

Secretary-General and other top UN officials denounce discriminatory migration policies

Following the announcement of the recent Executive Order in the United States regarding immigration, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres released a [statement](#) on Tuesday denouncing any policies founded in discrimination based on religion, ethnicity or nationality as both “ineffective” and “against the fundamental principles and values on which our societies are based.” Mr. Guterres also noted that discriminatory migration policies breed fear, anger and the very violence they claim to prevent. Above all, Mr. Guterres expressed his particular concern regarding decisions around the world that have jeopardized the integrity of the international refugee protection regime, preventing refugees from receiving the protections they are in desperate need of and are entitled to under international law.

Secretary-General Guterres, who previously served as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, has stressed the importance of the pursuit of peace and has repeatedly [underscored](#) the primacy of prevention and diplomacy in international peace and security, stating during his first official address as the UN chief that, “peace must be our goal and our guide.” Speaking with media at UN Headquarters on Wednesday Mr. Guterres specifically [addressed](#) the actions of the US prohibiting migration and refugees from specific countries and expressed belief that the measure should be reversed. Recalling the written statement he had made the day prior, Secretary-General Guterres emphasized that the measures put in place by the US administration are not the way to protect the US, or any country, from the threat of terrorism. He went on to firmly state that “these measures should be removed sooner rather than later.”

The Secretary-General’s calls have been also echoed by other officials and experts within the UN. On Wednesday, five independent human rights experts [released](#) a joint statement through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The UN Special Rapporteurs on migrant rights, racism, human rights and counter-terrorism, torture and freedom of religion jointly expressed their expert opinion that the US policy is discriminatory, a “significant setback for those who are obviously in need of international protection,” and risks violating international humanitarian and human rights law. The current UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, also made an [impassioned](#) plea for solidarity and compassion for refugees fleeing devastation in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and elsewhere. Mr. Grandi said “The world has to go back to solidarity, has to think again of these people – not with fear, not with suspicion, but with open arms, with an open mind, with an open

heart.”

Earlier this week the Mr. Grandi also [expressed](#) his deep concern over the uncertainty now faced by thousands of refugees in the process of resettlement in the United States due to the ban. The High Commissioner noted that in the first week of the Executive Order alone, 800 of some of the most vulnerable refugees were turned away from the US after already being cleared to restart their lives in the country. In total, the UNHCR (Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees) estimates that 20,000 refugees could have been resettled over the 120 days prohibited by the Executive Order. Recalling the history of the US as a leader in the protection of refugees, the High Commissioner voiced clearly his hopes that the “US will continue its strong leadership role and its long history of protecting those who are fleeing conflict and persecution.”

The UNHCR released a new infographic this week on Refugee Resettlement facts, focusing on the process within the US and globally. To view the UNHCR’s infographic, please click [here](#)

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- [Sri Lanka](#)
- [Sudan/Darfur](#)
- [_ Syria](#)
- [Yemen](#)
- [Other](#)

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Central African Republic:

President Museveni of Uganda [called](#) on all regional leaders participating in the fight against the remainders of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) to better cooperate with regional forces. While noting that the regional forces have reduced the LRA's capabilities enough that they no longer attack military targets, he also noted that the group's continued attacks on civilian and soft targets is an embarrassment for the governments unable to protect their citizens. Earlier in the week acting the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for CAR [reported](#) that the Ouaka province is at major risk of civilian casualties should conflict spillover from neighboring regions.

Top UN officials have [approved](#) an allocation of 6 million USD from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to support responses to new violent emergencies in the CAR. Part of this will allow the UN World Food Programme (WFP) to reach 36,800 people facing food insecurity due to the violence in recent months.

Democratic Republic of Congo:

The UN has [stated](#) that human rights abuses rose by over 30 percent in the DRC in 2016, with a [documented](#) total of 5,190 human rights violations across the country. The increase is allegedly tied to election-related repression and increased activities of several armed groups.

The representatives of the Guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the region (PSC Framework) [held](#) a meeting in Ethiopia, on 27 January, in which they considered efforts to address instability in eastern DRC, including support to the neutralization of armed groups. The representatives also discussed dialogue processes in the DRC and Burundi. However, political parties [failed](#) to agree on a new peace deal agreement, which has been in progress since the beginning of the year. The representatives reportedly could not agree on the method of appointing a new Prime Minister and experts worry the likelihood of organizing a nationwide poll by the end of the year will be extremely difficult and costly.

Gaza/West Bank:

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), [made](#) claims based on an internal report, accusing Israel of "unlawful" and "systematic killings" of Palestinian civilians in Gaza. The assembly called on the 324 parliamentarians from 47 countries to support the possibility of launching a formal investigation by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Iraq:

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has [reported](#) the disappearance and torture of minors by the regional government of Kurdistan. Over 180 boys under the age of 18 are purportedly being held without being charged according to HRW estimates. Furthermore, the government has not informed the children's families, increasing the probability of being disappeared.

