

Cambodia: Before crucial vote on Sunday, UN chief calls for 'pluralistic political process'

As Cambodians prepare to vote in general elections on Sunday, the United Nations Secretary-General issued a statement on Friday calling for “an inclusive and pluralistic political process” saying that it “remains essential for safeguarding the progress made by Cambodia in consolidating peace.”

Through his spokesperson, Stéphane Dujarric, he called on all political actors “to reduce tensions and political polarization.”

Prime Minister and leader of the Cambodian People’s Party, Hun Sen, has ruled the country for more than 30 years, and last November the rival Cambodia National Rescue Party was dissolved, by court edict, according to reports.

The UN independent expert appointed to monitor human rights in Cambodia, Rhona Smith, said at the end of April that there could be no “genuine” election process “if the main opposition party is barred from taking part.”

The UN chief on Friday called on the Cambodian government “to uphold international human rights standards and in particular to ensure guarantees for civil society actors and political parties to exercise their democratic rights.”

“He reiterates the continued commitment of the United Nations to support a peaceful and democratic Cambodia that fully respects the human rights of all its citizens,” concluded Mr. Dujarric.

New ECOSOC president to revive 'deliberative function' of forum

The newly-elected President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council ([ECOSOC](#)) Ronda King, of the Caribbean island nation of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, said on Thursday that she intended to make the year ahead “a defining” one for the body that leads the UN’s ambitious drive for sustainable economic, social and environmental development.

“It promises to be [a defining year](#), which could help set a new course for the

work of the Council and the High Level Political Forum ([HLPF](#)) held under its auspices,” said Ms. King, after being voted in as the 74th president.

Calling it an honour to serve, she thanked the Council members and asked for their help moving forward so that ECOSOC and the HLPF could live up to expectations.

She paid special tribute to the current president, Marie Chatardova, “whose leadership and vision” Ms. King said she would continue to rely and build on, with its emphasis on inclusion and participation.

She listed a revived ECOSOC as one of her main priorities. “You heard me correctly,” she said, “with your committed participation, we will revive the ECOSOC using in full, the hard-won innovations introduced by the General Assembly.”

“There has been some dissatisfaction with the functioning of ECOSOC over the recent few years. But in the coming 12 months, let us work together to restore the ‘deliberative function’ of ECOSOC,” she underscored

She also cited the HLPF as “the centerpiece” of her priorities, saying that when it meets in the General Assembly, Heads of State and Government will review the entire [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development.

“We will have to think of ways to strengthen the conduct of the next cycle of reviews” while looking towards the early 2030 Sustainable Development Goal targets, that are set for 2020, she said.

Ms. King argued against focusing solely on what does not work, and urged members to tone down criticism and avoid skipping meetings. “Let us focus on what does work well and why. Let us reflect on how we can make ECOSOC deliver fully,” she stressed.

For her part, outgoing President Chatardova recapped the “unprecedented engagement” of many groups during her year in office, calling it “very encouraging” towards achieving the 2030 Agenda.

She recalled 240 side events and special events, focused on partnerships, education, business, SDG Learning and Training, and local and regional government. Additionally, a film festival and a number of exhibitions enriched the official meetings, added Ms. Chatardova.

“I am sure when next year HLPF also meets under the auspices of the General Assembly, it will reaffirm the political will at the highest level to continue implementing the 2030 Agenda and lifting the obstacles,” she said.

Guterres sounds alarm over worst cashflow crunch in years

The United Nations is at risk of running out of cash, the UN chief has warned, urging Member States to pay their mandatory contributions on time and in full, so that the world body can continue to deliver on its key mandates.

In a letter to UN staff, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) stated that he had “written to Member States regarding the troubling financial situation facing the United Nations”.

“Caused primarily by the delayed contributions of Member States to the Regular Budget, this new cash shortfall is unlike those we have experienced previously”, he wrote. “Our cash flow has never been this low so early in the calendar year, and the broader trend is also concerning: we are running out of cash sooner and staying in the red longer”.

At the end of June this year, the amount of [money paid by Member States](#) for the 2018 assessment stood at around \$1.49 billion. At the same time last year, the amount paid to the regular budget was just over \$1.70 billion.

So far this month, Iraq, Moldova, Japan, Lithuania and Mexico have paid their contributions, leaving the outstanding amount owed for 2018, at nearly \$810 million, with 81 States yet to pay.

“I have appealed to Member States to pay their assessments on time and in full, and highlighted the risk the current situation poses to the delivery of mandates and to the reputation of our Organization,” Mr. Guterres wrote in the letter.

Speaking to journalists at UN Headquarters, his Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric said that the UN fully understands that some Member States operate on different fiscal timetables, but unlike in previous years, the cash flow has never been this low, so early in the calendar year.

He also said the UN does not have much financial flexibility and relies on Member States to pay their dues on time and in full.

Mr. Dujarric added that the UN Secretariat would now be looking into ways of reducing expenses, with a focus on non-staff costs.

