

Nicaragua must end demonstrator killings and seek political solution in wake of 'absolutely shocking' death toll: UN chief

The [United Nations Secretary-General](#) has called on the Nicaraguan Government to end violence against demonstrators which has cost an estimated 280 lives, and begin a national "political dialogue" to end the crisis which has gripped the country for nearly three months

Speaking in neighbouring Costa Rica on Monday night, António Guterres said that it was "an essential responsibility of the State to protect its citizens, and this basic principle cannot be forgotten, especially when, unfortunately, we have a death toll that is absolutely shocking."

At least 12 people were killed over the weekend, mostly as police and paramilitary supporters of the government confronted demonstrators who have been protesting proposed reforms to the pension system across the country, since 18 April. Protesters are demanding that the long-serving President, Daniel Ortega, step down.

The appalling loss of life must stop now – [Secretary-General António Guterres](#)

The UN chief told reporters on Monday that "it is essential that violence must stop immediately and that the political dialogue, the national dialogue, be revitalized because only a political solution is acceptable for Nicaragua."

Mr. Guterres said that he was "not a supporter of simplistic analysis of complex problems, but there is one thing that is obvious: there is a death toll that is shocking due to the use of force on the part of entities linked to the State, that is not acceptable."

His words were amplified by the UN human rights office, [OHCHR](#), on Tuesday in Geneva, where spokesperson Rupert Colville noted the "increasing climate of fear and mistrust" in the country and called for protesters' safety to be guaranteed, along with their right to freedom of expression.

"The appalling loss of life must stop – now," he said. "The violence is all more horrific as armed elements loyal to the government are operating with the active or tacit support of the police and other state authorities."



Artículo 66

Protesters in Managua take part in a march to demand an end to violence in Nicaragua. The banner reads “This struggle is non-violent” in Spanish.

Of those who lost their lives protesting at the weekend, two died when shots were fired at the Divina Misericordia Church in the capital, Managua, where student demonstrators had sought refuge after the university they had been occupying came under attack.

Of those killed in the demonstrations to date, at least 19 were police officers, Mr. Colville said, adding that the police, along with pro-State armed groups, have forcibly removed barricades erected by demonstrators and communities in so-called “clean-up operations”.

Amid reports that demonstrators have been subject to numerous rights violations including torture and extrajudicial killings, the OHCHR spokesperson said there are growing concerns that violence will intensify as Nicaragua prepares to mark Liberation Day on Thursday, 19 July – the date marking the overthrow of the Somoza regime in 1979 by the Sandinistas.

“We are expressing the concern that it could get worse,” Mr Colville said, explaining that the initial spark for the demonstrations was proposed pension reforms which evolved into wider discontent at President Daniel Ortega’s Government.

Dismissing Government claims that the demonstrators were intent on regime change, the OHCHR spokesperson added that there was “no united opposition” and “no armed opposition”.

“It’s certainly not an insurrection at this point,” he added, “even though those accusations are being made by the authorities”.

Loosely worded anti-terror legislation passed on Monday by Congress also represented a potentially worrying threat to freedom of expression, Mr.

Colville insisted.

He pointed to the “very loose wording” of Article 394 and its definition of a terrorist as someone who causes death or injuries or destroys public or private property.

“It’s this very loose wording which lays itself open to interpretation which could include people who are simply exercising their right to protest,” the OHCHR spokesperson said.

There are also concerns that human rights defenders have been subject to enforced disappearance, including Medardo Maireno and Pedro Mena.

According to OHCHR, police detained them on Friday at Managua airport and their families have not been told where they are, despite judicial requests.

[At Partnership Forum, UN officials highlights need for continued support for Somalia](#)

Speaking at the first day of the Somalia Partnership Forum in Brussels on Monday, senior United Nations officials commended the country’s government for its efforts in political reform, security, economic development, and recovery and humanitarian assistance – while flagging the need for further progress and international support for these efforts.

UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo [praised](#) Somalia’s leadership for the steps it has taken in developing a political roadmap for inclusive politics, especially with regard to preparations leading to the ‘one person, one vote’ elections in 2020-2021, and advances in its constitutional review process.

“The Federal Government of Somalia would need to continue its efforts in building constructive relations with all those who would benefit from its leadership: the federal Parliament, Federal Member States, political groups and civil society,” said Ms. DiCarlo.

“This will ultimately help to stabilize the political environment, achieve further progress and strengthen Somalia’s resilience against pressures that risk undermining its unity,” she added.

The Horn of Africa country is facing a range of political, developmental, security and humanitarian challenges as it rebuilds after decades of armed conflict and climate-related shocks.

Taking place in the Belgian capital, the two-day Forum also spotlighted the importance of supporting a nationally-owned and led reconciliation processes.

Ms. DiCarlo noted that further progress is needed to strengthen the constitutional, legal and institutional foundations of the Somali Federal State, including allocation of powers and resource sharing.

“Despite the challenges that may arise, it is critical that these processes are conducted in an inclusive, consensual manner to ensure ownership by the Somali people,” she said, adding that the UN is committed to advancing inclusive politics in Somalia.

“We are providing technical, financial and logistical support, and we strongly support nationally-owned and -led reconciliation processes, including the national reconciliation framework,” Ms. DiCarlo concluded.

In his remarks, UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Somalia Michael Keating encouraged the international community to “keep Somalia on the agenda,” and noted that the inclusive approach in Somali politics needs to be extended to building national security in an effort to build trust.

“I cannot commend the Government enough for its commitment to a genuinely holistic approach, to recognizing that it is not only about military and operations, it’s also about building institutions, rule of law, accountable local governance, reconciliation and countering violent extremism,” he said.

Record 123 million infants received at least one vaccine in 2017, says UN

A record-breaking total of around 123 million, or nine out of 10, infants, received at least one dose of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine in 2017, protecting them from deadly infectious diseases, according to United Nations figures released on Monday.

An additional 4.6 million infants were vaccinated globally in 2017, compared to 2010, due to the pace of global population growth.

And the data from the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) and the [UN Children’s Fund](#) (UNICEF) shows that 167 countries included a second dose of measles vaccine, as part of their routine vaccination schedule, and 162 countries now use rubella vaccines. As a result, global coverage against measles and rubella increased from 35 per cent in 2010, to 52 per cent.

The human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine was introduced in 79 countries to help protect women against cervical cancer.

Newly available inoculations are also being added as part of the overall package of life-saving vaccinations, such as those to protect against meningitis, malaria, and even Ebola.

Despite these successes, almost 20 million infants did not receive the benefits of full immunization in 2017. Of these, almost 8 million, or 40 per cent, live in fragile or crisis-affected places, including countries affected by conflict.

In addition, a growing percentage are from middle-income countries, where increasing inequality and marginalization – particularly among the urban poor – prevent many from getting immunized.

As populations grow, more countries need to increase their investments in immunization programmes, says WHO and UNICEF.

[Dress the world in wood, UN says in its 'Forests for Fashion' initiative](#)

The fashion industry is valued upward of 2.5 trillion dollars, and employs some 75 million people globally – so it makes good sense to shift textile production from fossil fuel-based synthetic fibers to renewable, biodegradable textiles, made from wood, according to a new United Nations initiative that aims to make forests literally more fashionable.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)-FAO's ([Food and Agriculture Organization](#)) "Forests for Fashion" initiative, links forest-based materials from sustainably managed forests, with the world of fashion.

"Sustainability of a society is both an individual and a collective responsibility," said UN Development Programme (UNDP) Goodwill Ambassador Michelle Yeoh, at UN headquarters on Monday.

"The fashion industry is responsible for producing 20 per cent of global waste water and 10 per cent of the global carbon emissions – more than the emissions of all international flights and maritime shipping combined," said the star of the movie *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

In addition, the textiles industry has recently been identified as a major polluter, with estimates of around half a million tonnes of plastic microfibers ending up in the world's oceans as polyester, nylon or acrylic are washed each year.

