

Idea of 'homogenous' Polish culture is a myth: UN human rights expert

An independent UN rights expert has accused the Polish Government of disseminating the "myth" of a "homogenous" Polish culture, in a statement released on Friday.

The UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, [Karima Bennoune](#), speaking at the end of a 12-day visit to the country, said it was a view that needed to be challenged.

Ms. Bennoune said Poland was currently experiencing political and cultural polarization, with a Government trying to promote cultural expressions which reflect its worldview. She described the effort as "regressive cultural engineering" and criticised the use of the term "anti-Polish", where it was being applied to those whose viewpoints differ from that of the Government.

The Special Rapporteur testified to the vibrant and diverse cultural life she experienced during her visit, adding that "Polish identity does not belong to any one group, or any one opinion bloc alone, but to all the citizens of Poland."

Some far-right nationalist groups, Christian fundamentalist groups and media outlets, she said, are becoming increasingly prominent and aggressive: she also expressed concern about the apparent normalization of these views, with some government officials expressing them without suffering any consequences.

The statement noted survey data indicating that an increase in hate speech of an open and public nature, in particular of an anti-semitic nature, may be attributed to amendments to Poland's Law on the Institute of National Remembrance, in February 2018.

"In view of the upcoming 100th anniversary of Polish independence in November 2018, an event about which many Poles have understandably strong feelings of pride, I call on the Government to take steps to ensure that this significant event is marked in ways that include, rather than exclude, and that do not equate discrimination with patriotism," Bennoune said.

Other areas of concern noted by the Special Rapporteur were, she said, the reaffirmation of "stereotypical cultural attitudes" towards women seen during the national debate over changing the abortion law, and the lack of specific legal protection for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender persons (LGBT).

Although Poland has a strong record of ratifying international human rights and culture accords, she said, more needs to be done to effectively implement such standards in practice.

Ms. Bennoune is to present a comprehensive report, and recommendations, to a future session of the [UN Human Rights Council](#).

UNODC Goodwill Ambassador Nadia Murad and Dr. Denis Mukwege awarded Nobel Peace Prize

Nadia Murad, a Yazidi rights activist and the first Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and Denis Mukwege, a gynecologist helping victims of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) won the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize on Friday.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee on Friday announced their decision to award the Nobel Peace Prize for 2018 to Ms. Murad and Dr. Mukwege for their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict.



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Denis Mukwege, Director and Founder of Panzi General Referral Hospital in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

More to follow...

UN chief urges peaceful, free and fair elections in Cameroon

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has called for a peaceful, credible and inclusive elections in Cameroon, as the country prepares to hold presidential elections this coming Sunday.

In a [statement](#) from his spokesperson, the [UN chief](#) also called on all stakeholders to “exercise restraint before, during and after the election.”

He also urged all Cameroonians to exercise their democratic rights, urging all candidates “to address any complaints related to the electoral process through established legal and constitutional channels.”

Nine candidates are contesting the elections to the country’s highest body, according to media reports.

Further in the statement, the Secretary-General condemned all threats of violence or acts of intimidation by any group and reiterated that all grievances should be addressed through inclusive dialogue.

“The United Nations stands ready to provide support in this regard,” added the statement.

Insecurity is a concern in Cameroon in the country’s north, as a result of activities of the Boko Haram terrorist group, and [according](#) to the [UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA), there are some 160,000 persons displaced across the country – a majority of them in the south-west.

Syria: UN Humanitarian Coordinator calls for unimpeded access from within the country

Highlighting the “complexities of the situation in Syria” with close to 13 million people in need of life-saving assistance, the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in the country called on warring parties to allow access to all areas from within the country, so aid can reach those in need “fast and efficiently”.

Ali Al Za’atari, who is also Resident Coordinator in Syria, said that was especially necessary in the north-west cities of Idlib and Afrin.

“Syria is still undergoing a serious humanitarian crisis and this humanitarian crisis affects about 13 million Syrian citizens and refugees as well,” he told the UN News Arabic service.

During a briefing to the press at UN Headquarters in New York, he noted that given the scale of the needs remaining across all sectors – food, health care, education, economic recovery and reconstruction – and the continued movements of population, the crisis is likely to continue for years.

“There are no longer armed clashes and shells falling on the roofs and on people in many cities and Syrian territories, but in other areas this threat still exists and people are still scared and insecure,” he stressed.

Noting that donors have been “generous”, he warned that the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan was in need of nearly \$3.4 billion in total – but only 46 per cent funded so far. “This puts limits on our work in Syria,” he said, adding that he is confident more funding will be received by the end of the year.

Although 14 UN agencies are based in the country, humanitarian access for assessments and aid delivery remains challenging, especially in the cities of Idlib and Afrin as “the region is out of government control” and “it could be a very long and complicated process to get access.”

On the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York last week, Mr. Al Za’atari said that a plan had been agreed between UN humanitarians and the Syrian government delegation “that would allow for greater and faster access, as well as various assessments of the situation of those in need”.

“If things continue well, as agreed, we expect to have an agreed response plan by March 2019,” he told UN News.

[Marking World Space Week, UN stresses power of space to ‘unite the world’](#)

Highlighting the importance of space and its applications for humankind, the United Nations is celebrating World Space Week 2018 with a focus on the role the cosmos plays in bringing people together, back on earth.

“Space Unites the World,” the theme for [World Space Week](#) (WSW) 2018 is inspired by UNISPACE+50 – a UN conference in June this year – that brought together leaders in exploration, and experts on space applications from all over the globe.

In addition to promoting cooperation between space-faring and emerging space nations, UNISPACE+50 saw Member States [pledge](#) their collective efforts to

enhance the ways space science is used for sustainable development.

► **READ ALSO:** [If we can build the International Space Station, 'we can do anything' – UN Champion for Space](#)

Marked annually from 4-10 October, World Space Week commemorates the launch of Sputnik I, the first artificial satellite to be put into orbit, by the Soviet Union, on 4 October 1957, as well as the entry into force just over a decade later, of what's formally-known as the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies.

Since 2007, over 94 nations have participated in more than 2,250 Space Week events, drawing more than 1.3 million attendees.

Major [events this year](#) include:

- Experience a Transatlantic Space Week at sea, onboard the Queen Mary 2 cruise ship, as it voyages from New York to Southampton.
- The European Space Agency (ESA) hosts an Open Day on 7 October 7 at its technical centre in Noordwijk, Netherlands.
- The Leicester National Space Centre in the UK hosts a Space Week Family Sleepover, giving enthusiasts the chance to snuggle up next to giant rockets – spacesuits are also available.
- In the United States, women in the space industry in various cities, will take part in the 'Ladies Do Launch', event, consisting of a series of live audience interviews.
- In Bangladesh, the non-profit Youthpreneur Network , hosts the Astronomy for Girls event, in the capital Dhaka.

Space boost for women and girls, in STEM fields

The Bangladesh event shows the emphasis being placed during Space Week on encouraging young women and girls to take up space science and the so-called STEM fields overall – science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Speaking at UNISPACE+50, from the International Space Station – at a height of over 400 kilometres in low-Earth orbit – US astronaut Serena Auñón-Chancellor, offered some excellent advice for girls and young women wishing to pursue careers in the STEM fields but feel ambivalent asking questions or learning more people those already established.

“I tell them...bother people” she said. “Bother them if you are interested in their work and research, get them to tell you about it, ask questions ... explore, discover and that is the best way for young girls and women to get interested in STEM fields.”

► **READ MORE:** [From low-earth orbit, 'envoys' of humanity join UN space forum](#)

Photo Gallery: Space for a better future, the journey of

UNISPACE+50

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