

Millions denied citizenship due to ideas of national, ethnic or racial 'purity': UN rights expert

Ideologies which define nationality as being determined by ethnicity or bloodline are denying millions of people of their right to citizenship, a UN expert has charged.

E. Tendayi Achiume, Special Rapporteur on racism, focused on the issue of ethno-nationalism in her first [report](#) to the Human Rights Council in Geneva, whose current session ends on Friday.

In it, she highlighted the plight of millions of stateless people worldwide—often members of minority groups—who are victims of long-standing discrimination which sees them as “foreign”, even though they have been resident in a country for generations or even centuries.

Meanwhile, several countries continue to enforce “patriarchal laws” which make it impossible for women to pass down citizenship status to their children or foreign-born spouse.

This is gender-based discrimination often deployed by States to preserve notions of national, ethnic and racial ‘purity’ – *Special Rapporteur Tendayi Achiume*

In some cases, women are even stripped of their nationality upon marrying a foreigner and cannot regain it if the marriage ends.

“This is gender-based discrimination often deployed by States to preserve notions of national, ethnic and racial ‘purity,’” she said.

Ms. Achiume believes prejudice rooted in ethno-nationalism is behind racial discrimination, whether in citizenship or immigration laws.

She recalled that in the past, European colonial powers used the ideology to exclude local populations within colonies from gaining citizenship, while Jews and Roma were targeted on the same grounds, in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Today, she said, migrants are the target of political hate speech and intolerance, again often under the pretext of ethnic purity and religious, cultural or linguistic preservation.

“Countries that have long celebrated immigration as central to their national identity have taken steps to vilify and undermine immigration, with a disproportionate effect on certain racial, religious and national groups,”

Ms. Achiume pointed out.

“Islamophobic or anti-Semitic ethno-nationalism undermines the rights of Muslims and Jews irrespective of citizenship status...the case of the Rohingya Muslims offers a chilling example.”

The Rohingya are a mostly Muslim minority in Myanmar, which is a predominantly Buddhist nation.

Though resident there for centuries, Ms. Achiume said many Rohingya have been rendered stateless following a 1982 nationality law that discriminates on the basis of ethnicity.

Waves of violence and discrimination have driven scores of Rohingya to neighbouring Bangladesh. More than 700,000 have arrived in the past year alone in the wake of a violent military crackdown that began in late August.

[Act now to end violence, Zeid urges Nicaraguan authorities](#)

The Nicaraguan authorities should “take real steps” to prevent further loss of life in the country amid ongoing protests and violent repression by pro-Government “armed elements”, the UN’s top [human rights](#) official said on Thursday.

Noting in a [statement](#) that “approximately 250 people, many of them young persons”, had been killed since mid-April in demonstrations against President Daniel Ortega’s Government, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein highlighted a “climate of intimidation and insecurity” on the streets.

Thousands of people had also been injured in the violence and 12 police officers had also been killed, according to official sources, the High Commissioner said.

Although the “excessive use of force” by police officers against demonstrators had decreased, violence by “pro-Government elements has continued to escalate”, he insisted.

Those targeted include communities that have erected barricades or roadblocks, with “signs of selective repression” against demonstrators and their families, human rights defenders and members of the church.

I now urge the authorities to take real steps to recognize the seriousness of the situation – *High Commissioner Zeid*

More than 700 people are also reported to have been arbitrarily detained and some have been allegedly subjected to ill-treatment, while cases of disappearances have also been reported, according to Zeid's statement.

Amid an atmosphere of "widespread fear", the UN official urged the State to "recognize the seriousness of the situation" and adopt "appropriate measures to protect the population and prevent further deaths".

The High Commissioner's comments follow a visit to Nicaragua by a team from the UN Human Rights Office, OHCHR, from 26 June to 3 July.

Their mission was to carry out human rights monitoring and support the work of a State commission tasked with disarming "pro-Government elements" and encourage the dismantling of barricades.

"While I am grateful to the Nicaraguan Government for inviting the UN Human Rights Office to the country, I now urge the authorities to take real steps to recognize the seriousness of the situation," Zeid said.

