

Iran spends over \$10b annually to meet Afghan migrants' needs: *UN envoy*

World to blame for failing to support Tehran

International Desk

Iran's UN envoy said over six million Afghan nationals currently live in Iran as the Islamic Republic spends over \$10 billion annually to meet their needs amid the international community's indifference to the issue.

Amir Saeid Iravani made the remarks in an address to a UN Security Council meeting on Thursday on the situation in Afghanistan.

He criticized the international community for failing to support Iran in the face of problems stemming from the crisis in neighboring Afghanistan.

Iravani said Iran has shouldered a disproportionate share of problems stemming from Afghanistan's crisis, especially after the US withdrawal in 2021.

The Iranian diplomat said all efforts must focus on enabling refugees' return by strengthening Afghanistan's capacity to

provide housing, jobs, and essential services.

"Iran is committed to actively supporting Afghanistan's political, economic, and social reconstruction, working towards a brighter future for its people while promoting regional peace and security. Western countries, whose prolonged occupation and abrupt withdrawal plunged Afghanistan into crisis, have a moral, legal and political obligation to contribute meaningfully to the country's rebuilding efforts," he said.

Afghanistan is still reeling from a decades-long US occupation and its hasty withdrawal which resulted in the country's lightning takeover by the Taliban.

"The irresponsible withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan in August 2021 has led to widespread migration from Afghanistan, placing significant pressure on Iran, which was already under unilateral and illegal sanctions", Iravani

said.

Iravani urged the international community to provide adequate and sustainable support to countries like Iran and Pakistan, which are facing ongoing challenges related to Afghanistan.

He highlighted a recent report from the UN Secretary-General regarding severe economic and humanitarian challenges in Afghanistan, noting that 23.7 million people, particularly women and children, still require urgent assistance.

"This situation poses a serious concern for neighboring countries directly affected by the humanitarian crisis," the Iranian diplomat said.

He also expressed Iran's deep concern about the ongoing drugs problem in Afghanistan, increasing threat posed by the terror group Daesh-Khorasan, restrictive measures against girls, women, and ethnic minorities in Afghanistan. Iran's Interior Minister Eskan-



IRNA

dar Momeni recently said the country has no capacity to host more migrants.

Iran has recently begun to repatriate illegal Afghan refugees

living in Iran.

The number of illegal immigrants in Iran is unofficially estimated to be around 10 million, with many seeking better

economic opportunities or fleeing conflict in their home country, especially since the 2021 takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban.

UN chief calls for Israel's withdrawal from Golan buffer zone

United Nations chief António Guterres called for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the demilitarized zone in the strategically important Golan Heights in Syria.

Guterres said in a statement on Thursday that he was "deeply concerned by the recent and extensive violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

"The Secretary-General is particularly concerned over the hundreds of Israeli airstrikes on several locations in Syria," the statement added, calling for urgent de-escalation "on all fronts, throughout Syria."

"On Sunday, Israel troops seized land inside Syria's Golan Heights, adjacent to the territory it already illegally occupies there, just hours after militants swept president Bashar al-Assad from power.

Since then, the Israeli military has also launched hundreds of air and naval strikes against Syrian military assets, targeting everything to prevent them from falling into the hands of militants.

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz ordered the military to "prepare to remain" throughout the winter in the UN-patrolled buffer zone that is supposed to separate Israeli and Syrian forces on the Golan Heights.

"Due to the situation in Syria, it is of critical security importance to maintain our presence at the summit of Mount Hermon, and everything must be done to ensure the (army's) readiness on-site to enable the fighters to stay there despite the challenging weather conditions," Katz's spokesman said in a statement on Friday.

Israel's measures in Syria have drawn reactions from many regional countries.

Iran, Qatar and the UAE on Thursday called for safeguarding Syria's national sovereignty and territorial integrity and stopping Israel aggression against the country.

They also stressed the need for serious efforts and action to bring an end to Israel's attacks on Syria's infrastructure.

It came after Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi held separate phone calls with his Emirati and Qatari counterparts to discuss the issue.

