

UN mobilizes in Rohingya camps to support babies born of rape, as young mothers face stigma

Members of the mainly-Muslim minority community began fleeing Myanmar's Rakhine state last August following a military crackdown targeting extremists, during which homes were destroyed, men and boys killed, and countless women and girls raped.

In early May, UN News [published a special report](#) highlighting the concerns being voiced by several leading UN officials over the legacy of what Andrew Gilmour, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, described as a "frenzy of sexual violence".

On Tuesday, the world marks the [International Day](#) for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, and we have been finding out how some of the survivors have been coping, now that dozens of children of rape have been born – and what UN agencies are doing to provide them with vital services and support.

"Sameera" (not her real name) is among the Rohingya refugees now sheltering in the crowded camps of the Cox's Bazar region in south-eastern Bangladesh.

The 17-year-old had only been married for a couple of months when her husband was killed.

She was raped just days after his death, when three soldiers showed up at her door, together with two other Rohingya girls, who were also raped.

"As I will give birth to the baby, he or she will be mine, no matter who the father is," she told the [UN Children's Fund \(UNICEF\)](#).

'Forgotten victims of war'

Since August, more than [16,000 babies](#) have been born in the refugee camps, according to the UN agency.

It is difficult to determine exactly how many were conceived through rape, said [Pramila Patten](#), the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

"You also have the stigma of a pregnancy as a result of rape which makes it very hard for (women) to come out openly with the fact of their pregnancy," she told *UN News* last month, shortly after returning from a mission to the Kutupalong camp, one of the largest refugee camps in the world.

"And in fact, there are many reports from local Rohingyas that many girls, especially young adolescents, are actually hiding the fact of their pregnancy and will never seek medical care, for example, for the delivery."

UNICEF has collected testimonies from several women and girls like “Sameera,” whose children are among what UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) has called the “[forgotten victims of war.](#)”

Conceived through conflict-related rape, these boys and girls grow up struggling with their identity, or fall victim to stigma and shame. At the same time, their mothers are marginalized or even shunned by their communities.

For the past three years, the UN has designated 19 June as [the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict](#) to promote solidarity with survivors.

Ms. Patten’s office is co-hosting an [event](#) at UN Headquarters in New York to mark Tuesday’s international day, where strategies will be discussed on how to change the perception that these children and their mothers are somehow complicit in crimes committed by the groups that violated them.



UNICEF/Brian Sokol

Sitting in her bamboo and plastic shelter in a refugee camp in Bangladesh, Rohingya refugee, Maryam, recounts the events that forced her from her home in Myanmar following a sexual assault that left her pregnant at 16 years old.

Midwives and monsoons

Back in Bangladesh, the arrival of the monsoon winds and rains just over a week ago is making life even more difficult for the Rohingya refugees and the humanitarians assisting them.

More than 720,000 Rohingya have arrived in Cox’s Bazar as of the end of May, according to the UN refugee agency ([UNHCR](#)), joining some 200,000 others who had fled earlier waves of persecution and discrimination.

UN agencies are responding to the overwhelming needs, though a [\\$951 million humanitarian plan](#) is less than 20 per cent funded.

Since the start of the crisis, the UN Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)) has [deployed](#) 60 highly skilled midwives to the area who are also trained in clinical management of rape and family planning counselling.

Nineteen women-friendly spaces have also been created in the camps.

UNFPA said key among “protection challenges” is scaling up assistance to survivors of gender-based violence, and other vulnerable populations, including through psychosocial support and counselling, and psychological first aid.

So far, 47,000 Rohingya mothers-to-be have received antenatal check-ups while 1,700 babies were safely delivered in clinics supported by the Fund.

UNFPA recently Tweeted that its midwifery and reproductive health services were still available “24/7” even though there was no electricity in the camps.

“Midwives and case workers have weathered the storms and walked on slippery and waterlogged roads to our facilities,” its office in Bangladesh further [reported](#).

