

UN Warns of New Syria Refugee Flow Into Europe

NEW YORK (Dispatches) – The United Nations has warned that Europe should anticipate droves of Syrian refugees if aid programs in Syria’s neighboring countries and other places are not sustained.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said that if enough support was not provided to around 5.3 million Syrian refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Egypt, countries in Europe would have to await an exodus like the one that rocked the continent in 2015.

“We had the experience of 2015, we don’t want to repeat that,” said Amin Awad, the director of the UNHCR’s Middle East and North Africa bureau, while briefing reporters on the details of the UN body’s \$4.63-billion appeal for 2017.

Awad said only 53 percent of the UNHCR’s appeal for aid to Syrian refugees had been received, adding that an acute shortage of services like the one that affected Syrian refugees in 2015 could force them toward European borders.

UNHCR figures show that more than a million refugees arrived in Europe in 2015 with around



A Syrian refugee holds a pamphlet as he waits to register his name at the Zaatari office for employment on October 4, 2017 at the Zaatari refugee camp, 80 kilometers (50 miles) north of the Jordanian capital, Amman.

half of them people fleeing war in Syria. The European Union, which initially adopted a welcoming and humanitarian gesture toward the refugees, then managed to cut the flow through a deal with Turkey.

Awad said vital programs providing

food, health care, education and shelter to Syrian refugees is facing cutbacks due to shortfalls in funding.

“That means we’re not able to provide stoves, we are not able to deliver kerosene, we are not able to deliver enough thermal blankets

... People are sitting in cold, open buildings,” said the UN official, adding, “Now the material assistance is left to the donors and international community... And that’s not coming through. So we have to be prepared for consequences.”

Jordanians Protest in Front of U.S. Embassy in Amman

AMMAN (Dispatches) – Jordanians on Wednesday held a protest in front of the U.S. embassy in Amman against President Donald Trump’s decision to recognize as the capital of the Zionist regime.

The Jordanian demonstrators chanted slogans against the U.S. and the decision, and stressed on the Arabic identity of the holy city.

“This is a stab to the entire peace process. We do not accept this decision and we will continue to protest because this decision will destroy the future of Palestine and will increase tension,” Samhan Ali, one of the demonstrators, told

Xinhua Wednesday.

Mahmoud Sweilem, another protester, said he will continue to join demonstrations in rejection of the decision.

“We want all Arabs and Muslims to take a serious action towards this decision,” said Sweilem.

The Muslim Brotherhood and several political parties called for holding a one-million man protest on Friday in downtown Amman in rejection of the U.S. decision.

Jordan, a key U.S. ally in the Middle East, rejected the decision and is exerting efforts at all fronts to reach a solution.

Another Saudi ‘Hate Preacher’ Banned in Denmark

COPENHAGEN (Press TV) – Denmark’s Immigration Authority has added a Saudi cleric to a blacklist of “hate preachers” banned from entering the European country.

Saudi cleric Abdullah bin Radi Almoaede Alshammary was added to the Danish list, which already included 10 other “hate preachers.” Danish paper Jyllands-Posten reported Tuesday.

The country’s Minister for Immigration Inger Stojberg welcomed the announcement.

“Hate preachers have no business being in Denmark. They travel around spreading hateful messages and try to convince others to share their rapturous views,” he said. “That’s why I’m glad to see that the Immigration Authority is doing a good job by continually discovering these hate preachers.”

First published in May, the list comprised six names, including two Saudis, one Syrian, one Canadian, and two Americans. Other names were added in June.

In an alliance with the Riyadh government, clerics in Saudi Arabia freely preach Wahhabism — a radical strand of ideology notorious for its lack of tolerance.

That ideology is practiced by radical

militant and terrorist groups in the Middle East, including Daesh, which has also managed to carry out terrorist attacks on targets in Europe and America.

Daesh began an offensive in Iraq and Syria roughly in 2014. But national armies and allied forces in both countries recently retook all the territory the terrorist group had overrun.

The London-based New Arab news website cited an Iraqi Interior Ministry official as saying recently that Saudi nationals comprised the biggest number of the foreign terrorists arrested during Iraqi army operations against the outfit in the country’s northern and western parts.

Female Afghan Officers Receive Military Training in India



The undated photo shows female Afghan soldiers during training.

KABUL (Press TV) – Nearly two dozen female Afghan officers are receiving weapons training at a military academy in southern India.

Media reports said Wednesday that the women had learned tactics and logistical and navigational skills at the academy in the southern Indian city of Chennai.

This week they were taught how to use an AK-47 and given classroom training in ambush situations. They will also learn how to deal with computer-simulated sieges during the three-week crash course, which ends on December 24.

The course is reported to be a pilot for a full training scheme being planned for next year as part of efforts by the Afghan National Army to recruit more women.

