

[UN chief calls for ‘solidarity, compassion and action’ on World Refugee Day](#)

With more than 68 million people worldwide displaced due to conflict or persecution – roughly equivalent to the population of Thailand– the head of the United Nations has called for unity and solidarity as a first step to support them.

The appeal by [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) comes in a video message for [World Refugee Day](#), observed this Wednesday, 20 June.

In it, he reported that a person was displaced every two seconds during 2017.

“On World Refugee Day, we must all think about what more we can we do to help.” The answer, he added, “begins with unity and solidarity.”

Mr. Guterres also expressed deep concern over the rise in the number of refugees who are not receiving the protection they are entitled to. He added that communities, or countries, that provide a safe haven for those fleeing war or persecution should be supported.

Later this year, a [Global Compact on Refugees](#) will be presented to the international community meeting at UN Headquarters in New York.

Mr. Guterres said it offers “a way forward” while also recognizing the contributions that refugees make to the societies hosting them.

“As long as there are wars and persecution, there will be refugees. On World Refugee Day, I ask you to remember them,” his message continued.

“Their story is one of resilience, perseverance and courage. Ours must be of solidarity, compassion and action.”

[‘No steps taken’ so far to end Israel’s illegal settlement activity on Palestinian land – UN envoy](#)

A senior United Nations official on Tuesday urged Israel to reverse course over illegal settlement construction on occupied Palestinian land, and for both parties to return to the negotiating table in pursuit of a lasting peace

deal.

“The need to reverse, or at the very least contain the impact of negative trends – especially [illegal settlement activity](#), violence and incitement – is critical not only to preserve hope for a meaningful return to the negotiating table, but also to prevent the escalation of broader regional tensions,” UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, told the Security Council.

Mr. Mladenov presented to the 15-member body the sixth quarterly report on the implementation of Council resolution 2334, covering the period from 26 March to 12 June this year.

“As detailed in the report, no steps were taken during the reporting period to “cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem’ as demanded by the resolution”, he said.

The July 2016 report of the Middle East Quartet – comprising the UN, Russia, the United States and the European Union – identified Israel’s settlement activity as one of the main obstacles to achieving a two-state solution, which is to establish a viable, sovereign Palestinian state that lives in peace and security with Israel.

In Tuesday’s briefing, Mr. Mladenov noted that some 3,500 housing units in settlements in what is known as “Area C” of the occupied West Bank had either been “advanced, approved or tendered”. One-third of those units are in settlements in outlying locations deep inside the West Bank.

Plans for 2,300 units were advanced in the approval process, while 300 units had reached the final approval stage. Tenders had gone out for about 900 units, he said. As in the previous period, no advancements, approvals or tenders were made in occupied East Jerusalem.

“I reiterate that all settlement activity is illegal under international law. It continues to undermine the practical prospects for establishing a viable Palestinian state and erodes remaining hopes for peace,” he said.

During the reporting period, Israeli authorities demolished or seized 84 Palestinian-owned structures, resulting in the displacement of 67 people and potentially affected the livelihoods of 4,500 others.

The reporting period was characterized by high levels of violence, including rocket attacks from Gaza, Mr. Mladenov said.

Since 30 March, during a series of protests in Gaza, 135 Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces. Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorists, have acknowledged that a number of their members were among those killed. Two Israeli soldiers were also injured during the protests, with at least five others injured as a result of rockets and mortars launched from Gaza.

Under the cover of the protests, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other

militants engaged in violent and provocative acts, stated Mr. Mladenov.

Hundreds approached and attempted to breach the fence, burned tires, threw rocks and fire bombs at Israeli forces, launched incendiary kites and laid improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Palestinian protesters also damaged and looted equipment and installations on the Gaza side of the border at the Kerem Shalom crossing.

“I want to again reiterate the call of the Secretary-General on all to unequivocally condemn, in the strongest possible terms, all actions that have brought us to this dangerous place and led to the loss of so many lives in Gaza,” he said.

Migrant children at US border have right to protection and ‘be with their families’: UNICEF chief

Separating children from their families is in no-one’s best interest – the head of UN Children’s Fund [UNICEF](#) said on Tuesday – pointing to “heartbreaking” stories of infants who have been reportedly removed from their parents after entering the US from Mexico illegally.

In an appeal to the US regarding its recent policy change cracking down on migration at the border with Mexico, Executive Director Henrietta Fore said in a statement that children who were in need of international protection “have the right to be protected...and be with their families”.

She underlined how for decades the US Government had provided support to “uprooted children” from Syria or South Sudan, Somalia, or Haiti, before warning that detention and family separation can create “toxic stress” which can impact on children’s long-term development.

Ms Fore added that any youngsters forced to flee their homes should have access to essential services and be with their families, since this gave them “the best chance at a healthy, happy and productive future”.

No appropriate reason to detain or jail children – *Joel Millman,*
IOM

Echoing that message, UNICEF spokesperson Christophe Boulierac, in Geneva, said that immigration and children’s rights were not incompatible.

He told journalists: “I think our main role here is to make the point... that

what's happening is not right and, and, more than that, immigration enforcement and protecting the right of children are not a zero-sum game."

