

# RtoP WEEKLY

INTERNATIONAL COALITION FOR THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

## □ DRC in focus: Ethnic conflict and instability cause tens of thousands to flee

The situation in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is rapidly [deteriorating](#) after an escalation of multiple ethnic conflicts in the area, with more than 42,000 people, 26,000 of those being children, fleeing from the DRC to Uganda since the beginning of 2018. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has [said](#) the humanitarian situation in the country is “at a breaking point”, while the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) has [called](#) the situation “one of the world’s worst displacement crises for children.” More than 70 armed groups [operate](#) in the eastern part of the DRC, mainly in the provinces of Ituri, Maniema, North and South Kivu, and Tanganyika. On 28 February, DRC local officials announced that new violent ethnic clashes in the eastern province of North Kivu have [killed](#) 23 people, including 16 civilians and seven members of the militia, since Sunday 25 February. The Hutu community has been in constant conflict with Nande and Hundu groups over control of the land.

Ever since President Kabila [postponed](#) the 2016 presidential election, political instability has also affected the country. Although elections are now scheduled to take place in December 2018, protests around the country continue against his government. Leila Zerrougui, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the DRC, [reported](#) that security forces killed at least two people, injured 47, and arrested more than 100 protesters during church-led demonstrations against President Kabila on 25 February. She urged the DRC to carry out credible investigations into the incidents and impose appropriate sanctions. On 27 February, a DRC military court [found](#) police officer Agbe Obeid guilty of killing a protester and sentenced him to life in prison. UN Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Stephane Dujarric also

[announced](#)

that President Kabila agreed to Secretary-General Guterres' request to visit the country, joint with African Union chairman Moussa Faki Mahamat, ahead of the presidential elections. A date, however, has not been announced.

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### **Burma/Myanmar:**

On 23 February, ICRtoP member Human Rights Watch (HRW) [reported](#) that the Burmese government allegedly bulldozed at least 55 Rohingya villages in the northern state of Rakhine, citing satellite imagery as proof. HRW also maintains that “Deliberately demolishing villages to destroy evidence of grave crimes is obstruction of justice” and expressed its concern that the Burmese government has refused to grant visas to the UN Fact-Finding Mission, effectively preventing experts from collecting evidence in northern Rakhine State.

On 26 February, the Council of the European Union (EU) [adopted](#) conclusions on Burma. Notably, the EU stated that it expects Burma to allow credible and independent investigations into alleged serious and systematic human rights violations and stressed that perpetrators of such crimes must be brought to justice without delay. In that regard, the EU strongly rejected the fact that Burma had decided to cease cooperating with the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, called upon Burma to reverse this decision, and that given the gravity of the alleged crimes against humanity invited Burma to become a State Party to the Rome Statute or accept the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. Furthermore, the Council of the EU urged Burma to create conditions for voluntary, safe and dignified return of displaced persons to their places of origin, indicating that particular attention needed to be placed on the increased protection needs of children, victims of sexual and gender-based violence, and female-headed households. Additionally, the EU called on the Government of Burma and the security forces to ensure that security, the rule of law, and accountability prevail in Rakhine, Kachin and Shan States.

Similarly, on 1 March, the British government [accused](#) Burmese authorities of blocking a British fact-finding trip by the Commons International Development Committee to Burma by denying them of visas to enter the country. The Chair of the Committee linked the reason for the denial to a report released by the Committee in January, which criticized the Burmese military treatment of the Rohingya.

On 27 February, thousands of Rohingya [fled](#) the area between the Bangladeshi and Burmese border known as the “no man’s land”, citing fears of forced deportation after officials from both countries visited the area last month. Zaw Htay, the Burmese government spokesman, stated that rules do not allow for people to stay in that area, and accused the Rohingya currently there of creating a scenario where the military would have to remove them, resulting in “more criticism” of Burma’s government.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) [warned](#) of the devastating effect of the upcoming Monsoon season in the largest Rohingya refugee camp in Cox’s Bazar. At least 100,000 refugees face deadly risks from floods and landslides. The IOM also announced its emergency response plan, which includes roads and drainage systems reparations, the establishment of more medical centers, and emergency simulations with other agencies.

