

PHOTO FEATURE: UN Women's Commission tackles parity and empowerment in changing workplace

15 March 2017 – Against the backdrop of rapid transformations in the world of work, the annual session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women – or in UN parlance CSW – will this year examine the impact such changes will have on women and girls, including in the areas of equal pay, unpaid care work, the informal economy and in technology.

The single largest forum for UN Member States and other international actors dealing with the promotion of gender equality, CSW focuses on women's rights and empowerment as it builds consensus for actionable policy recommendations.

According to UN Women, the priority theme of this year's largest inter-governmental meeting is "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work." It is also reviewing the challenges and achievements for women and girls in implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Challenges abound



Mother in Seychelles drops child off in the morning. Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

This session comes at a critical moment as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development gains momentum and the world of work rapidly transforms – bringing both challenges and opportunities for women's economic empowerment and economic justice.

The innovation, globalization and human mobility shaping today's workplaces are deeply impacting gender-based discrimination and income inequality.



Only 49.6 per cent of working age women, as compared to 76 per cent of their male counterparts, are represented in the global labour force. UN Women/Betsy Davis



Women take on 2.5 times more unpaid work than men. Photo: Marcel Crozet/ILO



The global gender pay gap is 23 per cent. Photo: UN Women/Christopher Herwig



Women are over-represented among the 73 per cent of the world's population that has limited or no social protection. Photo: IRIN/Mushfique Wadud

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At this pace, economic equality among men and women cannot be achieved for another 170 years, according to World Economic Forum's latest Gender Gap Report.

Research also shows that if women played an identical role in labour markets to that of men, as much as \$28 trillion, or 26 per cent, could be added to the global annual GDP by 2025.

At the present pace of change, it will take 70 years to close the gender wage gap.



Cooks prepare meals for students in Buchanan City, Liberia. Photo: Dominic Chavez/World Bank

From the gender pay gap to unpaid work, the challenges of the informal economy and the opportunities created by care and green economies, and new technologies, the 61th session of CSW will discuss key issues the sphere of work that significantly impact women and girl.

[At Security Council, UN officials urge governments to implement rules on prosecuting traffickers](#)

15 March 2017 – Human trafficking thrives in countries where the rule of law is weak or non-existent, top United Nations officials today told the Security Council, calling on Governments to make better use of the tools created under the UN flag to stop the victimization of men, women and children.

“At a time of divisions in so many areas, this should be an issue that can unite us,” Secretary-General António Guterres told the 15-member Council, stressing that “slavery is not a thing of the past.”

“Let us come together around the key issues of prosecution, protection and prevention, and thereby build a future without human trafficking,” he added.

The Secretary-General outlined a number of UN tools that exist which can be

used to punish human trafficking, and to prevent it in the first place. Among them is the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol, which includes the first internationally agreed definition of the crime of trafficking in persons and provides a framework to effectively prevent and combat it.

He noted also the International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions and the complementary Global Plan of Action on Human Trafficking. Approved in 2010, the Plan aims to better coordinate national responses to this scourge, and includes a UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

In his speech, Mr. Guterres called on Member States to strengthen intelligence-sharing and other law enforcement, while also addressing the underlying vulnerabilities of victims, such as educating girls, respecting the rights of minorities, and creating safe paths for migration.

He also called for engagement with the private sector, and cautioned that any support needs to incorporate the voices and views of the people effected.

RELATED: Treaties against human trafficking key to combating the scourge, supporting victims – UN anti-crime official

According to UNODC's 2016 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, issued in late-December, victims of trafficking are found in 106 of 193 countries. Many of these are in conflict areas, where the crimes are not prosecuted.

"For organized crime networks, human trafficking is a low-risk, high-reward criminal business, a perception reinforced by the inexcusably low conviction rates still reported around the world," told the Council Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of UNODC via videoconference from Vienna.

In addition to an estimated 21 million people around the world who are victims of forced labour and extreme exploitation, Mr. Fedotov discussed the threats facing refugees and displaced persons.

"As conflict displaces countless people, as the rule of law breaks down, as cooperation between countries falter, criminals see a clear business opportunity," he noted.

The best way to counter trafficking and protect the most vulnerable is to fully implement and make sure of the frameworks already in place, Mr. Fedotov underscored.

He noted that the Global Plan of Action will be reviewed this October, and will focus on trafficking in conflict situations.

