

Torture is unacceptable and unjustified 'at all times' underscore top UN officials

Torture in any form, is absolutely unacceptable and can never be justified, top United Nations officials said on Tuesday, urging great support for victims worldwide.

In his message to mark the [International Day in Support of Victims of Torture](#), Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that the “absolute prohibition” of torture is “stipulated in unequivocal terms” as a foundational principle, including within the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).

“Much has been achieved in the fight against this and other cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment and treatment, yet more action is needed to eradicate torture fully,” he said.

[“Torture remains unacceptable and unjustified at all times](#), including during states of emergency, political instability, or even in a war.”

In the message, the Secretary-General also paid tribute to all who stand in solidarity with the victims of torture and their families, and underscored that the victims have the right to justice, rehabilitation and redress.

Commemorated annually on 26 June, the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture marks the moment in 1987, when the UN [Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#), came into effect.

The International Day also serves as a rallying cry for all stakeholders including UN Member States, civil society and individuals to unite in support of victims of torture and those who are still subjected to the ghastly practice. It also highlights the need for prompt and specialized rehabilitation programmes to help victims “make the transition from horror to healing.”

“It takes decades to restore this broken human being as a result of the effects of a [pernicious attack](#) on their body and their mind,” said High Commissioner Zeid in a separate message.

In his [message](#), the UN rights chief also reiterated the vital role played by the Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, a unique victim-focused mechanism that channels funding for the assistance to victims of torture and their families that helps over 50,000 torture victims and their families every year.

The UN human rights chief, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, also underlined the need

for stable and peaceful States everywhere, to support victims of torture.

“If you do not pay attention” to the victims, he said, “and if you leave them unattended, they are the ones will keep the wounds of a State open because their suffering hasn’t been addressed.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights added that the [Fund](#) plays a “critical role in restoring some sense of humanity to societies and societies” where torture is still used.

Cocaine and opium production worldwide hit ‘absolute record highs’ – major threat to public health says UN study

The scourge of opium-based drugs and cocaine are a bigger global threat to public health and law enforcement than ever before, according to the latest [World Drug Report](#), released on Tuesday by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)).

The findings “show that drug markets are expanding, with cocaine and opium production hitting [absolute record highs](#), presenting multiple challenges on multiple fronts,” said UNODC Executive Director Yury Fedotov.

The 2018 Report provides an overview of the supply and demand of drugs as well as their impact on health.

The UN drug and crime fighting chief said the annual report was “a key pillar of our support, along with assistance to translate international obligations into action and capacity building on the ground to enable effective responses,” he added, in order to “protect the health and welfare of humankind.”

Beyond the production of the opium-based street drug heroin, pharmaceutically-produced opioids account for 76 per cent of non-medical, prescription drug deaths worldwide, with the powerful synthetic opioid Fentanyl an increasing problem in North America, and Tramadol a growing concern in parts of Africa and Asia.

Accessibility of both for medical use is vital for treating pain, but traffickers manufacture them illegally, causing considerable harm to health.

UNODC revealed that global seizures of pharmaceutical opioids in 2016 was 87 tons – with West, Central and North Africa accounting for the vast majority and Asian countries reporting just 7 per cent of the global total.

From 2016-2017, global opium production jumped by 65 per cent – the highest estimate recorded by UNODC since it started monitoring the drug's production at the start of this century.

The demographics

Turning to vulnerable age groups, the Report finds that drug use is highest among young people with research suggesting that 12- to 17-year-olds are at critical risk.

While the majority of people who misuse drugs are men, women have specific drug use patterns. The prevalence of non-medical opioids and tranquillizers is common to both, but women often begin abusing drugs at a later stage than men.

“UNODC is committed to working with countries to seek balanced, integrated solutions to drug challenges and achieve progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals,” Mr. Fedotov underscored in the report.

UN chief weighs in on drug abuse

[Secretary-General António Guterres](#) also highlighted the dangers of growing drug abuse on Tuesday, saying that drug challenges are “among the most [complex problems we face](#).”