"Fashion is often a synonym of dangerous working conditions, unsafe processes and hazardous substances used in production," she continued, citing the cruel

abuses of modern slavery and child labour.

Although the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) are an ambitious blueprint for governments, Ms. Yeoh stressed that everyone must make a conscious choice to change habits and plan for the future.

“Today we count around 3.2 billion people in the global middle class,” she said. “By 2030, this number will rise to about 5.4 billion with the major part of the growth occurring in Asia. The 2.2 billion people entering the global middle class will aspire to a similar lifestyle as we know it today – which includes a similar consumption pattern with respect to clothing.”



UN News/Matt Wells

View of designs using textiles produced from wood-based fibers at the UN agencies backed exhibit

A fashion revolution

Calling fashion “a major development challenge,” Ms. Yeoh sees clothing as “an essential element for the transition towards sustainable societies.”

While acknowledging the need for governments’ involvement in shifting the fashion industry to in the right direction, she put the main onus on individuals to start the fashion “revolution”.

“Many of us would also think that forests are best left untouched, however is often by adding value to their products that we can best protect them, and in many cases restoration efforts can be coupled with productive forests,” she attested.

Moreover, forests can create productive ecosystems, to support local and rural communities. According to the UNDP envoy, ‘forest fibers are already a reality and textile businesses are growing or buying large forest

extensions.”

“New fibers are highly sustainable, their carbon and ecological footprints are low, and there are different fast-growing species suitable for different places and climates,” she indicated.

“Let’s face it,” concluded Ms. Yeoh, “changing the production and consumption patterns of the fashion industry will have a domino effect on many aspects of development and provide a visible and meaningful contribution to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.”

Sand and dust storms, a “human well-being” issue, says high level panel

From higher morbidity and mortality rates to reduced economic growth, the impact of sand and dust storms can be major, especially for lower-income nations and vulnerable communities. However, with stronger collaboration and improved information-sharing, much of the risk could be managed and mitigated, a UN meeting heard on Monday.

The high level General Assembly meeting examined the risks posed by sand and dust storms, known by the acronym SDS, and the various opportunities available to mitigate those risks and fill the existing knowledge gaps.

“For people, the stakes of inaction on this issue are high,” said Miroslav Lajčák, President of the UN General Assembly. “Human well-being is at risk.”

Various studies have revealed the severe effects that sand and dust storms can have on health, including respiratory, cardiovascular, skin and eye diseases.

The panel also highlighted the major economic impact that these meteorological events can have: “One sand or dust storm can cost hundreds of millions of dollars,” explained Mr. Lajčák. “The losses are really felt in the agriculture, transportation and infrastructure sectors. These are resources that could have been channeled towards sustainable development at a time when we need to mobilize more for the 2030 Agenda”.

As this is a phenomenon that affects more than 45 countries – principally in the Sahel, Central and East Asia, the Middle East as well as North America and the Caribbean – Governments and experts have sought solutions to mitigate the risk, build resilience and strengthen the amount of information on the subject globally. The [UN World Meteorological Organization](#)’s Warning Advisory and Assessment System is now capable of issuing forecasts as far as three days in advance. However, ensuring that this information reaches the most

vulnerable to reduce death rates as well as negative impacts to their livelihoods, is a challenge that remains to be tackled.

“It is unconscionable that information that can help the health of people affected...is not available to them,” said Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary-General, in a video played at the event.

Among the solutions proposed, the panelists cited: greening areas where SDS events tend to be born by planting more trees; improving information channels so even the most vulnerable communities can adequately prepare and protect themselves; and enhancing cross-border collaboration so countries can share lessons learned and implement holistic disaster risk reduction measures.

“For the last three years, the General Assembly has pledged to take action on sand and dust storms. But we cannot do this alone,” said Mr. Lajčák, calling for “more Member States to work in tandem with the Rio Conventions, on climate change, biodiversity, and importantly, combatting desertification” and address the issue in a durable and lasting fashion.