported with alarming regularity”, he said, calling all parties to “respect international humanitarian law, including the obligation to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, and to take all feasible precautions to avoid and minimize incidental harm.”
Senior UN children’s advocate says they ‘should never be targeted by violence’

The last two weeks have seen a suicide attack on an education centre in Afghanistan which killed and injured young students in class, 21 children killed in Yemen when their school bus was hit by an airstrike, and ongoing child casualties in Syria - particularly in the conflict zones of Idlib and Western Aleppo in the North of the country.

“Children have been directly targeted by belligerents. They were also collateral victims of despicable acts of war,” said Ms. Gamba. “We cannot remain silent in the face of such atrocities”, she said, adding that she wanted those fighting to understand the “simple message: enough is enough”.

She went on to urge all sides in conflicts to protect children from the scourge of war and to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law.

Children should never be targeted by violence. It is our collective responsibility to use these tools to their full extent and to obtain results for those boys and girls who desperately need protection”.

Following the deadly air strike in Yemen last week, UN Secretary-General António Guterres urged an “independent and prompt investigation”, adding that warring parties must take “constant care to spare civilians.”

In recent days several UN Agencies have strongly condemned the attacks. The UN Children’s Fund UNICEF described them as a “war on children”, whilst the UN Human Rights Office OHCHR, pointed out that the Yemen strike was just the latest example of the children being killed in the country’s violent years-long conflict.
From a Childhood Hobby to a Successful Business

"It started as a hobby. I was making dresses for my dolls at first. My aunt then gave me a sewing machine and I started making dresses and selling them".

A mother of five daughters and one son, Intisar is a 45-year-old professional tailor from Sheikh Othman district in Aden.

Famous for her beautiful women dresses in her neighborhood, Intesar started her tailoring journey when she was seven years old.

Intisar’s husband, Khalid, passed away in late 2014 causing a devastation to her life and children.

"My husband suddenly got sick and died in November 2014. He was a very kind and loving man," "Khalid was the main caretaker of the family despite the fact that I have been also contributing to the family income through sewing and selling women dresses in a small store I had".

Just when Intesar and her children thought things could not get any worse following the death of their loving husband and father, they faced another loss due to the outbreak of the conflict in March 2015.

Although Intesar was trying hard to provide a decent living for her children, her already-low income got worse following the conflict.

"I gave a woman, who used to work as a vendor of my products, dresses worth YER 150,000 (US$ 333) before the conflict broke out. However, the conflict forced the woman to flee her home which was looted and all the clothes were gone. I cannot ask her to compensate me because it was not her fault as she was escaping from death," Intisar said.

"We, however, managed to survive during the conflict as people fleeing into our area came to buy my products. This was because the conflict pushed them away from their homes without even packing their clothes," Intesar said. "The women, though, used to pay in installments because most of them did not have money to buy clothes. I cannot forget how my mother-in-law used to give me food and money sometimes".

Intisar spent the money she made from selling dresses on food and the educational needs of her children only. The income was not enough to buy fabric and other tailoring items to sustain her business. As a result, Intesar was forced to shut down the small store she had as she was not able to pay the rent.

"I had a small store that I opened using a previous loan I received from the Social Fund for Development (SFD) through the Al Etihad Micro-Finance Programme. Nevertheless, I had no choice but to close it to save the money I made in order to provide basic needs for my children. This had affected my income negatively that I was barely able to feed my children and help them continue with their education".

When peace returned to Aden in July 2015, Intesar was compensated by SFD through Al Ethihad Micro-Finance Programme. She received a grant to restore her small business.

"I was able to buy fabric and decorations for dresses with the money I got. I can say that my income was saved and I was able to continue my business".

In February 2018, Intesar paid the last installment of the past loan provided by SFD. In the same period, she applied for another loan of US$ 666 which enabled her to open another store.

"I am now happy that I have resumed the same work and getting income, even better than before the conflict. I have bought a new sewing machine, fabric and decorations for ladies’ wear. My income has increased that I have been able to employ my niece.

As of May 2018, 1,850 small and micro enterprises affected by the crisis received grants to offset their debts and restore their businesses

My next step is to keep my business growing until I establish a small tailoring factory. I will hire professional tailors to make the most beautiful dresses in the market,” Intisar said with a tone of excitement.
Hundreds of pregnant women risk death in Yemen: U.N

Hundreds of pregnant women in the Yemeni city of Hodeidah risk dying as the escalating conflict puts medical care out of reach in a country with one of the world’s highest maternal mortality rates, the United Nations said.

The U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA) said pregnant women were at “extreme risk” as it became harder to access care, with the maternal death rate likely to have doubled from its 2015 tally of 385 deaths per 100,000 live births.

The violence limits the agency’s access to Hodeidah, but it estimated 90,000 women were due to give birth there in the next nine months.

The escalation in the conflict has destroyed health facilities and placed those who suffered complications like haemorrhaging or infections at heightened risk, it said.

Nadia - not her real name - fled Hodeidah nearly three weeks ago, fearing for her five children and unborn baby.

“I thought me, my baby and kids would die and get sick if I stayed,” Nadia who is five months pregnant, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone from the capital Sanaa, “I was afraid of losing the baby and delivering early”.