Reluctance to return

Meanwhile, an [agreement](#) signed earlier this month by the UN refugee agency ([UNHCR](#)), the UN Development Fund ([UNDP](#)) and the Government of Myanmar could pave the way for thousands of Rohingya to return home.

It also will give the two UN entities access to Rakhine State.

Knut Ostby, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Myanmar, said the most important conditions for the safe and voluntary return of the refugees are citizenship rights and an end to violence.

Though resident in Myanmar for centuries, the mostly Muslim Rohingya are stateless.

“There will need to be programmes for reconciliation, for social cohesion. And these will have to be linked to development programmes. It is not enough to deal with this politically,” he [told UN News](#).

However, Rohingya women and girls are wary about going back to Myanmar, according to Ms. Patten.

“They would be prepared to return only if they have full citizenship rights, but they doubt whether that’s possible. They are very realistic about it,” she said, while also echoing their concerns about safety.

“They all seem to request some kind of a UN mission presence in Myanmar should they go back. But they do not look very hopeful. It’s not the first

time that there has been this kind of exodus. And for them, there's simply no trust."

Ms. Patten said overall, the Rohingya refugees are pinning their hopes on possible action by the UN Security Council.

A delegation of the 15 ambassadors [travelled](#) to Bangladesh and Myanmar just ahead of her visit to Cox's Bazar.

"Now they put a face to the Security Council," she said. "And they are expecting no less that the members of the Security Council translate their shock and their outrage into concrete action."

[For video game addiction, now read official 'gaming disorder': World Health Organization](#)

The UN health agency has for the first time, tagged compulsive video [gaming](#) as a mental health condition in its updated classification manual, released on Monday.

"For gaming disorder to be diagnosed, the behavior pattern must be of sufficient severity to result in significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning and would normally have been evident for at least 12 months," said the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO).

While some media reports welcomed the formal designation of "gaming disorder" within WHO's [International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems](#) (ICD) as helpful to sufferers, others saw it as causing needless concern among parents.

"There are few truer snapshots of a country's wellbeing than its [health statistics](#)," said WHO. While broad economic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product may skew impressions of individual prosperity, data on disease and death reveal how a population is truly faring.

According to WHO, ICD is the "bedrock for health statistics," codifying the human condition from birth to death, including all factors that influence health.

These statistics form the basis for healthcare provision everywhere and are at the core of mapping disease trends and epidemics; helping governments decide how money is spent on health services.

Crucially, in a world of 7.4 billion people speaking nearly 7,000 languages, ICD provides a common vocabulary for recording, reporting and monitoring health problems, says WHO.

“Fifty years ago, it would be unlikely that a disease, such as schizophrenia, would be diagnosed similarly in Japan, Kenya and Brazil. Now, however, if a doctor in another country cannot read a person’s medical records, they will know what the ICD code means,” WHO explained.

Without the ICD’s ability to provide standardized, consistent data, each country or region would have its own classifications that would most likely only be relevant locally.

“Standardization is the key that unlocks global health data analysis,” said WHO.

Ready for the 21st century

The eleventh edition of ICD was released on Monday to allow Member States time to plan implementation before it is presented for adoption at the 2019 World Health Assembly.

Noting that it has been updated for the 21st century WHO said: “Over a decade in the making, this version is a vast improvement on ICD-10,” adding that it now reflects critical advances in science and medicine.

Moreover, the guidelines can also be integrated with modern electronic health applications and information systems – making implementation significantly easier, vulnerable to fewer mistakes and allowing more detail to be recorded.

[UN rights chief slams ‘unconscionable’ US border policy of separating migrant children from parents](#)

As part of his final global update, the United Nations human rights chief on Monday voiced his deep concern over recently-adopted United States border protection policies that have seen hundreds of migrant children forcibly separated from their parents.

“In the past six weeks, nearly two thousand children have been [forcibly separated](#) from their parents,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said in his opening remarks to the 38th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva – the last session before his four-year term expires

in August.