The UN envoy for Iraq, Jan Kubis, [said](#) this week that Iraq's liberation from the Islamic State (ISIL) is soon to come, but fighting and massive [challenges](#)

will continue. Kubis also stated that Iraq will need substantial and sustainable international support and any scaling-down of engagement will only repeat past mistakes. Kubis also noted his concerns over ISIL's continued targeting of civilians, adding that they will be at extreme risk when fighting in western sections of Mosul begins. Human Rights Watch also [claimed](#)

in a report on Thursday that groups within Iraqi military forces known as the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) have been involved in the abuse, arbitrary detention, and enforced disappearances of men fleeing Mosul, carrying out secret screenings in unidentified detention centers.

Libya:

Over the weekend, German diplomats [reported](#) that the private camps used by human traffickers to hold refugees and migrants are rife with cases of rape, torture and execution. The leaked memo detailed evidence compiled by the German Foreign Ministry of, what they called, "concentration-camp-like" conditions. The report comes days before the beginning of a special European Union (EU) summit of heads of state in Malta on Friday where the European migrant situation is to be discussed. On Wednesday Human Rights Watch (HRW) [called](#)

on the EU and the heads of state meeting in Malta to put human rights and the protection of

migrants from future abuses in Libya. The UN-backed Prime Minister of Libya also [said](#) on Wednesday that his government would consider allowing NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) or EU ships to operate in national waters in cooperation with Libyan coastguard operations.

Elsewhere in Libya, forces loyal to Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar, the self-declared Libyan National Army (LNA), [continued](#) combat operations in an effort to retake Benghazi. The LNA reported that their forces had suffered heavy casualties, but the civilian impact from the offensive is currently unknown.

Nigeria:

Nigerian police have reported that clashes between mostly Christian Mumuye farmers and mostly Muslim Fulani herdsmen [killed](#) six people and resulted in the razing of 80 houses in Taraba state in central Nigeria. The violence began on Friday and continued through the weekend into Tuesday, when Mumuye youth reportedly attacked a Fulani village. Ethno-religious tensions in Taraba state escalated earlier in January when the state's governor was quoted by media urging Christian farmers to fight back against those he dubbed terrorists.

The situations faced by civilians in the country's embattled north has become wholly [unacceptable](#), according to local media outlets and humanitarian agencies on the ground such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). Food and medicine shortages, caused in no small part by corruption in the government-run humanitarian sector, has left camp residents in dire situations, with MSF reporting that in a camp visited in July 66 percent of children were emaciated and 1,200 graves had recently been dug. Residents in one camp protested conditions and claimed that they were able to eat only once a day and that inadequate shelter and medical care had made disease rampant. Security is also a concern with surveys of internally displaced people in the camps, the majority of whom are women and children, found two thirds of camp residents reported that guards are engaging in sexual abuses against the very civilians they were tasked with defending. Of the 1.8 million internally displaced people in Nigeria, many are children. Over 30,000 of these children have been [separated](#) from their parents while fleeing the fighting.

South Sudan:

Renewed violence [broke-out](#) in the city of Malakal in the upper Nile region this week as rebels and government forces engaged in heavy fighting causing civilians in the area to flee for safety. The UN mission in South Sudan noted great concern over the intensification of violence and called on both parties to cease hostilities, with observers warning of the potential for the breakdown of the security situation into an all-out war. The clashes are a continuation and escalation of sporadic fighting that [occurred](#) in Malakal last week.

The expansion of the fighting in Malakal to Wau Shilluk, a town to the north, [forced](#) the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to halt humanitarian operations for thousands of displaced persons and evacuate 14 staff to safer locations.

Fighting [reported](#) to have broken out between government and rebel soldiers in a town on the southern border with Uganda also forced many civilians to flee into the neighboring state this week.

Following the [joint statement](#) released by the UN and African Union (AU) on 29 January, which [expressed](#) deep concern regarding the current violence and called for an immediate cessation of hostilities, the Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (CEPO), a leading civil society organization in South Sudan,

[called](#) on the UN, AU and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to move from statements to action in South Sudan. CEPO maintains an active and ongoing mapping of violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed in South Sudan's ongoing civil war on their [website](#)

. Exiled rebel leader Riek Machar, currently residing in South Africa, [supported](#) the joint calls of the UN, African Union and IGAD to end the conflict, but disagreed with the calls for dialogue until a reinstatement of the ceasefire is reached.

The Enough Project has [released](#) a report on corruption in the South Sudanese military and the pursuit of profits and powers as fuel for violence and conflict in the country, entitled “[Weapons of Mass Corruption: How corruption in South Sudan's military undermines the world's newest country](#)

.” The report identifies incidents of fraud and other forms of corruption amongst military officials as being a major obstacle to the assurance of peace and the protection of civilians from violence in the country.

Sri Lanka:

Torture and impunity for such heinous acts continues to be a serious concern in Sri Lanka, [according](#) to the UN Special Rapporteur on torture, Juan Mendez. Several organizations have released press statements regarding Mr. Mendez's report and criticizing the collapse of the system in the country meant to investigate and prosecute torture.