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### **Burundi:**

On 26 February, the Council of the European Union (EU) [adopted](#) conclusions on EU priorities at the United Nations human rights fora in 2018, in which it expressed its deep regrets with Burundi's unprecedented withdrawal from the Rome Statute.

On 26 February, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Burundi Michel Kafando [warned](#) in a briefing to the UN Security Council that the situation in Burundi was “not suitable for credible elections”. In this regard, Kafando cited the unstable political situation caused by the government's plan to revise the Constitution, as well as the humanitarian and human rights situation in the country. Additionally, the International Federation for Human Rights and Ligue Iteka, a Burundian human rights group, [accused](#) the government of intimidating and harassing critics of the upcoming government referendum, citing the fact that in a campaign speech, President Nkurunziza stated that those opposed would “suffer the consequences.” The Ministry of Public Security spokesperson has also allegedly welcomed the arrest of people campaigning for a “no” vote.

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### **Central African Republic:**

Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the Central African Republic (CAR), [stated](#) that the path to peace, stability and reconciliation in the country remains “long and difficult”, citing the dire humanitarian situation in the country and the continuous violations of human rights by armed groups. Mr. Onanga-Anyanga also urged for the establishment of a formal justice system in the CAR.

On 28 February, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) [condemned](#) the killings of six aid workers in an attack by unknown assailants in the CAR. The group was traveling to Markounda, a region near the border with Chad, to train local teachers. Regrettably, attacks against humanitarian

workers are not uncommon in the CAR. In August of last year, a group of unknown attackers also killed six Red Cross volunteers.

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### Democratic People's Republic of Korea:

A panel of eight United Nations experts [monitoring](#) the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) compliance with international sanctions found that the DPRK has been shipping supplies to the Syrian government, which could be used for the production of chemical weapons and attacks against civilians. While the 200-page report does not definitely indicate that a plot to develop chemical weapons exists between both governments, it does explain that the countries have collaborated to circumvent sanctions, citing copies of contracts and materials bills between the DPRK and Syrian companies.

On 26 February, the European Council [expanded](#) sanctions against the DPRK in compliance with the 2017 UN Security Council resolution 2397. The new EU sanctions include an increased export ban on refined petroleum products and industrial machinery, restrictive maritime measures, and sanctions against three individuals and one entity.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in [announced](#) that the DPRK is willing to begin a dialogue with the United States, after delegations from the two Koreas met during the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang. President Moon Jae-in expressed the need for the US and the DPRK engage in talks in order to find a solution to the current situation. The announcement comes after the US [issued](#) new sanctions against the DPRK, targeting 28 ships connected to the DPRK's oil imports and coal exports. On 1 March, Yoon Young-chang, Senior Press Secretary for the South Korean President, [announced](#) that President Moon Jae-in and President Trump held a phone conversation over possible preliminary talks between the US and the DPRK. During the same call, President Moon Jae-in

[announced](#)

that he was sending a special envoy to the DPRK in an effort to continue communications between the two countries.

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### **Gaza / West Bank:**

Al-Jazeera [reported](#) that the Israeli army continues to arrest minors in the West Bank. Under Israeli military law, children as young as 12 years old can be arrested, mostly for stone-throwing, which can carry a sentence of up to 20 years in prison. The human rights group Defense for Children International-Palestine (DCIP) also said that every year Israeli military courts prosecute between 500 and 700 minors.

On 28 February, the Israeli military police [opened](#) an investigation into the death of a man during a raid in the town of Jericho in the West Bank. The military first reported the man died of tear gas exposure, yet, the autopsy later indicated that he died from gunfire.