Mr. Zeid said that the American Association of Pediatrics in the US, had called it a cruel practice of “government-sanctioned child abuse” which may cause “irreparable harm” with “lifelong consequences”.

“The thought that any State would seek to deter parents by inflicting such abuse on children is unconscionable,” he said, calling on the United States to immediately put a stop to the policy, and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In a statement issued on Monday, UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) defended the rights of migrant and refugee children, but did not single out the US.

“[As a matter of principle](#), the Secretary-General believes that refugees and migrants should always be treated with respect and dignity, and in accordance with existing international law,” said a statement issued by his Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric.

“Children must not be traumatized by being separated from their parents. Family unity must be preserved,” said the statement.

The human rights situation in the US was one of the many topics to be discussed at the latest Human Rights Council session, which runs through 6 July.

Mr. Zeid also expressed his deep concern about a bill presented to Parliament in Hungary last month which, if adopted, would effectively criminalize human rights monitoring at borders and within border zones, as well as criminalizing the provision of information, legal aid and assistance to migrants.

The High Commissioner stressed that “people do not lose their human rights by virtue of crossing a border without a visa”.

At the onset of his speech, the UN human rights chief warned of the return of “chauvinistic nationalism” around the world, and urged leading politicians to combat this “menace that stalks our future.”

“Is it not the case, for example,” he asked, “that historically, the most destructive force to imperil the world has been chauvinistic nationalism – when raised to feral extremes by self-serving, callous leaders, and amplified by mass ideologies which themselves repress freedom.”

He said that the UN had been conceived to prevent the rebirth of chauvinistic nationalism, which was a primary cause of The Second World War.

“Chauvinistic nationalism is the polar opposite of the UN, its very antonym and enemy. So why are we so submissive to its return? Why are we in the UN so silent?” he exclaimed.

“The UN’s *raison d’être* is the protection of peace, rights, justice and

social progress. Its operating principle is therefore equally clear: only by pursuing the opposite to nationalism – only when States all work for each other, for everyone, for all people, for the human rights of all people – can peace be attainable,” he added.

Mr. Zeid said that that over the last few years, he and his Office had rightly lived by the motto that “only fearlessness is adequate to our task at this point in time”, adding that they were “not ducking for cover, or using excuses or resorting to euphemisms” but displaying “fearlessness approaching that shown by human rights defenders around the world – for only by speaking out can we begin to combat the growing menace of chauvinistic nationalism that stalks our future,” he said.

High Commissioner highlights abuse challenges around the world

On Syria, he said that the horrific violations and abuses committed since the conflict began – principally by the government and its allies, but including also the violent extremists and their supporters – have destroyed much of the country along with many of its people.

On Myanmar, he said, there are clear indications of well-organised, widespread and systematic attacks continuing to target the Rohingyas in Rakhine State as an ethnic group, amounting possibly to acts of genocide if so established by a court of law.

On North Korea, he said that “making human rights part of peace talks contributes to meaningful and sustainable peace in the long-term.”

Reflecting on how being in the top UN human rights job had affected him personally, Mr. Zeid said that it had been “the hardest, most challenging, most fulfilling responsibility I have held”. He noted that it had affected his relationship with the country of his birth, Jordan, which he had previously represented as UN Ambassador, for seven years up to 2007.

“However, this price is small in comparison to that paid by so many human rights defenders, and civil society more broadly, who sacrifice so much more, again and again, and who to me are the real heroes, genuine heroes of the human rights movement,” he said.

FROM THE FIELD: Rohingya babies conceived out of ‘incomprehensible brutality’

A photojournalist has been talking of the “incomprehensible brutality” described to him by Rohingya refugees who are carrying babies after being

raped.

Brian Sokol travelled with the [UN Children's Fund](#), UNICEF, to Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh to interview and photograph Rohingya refugee women who had fled Myanmar over the last year fearing violence and persecution.

