

"Catastrophe" Looming in Aleppo as Humanitarian Situation Continues to Deteriorate

Aleppo, known as Syria's second city, continues to suffer dire humanitarian consequences as a result of the ongoing civil war in Syria. On 7 July, after an intense military campaign, the Syrian government managed to encircle rebel-held eastern Aleppo and begin a siege of the city, effectively leaving the roughly 300,000 citizens with two choices: catastrophe or surrender. Since the beginning of the siege, the residents have been victim to brutal conditions that have left food and supplies running low, while hospitals crumble under repeated airstrikes from Russia and Syria. Speaking to the situation, Cameron Hudson, Director of the Simon-Skjoldt Center for the Prevention of genocide at the United States Holocaust Museum, [stated](#) quite bluntly: “

The world is facing another Srebrenica moment

.”

However, on Saturday, the rebel coalition of Jaysh al-Fatah, which includes the newly rebranded al-Nusra, managed to break the siege of eastern Aleppo. After several days of fighting, they overran government positions and bases in the southwest of the city. Though the siege has technically been broken, the forces have failed to open up a safe corridor for civilians to escape or for use in delivering humanitarian aid. Furthermore, the [fighting](#) has now left the government-controlled western portion of Aleppo, home to 1.5 million people, cut off from the outside world. The UN has warned that the fighting has only led to the possibility of replicating the humanitarian crisis unfolding in eastern Aleppo, effectively stretching to encompass the entire city.

On Monday, the UN Security Council (UNSC)

[held](#)

an informal meeting on the humanitarian situation in Aleppo, hearing first-hand accounts of the suffering and situation of civilians in the city. The US Ambassador called on the Council to send a clear signal that all sieges in Syria need to end, calling on Russia to end its part in their facilitation. Russia, in response, has

[stated](#)

that the resumption of peace talks on Syria should not be hinged on the possibility of a ceasefire in Aleppo, stating peace talks must resume immediately with no preconditions.

Aleppo's rapid plunge into battle has killed dozens of civilians over the past several weeks, displaced thousands, and cut off clean water and electricity to 2 million people. Both the original siege of eastern Aleppo and this week's rapid uptick in fighting have taken place against a backdrop of international and domestic condemnation and humanitarian concern. Several human rights organizations have detailed how civilians under siege have suffered under the worst conditions seen in the war. Physicians for Human Rights, an NGO that tracks abuses against medical workers, has called last week the worst for medical facilities in Aleppo since the start of the war. They continued, noting that "*destroying hospitals is tantamount to signing thousands of death warrants for people now stranded in eastern Aleppo*".

In the wake of these unprecedented assaults on medical facilities, Human Rights Watch (HRW) has [called](#) for the UN Security Council to ask the Secretary-General to conduct an independent inquiry, citing that deliberate attacks against medical facilities are undeniably violations of the laws of war and should be prosecuted as war crimes. Furthermore, of the 35 remaining doctors within eastern Aleppo, 15 have [attached](#) their names to a letter written to US President Obama asking for an intervention to stop the bombing of hospitals, attacks which the doctors call deliberate in nature.

As the doctors' letter was made public, Russia announced a daily three-hour ceasefire, which went into effect on Thursday from 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. local time to allow for the delivery of humanitarian aid. However, despite the announcement, fighting has continued in the city. Furthermore, most observers consider the window of movement presented by the ceasefire as inadequate or impossible to deliver the needed [humanitarian](#) aid to the city. UN Under-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs Stephen O'Brien has continued his call for a weekly 48-hour ceasefire for Aleppo. Meanwhile, the fighting persists, including with the possible use of chlorine gas [dropped](#) by government forces on rebel-held positions in Aleppo this week, which reportedly killed four and injured many others. Such an act – if confirmed – would constitute a war crime, according to the UN special envoy for Syria. However, on both sides, Aleppo continues to suffer, with both portions of the divided city yet to receive humanitarian aid or have secure access to the outside world.

Catch up on developments in...