In his message to mark the [International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking](#), he emphasized that the impact of illegal drugs – including on families, communities and sustainable development – underscored the need for international cooperation and effective law enforcement, in accordance with international standards, to stop organized networks and drug traffickers.

Mr. Guterres stressed that drugs must be addressed with “a holistic focus across many fronts” while expanding evidence-based approaches to prevention, treatment and support.

The UN chief cited the outcome document adopted by the 2016 General Assembly Special Session on the world drug problem, which outlines concrete steps for taking balanced action, rooted in the principle of shared responsibility.

“It is also flexible enough to allow countries to pursue national drug policies according to their priorities and needs,” he continued.

“I urge countries to advance prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration services; ensure access to controlled medicines while preventing diversion and abuse; promote alternatives to illicit drug cultivation; and stop trafficking and organized crime,” said the Secretary-General, adding that all these steps “would make an immense contribution to our work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.”

[Aid teams respond to escalating southwest Syria conflict: 750,000 civilians are at risk](#)

Vital humanitarian relief continues to reach Dera'a in south-west Syria, where 750,000 people are at risk and at least 45,000 people have been displaced amid a government-led offensive to regain opposition-held areas, UN aid teams said on Tuesday.

Clashes between forces loyal to the Government of Syria and armed opposition units have forced most to flee from eastern Dera'a to areas near the Jordan border, according to the [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#).

The uptick in violence comes despite a ceasefire deal covering Dera'a that was agreed by Turkey, Iran and Russia last year, OCHA spokesperson Jens Laerke told journalists in Geneva.

"Civilian infrastructure has also reportedly been attacked and damaged," he said, "including an airstrike on Sunday 24 June that took a field hospital in the town of Al-Hrak out of function".

To help those in need, "food, health, nutrition, education and other core relief items" have been transported via cross-border deliveries from Jordan, the OCHA spokesperson added.

We expect the number of displaced people could more than double as the violence escalates – *Bettina Luescher (WFP)*

Another contributor to the aid effort, the [World Food Programme \(WFP\)](#), confirmed in Geneva that the fighting had closed main supply routes inside Syria.

It too relies on cross-border access and reaches affected families via the Ar-Ramtha border crossing between Jordan and Syria, WFP spokesperson Bettina Luescher explained, in accordance with a UN Security Council resolution allowing the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

"The World Food Programme is really worried about the situation," she said. "We expect the number of displaced people could more than double as the violence escalates."

To date, WFP has delivered ready-to-eat food to more than 30,000 people sheltering in villages and makeshift camps.

These rations provide enough food for one week and include canned foods such as tuna, chicken and beans. To help prevent malnutrition in infants, WFP has provided specialized nutritional products, Luescher said.

Those fleeing attacks have sought shelter to the west of Dera'a, in Quneitra governorate, WFP said in a statement which also highlighted that "retaliatory shelling" had targeted the governorate of Swaida, to the east.

Tarik Jasarevic, spokesperson for the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) said that more than 135,000 treatment units, including 2,100 trauma kits were ready to be sent to Dera'a from the capital Damascus "once the green light is received from the Syrian authorities".

In addition, five medical mobile teams will be deployed "in coming days" to Dera'a, Mr. Jasarevic told reporters.

In terms of cross-border deliveries, WHO has more than 50 metric tonnes of emergency health supplies that "will cross the border into Syria" soon, he added.

[UN spotlights wellbeing of seafarers on International Day](#)

Highlighting the challenges – both physical and mental – faced by seafarers on their voyages, the United Nations [International Maritime Organization](#) (IMO) has called for greater attention to ensuring their wellbeing.

In his annual message for the [Day of the Seafarer](#), IOM Secretary-General Kitack Lim noted that many factors can affect the quality of life at sea, including shore leaves, prompt and sufficient wages and even "simple things" like the Internet or provision of exercise on board ships.