He met 14 pregnant women who had been raped, including a 16-year old girl who he calls Maryam.

He tells her story in a personal blog from the field:

<https://blogs.unicef.org/blog/rohingya-shrouded-maternity/>

[Space science now a 'fundamental pillar' of 21st century human development: top UN space official](#)

After “relentless” progress in space technology, the focus for the international community must now shift to ensuring that the benefits of space science are available to everyone, everywhere, a senior United Nations official told a major conference on Monday.

Speaking at the opening of UNISPACE+50 symposium in Vienna, Simonetta Di Pippo, the Director of the [UN Office for Outer Space Affairs](#), said that space technology had become a “fundamental pillar” of 21st century society, driving development worldwide.

The forum commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the [ground-breaking](#) 1968 UN Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, or UNISPACE for short.

“What remains to be seen, however, is how we can work collectively to organize our efforts across the board to deliver the full potential of space for sustainable development,” she said.

In her remarks, Ms. Di Pippo said that space is the vital enabler to realize the ambitions set by global goals, including the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), as well as the [Paris Agreement on Climate Change](#) and the [Sendai Framework](#) to reduce the risk and impact of disasters across the world.

The impact of global cooperation in using space for sustainable development cannot be overstated, she added.

“From city halls to the UN General Assembly, when policy makers need to see the big picture to make well-informed policy decisions, they are turning to

space,” said Ms. Di Pippo.

“The challenge is to ensure the tools and information space can provide are helping to make effective policy in all corners of the world.”

These are the precise issues which will be explored further in the coming days at the conference, she added.

‘New’ directions and thinking needed – Committee Chair

Also on Monday, David Kendall, the chairperson of the UN [Committee on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space](#) said that the increasing involvement of UN Member States in the Committee, was a reflection of the increasing importance that countries around the world attach to the frontier science.

“Member States are now realizing more and more that space is an essential element in delivering their programmes to their citizens,” he said.

The need, therefore, is to develop “new directions and thinking” in relation to the governance of outer space, he added.

Mauritius Research Council selected for third round of KiboCUBE

Further on Monday, UNOOSA and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) announced the selection of a team from the Mauritius Research Council for the third round of their joint KiboCUBE programme.

Launched by UNOOSA and JAXA in 2015, the KiboCUBE initiative offers educational and research institutions from developing countries the chance to develop “cube satellites” (CubeSats) for deployment from the International Space Station.

Through KiboCUBE, the small Indian Ocean island’s research body will deploy the first ever Mauritian satellite, MIR-SAT1, that will include a longwave infrared thermal camera, allowing the collection of thermal images of Mauritius and areas around it. The team also aims to test the onboard communication capabilities of the CubeSat by studying the satellite’s capacity to transfer information using satellite radio waves.

UNOOSA head Simonetta Di Pippo highlighted the importance of the programme, especially for developing countries.

“The third round of the KiboCUBE programme is yet another exciting step towards increasing the space capabilities of countries and ensuring we close the ‘space divide’ between those that have access to space and its benefits, and those that do not.”

In the first round of the KiboCUBE initiative, the University of Nairobi in Kenya launched Kenya’s first satellite. This was also the first space hardware deployed under the auspices of the UN. The second round selected Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, which is expected to deploy its satellite in 2018, subject to the ISS operational requirements and progress of the CubeSat development.

Coming up

Monday and Tuesday feature the UNISPACE+50 [symposium](#), focusing on debate and discussion involving a wide range of stakeholders on the future of international space cooperation and the peaceful uses of outer space. The symposium will be followed by the [high-level segment](#) of the forum (Wednesday-Thursday).

Alongside the main events, an [exhibition](#) featuring more than 40 participants will be held in the Rotunda of the Vienna International Centre from 18-23 June. The exhibition will be open to the public from 9 a.m. until 12.30 p.m. (local time) on Saturday, 23 June.

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