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps also said in a statement that the US and Israel are using Syria's instability to destroy its infrastructure. The Arab League also condemned Israel's "illegal actions" in Syria.

Israel condemned over Gaza journalists 'massacre'

Israel has been accused of carrying out a "massacre" of journalists in Gaza in two separate reports from media freedom organizations this week that analyzed the deaths of reporters worldwide this year.

According to calculations from Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF) published on Thursday, the Israeli army killed 18 journalists as they were working this year - 16 in Gaza and two in Lebanon - around a third of the total worldwide of 54, AFP reported.

"Palestine is the most dangerous country for journalists, recording a higher death toll than any other country over the past five years," RSF said in its annual report, which covers data up to December 1.

The organization has filed four complaints with the International Criminal Court (ICC) for "war crimes committed against journalists by the Israeli army". It said that in total "more than 145" journalists had been killed by the Israeli army in Gaza since the start of the war there in October 2023, with 35 of them working at the time of their deaths.

RSF described the number of killings as "an unprecedented massacre".

With foreign reporters prevented from entering the territory and local reporters being deliberately targeted, Gaza



Mexican journalists take part in a demonstration of solidarity with the colleagues detained, disappeared, and killed in Gaza in Guadalajara, Mexico, on December 5, 2024.

ULISES RUIZ/AFP

was "a place where journalism itself is threatened with extinction", RSF said. In a separate report published Tuesday, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) said that 104 journalists were killed worldwide in 2024, with more than half of them in Gaza.

The IFJ and RSF figures vary because of different methodologies used to calculate the tolls, but the IFJ used similar language to condemn Israel's military. "The war in Gaza and Lebanon once again highlights the massacre suffered by Palestinian (55), Lebanese (6) and Syrian (1) media professionals, representing 60 percent of all journalists killed in 2024," the IFJ said.

IAEA says Iran okays enhanced oversight at Fordo nuclear site

International Desk

Iran agreed to additional monitoring measures by the UN nuclear watchdog at its Fordo enrichment plant, after it announced plans to significantly increase its production of highly enriched uranium at the site, the agency said in a report seen by AFP on Friday.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said last week that Iran had revamped its Fordo Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP), south of Tehran.

The changes would "significantly increase the rate of production of uranium enriched up to 60 percent," the agency said.

The rate of production will jump to more than 34 kilograms of highly enriched uranium per month, compared to 4.7 kilograms pre-

viously, it added.

The IAEA called on Iran to implement inspections urgently, while European powers pressed Tehran to "immediately halt its nuclear escalation."

"Iran agreed to the Agency's request to increase the frequency and intensification of safeguards measures at FFEP," the IAEA said in a confidential report seen by AFP.

Iran insists on its right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and has denied any ambition of developing weapons capability.

IAEA chief Rafael Grossi told AFP last week that Iran's expansion of enrichment was "a clear message that they are responding to what they feel is pressure."

Iran said last month that it would launch "new and

advanced" centrifuges in response to an IAEA resolution that censured Tehran for what the agency called lack of cooperation.

Nuclear tensions between Iran and the West have been simmering since Donald Trump withdrew from a landmark 2015 deal with Tehran during his first term as the US president, which had exchanged sanctions relief for limits on its nuclear program.

In 2019, Iran started to roll back the limits it had accepted under the deal after the other parties, especially the European ones, failed to live up to their commitments.

The agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was signed between Iran, the UK, China, France, Germany, Russia, and the US. Under the terms of the

JCPOA, which was endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2231, all previous UN sanctions related to Iran's nuclear program can be re-imposed in the event of "significant non-performance by Iran of JCPOA commitments" (the snapback provisions).

Britain, France and Germany have told the United Nations Security Council that they are ready - if necessary - to trigger the so-called "snapback" of all international sanctions.

They will lose the ability to take such action on Oct. 18 next year when a 2015 UN resolution expires. The resolution enshrines Iran's deal with Britain, Germany, France, the United States, Russia and China that lifted sanctions on Tehran in exchange for restrictions on its nuclear program.

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