

# Using 'leprosy' metaphors in political rhetoric 'fuels public stigma' and discrimination: UN rights expert

Recent incidents where high-level politicians have used the word 'leprosy' in discriminatory remarks against rivals only contributes to harmful stereotypes surrounding the disease.

That's the view expressed by a [UN human rights expert](#) who is calling for the word to be abandoned as a metaphor "for all that is loathsome."

Alice Cruz pointed out that in the past two months alone, both the Portuguese Prime Minister, António Costa, and Bangladesh's Minister of Shipping, Shajahan Khan, have used the word 'leprosy' when referring to opposition parties.

"The historical symbolism of leprosy as being negative is deeply ingrained and triggers use of the word unthinkingly," said Ms. Cruz, who is the UN Special Rapporteur on the elimination of discrimination against people with the disease.

The historical symbolism of leprosy as being negative is deeply ingrained – *UN expert Alice Cruz*

"Using it as a metaphor leads to wrongful stereotyping that fuels public stigma, everyday discrimination, and impairs the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by persons affected and their families."

Leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, is caused by a bacteria called *Mycobacterium leprae* and mainly affects the skin. It is transmitted when someone who has the disease coughs or sneezes.

Though leprosy is curable if detected early and treated, it can cause progressive and permanent damage if left untreated, leading to disfigurement, blindness and chronic wounds.

While leprosy has existed since ancient times, Ms. Cruz explained that it is "not a disease of the past." Rather, it is still present today and deeply associated with social inequities affecting millions worldwide.

She added that public stigma is among the barriers to early diagnosis, as are other "discriminatory factors" such as gender, age, race and increased vulnerability due to disability, social exclusion or even migration.

"The enforcement of equality and non-discrimination for people affected will not be possible without addressing harmful stereotypes and wrongful

stereotyping,” she said.

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## [US and Mexico child deportations drive extreme violence and trauma: UNICEF](#)

The many life-threatening dangers faced by children from Central America who are being deported from the United States of America and Mexico, are highlighted in a new report from United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) on Thursday, which also draws attention to the traumatic consequences of family separation by migration authorities.

In the first 6 months of this year, almost 25,000 women and children from northern Central America were deported after arriving in Mexico and the US, in search of asylum or a better life.



UNICEF/Tanya Bindra

The study, [Uprooted in Central America and Mexico](#), identifies poverty and violence as two of the main reasons why children are leaving their homes in Central America, and attempting to migrate to the US and Mexico, mainly from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Once the children are sent back to their country of origin, these threats only increase.

Central American countries are some of the poorest in the Western Hemisphere: almost three quarters of Honduran children are living in poverty. Many families take out loans to finance their departure, and, when they are sent back, children can find themselves homeless or unable to pay for basic necessities.

For those who fled their homes to escape gang violence (endemic in communities across northern Central America, with hundreds murdered every year), a return can mean a heightened risk of attack. In fear of their lives, many avoid their towns and villages and end up internally-displaced.



UNICEF/Tanya Bindra

The trauma suffered by children held in detention by migration authorities, and separated from their families, can have a negative effect on the child's long-term development, said the agency report.

María Cristina Perceval, UNICEF Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, urged governments to consider the needs of children before deporting them, and to protect and reintegrate them once they return home: "Millions of children in the region are victims of poverty, indifference, violence, forced migration and the fear of deportation. Being returned to impossible situations makes it more likely that they will migrate again."

The report makes a series of recommendations to keep refugee and migrant children safe. These include allowing them to be with their families and supporting alternatives to detention; safeguarding their wellbeing, and solving the problems that force them to leave home in the first place.



UNICEF/Tanya Bindra

An unaccompanied minor deported back to Guatemala by Mexican authorities, is led through Guatemalan immigration to be reunited with her family at La

Aurora International Airport, Guatemala City, Guatemala on May 1, 2018.

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## [UN chief welcomes re-opening of key Gaza border crossing](#)

UN humanitarian experts expect some 400 truckloads of goods will now be able to enter Gaza after the Kerem Shalom crossing became operational on Wednesday morning; roughly a month after it was largely closed by Israel in response to attacks by Palestinians in the enclave, which is controlled by Hamas militants, and [deadly mass-protests](#) at the border fence against Israeli policies.

Israel has blockaded the Gaza Strip for more than a decade, strictly-controlling what can enter and leave the territory, including a naval blockade in the Mediterranean.

