

# 'Spotlight Initiative' can make violence against women 'a thing of the past', says UN deputy chief

The launch of a new partnership between the United Nations and European Union, is an essential tool to make violence against women and girls “a thing of the past”, said UN [Deputy Secretary-General](#) Amina Mohammed on Tuesday.

Addressing a leading forum on development in Brussels, known as *European Development Days*, Ms. Mohammed said that the joint [Spotlight Initiative](#) was a key element for making Goal 5 on women’s empowerment, of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, a reality.

Now in the third year of working towards the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), the forum this year is shining a spotlight on gender equality.

“Without equality and empowerment, we will simply perpetuate today’s paradigm: trying to address all the world’s challenges with only half the world’s assets,” said UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed in her opening remarks.

She painted a picture of women not fully included in decision-making, being subjected to a “global pandemic” of violence against women and girls.

“Attacks and discrimination are deeply embedded in social norms, attitudes and practices,” she asserted. “Addressing these mindsets will require significant investments of time, resources and political will.”

The UN deputy chief cited the World Bank in detailing how women’s equal participation in the labor force had the potential to unlock \$160 trillion for sustainable development reinvestment.

“Without equality and empowerment, we will simply perpetuate today’s paradigm” – *UN deputy chief, Amina Mohammed*

“Yet a stark reality prevails: more women than men live in extreme poverty,” she continued, adding that the worldwide pay gap stands at 23 per cent, and gender roles have been too slow to change.

Ms. Mohammed pointed to the benefit of reaching SDG 5 – for the more than 190 countries around the world who signed up to the Goals in 2015 – which calls for gender equality and women’s empowerment.

“I often call it the ‘docking station’ for all the goals,” she said, flagging that Spotlight builds on civil society leadership and aims to address some of the imbalances women face.

Noting that worldwide, almost one-in-two women murdered are killed by a partner or ex-partner, she said that in some countries, “Spotlight will focus on the most extreme form of violence – femicide.”

“Often,” she continued, “in the wake of these murders, we find that women have indeed reported to the police, or sought medical care. But service providers did not have adequate information or the means to identify the risk.”

Some of the violence takes place due to the broader insecurity that women face, particularly where they are advocating for women’s rights.

Ms Mohammed also underscored the UN’s commitment to lead by example by empowering women within the Organization itself, working towards – for the first time in UN history – full gender parity in the Senior Management Group and among those nominated to be Resident Coordinators, the UN’s team leaders on the ground.

“We have a long way to go. But we have a plan and we have the will,” she stressed.

---

## [Children ‘as young as one’ involved in US separation of migrant families – UN rights office](#)

The current policy in the United States of separating “extremely young children” from their asylum-seeker or migrant parents along the country’s southern border “always constitutes a child rights violation”, the UN human rights office, [OHCHR](#), said on Tuesday.

Since last October, “several hundred” youngsters – including a 12-month-old infant – have been separated from their families while their parents serve out prison sentences for entering the U.S. illegally, or wait in detention while their asylum claims are processed, OHCHR spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani told journalists in Geneva.

She said OHCHR had received information on cases dating from last October; although the policy had begun in January 2017 when the newly-inaugurated President, Donald Trump, issued two executive orders related to migration.

The current separation of children “was a direct consequence of that decision”, Ms. Shamdasani said, adding that the policy is applied to asylum-seekers and other migrants “in vulnerable situations”.

There is nothing normal about detaining children – *Ravina Shamdasani (OHCHR)*

Thanks to the strong civil rights movement in the U.S. Ms. Shamdasai noted that a class action has been brought by the American Civil Liberties Union, on behalf of hundreds of parents – mainly from Central and Latin American countries – who have been separated from their children.

Ms Shamdasani noted that there is “nothing normal about detaining children”, and that it “is never in the best interests of the child and always constitutes a child rights violation”.

And on the legal issue of entering a country “without the right papers”, the UN human rights office spokesperson insisted that it should not be a criminal offence and “does not warrant jailing children”.

Once separated from their parents, Ms Shamdasani said that children are often transferred into the care of the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, and that efforts are made to find them a temporary guardian.

When their parents are released, youngsters are reunited with them and deported back to their country of origin.

For the majority this means to Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, where “rampant insecurity and violence” has forced them to flee, the OHCHR official explained.

In a call for an end to the practice, Ms Shamdasani noted that the U.S. “generally held in high regard” the rights of children.

And although it is the only UN Member State not to have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it had signed the international accord and ratified others, which meant that it had legal obligations to children in its care, the OHCHR spokesperson explained.

Also present in Geneva, a spokesperson for the UN Refugee Agency, [UNHCR](#), said that it was following the situation closely on the US southern border, but that it had no information on whether asylum requests had changed significantly since last year.

---

**The world is being ‘swamped by harmful plastic waste’ says UN chief, marking**

# Environment Day

The world must unite to “[beat plastic pollution](#)” United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said in his message for World Environment Day on Tuesday, noting that microplastic particles in the ocean, “now outnumber stars in our galaxy”.