In addition, Zeid called for "meaningful steps" to address impunity and guarantee justice for victims, noting that the "violence and repression" in Nicaragua were products of the "systematic erosion of human rights over the years".

"I call on the Government to cease State violence and to dismantle the pro-Government armed elements that have been increasingly responsible for repression and attacks," he said. "Those who have instigated or permitted such armed elements to act must also be held to account."

After urging the authorities to preserve any "evidence" that might be used in future investigations, the High Commissioner indicated that his office will stay in Nicaragua and coordinate its activities with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

[Yemen parties underscore 'strong desire' for peace, UN Envoy reports](#)

Warring parties in Yemen have expressed their "strong desire" to achieve peace, the [United Nations Envoy](#) for the country has reported.

Martin Griffiths was in the capital, Sana'a, this week for two days of talks with leaders and representatives of the Ansar Allah rebel movement and the rival General People's Congress, the party of the current and former President.

The rebels, also known as Houthis, and pro-Government forces, backed by a

Saudi-led coalition, have been battling for more than three years.

“I am reassured by the messages I have received, which have been positive and constructive. All parties have not only underscored their strong desire for peace, but have also engaged with me on concrete ideas for achieving peace,” Mr. Griffiths told journalists on Wednesday, adding that he will continue talks with the parties in the coming days.

The UN Envoy expressed thanks to rebel leader Abdel Malek al-Houthi, with whom he held a “fruitful discussion” in Sana’a.

All parties have not only underscored their strong desire for peace, but have also engaged with me on concrete ideas for achieving peace – *UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths*

He also expressed hopes of meeting soon with President Abed Rabboh Mansour Hadi, in a follow-up to talks held last week which he described as “positive”.

“I look forward to work with all the parties urgently to find a solution first that will restore security and stability in (Hodeida) but also create positive conditions for a rapid and urgent restart of political negotiations in the coming days,” he said, referring to the battle for the key port city.

Mr. Griffiths was at UN Headquarters on Thursday to brief the Security Council behind closed doors.

UN relief chief Mark Lowcock also addressed the 15 ambassadors on the humanitarian situation in Yemen, where more than 22 million people require some form of aid or protection assistance.

The crisis in Yemen has its genesis in the 2011 Arab Spring uprising, which swept across the country amid ongoing rebel insurgency.

Although anti-Government protests led to the ouster of the then President, the transfer of power to Mr. Hadi, his deputy, proved rocky.

The Office of the UN Special Envoy supports the return to a peaceful political transition in Yemen, engaging with all sides – as well as civil society, women, youth and others – in the process.

[Syria: Civilians caught in crossfire, UN refugee chief urges Jordan to open](#)

its border

The head of the United Nations Refugee Agency, [UNHCR](#), appealed on Thursday for Jordan to open its border with south-west Syria to help protect around 750,000 civilians who are “caught in the crossfire”, amidst airstrikes and heavy shelling.

“More than 320,000 people are now displaced and most are living in dire and [insecure conditions](#), including some 60,000 people camped at the Nasib/Jaber border crossing with Jordan,” [UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#), Filippo Grandi said, in a statement.

Although local communities in Syria have opened their doors to take in many of the displaced, most are forced to live in open spaces or in makeshift shelters that offer little safety and protection from the elements, he added.

“There are large numbers of women and children among the displaced, as well as elderly, injured and sick people and I am especially concerned about them,” he continued, adding that among the displaced are local humanitarian workers who have “selflessly served the civilian population throughout the duration of the conflict.”

Mr. Grande underscored the immediate priority of finding a political solution to the conflict to spare civilians further suffering. Fighting between pro-Syrian government forces and opposition militia, has been intensifying for weeks across Dara’a Governorate, close to the Jordanian border, as well as the Golan Heights border area with Israel.

*I call on all parties to redouble efforts to cease hostilities – UN
refugee chief*

He said that while the UN and partners are doing what they can to deliver life-saving aid to the people of south-west Syria – both from within the country and across the Jordanian border – the security situation is hindering efforts to reach many people in dire need.