Despite challenges and ‘unfinished business’, Colombia celebrates progress towards lasting peace, Security Council hears

Amid a long series of challenges, the implementation of the peace process in Colombia is moving forward and has achieved important milestones in recent months, according to a [new report by the United Nations Secretary-General](#) presented to the Security Council on Thursday.

On 20 July – Colombia’s Independence Day – as a new Congress was inaugurated, including representatives from the political party that has sprung out of the former FARC rebel movement, which waged a revolutionary struggle with government forces for more than 50 years, before signing a peace deal in 2016.

“The presence of the political party FARC fulfills one of the core objectives of the final Peace Agreement, and this Congress is among the more diverse, plural and representative in the country’s legislative history,” said Jean Arnault, Head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia, which was [set up nearly two years ago](#), to monitor and support implementation of the peace deal.

He added however that “while participation of FARC representatives in the Congress is a major step, reintegration into civilian life of former FARC-EP members is very much unfinished business,” noting that successful reintegration will “no doubt require dedication and resources”.

According to the report, “the fundamental goal of providing income-generating opportunities for 14,000 former combatants is far from being realized”. However, the Government made “the welcome decision” to extend food assistance to the territorial areas for training and reintegration until the end of 2018.

In addition to the fear and frustration expressed by some former combatants regarding a peace process they feel has not lived up to expectations, the report lays out other issues which President-elect Iván Duque, set to take office on 7 August, will have to address in order to bridge the divisions among the Colombian people: the proliferation of new illegal groups; the continued growth of the coca economy; and the ongoing violence in certain areas, especially against community leaders and human rights advocates.

In his briefing, the Head of the Verification Mission recognised the importance of the national “Pact of repudiation of violence against social leaders” signed by President Santos and President-elect Duque. “It is the first time that violence against social leaders is received with such a

strong sense of outrage, expressed in the streets of Colombia and cities abroad, in the halls of national institutions and across the political spectrum,” he said, calling this national consensus against attacks on local figureheads “significant”.

Mr. Arnault reiterated that the newly elected authorities can count on the support of the Verification Mission and stressed that “supporting institutions in their efforts to curb the violence in the territories will remain a top priority”.

[‘Stigma and discrimination still persists’ against people living with HIV – UN labour agency](#)

Although progress in treating people living with HIV has enabled them to work, they continue to face career discrimination, says a new study launched on Thursday by the United Nations labour agency.

Based on 13 country team surveys throughout the world, the [International Labour Organization’s \(ILO\) HIV Stigma and Discrimination in the World of Work: Findings from the People Living with HIV Stigma Index](#), draws on interviews with more than 100,000 people living with the virus.

“It is sad to see that despite years of work, stigma and discrimination still persist,” said Shauna Olney, Chief of the ILO branch which deals with gender, equality, diversity and AIDS, speaking in Amsterdam at the launch.

“But treatment alone is not sufficient. We must work harder to reduce stigma and discrimination for people living with HIV at workplaces. They have a right to work and no one should deny them that,” she added.

Co-written with the Global Network of People Living with HIV, the report was introduced during the biennial [International AIDS Conference “AIDS 2018”](#), which has been taking place this week; the largest conference on any global health or development issue in the world.

The data highlights a number of findings, such as that 10 out of 13 countries recorded a 30 per cent or higher unemployment rate for people living with HIV, with a greater rate among HIV-positive youth.

And women living with HIV are less likely to be employed than their male counterparts because of unpaid care responsibilities, and a lack of independent income.

Moreover, unemployment among HIV-positive transgender people in all countries remains high.

What this report shows is that we still have a long way to go – *ILO's Shauna Olney*

Hiding their HIV status

Another key finding reveals that their HIV status costs many people their jobs – often because of employer or co-worker discrimination.

“When information about my [HIV] status reached my manager, he called me to his office,” said an anonymous individual facing discrimination, in the report. “First he told me I was working badly – doing too little work. Then he asked me to submit my resignation, without any serious explanation – as if I were resigning voluntarily.”

As a result, many people are hesitant to disclose their HIV status. to employers or even co-workers. Testimony from Cameroon, in West Africa, shows the extent of the problem of accessing employment:

“I went to pick up my appointment letter only to be told that I had to undergo a medical examination. I already knew my sero-status, which I told the human resource officer about. She said I had to do the examination which confirmed my HIV-positive status. That marked the end of getting the job as they could not recruit me even though I had passed the interview,” said one anonymous interviewee.

Similarly, HIV-related discrimination remains a major cause for not receiving job promotions.

“What this report shows is that we still have a long way to go in our efforts to combat workplace related stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV,” said Sasha Volgina, GNP+ Programme Manager. “Access to healthcare and access to employment are inextricably linked and as such a meaningful commitment towards stemming the epidemic and securing the wellbeing of all people living with HIV, cannot be met without prioritizing ending HIV stigma in the workplace.”