"I hope you will take advantage of this opportunity," Mr. Fedotov told the Council.

Among the numerous speakers addressing the UN body today is Ashraf El Nour, Director, International Organization for Migration (IOM).

[UN aid chief urges global action as starvation, famine loom for 20 million across four countries](#)

10 March 2017 – Just back from Kenya, Yemen, South Sudan and Somalia – countries that are facing or are at risk of famine – the top United Nations humanitarian official today urged the international community for comprehensive action to save people from simply “starving to death.”

“We stand at a critical point in history. Already at the beginning of the year we are facing the largest humanitarian crisis since the creation of the UN,” UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien told the Security Council today.

Without collective and coordinated global efforts, he warned, people risk starving to death and succumbing to disease, stunted children and lost futures, and mass displacements and reversed development gains.

“The appeal for action by the Secretary-General can thus not be understated. It was right to sound the alarm early, not wait for the pictures of emaciated dying children [...] to mobilize a reaction and the funds,” Mr. O’Brien underscored, calling for accelerated global efforts to support UN humanitarian action on the ground.

Turning to the countries he visited, the senior UN official said that, about two-thirds of the population (more than 18 million people) in Yemen needed assistance, including more than seven million severely food insecure, and the fighting continued to worsen the crisis.

“I continue to reiterate the same message to all: only a political solution will ultimately end human suffering and bring stability to the region,” he said, noting that with access and funding, humanitarians will do more, but cautioned that relief-workers were “not the long-term solution to the growing crisis.”

RELATED: As fresh violence in Yemen sends thousands their homes, UN agency urges international support

In South Sudan, where a famine was recently declared, more than 7.5 million people are in need of assistance, including some 3.4 million displaced. The figure rose by 1.4 million since last year.

“The famine in the country is man-made. Parties to the conflict are parties to the famine – as are those not intervening to make the violence stop,” stressed Mr. O’Brien, calling on the South Sudanese authorities to translate their assurances of unconditional access into “action on the ground.”



Women in Ganyiel, Unity state, South Sudan, collecting bags of food. The situation in Ganyiel is dire, with thousands of people having fled to the area from famine-stricken Leer and Mayendit counties. Photo: OCHA/Gemma Connell

Similarly, more than half the population of Somalia (6.2 million people) is in need of aid, 2.9 million of whom require immediate assistance. Extremely worrying is that more than one million children under the age of five are at the risk of acute malnourishment.

"The current indicators mirror the tragic picture of 2011, when Somalia last suffered a famine," recalled the UN official, but expressed hope that a famine can be averted with strong national leadership and immediate and concerted support by the international community.

RELATED: 'The world must act now to stop this,' UN chief Guterres says on visit to drought-hit Somalia

Concerning Kenya, he mentioned that more than 2.7 million people were food insecure, and that this number could reach four million by April.

"In collaboration with the Government [of Kenya], the UN will soon launch an appeal of \$200 million to provide timely life-saving assistance and protection," he informed.

Further in his briefing, Mr. O'Brien informed the Council of the outcomes of the Oslo Conference on the Lake Chad Basin where 14 donors pledged a total of \$672 million, of which \$458 million is for humanitarian action in 2017.

"This is very good news, and I commend those who made such generous pledges," he said but noted that more was needed to fully fund the \$1.5 billion required to provide the assistance needed across the region.

On the UN response in these locations, Mr. O'Brien highlighted that strategic, coordinated and prioritized plans are in place and dedicated teams on the ground are closely working with partners to ensure that immediate life-saving support reaches those in need.

"Now we need the international community and this Council to act," he highlighted, urging prompt action to tackle the factors causing famine; committing sufficient and timely financial support; and ensuring that fighting stops.

In particular, he underscored the need to ensure that humanitarians have safe, full and unimpeded access and that parties to the conflict in the affected countries respect humanitarian law and called on those with influence over the parties to the conflict to "exert that influence now."

"It is possible to avert this crisis, to avert these famines, to avert these looming human catastrophes," he concluded. "It is all preventable."

Security Council encourages Syrian parties to take part in UN-supported talks 'without preconditions'

10 March 2017 – Looking forward to the early resumption of the United Nations-facilitated intra-Syrian negotiations, the Security Council today encouraged the Syrian parties to return to talks in good faith “and to engage constructively and without preconditions” on the agenda set out by UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura when they resume.