“I call on all parties to redouble efforts to cease hostilities, to allow humanitarian actors to deliver life-saving assistance, shelter and evacuate the wounded,” Mr. Grande said, spelling out that civilian protection, safety and security along with that of humanitarian workers is of “utmost importance.”

It is “a core principle of international humanitarian law that needs to be guaranteed by all parties to the conflict and the international community at large,” he stressed.

“I commend Jordan for generously providing protection to hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees since the beginning of the crisis and for

providing and facilitating assistance to those in need inside Syria,” he said.

But, “given the immediate dangers,” added Mr. Grande, “I am advocating for granting temporary refuge in Jordan to those in need of safety and for the international community to provide immediate and substantive support to Jordan, in a spirit of solidarity and responsibility sharing.”

Underscoring that UNHCR is prepared to immediately scale up its assistance inside Syria and to Jordan, the High Commissioner concluded: “Thousands of innocent lives are going to be lost, once again, if urgent action is not taken.”

[Dangers of poor quality health care revealed ‘in all countries’: WHO report](#)

Ineffective health care is a global phenomenon which increases the burden of illness and wastes scarce resources, UN experts said on Thursday.

In a new [report](#) on the subject, the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) and partners cited problems with delivering quality health care across all Member States.

The finding is important because, although nations have committed to providing universal health coverage by 2030, the outcome “would still be poor” without the delivery of effective care, WHO says.

“Inaccurate diagnosis, medication errors, inappropriate or unnecessary treatment, inadequate or unsafe clinical facilities or practices – or providers who lack adequate training and expertise – prevail in all countries,” the agency said in a statement.

The challenge is greatest in low- and middle-income countries, where 10 per cent of hospital patients acquire an infection during the course of their stay, compared to 7 per cent elsewhere.

In some poorer nations, moreover, clinical guidelines are followed in less than 50 per cent of cases, resulting in “low-quality antenatal and childcare”, as well as “deficient” family planning, according to the report by WHO, the [World Bank](#) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Inadequate clinical practice was also “common” in private and public clinics

in several low- and middle-income countries, the study found, with some demonstrating diagnostic accuracy as low as 34 per cent.

Ensuring quality health care for everyone is essential, it says, primarily because it prevents suffering, but also since it helps to boost economic productivity.

Furthermore, failing to treat sick people results in increased financial pressure on families and health systems which amounts to trillions of dollars each year, the report notes.

Highlighting the dangers of ineffective health coverage when faced with a public health emergency, the report notes that in Liberia, inadequacies there allowed the 2014 Ebola epidemic “to proliferate rapidly”.

It found that the virus exposed “largely absent” infection prevention and control where it was most needed, along with several “persistent” systemic constraints.

These included a lack of skilled professionals in communities, as well as an absence of financing mechanisms, distribution networks and information procedures.

Following the outbreak, an investment plan was put in place to help the West African nation’s ability to tackle future health emergencies, involving the provision of essential services and improving community confidence in health systems.

Underscoring the fact that the problem crosses all economic boundaries, the report found that richer countries had problems too, with breast-screening rates as low as 19 per cent and influenza vaccination rates below 30 per cent, in 35 nations.

Findings from high-income countries also indicated that 1 in 10 patients is harmed during medical treatment, and that around 15 per cent of hospital expenditure can be put down to mistakes in care or having to treat patient infection.

Despite the challenges, the report noted some progress in improving the quality of care, for example in survival rates for cancer and cardiovascular disease.

In an appeal to Governments to promote stronger national health-care quality policies, the three co-authors of the report emphasized their rejection of the perception that quality health care is a “luxury that only rich countries can afford”.

Finally, noting that technological innovation already “plays a key role” in offering ways to expand high-quality health-care services rapidly and affordably, the report also finds that “many” low- and middle-income countries have developed successful strategies to improve the quality of health coverage, but all that is missing is a global platform to share this knowledge.