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### **Iraq:**

On 25 February, Iraq's Central Criminal Court [sentenced](#) 16 more Turkish women to death, after finding each of them guilty of belonging to the Islamic State (ISIL) terrorist group as brides. According to Judge Abdul Sattar al-Beeraqdar, the High Judicial Council's spokesperson, "The convicted women had confessed during the investigation they joined ISIS, marrying ISIS members and providing logistical aid to the group." In a statement released last week, ICRtoP member Human Rights Watch (HRW) warned that the women were receiving unfair trials and were "getting the harshest possible sentences for what appears to be marriage to an ISIS

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member or a coerced border crossing”. HRW further asserted that Iraqi courts needed to “redirect their priorities”.

On 1 March, Iraqi security forces [discovered](#) an ISIL warehouse in the northern province of Nineveh, which contained bombs, mortars and suicide belts, and also arrested several ISIL suspects.

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### **Kenya:**

On 27 February, Kenya’s Attorney General Githu Muigai [announced](#) that Kenya had “no plans” of withdrawing from the International Criminal Court (ICC). Instead, he called on the ICC to have a “constructive engagement” with countries in Africa.

Kenya’s High Court [ordered](#) Kenya’s Immigration Department to aid in the return of opposition lawyer Dr. Miguna from Canada. Dr. Miguna was deported after participating in the mock inauguration of opposition leader Raila Odinga.

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### **Libya:**

According to a leaked report from the UN’s Libya Sanctions Committee, which is set to be submitted to the UN Security Council, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have once again [violated](#) the arms embargo on Libya that has been in place since 2011.

Dozens of Tunisian children, born in Libya to suspected Islamic State (ISIL) foreign fighters are currently being [held](#) in Mitiga prison, caught in diplomatic limbo. It appears that Libya has refused to return the children to Tunisia through the Red Cross, and is instead coordinating with Tunisia. While Libya’s Special Deterrence Forces have expressed their readiness to release the women and children, it has also indicated that such a release would be contingent on Tunisia’s official commitment to address the repatriation of all of its citizens, including suspected ISIL fighters.

At a press briefing on 23 February, Cécile Pouilly, spokesperson for the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), [stated](#) that UNHCR was concerned that armed groups were preventing hundreds of

Libyan families from returning to their homes in the city of Tawergha. A few days later, in a joint response to migration and protection challenges, the United Nations, the African Union, and the European Union have [pledged](#) to further enhance cooperation with Libyan authorities.

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## **Mali**

On 26 February, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) [published](#) its 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan for Mali, indicating that the humanitarian community in Mali requires \$263 million to respond to the 1.56 million people in need, and that 11 percent of the funds would go toward protection issues.

On 28 February, four UN peacekeepers were [killed](#) and four more were injured, after their vehicle struck an explosive device in Mopti. According to mission chief Mahamat Saleh Annadif, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) is currently upgrading its security presence in Central Mali, “concerned the terrorists are multiplying their attacks of unspeakable vileness”.

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## **Nigeria:**

On 26 February, a joint offensive by Nigerian and Cameroonian troops around the Lake Chad region, [freed](#) at least 1,130 civilians and killed 36 Boko Haram suspects, kidnapped, and authorities have [deployed](#) fighter jets, helicopters and surveillance planes to search for the missing girls. On 28 February, the Nigerian government finally [revealed](#) the names of the 110 kidnapped girls.

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## **Philippines:**

Harry Roque, President Duterte's spokesman, [said](#) that the Philippines would allow a UN investigation into the alleged human rights abuses during Duterte's "war on drugs", if the UN were to send a "credible, objective and unbiased" rapporteur. However, Mr. Roque also stated that Dr. Agnes Callamard, the current Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, did not fit this description. Upon learning of his government's potential willingness to accept a visit from a UN Special Rapporteur, President Duterte angrily [stated](#) that he would not cooperate with any UN investigator. Similarly, Duterte ordered the police and the military not to cooperate with any probe and not to "answer" any question.

On 28 February, President Duterte [stated](#) he would step down by 2020, citing his age and lack of ambition as the main reasons. This statement comes after critics accused President Duterte of trying to stay in power after he established a constitutional revision panel last month, in order to implement a federal system in the Philippines.