[Burma/Myanmar](#)

[Burundi](#)

[DRC](#)

[Iraq](#)

[Libya](#)

[Mali](#)

[Nigeria](#)

[South Sudan](#)

[Sudan/Darfur](#)

[Syria](#)

[Yemen](#)

Burma/Myanmar: Myanmar State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi has [set](#) the date for the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference to begin on 31 August. The five-day conference will host multiple armed ethnic groups in efforts to hold peace talks to end the ongoing violence in Myanmar. However, three ethnic armies have rejected the national military's call to disarm and have [refused](#) to lay down their arms to participate in the Peace Conference. The three groups, the Arakan Army (AA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and the Palaung State Liberation Front/ Ta'ang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA), did not sign last year's ceasefire agreement.

Burundi: The UN Committee on Torture has [expressed](#) grave concern after four Burundian lawyers were threatened with disbarment for contributing to a report by the Committee on Burundi, which is set to be released on Friday. A Burundi prosecutor has [alleged](#) multiple offenses against the lawyers, including being involved in an attempted coup. The same day, the Burundi government [stated](#) it would not participate in any further dialogue with the UN Committee.

Democratic Republic of the Congo: On 7 August, armed groups [killed](#) at least 14 people in separate attacks in the troubled eastern region of Kivu. In the deadliest attack, members of

the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR)

[torched](#)

60 houses in the village of Kibirizi, killing seven people. Mai-Mai tribal militants were also implicated in

[attacks](#)

that left seven more dead and scorched a total of 150 homes in villages throughout northern Kivu.

A senior Human Rights Watch (HRW) researcher, Ida Sawyer, has been

[blocked](#)

by the DRC government from continuing work in the country. Sawyer's work permit was revoked in "the government's latest attempt to curtail human rights reporting during a period of increased government repression," according to HRW.

Gaza/West Bank: On Tuesday, Israel [announced](#) that a Palestinian official working for the UN Development Program is charged with assisting Hamas. Waheed Al Borsh allegedly confessed to using the international aid organisation in order to build a jetty for Hamas naval forces. This is the second incident of this nature. Last week, Israeli security officials discovered evidence suggesting that the head of World Vision was diverting money from the charity to Hamas. These allegations [have](#) prompted increased scrutiny of Gaza aid groups.

Iraq: August 9th [marked](#) the two-year anniversary of the first US airstrikes against ISIL. Since that time, the US-led international coalition against ISIL has made 14,000 airstrikes against the terrorist organization, with the overwhelming majority undertaken by the US in Iraq.

Mercy Corps has released a statement

[warning](#)

that in addition to the estimated 70,000 people who have been displaced in recent fighting between Iraqi forces and ISIL in central Iraq, the group expects a further 200,000 people to become displaced over the next two weeks as they flee their homes for safety prior to the government assault on Mosul.

Over the weekend, ISIL

[allegedly](#)

executed 61 civilians in the town of Hawijah, in Iraq's northern Kirkuk province, for attempting to flee from ISIL captivity. The dead are believed to belong to the estimated 1,900-3,000 civilians that ISIL is believed to be forcibly holding for use as human shields in the area after their capture last week.

On Sunday, a triple-suicide-bombing carried out by ISIL near Qayyara, 50 km north of Mosul, [killed](#) 10 Iraqi security members.

The Iraqi Defense Ministry has stated that Defense Minister Khaled al-Obeidi [survived](#) an attempted assassination, by mortar attack, while surveying troops preparing for the liberation of Mosul.

On Wednesday, unidentified militants [blew](#) up an oil well in the province of Kirkuk in northern Iraq. The same day, several separate attacks on the [outskirts](#) of Baghdad left ten people dead and scores wounded. The majority of the deaths took place in the town of Latifiyah, where four soldiers and three civilians died when a suicide-bomber struck an army checkpoint.

On Thursday, a car-bomb in the southern Iraqi city of Samawah [killed](#) two policemen.

