

UN agency reports 65 million people are refugees worldwide

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22 June 2016

The number of people around the globe displaced by war, armed conflict and persecution at the end of 2015 was higher than ever before. A report titled Global Trends, published on World Refugee Day by the UNHCR, counted 65.3 million displaced persons, the first time it has surpassed 60 million since the collection of figures began in 1951.

Compared to the previous year, the number of people forced to flee rose by 5.8 million. Compared to 2011, when the UN refugee agency reported a new record of 42.5 million, the number has risen by more than 50 percent.

Although the document fails to name those responsible for this global humanitarian crisis, it demonstrates very clearly the extent of the suffering and persecution caused by the continuous wars waged by the US and its Western European allies over the past two-and-a-half decades in the name of human rights and combatting terrorism.

According to the UNHCR, 12.4 million people were forced to flee their homes last year, of which 8.6 million sought refuge within their own countries and are now dependent on aid to survive as internally displaced people. Every minute, 24 people were driven from their homes, or 34,000 per day.

The number forced to flee from persecution, armed conflict, rampant violence or human rights violations surpassed the population of Britain or France. A fictional “nation of refugees” would come in 21st place in a list of the states with the largest populations. Today, one out of every 113 people is either an asylum seeker, internally displaced or a refugee.

In each of the categories into which the UN divides refugees, new tragic records were reached. Internally displaced people now number 40.8 million; there are 3.2 million waiting on the outcome of asylum

applications and 21.3 million were forced to flee their country of origin as refugees. More than half of all refugees are children and young people. The number of unaccompanied children seeking asylum as refugees has trebled to 98,000.

A list of the main countries of origin for refugees sheds a stark light on the crimes of the imperialist powers, which have laid waste to wide areas of the Middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Africa, thereby provoking the global refugee crisis.

By financing and providing military support to Islamist forces, the US encouraged the outbreak of a civil war in Syria in 2011 which created the conditions for the establishment of ISIS. Together with the US-led air strikes on ISIS militias, which in turn treat the local population with brutality, the war for regime change has forced more than 11.6 million people to flee in the past five years. Out of a total population of 20 million, every second Syrian is a refugee.

From Afghanistan, where the US led a military invasion in 2001 as part of a “war on terror” that destroyed large areas of the country, 2.7 million people fled across the country’s borders and 1.2 million have become internally displaced. The war in Iraq has to date forced 4.9 million from their homes, the majority of which are cared for internally by the UNHCR.

The UN report focused in particular on the rapidly worsening situation in Yemen. Within a year, almost 10 percent of the population has been forced to flee. Around 2.5 million are internally displaced, while 169,900 have fled abroad. The reason for this is the war waged by Saudi Arabia, the United States’ closest ally in the region. After Houthi rebels overthrew the Saudi and US-backed President Abed Rabbo Mansur Hadi in January 2015, Saudi Arabia intervened with air strikes and ground troops, resulting in the deaths of at least

6,000 civilians.

This intervention was not only given the full backing of the US government, it was carried out with participation and support of the Pentagon. US President Barack Obama had previously vastly expanded the drone war in Yemen, subjecting the impoverished population to criminal air strikes.

Another major source of global refugees is Central Africa, where, along with the US, it is above all the European powers who have acted militarily in the name of “humanitarian interventions” to secure important supplies of raw materials and markets.

The UNHRC counted 4 million refugees and internally displaced people from Sudan, 2.5 million from South Sudan, 2.4 million from Somalia, 2.9 million from the Democratic Republic of Congo, 1 million from the Central African Republic, 2.4 million from Nigeria, 475,000 from Eritrea, 450,000 from Libya and 280,000 from Mali.

The coup in Ukraine orchestrated by the US and Germany, which brought fascist forces to power, forced almost 2 million people to leave their homes. Above all as a result of the separatist war in the east of the country, which was a direct product of the coup, 1.6 million people have been forced to flee internally.

But while the imperialist powers have caused the global refugee crisis, they are doing virtually nothing to accommodate and care for the refugees. According to the UNHCR report, 86 percent of the 21.3 million refugees have sought protection in low and middle income countries directly bordering conflict regions. In the least developed countries, 4.2 million refugees were accepted.

Top of the list for accommodating refugees is Turkey, where 2.5 million are struggling to survive. However, Turkey, as the border guard for Fortress Europe, has already closed its border to Syrian refugees. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that at least 60 Syrian refugees have been shot on the Turkish border since the beginning of the year.

There are 1.1 million refugees are living in Lebanon, which has a population of 4 million, 1.6 million in Pakistan, 1 million in Iran, 750,000 in Ethiopia and 700,000 in Jordan.

“More people are being displaced by war and persecution and that’s worrying in itself, but the factors that endanger refugees are multiplying too,” said UN

High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi. “At sea, a frightening number of refugees and migrants are dying each year; on land, people fleeing war are finding their way blocked by closed borders.”

Grandi was concerned above all with calls to abandon the Geneva Refugee Convention, which are mainly being raised within the EU. For this, he blamed racist agitation by governments and the media.

This contrasted, Grandi said, with the widespread willingness to help among the population, which is resisting the persistent xenophobia.

“In contrast to the toxic narrative repeatedly played out in the media, we have often witnessed an outpouring of generosity; by host communities, by individuals, and by families opening their homes,” Grandi said. “These ordinary people see refugees not as beggars, competitors for jobs, or terrorists, but as people like you or me whose lives have been disrupted by war. Their simple acts of solidarity are going on around the world, every day.”

Grandi ultimately appealed to the “international community of states” to increase financial support as well as the willingness to accept refugees. But it is precisely the aggressive foreign policy of the imperialist powers, and their strict closed border policy which is producing misery for refugees.



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