Sudan:

New reports of violence in Darfur have arisen this week, as well as details of an [alleged](#) revenge attack carried out by government forces on the civilians of Nertiti, which resulted in the deaths of nine people at the beginning of January and injured 69 others. UNAMID, the joint UN and African Union mission in Darfur, has been criticized by locals for allegedly failing to intervene in the reported attack despite having a base of operations in the town.

In commemoration of the 12 year anniversary of the "Port Sudan Massacre," activists from eastern Sudan [called](#) on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate the incident from 29 January 2005 that is alleged to have involved the killing approximately of 20 unarmed protesters by government forces.

Syria:

The UN World Food Programme [resumed](#) air drops to besieged Deir al-Zor on Tuesday, where roughly 93,500 citizens are believed to still be trapped. Syrian and Russian forces have [increased](#) the intensity of their offensive on rebel and Islamic State (ISIL) held portions of the city, with Russian air force bombers reportedly hammering ISIL positions with unguided bombs. Despite this, the siege lines have yet to significantly change as the humanitarian need for the nearly 100,000 trapped civilians grows more desperate as access to clean water has been eliminated.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights [reported](#) that a midnight airstrike on Wednesday in the city of Idlib hit offices of the Syrian Red Crescent, injuring several staffers, including the director of the local branch. It is still unclear which forces are responsible for the strike.

On Thursday, the US military reported that 11 civilians were [killed](#) in four separate airstrikes

by the US-led Coalition in Iraq and Syria between 25 October and 9 December last year. An attack on 7 December near Raqqa, Syria proved the most lethal for civilians as a Coalition airstrike hit a building allegedly containing ISIL combatants, killing seven civilians. The statement claims that the total number of civilians killed since the beginning of the air campaign is 199, but this number drastically conflicts with independent monitoring groups such as Airwars, who have totalled the civilian death toll at 2,358. According to US military data, the Coalition has conducted 17,861 airstrikes since the beginning of the operation, 6,868 of which have struck in Syria.

The UN- [orchestrated](#) peace negotiations in Geneva have been delayed until late February according to Russian sources. However, the UN has not yet confirmed this delay. The US and Saudi Arabia are [reported](#) to have come to an agreement on cooperating to establish safe zones in Syria, but no further details have yet emerged.

Yemen:

A US [raid](#) on alleged al Qaeda allies last Sunday caused an unknown amount of civilian casualties, with conflicting reports. US military officials have [said](#) 14 militants were killed and one commando killed with others injured. Medics on scene reported a total of 30 fatalities, including 10 women and three children including, reportedly, the eight-year old daughter of Anwar al-Awlaki, who was targeted and killed by US drones in 2011. On Thursday, the US [admitted](#) to the likelihood civilians, including children, had been killed by their raid, but were silent on the number believed killed. US naval bombardment on positions believed to be held by al-Qaeda [continued](#) into Thursday according to Yemeni security officials.

UN experts have [warned](#) that airstrikes carried out by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen may amount to war crimes. The expert panel [reviewed](#) 10 attacks between March and October 2016 that are believed to have killed at least 292 civilians. The panel found that in all cases the Saudi-led forces did not meet the minimum standards of proportionality and precautions for attack found in international law. The experts said that despite their inability to travel to Yemen that they had achieved the highest achievable standard of proof and were near certain of their findings. The panel also [expressed](#) concern over actions of the Houthi rebels that may also amount to war crimes.

On Monday, rockets reportedly fired by Houthi rebels into Saudi Arabia on Monday [damaged](#) a UN building. In [condemning](#) the attack the on the De-escalation and Coordination Committee building UN Special Envoy for

Yemen Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed noted that the building attacked was supposed to host the committee that will oversee the cessation of hostilities and report on violations.

Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF) released a report on the healthcare situation in Yemen this week. The report, entitled "[Yemen: Healthcare Under Siege in Taiz](#)," focuses on the events occurring in the embattled city, but MSF officials say the situation in Taiz is representative of Yemen as a whole. MSF reported that both sides of the conflict have regularly demonstrated a lack of respect for the protection of civilians and healthcare workers and facilities. The UN also stated that Yemen is [exposed](#) to the risk of widespread famine and food shortages once the city's limited stores of stable foods are depleted, likely within the next 3 months. Torture, murder and abuse of migrants by traffickers and kidnappers in Yemen has also been [reported](#).

What else is new?

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has published a new report on the implementation of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention). In 2016, ICRC surveyed capacity for the protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in 25 African states and identified how states could best meet their responsibilities towards displaced persons. The findings are summarized in the new report, "Translating the Kampala Convention into Practice: a stocktaking exercise," which is available [here](#) for free PDF download or for hard-copy purchase.

ICRtoP member the Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR) is co-sponsoring a panel discussion on the relationship between legal accountability and the prevention of atrocity crimes on Thursday 9th February. The event is entitled "Accountability and Prevention of Mass Atrocities: International Criminal Justice as a Tool for Prevention" and will be hosted at the New York City Bar Association. For more information on this event or to register your attendance, please click [here](#).

The Yale MacMillan Center will also be hosting an event from 16-17 February, entitled "Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect." Both days of programming will be held at Yale University in New Haven, CT. For more information please click [here](#).