The offensive on Hodeidah launched in June by a coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates is the largest battle yet in a conflict that has killed more than 10,000 people.

“It is becoming increasingly difficult to reach pregnant women or those who want to avoid getting pregnant with the reproductive health services and medicines they require,” said Luay Shabaneh, UNFPA director for the Arab Region, this week.

Hodeidah is the main port of the impoverished Arab country, where around 8.4 million people are believed to be on the verge of starvation, and a lifeline for millions.

“I was suffering, tired and filled with fear. There was malnourishment, there was no basic needs like electricity and medical treatment,” said Nadia of her life in Hodeidah.

WFP Fears 18 Million Yemenis Suffering from Food Insecurity

The World Food Program (WFP) warned that 18 million people in Yemen are food insecure, of whom more than 8 million are “food insecure” and depend entirely on foreign aid.

According to the WFP, the rate of malnutrition among children in Yemen is among the highest in the world, and the current hunger rate is unprecedented and causes severe suffering to millions of people. “The humanitarian situation in Yemen is very fragile,” The UN program said, pointing out that any disruption in vital supplies such as food, fuel and medicine could cause millions of people to die of starvation in Yemen.

More than 3 million pregnant, lactating women and children under the age of five need food support to prevent or treat malnutrition, and more than half of Yemeni households buy food in debt, up nearly 50 percent from pre-crisis levels.

The US-Saudi coalition has been waging a war against Yemen for three years, encircling land and sea ports and preventing the movement of aircraft over Yemen. Last month its forces launched a major offensive against the port of Hodeidah, the only maritime outlet through which aid reaches those trapped in the country, but failed to control it.
WHO: Yemen May Be on Verge of New Deadly Cholera Epidemic

The World Health Organization (WHO) warns Yemen may be on the verge of another cholera epidemic, which could be deadlier than previous ones because of widespread malnutrition in the war-torn country. Yemen has had two major waves of cholera epidemics in recent years. The World Health Organization reports that an increasing number of cases in several heavily populated areas over the past few weeks indicate the country may be on the cusp of a third major wave of this deadly disease.

WHO's emergency response chief, Peter Salama, told VOA another cholera epidemic is likely to be more life-threatening than the previous ones because the population is seriously weakened after three years of civil war. Fighting has been raging between the government and rebel forces. "What we are likely to see is that interplay with cholera and malnutrition occurring more and more and food insecurity," he said. "And, not only more cases because of that, but even higher death rates among the cholera cases that do occur because people just do not have the physical resources to fight the disease any longer".

The United Nations is calling for three days of tranquility between August 4 and 6. It wants the warring parties to stop fighting during this period so WHO and its partners can carry out a massive oral cholera vaccination campaign. Salama said 3,000 health workers are being mobilized in three districts in northern Yemen. Their aim is to vaccinate more than 500,000 individuals above the age of one. Last year, cholera cases in Yemen topped one million in the world's worst outbreak of the disease.
UNICEF appeals for end to ‘war on children’ in Syria and Yemen

In a tightly worded statement, UNICEF pointed out that children were reported killed in Idlib and western Aleppo, located in northern Syria. The death toll included an entire family of seven. Furthermore, three UNICEF-supported health facilities were also attacked, two of which are now out of service.

“The war on children in Syria is putting at least one million children at risk in Idlib alone,” said the statement, attributable to Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

These latest incidents follow the deaths of 21 children in Yemen last week, killed when their school bus was hit during an airstrike.

For Juliet Touma, UNICEF Chief of Communications in the region, they represent an escalation in attacks on children.

“There’s obviously a war on children,” she told UN News, explaining that ongoing fighting means children in the two countries are being deprived of basic rights such as access to healthcare and education.

The Syrian crisis began nearly eight years ago with civilians continuing “to bear the brunt of a conflict marked by unparalleled suffering, destruction and disregard for human life,” according to the UN humanitarian affairs office, OCHA.

UNICEF reported that more than five million children there require humanitarian assistance, with nearly half forced to flee their homes.

Meanwhile, the UN humanitarian affairs office, OCHA, said three years of fighting in Yemen means nearly two-thirds of the population requires some form of aid relief or protection support to survive.

“Across the region there are about 30 million children who need humanitarian assistance,” Ms. Touma said, also referring to the situation in places such as Libya, Sudan and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

“So, children under attack…and that needs to come to an end.”
The hopes of the world rest on young people.

Peace, economic dynamism, social justice, tolerance – all this and more, today and tomorrow, depends on tapping into the power of youth.

Yet more than 400 million young women and men live amidst armed conflict or organized violence.

Millions face deprivation, harassment, bullying and other infringements of their rights.

Young women and girls are particularly vulnerable.

The world’s young people need safe spaces -- public, civic, physical and digital spaces where they can freely express their views and pursue their dreams.

We must invest so that young people have access to education, training and decent jobs to achieve their full potential.

The United Nations is strongly committed to listening to the voices of young people – and opening pathways for meaningful participation in decisions that affect them.

This September, we will launch a new strategy to step up our work with and for young people.

In making the world safe for young people, we make the world better for all.

I wish all a happy International Youth Day!

António Guterres