In his message marking the day on 5 June, he said a healthy planet was essential for a prosperous and peaceful future, spelling out that: “We all have a role to play in protecting our only home.”

“Our world is swamped by harmful plastic waste,” he stated. “Every year, more than eight million tonnes end up in the oceans.”

Pointing out the astonishing comparison between stars in the cosmos and ocean plastics, Mr. Guterres underscored that “from remote islands, to the Arctic, nowhere is untouched.”

If present trends continue, by 2050 our oceans will have more plastic than fish, he said.

On World Environment Day, Mr. Guterres is encouraging everyone to also stop using plastic products which are designed just to be thrown away, such as plastic bottles.

“Refuse what you can’t re-use,” he asserted.

“Together, we can chart a path to a cleaner, greener world,” concluded the Secretary-General.

Since it was first celebrated in 1974, the Day has helped raise awareness and generate political momentum around global environmental concerns such as ozone depletion, desertification and global warming.

## ***The state of renewable energy***

In conjunction with the Day, UN Environment ([UNEP](#)), on Monday, launched *REN21*, or the [Renewables 2018 Global Status Report](#), which paints a positive picture of a renewable power sector characterized by falling costs, increased investment, record-setting installation and innovative business models that are driving rapid change.

The Renewable Energy Policy Network for the 21st Century, or REN21 – supported by UNEP – is a global renewable energy policy network that aims to facilitate knowledge exchange, policy development and joint action towards a rapid global transition to renewable energy.

After years of active policy support – driven by technology advances, rapid growth and dramatic cost reductions in solar and wind – renewable electricity is now less expensive than newly installed fossil and nuclear energy

generation in many parts of the world.

But not all of the news is good. There is uneven progress between sectors and across different geographical regions, and a “fundamental disconnect” between commitments and real action on the ground.

The power sector on its own will not deliver the emissions reductions demanded by the [Paris Climate Agreement](#) or the aspirations of [Sustainable Development Goal 7](#) to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, says the report.

The heating, cooling and transport sectors, which together account for about 80 per cent of global total final energy demand, are also lagging.

Simply put, the global renewable energy transition is progressing far too slowly.

---

## [UN rights expert chides US government's 'systematic assault' on welfare](#)

The principal strategy for dealing with extreme poverty in the USA is to “[criminalise and stigmatise](#)” those who need assistance, according to a United Nations independent human rights expert, in a statement on Tuesday.

That stark assessment of the social divide within one of the world's wealthiest countries comes from UN Special Rapporteur Philip Alston who will present his latest report to the Human Rights Council later this month.

It's based on his fact-finding visit to the US last December, where he travelled to California, Alabama, Georgia, West Virginia and Washington, D.C.

Mr. Alston said the Trump Administration had introduced “massive” tax breaks for corporations and the very wealthy, while at the same time orchestrating what he called “a systematic assault on the welfare system.”

For Mr. Alston, who is the [UN expert on extreme poverty and human rights](#), it's a strategy that seems driven primarily by contempt, and sometimes even by hatred for the poor, along with a ‘winner takes all’ mentality.

“Locking up the poor precisely because they are poor, greatly exaggerating the amount of fraud in the system, shaming those who need assistance, and devising ever more obstacles to prevent people from getting needed benefits, is not a strategy to reduce or eliminate poverty,” he said.

He accused the US legal system of focusing on raising revenue for individual states, as opposed to promoting justice, adding that “fines and fees are piled up so that low level infractions become immensely burdensome, a process that mostly affects the poorest members of society”.

But at the same time, he said: “judges set large bail amounts for defendants awaiting trial, allowing the rich to pay their way to freedom, while the poor sit in jail unable to work or provide for their families.”

Mr Alston added that with the US now having the highest income inequality in the Western world, the highest incarceration rate globally, and one of the lowest election turnout rates among developed nations, “it is no coincidence that high inequality coincides with the overt and covert disenfranchisement of millions and millions of American voters.”

---

## [Guterres strongly denounces latest attack on peacekeepers in Central African Republic](#)

United Nations [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) has strongly condemned Sunday’s attack that killed a UN peacekeeper from Tanzania and injured seven others while they were patrolling in the west of the Central African Republic (CAR).

The attack by armed insurgents brings to four the number of peacekeepers killed in targeted violence in that country since the beginning of this year, according to a statement issued by [UN Spokesperson](#) Stéphane Dujarric.

“The Secretary-General recalls that attacks against United Nations peacekeepers may constitute a war crime and that sanctions can be applied against the perpetrators,” said the statement, which also noted that Mr. Guterres urged national authorities to spare no effort in bringing them to justice.

The Secretary-General “reaffirms his unwavering support” to the UN Stabilization Mission in CAR ([MINUSCA](#)), added the statement, in its efforts to “protect civilians and stabilize the country”.

The UN chief paid tribute to all those peacekeepers who had made the ultimate sacrifice in CAR, and offered his deepest condolences to the bereaved family as well as to the Government of Tanzania, wishing a swift recovery to the injured.