

'Much more' can be done to raise awareness about the plight of persons with albinism: UN chief

On the international day to raise awareness on albinism – a rare genetic condition that results in the lack of melanin in the body – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has called for greater solidarity with people living with albinism, so they can live more empowered lives.

“Albinism is a genetic condition that affects people throughout the world, regardless of race, ethnicity or gender,” Mr. Guterres said on Wednesday.

“Yet, tragically, people with albinism continue to suffer widespread discrimination, stigma and social exclusion,” he added, stressing also the importance of enabling people with the condition to enjoy their full human rights.

In many countries, grossly erroneous beliefs and myths, heavily influenced by superstition, put the security and lives of persons with albinism [at risk of constant violence and abuse](#); especially children and women, and other vulnerable groups.

In his message on the [International Albinism Awareness Day](#), the UN chief also noted the endorsement of a regional action plan on albinism in Africa by the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights and by the Pan African Parliament, as “a key step forward.”

“But much more can be done globally to raise awareness about the plight of people with albinism,” urged Mr. Guterres.

The Secretary-General underscored the importance of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and the promise to “leave no one behind.”

He said the day was an opportunity “to declare solidarity with people with albinism and strive together so those who are often left furthest behind are able to live free from discrimination and fear, and empowered to enjoy their full human rights.”

The UN General Assembly [designated](#) 13 June as the International Albinism Awareness Day, in 2014.

The action by the General Assembly followed a [resolution](#) by the Human Rights Council – the highest UN intergovernmental body on human rights – that called for greater protection for persons with albinism against discrimination and violence.

'True' peace, requires standing up for human rights, says UN chief Guterres

Achieving peace involves more than “laying down weapons”, United Nations [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) said on Wednesday, calling for intensified efforts to address the root causes of conflict.

In a message marking the 100-day countdown to the [International Day of Peace](#), observed annually on 21 September, Mr. Guterres reiterated the importance of human rights for lasting peace.

“There is more to achieving peace than laying down weapons. True peace requires standing up for the human rights of all the world’s people,” he said.

“Let us stand up for human rights for all, in the name of peace for all.”

The theme of the commemorations this year is ‘The Right to Peace – The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 70.’

He said that the International Day “embodies our shared aspiration to end conflict in all its forms and to safeguard the human rights of all people,” adding that the UN has called for a 24-hour global ceasefire, “with the hope that one day in our lifetime, we will witness an end to violence.”

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In his message, the UN chief also called on everyone to work to advance the Sustainable Development Goals, including through the promotion of inclusive societies, access to justice and building accountable institutions.

Adopted by all 193 UN Member States in 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognize the importance of achieving economic and social development, together with equality for all, to build a more peaceful world.

Part of the Agenda for Sustainable Development, which commits countries to a deadline of 2030, the 17 Goals cover a broad range of issues, including poverty, hunger, health, education, climate change, gender equality, water, sanitation, energy, environment and social justice.

One of the Goals (SDG16) focuses primarily on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies through achievable but sustainable development. It also includes providing access to justice for all and building effective,

accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

[At least 2.5 million migrants were smuggled in 2016, first UN global study shows](#)

Migrant smuggling occurred in all parts of the world, generated an income of up to \$7 billion – equivalent to the amount the United States or the European Union spent on humanitarian aid that year – according to the UN agency that fights drugs and crime.

“This transnational crime preys on the most vulnerable of the vulnerable,” said Jean-Luc Lemahieu, UNODC Director of Policy Analysis and Public Affairs.

“It’s a global crime that requires global action, including improved regional and international cooperation and national criminal justice responses,” he added.

The study describes 30 major smuggling routes worldwide and finds that demand for smuggling services is particularly high among refugees who, for lack of other means, may need to use people-smugglers to reach a safe destination fleeing their countries of origin.

Data suggests that many smuggling routes include unaccompanied or separated children, who might be particularly vulnerable to deception and abuse by smugglers and others.

According to the UN migration agency [IOM](#), smuggling results in thousands of deaths each year.

Many smuggled migrants die from drowning, whereas others perish due to accidents or extreme terrain and weather conditions. The Mediterranean appears to be the deadliest route, statistically, accounting for around 50 per cent of the total number of deaths.

Not only have some migrants been murdered along smuggling routes, they are also vulnerable to a range of other crimes, including violence, rape, kidnapping and trafficking in persons.

Turning to the gender composition, the study found that smuggled migrants are often influenced by the conditions they faced at home. Although most on the move are relatively young men, in parts of South-East Asia a large proportion are women.

According to the report, smuggling networks often engage in systematic

corruption ranging from the local to the international level, and operate a range of schemes, including fake marriages or employment rackets; counterfeiting travel documents and the corruption of senior officials.

Smugglers often advertise their business in diaspora communities, refugee camps or through various social networks online, involving migrant groups.