In a press statement that follows a briefing earlier this week from Mr. de Mistura, the Council welcomed the conclusion of a further round of intra-Syrian negotiations in Geneva on 3 March 2017. It further welcomed the Special Envoy’s announcement that the talks had yielded a clear agenda for future negotiations as indicated by resolution 2254 (2015), focusing on governance; constitutional issues; elections; and counter terrorism, security and confidence building measures.

The members of the Security Council reiterated their commitment to ensuring the inclusion of Syrian women in the political process through sustained consultation and dialogue and promoting their full and effective participation.

Recognizing that the continuation of political negotiations was made possible by the ceasefire developed through the Astana process, the Council called on the Syrian parties to fully implement the ceasefire, established pursuant to the arrangements of 29 December 2016, including ending ceasefire violations and ensuring humanitarian access.

The Council also encouraged the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) members to use their influence over the parties to help end violations, reduce violence, build confidence and ensure safe, sustained and unhindered humanitarian access in line with its resolution 2165 (2014).

The ISSG established respective taskforces on humanitarian aid delivery and a wider ceasefire. They have been meeting separately since early 2016 on a way forward in the crisis. Russia and the United States are the co-chairs of the taskforces and the ISSG, which also comprises the UN, the Arab League, the European Union and 16 other countries.

In his briefing to the Council, Mr. de Mistura had expressed his intention “to bring the invitees back to Geneva for a fifth round with a target date of 23 March.”

Nation-building amid insurgency ‘an uphill struggle’ for Afghanistan – UN envoy

10 March 2017 – The United Nations envoy for Afghanistan today highlighted both the visible progress the conflict-torn country has made and the challenges lie ahead, urging the Government to redouble efforts while calling for continued international political and financial support.

“The Government has to pursue both an inclusive peace process and economic growth against the backdrop of an intensifying insurgency and worsening security,” said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative in Afghanistan, during a UN Security Council quarterly debate on the situation in that country.

Mr. Yamamoto said that the National Unity Government – almost halfway through its five-year term – has made visible steps forward on anti-corruption, the electoral process and women’s economic empowerment.

“Fortunately, the ground is being prepared to make Afghanistan a success,” he stressed.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), headed by Mr. Yamamoto, will launch its first anti-corruption report, titled *Afghanistan’s Other Battlefield: The Fight against Corruption* soon. The report will highlight the Government’s achievements in addressing corruption, and recommends options for further progress, he explained.

The Government has committed to holding parliamentary elections which are seen as fair, inclusive and transparent by the Afghan people, he said, noting that the commissioners of the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission have been appointed.



Special Representative and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Tadamichi Yamamoto, briefs the Security Council. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Afghanistan remains one of the most difficult places in the world to be a woman, he said. However, just two days ago, on International Women’s Day, the Government launched a national plan that recognizes women as key economic actors.

The deteriorating security situation remains of great concern, he pointed out, urging the Taliban to enter peace talks without preconditions and

warning against attacks by foreign fighters, including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh).

Last year, UNAMA recorded the worst number of civilian casualties since record-keeping began nearly a decade ago.

Deteriorating security also led to the highest-ever level of internal displacement in 2016. More than 650,000 Afghans were displaced. Returns from Pakistan exceeded 620,000 people. Displacements and returns for 2017 are likely to remain at these levels.

Developing a nation while fighting an insurgency is an uphill struggle, he emphasized, noting that due in part to the worsening security situation over the past two years, service delivery has become increasingly difficult. "We have witnessed some downward trends in key indicators, such as access to health clinics and education facilities," he said.

More focused action on governance, social services and private sector development to promote equitable growth will be necessary, he said.

He urged the countries concerned, particularly in the neighbourhood, to support the Afghan Government's interest in the intensified regional peace effort, and asked the Council to renew UNAMA's mandate, which expires on 17 March.

UNAMA is mandated to support the Afghan Government and the people of Afghanistan as a political mission that provides 'good offices' among other key services. 'Good offices' are diplomatic steps the UN takes publicly and in private, drawing on its independence, impartiality and integrity, to prevent international disputes from arising, escalating or spreading.

UNAMA also assists the process of peace and reconciliation; monitors and promotes human rights, including the protection of civilians in armed conflict; promotes good governance; and encourages regional cooperation.