They are the first Afghan women to attend the academy, which has been

training men from the war-ravaged country’s military for several years.

The Kabul government has said that it wants women to make up 10 percent of the armed forces.

Afghan women face the danger of fighting in their homeland. Those who sign up say they face criticism for their choice.

Afghan girls were banned from education and women were not allowed outside under the Taliban’s 1996-2001 regime in Afghanistan.

Gender equality remains a distant dream across Afghanistan, in spite of official promises.

The United States invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 after the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, and overthrew the Taliban regime.

But insecurity remains in the country despite the presence of foreign forces.

New UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon in Beirut

BEIRUT (Xinhua) – The United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL) Pernille Dahler Kardel arrived in Beirut to take up her new position, a press release by the United Nations said.

Kardel was received Tuesday night by an official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at Beirut Rafik Hariri international

airport.

“I am delighted to begin my new functions in Lebanon and I look forward to working with Lebanese and international partners and the rest of the UN family in support of Lebanon’s peace and security, stability and socio-economic development,” Kardel said according to the release.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres announced the appointment of Kardel on November 22.

Kardel, from Denmark, has 25 years of experience in diplomacy, political affairs, international cooperation and economic development, spanning several continents.

Al-Quds ...

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Abbas slammed the recognition by Trump of Jerusalem Al-Quds as the capital of Israel as a “gift” to the “Zionist movement” as if he “were giving away an American city,” adding that Washington no longer had any role to play in the Middle East “peace” process.

At a post-summit news conference flanked by Abbas and OIC Secretary General Yousef al-Othaimeen, Erdogan said, “Today’s summit was a message of decisiveness towards U.S. provocation. There is no need (for them) to continue with a mistake.”

“We repeatedly warned the United States that it was plunging the region into fire with that wrong decision.”

Saudi Snub?

But bridging the gaps in a Muslim political community was always a tall order, let alone announcing any concrete measures agreed between the 57 OIC member states.

Several key players, like Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, were unlikely to want to risk their key relationship with Washington for the sake of an anti-Washington OIC statement.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, Jordanian King Abdullah II and Lebanese President Michel Aoun were among the heads of state present, as well as the emirs of Qatar and Kuwait and presidents of Afghanistan and Indonesia.

The level of Saudi representation -- critical if the final statement is to carry long-term credibility -- was only at the level of a senior foreign ministry official.

“Some countries in our region are in cooperation with the United States and the Zionist regime and determining the fate of Palestine,” seethed Rouhani, whose country does not recognize Israel and has dire relations with Saudi Arabia.

He said Trump’s decision shows that the United States lacks any respect for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian nation. Rouhani also said on his Twitter account that the move showed that the U.S. was not “an honest mediator and will never be,” adding that Washington only wanted to “secure the interests of the Zionists.”

A surprise guest was Venezuela’s President Nicolas Maduro whose country has no significant Muslim population but is a bitter critic of U.S. policy.

As the OIC released its draft statement, Palestinians clashed with Zionist troops around Hebron (Al-Khalil), in the occupied West Bank. The Mista’arvim, Israeli spies disguised as protesters, kidnapped demonstrators near the illegal settlement of Beit El, north of Ramallah.

In Al-Birah, also near Ramallah, Israeli troops fired rubber coated bullets and tear gas at Palestinian protesters. And in Khan Younis, in the Gaza Strip, Palestinian protesters managed to scale the barrier fence as they confronted Israeli troops.

The OIC warned the U.S. it would be responsible for the consequences of its decision, without expanding on what those consequences would be.

The draft communique also called Israeli actions and policies “colonial” and “racist”.

The OIC also expressed its unequivocal support for the just struggle of the Palestinians and condemned Israeli attacks on peaceful

protests.

The strongly worded document also called on the UN Security Council to step in and act against Trump’s decision.

Zionist ...

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In November, Israeli military chief of staff Gadi Eisenkot said in an interview with the same website Katz spoke to that Tel Aviv was prepared to cooperate with Saudi Arabia to face Iran’s plans “to control the Middle East.”

Arab countries have not made similar statements publicly and continue to criticize the occupying regime of Israel over its 50-year occupation of Palestinian territory.

U.S. President Donald Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem Al-Quds as Israel’s capital last week has drawn sharp criticism from Saudi Arabia.

King Salman said Wednesday that Palestinians have the right to Israeli-annexed East Jerusalem Al-Quds as their capital.

Only two Arab countries -- Jordan and Egypt -- have peace treaties with Israel.

In Katz’s interview on Wednesday, he also issued a warning to Lebanon and Hezbollah. The Zionist regime and Hezbollah fought a war in 2006 and often trade warnings.

Katz said if Hezbollah initiates a war against Israel, “this time all of Lebanon will be a target.”

