

UNITED NATIONS PRESS RELEASE



For immediate release

Statement by Adama Dieng, United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, on the situation in Raqqah, Syrian Arab Republic

(New York, 30 August 2017) United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide Adama Dieng expressed deep concern at the deteriorating situation of civilians trapped in the fighting in Raqqah.

“I am deeply disturbed by reports coming out of Raqqah of the horrendous situation faced by civilians caught up in the offensive to retake the city from the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The city is under intense bombardment by international counter-ISIL coalition forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). In addition, ISIL is reportedly using civilians as human shields.”

Up to 25 000 civilians remain trapped in the parts of Raqqah still controlled by ISIL. In addition to the terrible situation they face in the city, ISIL is reportedly killing those who try to escape, and coalition forces are targeting boats on the Euphrates river, which had been one of the remaining escape routes for civilians. At the same time, civilians in the areas south of the Euphrates river are reportedly facing indiscriminate attacks by Syrian government forces and their allies during military operations to retake the area.

“I urge all parties to adhere to their obligations under international human rights and international humanitarian law, in particular their responsibility to take all possible measures to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure and to ensure that all military action, including airstrikes, are proportionate and comply with international law. The legitimate aim of retaking Raqqah must not be achieved at such a high cost to civilians” the Special Advisor said.

The Special Advisor reiterated calls for a humanitarian pause to spare civilian lives. “As the offensive to retake Raqqah reaches its final stages, the fighting is likely to intensify, as will the risks faced by civilians still trapped in the city. I urge all parties and the international community as a whole to ensure the protection of civilians trapped in Raqqah and to take all possible steps to allow them to leave safely.”

* * * * *

For media queries please contact:

Maria Westergren, Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect
<http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/>
Phone: +1 212 963-6241; Email: maria.westergren@un.org