Research showed that taking children into custody without their parents had an "immediate" and negative effect on their wellbeing, Mr Boulhierac said.

He highlighted research which showed that children who have not seen a parent for one month after the parents' arrest "experience more frequent changes in sleeping habits, anger and withdrawing from their family", compared with children who had seen their parents within the same period following their arrest.

Responding to journalists' questions, Mr Boulhierac confirmed that the US is the only country which has signed but has yet to ratify the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.

He cited Article 9 of the international accord, which specifies that a child "shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will" except after judicial review and only if it is "necessary for the best interests of the child".

On the same issue the UN Migration Agency [IOM](#) said that it agreed "almost 100 per cent" with the UNICEF statement.

"We feel in general no migrant should be detained for being a migrant," IOM spokesperson Joel Millman said, before adding that there was "no appropriate reason to detain or jail children".

If we can build the International Space Station, 'we can do anything' – UN Champion for Space

The sight of Earth, from hundreds of kilometers away in open space while you are tethered only to the International Space Station, is "absolutely amazing", said Scott Kelly, the UN Champion for Space and former US astronaut, stressing that the world we live on "is our only planet."

"Through that single visor, you see how fragile the Earth's atmosphere is ... it's almost like someone put this thin film over the surface of our planet and the first time you see it, you realize that is everything that protects us from space," said Mr. Kelly, delivering a keynote address at the UNISPACE+50 gathering in Vienna; a United Nations forum on the peaceful uses of outer space.

However, in spite of this breathtakingly beautiful sight, there are parts of the globe when viewed from space, that are almost always shrouded in pollution, he continued.

Humankind may get to Mars someday or elsewhere in the Solar System, but if it is to survive, it “needs to survive on earth” added the former NASA astronaut who spent over a year orbiting the planet.

In his address, Mr. Kelly described his life onboard the International Space Station, a structure measuring about 300 feet long and 200 feet wide and orbiting between 280-460 kilometers in space.

This space station is the hardest thing we have ever done ... if we can do this we can do anything – *UN Champion for Space Scott Kelly*

Particularly poignant was his description of the time he left the station for his last time, onboard a Russian Soyuz spacecraft:

“We built this space station ... while flying around the Earth at 17,500 miles an hour, in a vacuum, in temperatures ranges of plus or minus 270 degrees”, he said, adding that they had connecting modules, “some of which had never touched each other before on Earth” which “put together astronauts and cosmonauts working in these very, very difficult conditions.”

“This space station is the hardest thing we have ever done ... if we can do this we can do anything,” underscored Mr. Kelly.

He linked this incredible feat of human ingenuity and perseverance with addressing the challenges confronting the vert survival of planet Earth.

If we want to fix the problems with the environment we can do that, expressed Mr. Kelly.

“After spending a year in space, I was absolutely inspired that we can dream it we can do it ... and most importantly, if we work as a team because teamwork makes the dream work. The sky is not the limit.”

UN News is on location in Vienna covering UNISPACE+50 and its associated events. Follow us at [@UN_News_Centre](#) for news and highlights.

[It's time to 'eliminate the scourge of conflict-related sexual violence',](#)

urges UN chief

The effects of conflict-related sexual violence echo across generations, in the form of trauma, stigma, and unwanted pregnancy, said the UN chief on Tuesday, describing the scourge as “a threat to our collective security” and “a stain on our common humanity.”

That was the central message from [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) to mark the [International Day](#) for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict.

“Children conceived through wartime rape often [struggle](#) with issues of identity and belonging for decades after the guns have fallen silent,” explained Mr. Guterres.

“They may be left in a legal limbo, or at risk of becoming stateless,” he continued. “They are vulnerable to recruitment, trafficking and exploitation, with broad implications for peace and security, as well as human rights.”

These women and children are sometimes seen as affiliates of armed and violent extremist groups, rather than as victims and survivors
– *UN Chief António Guterres*

Many of those children scarred by violence in war are rarely accepted by society, have been labelled “bad blood” or “children of the enemy,” and are alienated from their mothers’ social groups, according to the UN.

Meanwhile, unsafe abortion, following violent rape, remains a leading cause of maternal mortality in conflict-affected settings.

“Their mothers may be marginalized and shunned by their own families and communities. These women and children are sometimes seen as affiliates of armed and violent extremist groups, rather than as victims and survivors,” Mr. Guterres maintained.

Moreover, the issue of children born of war has been missing from both the international human rights framework and from peace and security discourse, rendering them a voiceless category of victims.

Under this year’s theme, “The Plight and Rights of Children Born of War,” the Day encourages solidarity with the survivors who have endured multiple ordeals, in the wake of sexual violence.

“On the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, we amplify the voices of these forgotten victims of war, who suffer stigma, shame and exclusion in societies polarized by armed conflict,” spelled out Mr. Guterres.

He underscored that the UN stands ready to work with governments, civil

society, traditional and religious leaders, and all partners “to support children born of rape in wartime and their mothers, and those working on the frontlines to support them.”

“Let us reaffirm our global commitment to eliminate the scourge of conflict-related sexual violence and to provide justice, services and support to all those affected,” concluded the Secretary-General.