

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 61st SESSION

Urgent Debate on the recent military aggression launched by the Islamic Republic of Iran against Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates on 28 February 2026

25 March 2026

Mr Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, warned that more than three weeks after strikes by the United States and Israel on Iran, the conflict is escalating and spreading across the region, with civilians bearing the brunt of the consequences. Several countries in the Gulf and beyond have been affected by missile and drone attacks, resulting in deaths, injuries, and damage to critical infrastructure, including in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan.

There are serious concerns regarding violations of international law, particularly attacks against civilians and disproportionate harm. The conflict is also affecting countries such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with significant civilian casualties reported across all sides.

The situation remains highly volatile, with risks of further escalation, including near nuclear facilities. Civilians in Iran and Lebanon face both military violence and, in Iran, increased internal repression.

Beyond the region, the conflict is disrupting global trade, particularly through the Strait of Hormuz, affecting the supply of energy, food, and medicine. This is contributing to rising prices and increasing risks of hunger and economic instability, especially in vulnerable countries.

Mr Türk emphasized that the only way to prevent a broader global crisis is to end the conflict. He called on all States to respect international law, protect civilians, and uphold the multilateral system. He stressed that war must not be used as a tool of international relations. The current conflict has an unprecedented capacity to entangle countries across borders and trigger cascading regional and global crises, with devastating consequences for civilians worldwide.

Mr Surya Deva, Chair of the Coordination Committee of Special Procedures, addressed the Council regarding the escalation following Iranian attacks on Gulf Cooperation Council States and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. He condemned both the initial unlawful strikes by the United States and Israel against Iran and the subsequent Iranian attacks, highlighting their severe and growing impact on civilians across the region.

Mr Deva expressed deep concern over missile and drone strikes targeting populated areas and critical infrastructure, resulting in deaths, injuries, displacement, and widespread disruption. He underscored broader human rights impacts, including fear, economic hardship, and damage to essential services. He recalled that all parties must comply with international humanitarian law, including the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution. Violations may amount to war crimes, and accountability applies to all parties without exception.

He also highlighted the already critical human rights situation within Iran, exacerbated by repression and the ongoing conflict, as well as the global repercussions on supply chains, energy access, and economic stability.

He called for an immediate ceasefire, renewed diplomatic engagement, and a peaceful resolution grounded in international law and human rights. He reiterated that there is no military solution to this crisis, and that protecting civilians must remain the primary priority. All uses of force, including those invoked under self-defence, must comply with the principles of necessity and proportionality, as well as distinction, proportionality, and precaution. The indirect consequences of the conflict—such as disruptions to essential services, restrictions on civic space, and security-related arrests—are already affecting the enjoyment of human rights in several countries.

Concerned Countries

Bahrain stated that it has been subjected for 26 days to unprovoked attacks by Iran targeting Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. These attacks have resulted in civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure, despite Bahrain not being a party to the conflict. Essential services have been disrupted, leading to measures such as remote work and distance learning.

Bahrain rejected allegations that its airspace was used for hostile operations. Its authorities reported intercepting 153 missiles and 301 drones. It characterized these attacks as an unlawful use of force in violation of the UN Charter and reaffirmed its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Bahrain welcomed the draft resolution condemning the attacks and called for its adoption by consensus.

Islamic Republic of Iran condemned ongoing attacks against its territory, referring to longstanding hostility, particularly from Israel with support from the United States. It stated that the attacks have targeted Iran as well as Lebanon and Palestine, causing extensive civilian casualties and destruction of civilian infrastructure, including homes, hospitals, schools, and cultural sites.

Iran reported thousands of casualties, including children, and significant destruction of civilian infrastructure. It held both direct perpetrators and supporting actors accountable. Iran asserted its right to self-defence and warned of potential regional spillover if the situation continues to escalate. It called on neighbouring States to act collectively to preserve regional stability.

Jordan condemned the Iranian attacks as violations of international law and sovereignty, emphasizing their impact on the rights to life, health, and dignity. It expressed solidarity with affected States and supported measures taken to protect civilians.

Jordan reported intercepting over 240 missiles and drones and managing more than 440 projectiles, resulting in injuries to civilians. It welcomed a UN Security Council resolution condemning the attacks and called for de-escalation, diplomatic engagement, and restoration of regional stability.

Kuwait described the situation as catastrophic, citing repeated violations of international law and human rights. It condemned attacks on civilian and diplomatic targets, including infrastructure and aviation facilities.

Kuwait emphasized that attacks on civilian infrastructure and essential services violate fundamental rights, including the right to life and security. It also highlighted economic impacts, including disruptions to maritime navigation and energy supply chains, as violations of international legal frameworks, including the law of the sea and economic and social rights obligations.

Kuwait reaffirmed its commitment to peaceful dispute resolution but asserted its right to self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter. It called for strong international action to end the attacks and restore stability.

Oman expressed deep concern over the humanitarian consequences of the escalation. It condemned attacks on civilians and infrastructure as violations of international law and emphasized respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Oman reiterated the importance of addressing root causes, promoting dialogue, and reducing tensions. It reaffirmed its commitment to mediation, balanced diplomacy, and adherence to international law as essential pathways to restoring stability.

Qatar condemned the attacks as violations of international law and human rights, highlighting their impact on civilians and critical infrastructure, including water and energy systems.

It stressed the disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups and warned of global economic consequences, particularly due to disruptions in maritime routes. Qatar called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and reinforced the importance of dialogue and respect for sovereignty.

Saudi Arabia condemned the attacks as violations of sovereignty and international law. It highlighted their impact on civilians, infrastructure, and regional stability, as well as on global economic systems.

It rejected attempts to evade accountability and called on the international community to support measures aimed at protecting civilians and restoring peace.

United Arab Emirates reported sustained attacks involving over 2,000 missiles and drones targeting civilian infrastructure. It noted casualties among civilians and military personnel and injuries affecting multiple nationalities.

The UAE condemned the attacks as violations of international law and reaffirmed its right to self-defence. It emphasized its commitment to regional stability, international law, and sustainable development.

Interactive dialogue

Eighty-two delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. Many condemned the escalation and expressed solidarity with affected countries. They called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Delegations emphasized the need for de-escalation, restraint, and full compliance with international law, including the UN Charter, international human rights law, and international humanitarian law. They expressed deep concern about the humanitarian consequences, including civilian casualties and damage to essential infrastructure.

States underscored that attacks on energy and water infrastructure have disproportionate impacts on vulnerable populations, exacerbating inequalities and increasing risks to civilian populations.