He is encouraged to see that those concerned have responded to calls to avoid the devastating impact of yet another conflict on the civilian population in and around Gaza – *UN Secretary-General*

UN chief António Guterres also welcomed Wednesday's move lift restrictions by extending Gaza's permissible fishing area to nine nautical miles, up from six.

"He is encouraged to see that those concerned have responded to calls to avoid the devastating impact of yet another conflict on the civilian population in and around Gaza," according to a statement issued by his spokesman.

"The Secretary-General calls on all parties to support the efforts of [UN Special Coordinator](#) Nickolay Mladenov and Egypt to avoid an escalation and address all humanitarian issues in Gaza and the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza."

The Kerem Shalom crossing was closed in early July after Palestinians launched fiery kite bombs across the border into southern Israel, causing extensive property damage and heightening the threat of escalating conflict.

Only food, medical and limited fuel deliveries were allowed in.

With supplies of fuel and other essential supplies dwindling, Gaza's two million citizens have been living through what the UN humanitarian affairs office, [OCHA](#), has described as "an unprecedented humanitarian crisis."

Last week, the office said that five key hospitals in Gaza might have to

close, if fuel for emergency generators ran out. There was a threat that raw sewage could overflow onto the streets, due to a lack of power for treatment facilities.

Gaza's unemployment rate is among the world's highest, and the majority of its residents depend on aid relief to survive.

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## [UN rights experts call on Russia to release Ukrainian film-maker whose life is in 'imminent danger'](#)

A Ukrainian film-maker whose outspoken criticism of Russia's continued annexation of Crimea has landed him in jail, prompted United Nations human rights experts to call on Russian authorities for his immediate and unconditional release on Wednesday.

"We urge Russian authorities to unconditionally release him as a matter of urgency," the UN experts declared.

Oleg Sentsov was arrested by Russian authorities in May 2014 in Crimea, and convicted to 20 years in a Russian prison, as a Russian citizen, on charges of terrorism. The Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea was annexed by Russia earlier that year, in contravention of international law.

In March 2014, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution calling on States not to recognize changes in status of the Crimea, and last September, a report from the UN human rights office (OHCHR) said that rights had significantly deteriorated under Russian occupation, including arbitrary arrests and detentions, enforced disappearances, ill-treatment and torture.

Mr Sentsov went on hunger strike three months ago, to protest what he believes is the politically-motivated incarceration of 64 Ukrainians in Russian prisons.

We urge Russian authorities to unconditionally release him as a matter of urgency –UN experts

The rights experts expressed grave concern for his physical and mental integrity. "Sentsov's life is in imminent danger. His hunger strike follows a trial and a conviction that has fallen short of international law," the experts said.

They also called on the Russian authorities to ensure that Mr. Sentsov is

immediately provided with appropriate medical treatment, based on his full and informed consent.

According to news reports, his mother had written to Russian President Vladimir Putin at the end of June pleading for her son's release, but was told that pardons would only be considered if the prisoner made the request, which Mr Sentsov has refused to do.

The UN human rights experts – David Kaye, [UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression](#); Dainius Pūras, [Special Rapporteur on the right to physical and mental health](#); and Michel Forst, [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders](#) – remain in contact with the Russian authorities about this case.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

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## [Monsanto lawsuit ruling a 'significant recognition' of victims' human rights, say UN rights experts](#)

Special Rapporteur Dainius Pūras.

A court in California on Friday ruled that chemical giant Monsanto should compensate Dwayne Johnson, a school groundskeeper, after a jury found the company did not place a warning label on its weed killers, stating that their widespread use could cause terminal cancer.

Mr. Johnson, 46, had regularly used Monsanto products RoundUp and Ranger Pro in his work, according to media reports. He was diagnosed with non-Hodgkins lymphoma four years ago and doctors do not expect him to live beyond 2020.

"The ruling recognises the potential causal relations between cancer and Monsanto's glyphosate-based weedkillers, including RoundUp, and the company's negligence by failing to inform users of cancer risks," the independent UN experts said in a statement issued on Wednesday.

Special Rapporteur Hilal Elver.

"This decision is a significant recognition of the human rights of victims, and the responsibilities of chemical companies."



They said the court's decision reflects a 2015 assessment that glyphosate, a herbicide, was classified by the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) as "probably carcinogenic to humans".

It showed that "internal company documents" demonstrated that Monsanto had known for decades that glyphosate, and specifically, Roundup, could cause cancer. The company has appealed the ruling.

"We regret that the ruling came too late as Mr. Johnson is suffering from terminal cancer. No monetary compensation is adequate for his life," the statement continued.