Libya: On Tuesday, Libyan and US officials [confirmed](#) the presence of US special operations troops on the ground helping Libya's unity government fight ISIL.

In a joint statement [released](#) on Wednesday, Western countries expressed concern about tensions around the Zueitina oil port. The states, which include the U.S., France and Britain, urged for a return of oil and gas infrastructure control to the government.

This week, Libyan pro-government forces [liberated](#) most of the city of Sirte, which has been under the control of ISIL since 2015. Libyan forces were able to [seize](#)

the Ouagadougou complex - the jihadist group's headquarters - with the help of airstrikes from U.S. drones and fighter jets. Moktar Khalifa, mayor of Sirte, reportedly stated that "Sirte is 70 percent free, it will soon be completely free."

On Thursday, it was reported that French special forces [have](#) withdrawn from Benghazi.

Mali: A string of attacks that began over the weekend in Mali and lasted into Monday, have [left](#) several people dead, including one UN peacekeeper. Several other peacekeepers sustained injuries on Sunday when their vehicle struck a mine buried in the road.

In a separate event, an Ansar Dine member [died](#) in an attack on the Malian army that also left five soldiers [missing](#) and possibly drowned as five bodies have been recovered from a nearby river, but whose identities have yet to be confirmed.

On Tuesday, [clashes](#) erupted between ex-rebels from the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA) and members of the pro-government group, GATIA. The fighting continued through Wednesday.

In a recent interview, Mali's ex-foreign minister, Tiebile Drame, [called](#) for a national dialogue to take place. Mr. Drame is currently the president of the main opposition party in Mali, the Party for National Renaissance (PARENA). While welcoming the peace agreement signed in 2015, he has cited the recent uptick in violence in urging the government to convene a national dialogue.

Nigeria: On 9 August, gunmen dressed as priests [killed](#) three Nigerian Army soldiers in Nigeria's southern oil state of Bayelsa.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

[commended](#)

the EU's recent 50 million Euro contribution to the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF), led by the Lake Chad Basin countries. Ban also commended the work of the MNJTF countries "for the significant progress achieved in combating the terrorist threat posed by Boko Haram."

South Sudan: *Political Developments* After the announcement that South Sudan had [agreed](#)

to the deployment of a regional force by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), on Sunday, the US began circulating a draft resolution to the UNSC that would provide a mandate for a 4,000 member deployment to secure the capital of Juba. However, South Sudan

[has](#)

both rejected the US's proposal, which also includes an arms embargo, and has denied that South Sudan had been consulted on or agreed to such a regional force. Over the past week, South Sudan has noticeably decreased its cooperation with the UN, seizing the passports of 86 UN workers and denying the UN access to any part of the country south of the capital, which is in clear violation of the UN's operating arrangement in the country.

Developments in the Fighting

On 7 August, the governor of Gbudue, Patrick Zamoi,

[survived](#)

an assassination attempt in which gunmen opened fire on his convoy.

On 9 August, the SPLA and SPLM-IO forces loyal to ex-First Vice President Machar engaged in

[fighting](#)

in the town of Yei, near South Sudan's border with Uganda. The fighting erupted after SPLM-IO forces allegedly seized control of Lasu county, located to the southwest of Yei.

The Humanitarian Situation

On 8 August, Amnesty International

[publicly](#)

released its submission, entitled "South Sudan: Conflict and Impunity", for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of South Sudan, which will take place in November. In the

[submission](#)

, Amnesty International attempts to highlight the failings of the human rights regime in South Sudan as well as the overall state of impunity that exists for any who commit violations of

international human rights and humanitarian law in the country.

On 10 August, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) released its latest report on the outflows of refugees from South Sudan. The NRC

[warns](#)

that the number of South Sudanese fleeing to Uganda has reached the pace of 2,000 per day, with 70,000 already having fled in the past 20 days. The NRC expects that at least another 80,000 will flee by the end of the year.