"All of these come, and more, come together, under the banner of 'seafarers' wellbeing'," he said.

"Day of the Seafarer 2018 provides a platform to advocate for higher standards of welfare and enable shipping companies and others within the industry to show how they provide a good working environment for seafarers and thereby make a positive contribution to their wellbeing," added Mr. Lim.

The theme for 2018 continues the focus IMO announced last year on the physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing of those at sea.

According to the UN agency, by addressing the issue of seafarers' wellbeing and particularly mental health, the campaign can inform specific strategies to tackle stress and other issues affecting seafarers' mental conditions –

and make the tools available more widely known.

The campaign will also showcase best practices, as well as spotlight areas of concern and examples of shortcomings.

A major part of the campaign is an online survey where seafarers themselves are being encouraged to share their own views and experiences. The results of the survey will be analysed and presented to the IMO Council.

Alongside the survey, the campaign also has a strong social media focus and includes a photo competition where seafarers are being called to show the world “what a good day at the sea looks like.”

The Day of the Seafarer, marked annually on 25 June, was established in a resolution adopted by the 2010 Diplomatic Conference in Manila, the capital of Philippines, to recognize the unique contribution made by seafarers from all over the world to international seaborne trade, the world economy and civil society as a whole.

[Easing funding woes for UN agency assisting Palestine refugees a ‘wise investment for today and the future’](#)

A pledging conference on Monday for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East ([UNRWA](#)) aimed to address the body’s chronic funding shortfall and also examine long-term priorities.

“The [outstanding work](#) of UNRWA has an immediate effect by meeting the urgent humanitarian needs of millions of Palestine refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria,” [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres said in his opening remarks at the Conference.

“At the same time, this work provides a foundation of hope and dignity – serving as a critical conflict prevention mechanism in a turbulent region and moving our world closer to the promise of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) to leave no one behind,” he added.

For decades, UNRWA’s high quality education has been standard setting in the region, gender parity has been the school norm for generations and UNRWA health care has attained near universal immunization, the UN chief explained.

He also lauded the UN agency’s microfinance programmes and its work providing food assistance to 1.7 million refugees, while acknowledging: “All these

efforts have taken place in an environment of chronic economic hardship and conflict.”

Mr. Guterres expressed deep gratitude to all who have contributed the funding that which has allowed UNRWA to maintain its vital services, noting the agency’s own extraordinary measures to reduce its expenditures by an additional \$92 million.

“But these innovative efforts will not be sufficient to fully close the funding shortfall this year,” he said, urging UN Member States to make up the difference.

UNRWA’s vital efforts must be allowed to falter, he said, stressing that failure comes with a price, namely more hardship for communities; more desperation for the region; and more instability for the world.

“We must do everything possible to ensure that food continues to arrive, that schools remain open and that people do not lose hope,” he said, and noted that closing UNRWA’s funding gap “is a wise investment for today and for the future.”

Miroslav Lajčák, the President of the UN General Assembly, pointed out that UNRWA had not been set up to last for 70 years.

“We have turned a temporary solution into the status quo,” he told those assembled, encouraging everyone to change that “through direct and meaningful talks.”

“And, ultimately,” he continued “a two-state solution, which allows Israelis and Palestinians to live side-by-side, in peace.”

He urged all to work together to come up with an immediate solution for the Agency’s shortfall, but added: “Let us not forget the bigger picture. And the urgent need for a political solution.”

For his part, UNRWA Commissioner General Pierre Krähenbühl presented a special report on the Agency’s current financial crisis, in which he outlined the dramatic dimensions of the funding shortfall.

He also highlighted resource mobilization efforts under way to address it, including the [Dignity Is Priceless](#) campaign, which aims to raise funds from individuals.

This year’s meeting was a milestone for judging the prospects to bridge UNRWA’s budget gap as well as a platform to outline consequences, should a significant shortfall remain.

The General Assembly established UNRWA in 1949 to provide assistance and protection to 5.3 million registered Palestine refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.