On Saturday 24 February, thousands [protested](#) against the alleged extrajudicial killings committed by the Philippine's government in the "war on drugs". The Catholic Church organized the march named "walk for life". On 23 February thousands of students also participated in a school walkout. In response, military officers held a countermarch in support of Duterte's policies.

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## **South Sudan:**

On 26 February, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the UN World Food Programme (WFP) [cautioned](#) that nearly two-thirds of South Sudan's population could suffer from severe food insecurity in the coming months, which entails a 40 percent increase compared to food insecurity rates in January 2017. Accordingly, the FAO, UNICEF, and the WFP called for an urgent humanitarian response and access to those in need.

On 23 February, the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan (the Commission) [published](#) a report that contained enough evidence, including witness testimony, to prosecute 40 South Sudanese officials for war crimes and crimes against humanity. This is the Commission's first [report](#) since it was mandated by the Human Rights Council to collect and preserve evidence for accountability mechanisms, including for use in the Hybrid Court, pursuant to the 2015 peace agreement. The Chairperson of the Commission, Yasmin Sooka, said that "The court could be

set up straight away and the prosecutor could begin working on indictments. Under the peace agreement those indicted can no longer hold or stand for office”, and further stated that “Ultimately this is the only way to stop the rampant devastation of millions of human lives by South Sudan’s leaders.” The Commission said it would engage in dialogue with South Sudan on the 13 March in Geneva, Switzerland. On 28 February, President Salva Kiir’s spokesperson Ateny Wek Ateny [called](#)

on the the UN to release the names of the 40 officers involved in the alleged crimes, stating that the South Sudanese government would held them accountable if the evidence were real.

In a meeting to improve bilateral relations, Sudan’s First Vice-President Bakri Hassan Salih and South Sudan’s Presidential Advisor Tut Kew Gatluak [discussed](#) opening border crossings between the two countries. The move comes after Sudan announced the restoration of border trade with South Sudan.

The rebel group Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO) [accused](#) the South Sudanese army of killing an SPLM-OI commander in an attack in the Yei area. The attack comes ahead of the resumption of peace talks in Addis Ababa. The rebel group also called on the Ceasefire Transitional Security Arrangement Monitoring Mechanism (CTSAMM) to investigate the attacks, citing fears of more attacks on rebel-held bases. Both parties signed a cease-fire agreement on 21 December 2017.

The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) [announced](#) the withdrawal of a police unit from Ghana, amid sexual assault allegations in an Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camp in Wau. The 46-member unit was relocated to the capital city of Juba. The UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) has opened an investigation into the incident. In response, Ghana’s police force [announced](#) it would fully cooperate with the investigation and requested the UN’s permission to deploy a small team to examine the incident.

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## **Sudan:**

Pramila Patten, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, [called](#) on Sudan to hold the perpetrators of sexual crimes accountable for their actions and condemned the impunity they currently enjoy in the country. She proposed a Joint Communiqué focusing on five priorities areas to address conflict-related sexual violence and providing UN support. Mrs. Patten also criticized the Prosecutor General of the Special Court in Darfur for not investigating a “single case” of conflict-related rape.

The African Union's Peace and Security Council (PSC) [urged](#) all parties to advance the peace process in South Sudan and warned of possible sanctions against "all those who continue to obstruct efforts towards lasting peace and security in Darfur." The PSC also called for armed groups to sign the Doha Document for peace in Darfur (DDPD).

Sudanese security forces [continue](#) to arrest opposition leaders and members of opposition parties, despite releasing more than 50 political detainees last week. On 23 February, the National Security and Intelligence Services (NISS) arrested the deputy chairman of the opposition Sudanese Congress Party (SCoP), as well as three members from the Sudanese Communist Party.

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## Syria:

Since the Syrian regime began its assault on Eastern Ghouta on 18 February, government air and ground strikes have [killed](#) more than 580 people and injured over 1,000.