“What happened in 2006 would be a picnic compared to what could happen... I say Lebanon will return to the stone age.”

French ...

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Former LafargeHolcim CEO Eric Olsen resigned in April after the company admitted it had paid armed groups to keep a factory operating in Syria. His lawyer has said Olsen will appeal against the probe.

Sherpa and other human rights groups in France as well as the French Finance Ministry have filed law suits against Lafarge.

Sherpa wants the company to be placed under formal criminal investigation, like Olsen, and also accuses Lafarge of not cooperating with authorities and trying to hide important details from the investigation.

A LafargeHolcim spokeswoman on Tuesday rejected these accusations, but would not comment on the \$15 million figure.

“LafargeHolcim fully cooperates with the justice (authorities). Thousands of documents have been given by the group to magistrates or seized during a search,” she said.

Being placed under formal investigation in France means that prosecutors believe they have “serious or consistent evidence” that could result in prosecution. It is a step towards a possible trial, though the investigation can still be dropped.

Last Friday the Paris prosecutor also placed Olsen’s predecessor as CEO, Bruno Lafont, and his ex-deputy for operations under formal investigation as part of the inquiry into Lafarge activities in Syria, the two men’s lawyers said.

“Unacceptable errors were made which the company regrets and condemns,” LafargeHolcim’s chairman Beat Hess told French daily Le Figaro last week.

He added that Lafarge “probably pulled out of Syria too late”.

Iraqis ...

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“The situation in Iraq was terrible - the army was collapsing, politicians had fled the country with their families and every day we helplessly watched footage on TV of Daesh destroying buildings, massacring the army and persecuting Christians and Yazidis.”

“The fatwa actually came as a huge relief and inspired people to gather their courage to start fighting Daesh. Overnight, the atmosphere in Iraq changed from one of fear and despair to one of hope and determination.”

While the forces are predominantly Shia, the force has separate battalions of Sunni Muslims, Turkmen and Christians. According to the head of Hashd media team Muhunnad Najam al-Aqabi, the 140,000-strong force currently includes 34,000 Sunni fighters and about 10,000 from Iraq’s minority faiths, including Christians, Shabaks and Yazidis.

It also welcomed Sunni fighters from areas which were not just Daesh strongholds but which had fostered a large Al-Qaeda presence for over a decade.

“The Hashd was the only organization who really gave Sunni Iraqis the opportunity to fight Daesh,” said the head of the Hashd’s Sunni Salahadin Brigade, Yazan al-Jiboury. “One of the most important victories of the Hashd has been to unify Iraq, irrespective of sect, ethnicity or religion.”

The Hashd has the idiosyncrasy of effectively being a voluntary force. Its fighters receive a token sum of less than \$500 per month (although the Iraqi government has just voted in favor of a new law to raise the current wages) in stark contrast to the country’s other armed forces, whose monthly wages range from about \$1,000 to \$2,000.

Most Hashd fighters view their role as a dual one of national duty and holy jihad against a terrorist group that threatened their country and its people.

“Jihad is a sacred concept which Daesh took advantage of. They have given the world a terrible image of jihad, Muslims and Islam,” said Sheikh Alaa al-Shabaki al-Mosuli, carrying a Kalashnikov on the frontline of an offensive to retake the historic desert town of Hatra earlier this year.

One of about 10 sheikhs fighting at Hatra, he said the religious men had taken up arms only to help bring peace to Iraq.

“Our jihad is to protect our country and our innocent people and to defend humanity,” he said. “If Daesh had not been pushed back by our jihad, they would be in control of much larger areas and have killed many more innocent people.”

In downtown Fallujah in early November, 22-year-old Mohammed Bassem approached a group of local officials to make a complaint about Iraq’s national police who, he said, were treating local residents with disrespect, laboring under a long-held idea in the country that Fallujah was a breeding ground for terrorists.

“The national police haven’t been treating us with humanity,” he said. “They are not like the Hashd. You know, we really expected the Hashd to treat us in a bad and criminal way but, after liberation, we found them to be very nice and helpful, and they have also provided us with a lot of services.

“All this bad stuff about the Hashd was just media propaganda. I have not heard of anyone locally having problems with the Hashd.

“The only problems we’ve had here are with Iraq’s national police.”

Muhandis said America never believed that a powerful local volunteer force could emerge in Iraq to battle and destroy Daesh.

But, more than three years after its establishment and after considerable sacrifice - Hashd spokesman Ahmed al-Asadi told MEE that 7,678 Hashd fighters had been killed and more than 14,000 injured - that is exactly what the force has become, with its leaders said to be among the most powerful men in Iraq.

While the force remains under control of the Iraqi government, headed by Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi as its commander in chief, it seems unlikely that the position of the Hashd in Iraq will be undermined by external influences.