Smaller-scale smugglers are either ethnically linked to their operating territories, or share ethnic or linguistic ties with the migrants they smuggle. Moreover, some successfully smuggled migrants, then become smugglers themselves.

Moving forward

When it comes to better strategies for reducing migrant smuggling, the report recommends that a holistic approach must go beyond geographical measures, and include making legal migration opportunities more accessible in origin countries and refugee camps; tackling smuggling networks; and raising awareness in origin communities are just a few ways to combat the scourge.

While data collection, analysis and research on migrant smuggling remain in their infancy, there is a clear need for a solid international body of knowledge to support policy making on migrant smuggling, along with improved data collection systems at the national, regional and international levels, according to the study.

Terrorism diverts resources from 'much-needed' development to 'costly' security, warns UN envoy for Central Africa

The scourge of terrorism and violent extremism continues to affect all of Central Africa and divert government resources from much-needed development programmes to costly security operations, a senior United Nations official told the Security Council on Wednesday.

“Boko Haram and the Lord’s Resistance Army have not stopped their deadly attacks on civilians, committing egregious human rights abuses and causing countless victims,” said François Louncény Fall, the Special Representative and head of the UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), referring to the main armed groups active in the sub-region.

Briefing the Council members on the Secretary-General's semi-annual report on the activities of UNOCA, Mr. Fall stressed that his Office is engaging sub-regional organizations, including the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), to fight Boko Haram and more broadly violent extremism.

Mr. Fall said that violent extremism, as well as persisting cross-border insecurity and criminal activities are compounded by the flow of small arms and light weapons throughout the sub-region, which covers Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe.

In response to this challenge, the first Conference of States Parties to the Central African convention for the control of small arms and light weapons is taking place in Yaounde, in Cameroon, with the participation of UNOCA, he added.

On the political front, Mr. Fall noted that all 11 ECCAS member States are either midway or early in their respective electoral cycles and, as a result, experiencing civic tensions over the whole electoral process.

He said he had strengthened efforts in conflict prevention and crisis management in support of subregional organizations.

The request for UNOCA's engagement, good offices of the Secretary-General, and preventive diplomacy remained strong, he said.

"Since its mandate was last renewed in 2015, UNOCA has proved its effectiveness as a tool to advance the Secretary-General's prevention agenda in Central Africa," Mr. Fall stressed, calling for the Council's support to the renewal of UNOCA's mandate for another three-year period, as recommended by the Secretary-General in his report.

Military escalation will have 'serious consequences' for Yemeni civilians, warns UN Special Envoy

An attempt by a Saudi-led military coalition to take control of the Yemeni port of Hodeidah from opposition Houthi forces "will have serious consequences" on an already "dire" situation for millions of civilians, the UN [Special Envoy for Yemen](#) said on Wednesday.

In a statement issued amid reports that a major air and ground assault is now underway against the key Red Sea port city, Martin Griffiths also warned that it "will have an impact" on his efforts to bring the warring parties to the

negotiating table.

Reiterating the UN's "strong commitment" to reaching a political solution to the conflict, the Special Envoy said that "every opportunity" was being employed to avoid a military confrontation.

He added that he and his team were in "constant contact with all the parties involved" to ensure that all of their concerns were addressed, on a political, humanitarian and security level.

"I call on the parties to engage constructively with our efforts to spare Hodeidah any military confrontation," Mr Griffiths' statement said. "I also call on the parties to exercise restraint and to give peace a chance."

Since fighting escalated in the Arabian peninsula State in March 2015, thousands of civilians have been killed and the vast majority of the population – some 22 million people – have become dependent on humanitarian assistance.

The attack on Hodeidah is significant since it is a key access point for aid and other everyday items for ordinary Yemen.

Speaking in Geneva in response to reports that fighting had intensified around Hodeidah, UN Refugee Agency chief [Filippo Grandi](#) said that it would make aid access "more difficult".

"It's not just the humanitarian access which has been on and off, but is also more important, access of goods through trade. Fuel, food, medicines, at least these three big areas. And I think that fighting will make it more difficult for that access to happen."

[UNHCR](#) had already taken the decision to pull out international staff ahead of the attack, Mr Grandi said, but not national staff, who he said were left "more exposed".

The UN refugee chief added that it was a "miracle" that more aid personnel had not become victims of the violence that claimed the life of a Lebanese national from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the city of Taiz, south of Hodeida, in April.

Even before the current conflict, Yemen was one of the poorest countries in the world and imports provided almost all of its daily requirements.

Across the country, the fighting between forces loyal to President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi supported by the Saudi coalition and Houthi rebels has left fewer than half of the country's health facilities operational.

Basic medical needs cannot be met, leaving ordinary Yemenis vulnerable to preventable diseases, including cholera, which affected more than one million people last year.