On Saturday 24 February, after days of delay, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) finally [adopted](#) a unanimous resolution (S/RES/2401) demanding parties to cease hostilities without delay for at least 30 days, ensuring a "durable humanitarian pause" to allow for humanitarian aid to be delivered and the wounded to be medically evacuated. However, the resolution [provided](#) scant detail on when the ceasefire was to begin, how it would be enforced, and even whether all concerned parties were even aware of the ceasefire's existence. The UNSC also [noted](#) that the cease-fire would not apply to military operations against terrorist groups, including the Islamic State (ISIL), Al-Qaida, and the Al-Nusra Front.

However, very little has changed since 24 February. Within 40 hours of the UNSC's unanimous [demand](#) for an immediate 30-day ceasefire, Syrian regime forces continued to bomb Eastern Ghouta, killing at least 34 people. A suspected chlorine gas attack also killed at least one child and injured 18 more. On 28 February, UN Undersecretary for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock [told](#) the Security Council that since its decision on Saturday, the situation has gotten worse, not better, asserting there has been "More bombing. More fighting. More death. More destruction".

Additionally, Russian President Vladimir Putin appears to have unilaterally [overridden](#) the UN Security Council resolution, by instead ordering a five-hour daily truce (from 9am until 12pm) beginning as of Tuesday 26 February. Russia also [announced](#)

that it would establish a humanitarian corridor, allowing civilians to leave the rebel-held suburbs during this daily truce. Yet as of 1 March, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent has

[indicated](#)

that only one elderly Pakistani couple has been evacuated from the besieged area. No other civilians have

[left](#)

the enclave and no humanitarian aid has gone in. While Russian President Vladimir Putin blamed the rebels for preventing civilians from leaving Eastern Ghouta, residents claim they do not trust the truce. Rebels likewise

[accused](#)

the Syrian government of making it difficult for civilians to cross. Moreover the UN and aid agencies have criticized the unilateral arrangement, saying residents wishing to leave were provided no guarantees of safety. Jan Egeland, Special Advisor to the UN Special Envoy for Syria, also

[maintains](#)

that the five-hour daily pause pursuant to Russia's "unilateral" plan, is not sufficient to allow aid to come in or civilians to go out. Aid trucks are currently

[standing](#)

by, but the "humanitarian corridors" remain empty. According to Mark Lowcock, a 45-truck convoy with humanitarian aid for 90,000 people was ready to

[enter](#)

10 besieged areas in Eastern Ghouta, but the Syrian government has not yet provided permission to do so.

Despite the Security Council's resolution on Syria, Turkey has also [escalated](#) its assault on Afrin, claiming that the ceasefire does not apply to Turkish forces' "counter terrorism" operation. However, Ankara has found itself alone in asserting it need not abide by the 30-day halt in fighting. Amnesty International also claims to have

[verified](#)

witness testimony from Afrin and is of the view that Turkish troops - and to a lesser extent Kurdish forces - have used indiscriminate shellfire in civilian areas, which is prohibited by international law. According to the Kurdish Red Crescent, attacks by Turkish forces in the past month have killed 93 civilians, including 24 children. Shellfire from the People's Protection Units (YPG) has also reportedly killed four civilians in Azaz, including one child. The Turkish military has repeatedly denied allegations of targeting or hitting civilians or civilian infrastructure, as has the YPG.

On 28 February, the European Union [demanded](#) that Russia, Iran and Turkey take responsibility to ensure that the 30-day ceasefire is respected and that the Syrian people are protected.

On 26 February, during the opening of the High-Level segment of the Human Rights Council's 37th session, Zeid Ra'ad al Hussein [delivered](#) his final address as High Commissioner for Human Rights, and called on Russia, China, and the United States to join France and the United Kingdom to end the "pernicious use of the veto". Furthermore, Zeid asserted that the five permanent members of the UN Security Council were responsible for the continued suffering of

innocent people, second only to those criminally responsible for committing the atrocities. While the High Commissioner did not mention specific vetoes, he was unmistakably referring to the war in Syria, over which Russia and China have repeatedly vetoed resolutions to hold war criminal to account and punish Bashar al-Assad's government for allegedly using chemical weapons.