Sudan/Darfur: On 8 August, Sudanese President Bashir [announced](#) that he will free all political prisoners prior to the start of the General Conference of the National Dialogue on 10 October in the lead up to the official signing of the AU-Roadmap for Peace by the opposition. Sudan Call, an umbrella group

[representing](#)

several Sudanese rebel movements, signed the AU-Roadmap Agreement for Peace in Sudan the same day. The signing has been heralded by the Troika, the United States, United Kingdom and Norway, as “a laudable commitment to ending the conflicts in Sudan and

[moving](#)

towards a process of dialogue as a basis for lasting peace in their country.” Immediately after the signing, negotiations

[began](#)

over an initial and eventual permanent ceasefire

[between](#)

the government and the signatories as well as for the delivery of humanitarian aid to rebel-held regions.

On Monday, five people died in a Sudanese government airstrike on the town of Kabe in Darfur’s Jebel Marra region. Another child died in renewed bombings the following day.

Syria: *Developments in the Fighting* As the battle for Aleppo [continues](#), the city is seeing the influx of hundreds of foreign fighters. On Monday, Iranian media announced that more Shi’ite militia fighters from from both Lebanon and Iraq are soon set to arrive in the area, with 1,000 Hezbollah fighters from Lebanon alleged to have already arrived on Sunday.

Over the weekend, several airstrikes on hospitals in Idlib province

[left](#)

10 people dead, while incendiary bombs, believed to be dropped by Russia,

[struck](#)

Idlib city.

On Sunday, ISIL launched an attack

[involving](#)

multiple suicide bombers on the US-backed rebel group, New Syrian Army (NSA), at the al Tanf border crossing between Syria and Iraq.

After 69 days, the US-backed Syria Democratic Forces (SDF) have

[managed](#)

to completely free the city of Manbij in northern Syria from ISIL. As Manbij begins to look towards a post-ISIL future, more than 60 local Arab tribes have

[begun](#)

meetings to discuss the future of the city.

On 10 August, Russian air strikes

[targeting](#)

the capital of ISIL's supposed caliphate, Raqqa, allegedly killed at least 30 people and left close to 100 wounded. Separately, 11 people

[died](#)

in airstrikes by the Syrian government on the town of Ariha in Idlib province.

The Humanitarian Situation

On 8 August, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights

[released](#)

the latest tally of the dead in Syria's 5-year civil war. The Observatory stated that from March 2011 - 1 August 2016, 292,817 people had died in the conflict.

Political Developments

Turkey will

[shortly](#)

be sending a negotiating team to Russia to discuss the ongoing war in Syria, including the possibility of a ceasefire,

[increased](#)

delivery of humanitarian aid, and a reigniting of the political process to end the war. Despite appearing to be on opposite sides in the conflict, Turkey and Russia are attempting a normalization of relations after a steady deterioration over the past year.

Having reached an

[agreement](#)

last August to assist the Syrian government in the country's civil war, Russian President Vladimir Putin has submitted a plan to the Russian legislature that would approve the indefinite residence of the Russian air force in Syria.

Yemen: On Sunday, four children [were](#) reportedly killed and three more were injured in Yemen's Nihm district, which lies east of the capital. UNICEF has deplored the killing of these children and has urged all belligerent parties to adhere to international humanitarian law and avoid civilian infrastructure.

On Tuesday, UNICEF [released](#) a statement claiming that 1,121 children have perished since March 2015, as a result of the ongoing conflict in Yemen.

Airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition in Sana'a

[killed](#)

at least 14 civilians early this week. Jets targeted a potato factory in the Nahda district, situated inside an army maintenance camp. On Thursday, in the third day of airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition, warplanes reportedly

[struck](#)

the Al-Dailami airbase and a military school, both in the Yemeni capital, Sana'a.

Yemen's prime minister has

[praised](#)

the support of the United Arab Emirates throughout recent conflict and fledgling peace talks.

This week, the U.S.

[stated](#)

its intention to rearm Saudi Arabia with \$1.5 billion in military equipment, including with technical and intelligence support, in order to support the war against shiite militias in Yemen.