A panel of eight United Nations experts also found that North Korea has been [shipping](#) supplies to the Syrian government, which could be used for the production of chemical weapons and attacks against civilians.

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### **Venezuela:**

On 1 March, the Venezuelan National Electoral Council (CNE) [announced](#) a new date for the snap presidential election. The announcement comes after President Maduro met with members of some opposition parties, agreeing to reschedule the election for the second half of May. The CNE also said it had agreed to some "electoral guarantees" proposed by opposition parties. Earlier this week, the CNE also

[declared](#) that a "mega-election" would not take place, referring to a request by President Maduro to hold legislative, state, and municipal elections along with the scheduled presidential election. President of the CNE Tibisay Lucena stated that while the CNE was not capable of holding such extensive elections now, the parliamentary elections scheduled for 2020, could take place earlier than expected.

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### **Yemen:**

Over 10,000 civilians have [died](#) and more than 40,000 have been wounded since the beginning of Yemen's war three years ago.

At the Security Council on 26 February, Russia [vetoed](#) a UK-proposed draft resolution that would have linked Iran with the transfer of Iranian-made arms to Houthi militias in Yemen and would have condemned Iran's violation of the arms embargo. Following Russia's veto, the Security Council then unanimously adopted the Russian-drafted resolution, which extended an arms embargo against Yemen, but made no specific reference to Iran.

On 27 February, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, [briefed](#) the Security Council a final time before stepping down from his post. Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed expressed his concern that "the parties have continued the destructive pattern of zero-sum politics which has led the country to plunge into more poverty and destruction", and stated that decision-makers in this conflict have taken "irresponsible and provocative actions, disregarding the daily suffering of the Yemenis". He further stressed that "Parties must adhere to international law and international humanitarian law" and that "any intentional or direct attack against civilians or civilian objects is a serious violation of international humanitarian law". Also briefing the Security Council on 27 February, John Ging, the Director of Operations at the UN Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, [underscored](#) that a humanitarian response was also critical to save lives, as 8.4 million Yemeni people remained severely food insecure and 2.2 million were still displaced. Accordingly, Ging asserted that securing \$2.96 billion pursuant to the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan was a top priority.

According to Yemen's health ministry office, on 24 February, twin suicide attacks targeting Aden's counterterrorism headquarters building [killed](#) six people and injured 31 more. The Islamic State (ISIL) has since claimed responsibility for the attack.

The Saudi-led coalition's intensive three-day airstrike campaign in Hudaydah finally [ended](#) on 25 February. Reports indicate that these strikes displaced thousands of civilians and also killed dozens of Houthi fighters. However, on Tuesday 27 February, air strikes near Saada [killed](#) five civilians and wounded at least 14 more.

This week, a Yemeni government minister also [accused](#) the United Arab Emirates (UAE) of attempting to fragment Yemen by setting up regional and tribal armies in the south.

On 28 February, United States senators [introduced](#) a bipartisan draft resolution on Yemen, calling for an end to US military support for the Saudi-led coalition. The draft is being pushed forward by Senators Bernie Sanders, Mike Lee and Chris Murphy.

**Other:**

On 26 February, the Council of the European Union (EU) [adopted](#) conclusions on EU priorities at the United Nations human rights fora in 2018. Particularly in light of 2018 marking the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the EU expressed its strong support for the UN Secretary-General's pledge to raise the profile of human rights and to make prevention and sustainable peace a priority for the UN system. In this regard, the EU recalled its "commitment to implementing the Responsibility to Protect, preventing and halting human rights violations in the context of atrocities". Further, the EU reiterated its support for the International Criminal Court (ICC) and welcomed the decision to activate the ICC's jurisdiction over the crime of aggression during the Assembly of State Parties. Additionally, the EU concluded that the international community must never accept impunity, when genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, or violations and abuses of international humanitarian and international human rights law occur. To that end, the EU indicated that it would continue its long-standing efforts to end impunity, strengthen accountability, and support transitional justice.