

Students gather at UN to 'Remember Slavery,' honour those who suffered brutal slave trade

Students from around the world joined United Nations and Government officials in New York on Friday to celebrate the contributions made by the people of African descent, beginning from the time they were taken from their countries and forced into generations of servitude.

Speaking to *UN News* prior to the event, Missouri Sherman-Peter, the Permanent Observer for the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to the UN, highlighted the importance of recognizing the heritage of those compelled into slavery, and informing the younger generation of what happened centuries ago.

"Knowledge is power, and you can't begin to resolve problems, address them or recognize and be proud of what you are unless you have the knowledge," she said.

"When you bring students to think that way, the problems and differences [among people] become less when everyone understands what happened [...] was horrific. But we are moving on and we can only move on with the young people with us."

For over 400 years, more than 15 million men, women and children have been victims of the tragic transatlantic slave trade, one of the darkest chapters in human history.

Christian Crouch, an Associate Professor of History and Director of American Studies, Bard College outlined the ordeals they faced.

"Five years is the number of years a slave survived in a sugar plantation that was nothing more than a factory in a field," she told young people at the commemorative event.

Responding to a question from schoolchildren in Tanzania, Ms. Crouch explained that the consequences of the transatlantic slave trade continue to reverberate.

"Slavery still flourishes in many places and not only on the African continent. It exists in different forms on every continent of the world," she said.



UN News/María Morera

Students attending the commemorative event visit the Ark of Return.

The student conference, held as part of the UN Remember Slavery Programme, is organized every year in spring to mark the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

It will be followed by educational activities throughout the year, including roundtable discussions, film screenings, an exhibition and tours, including to the [Ark of Return](#), the Permanent Memorial to Honour the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

READ ALSO: [Architect of UN slavery memorial explains 'The Ark of Return'](#)

Commemorative events are also organized around the world by UN offices and Information Centres to raise awareness on the causes, consequences, lessons and legacy of the transatlantic slave trade.

[South Sudan: Peace process under threat as violence surges across country, warns UN Mission](#)

Surging violence in parts of South Sudan is putting thousands of war-weary civilians at risk and endangering the fragile peace process in the world's youngest nation, the United Nations peacekeeping mission there has warned.

["Innocent civilians are being caught in the crossfire](#), including many women, children and elderly people," David Shearer, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for South Sudan and the head of the UN Mission in the country (UNMISS) said.

"Our teams on the ground are reporting incidents of killing, sexual violence, homes being burnt to the ground, cattle raiding, and the looting of hospitals and schools."

Intense fighting has been reported in Nhialdiu, Mayendit, Rupchai, Thaker, and Mirinyal, in the vicinity of Leer and Bentiu in the Unity region, as well as around Motot and Akobo in Jonglei.

In Leer, in the northern part of the country, armed clashes have occurred near a temporary UNMISS operating base and peacekeepers have placed on high alert to protect some six hundred internally displaced persons who sought sanctuary nearby, said the UN Mission.

The hostilities have forced the relocation of 30 humanitarian workers resulting in disruption of aid services.

"This surge in violence [...] is at odds with the cessation of hostilities agreement that was signed just a few months ago," explained Mr. Shearer.

"We urge the warring parties to lay down their guns, put the interests of the people first, and work together to build lasting peace."

In addition, with the upcoming peace talks at the High Level Revitalization Forum, the head of UNMISS underscored the need for all parties to stop fighting and "come together in good faith."

"Political leaders must demonstrate they are willing to compromise and resolve this conflict which is causing terrible harm to their people."

Since gaining independence in 2011, South Sudan has spent much of its short life mired in conflict, as what began as a political face-off between President Salva Kiir and former Vice-President Riek Machar erupted into full-blown war late in 2013.

[**UN agency urges Greece to upgrade conditions at Evros reception centre amid rising number of refugee arrivals**](#)

Some 2,900 mostly Syrian and Iraqi families have arrived in Evros this month, with eight others losing their lives trying to cross the Evros River from

Turkey – prompting the United Nations refugee agency to call on the Greek Government to improve the conditions at its reception area.

Located in the north-eastern part of Greece, the increase in new arrivals is placing a strain on the Fylakio Reception and Identification Centre, the only one in Evros, which is filled beyond its 240-person capacity – including 120 unaccompanied and separated children.

“With the Reception and Identification Centre overwhelmed, and struggling to conduct timely registration and identification, or to provide services such as medical and psycho-social care and interpretation, the authorities initially place people, including many children, in [inappropriate police detention facilities](#) in the area while they wait for places at the centre to open up,” Charlie Yaxley, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) office told a regular press briefing in Geneva on Friday.

He went on to inform the press that some have been held in police detention for more than three months with dismal conditions and limited services.

“A UNHCR visit found families in one facility sleeping on the floor beside a row of cells,” he elaborated, adding that in a separate police facility, only one doctor and four nurses were available for more than 500 people – including pregnant women, very young children and people in need of medical and psycho-social care.

While welcoming the recent release of more than 2,500 people from detention, UNHCR expressed concern that they are being done without vulnerability screening and information on asylum and other options.

“Their situation must be urgently addressed to enable access to care and asylum procedures,” stressed Mr. Yaxley.

The spokesperson acknowledged the police and the Fylakio Centre were trying to address the challenges, adding that with increasingly stretched resources, the situation has become untenable.

He proposed a number of measures to stabilize the situation, such as immediately setting up reception and identification mobile units and transferring unaccompanied children to safe accommodation and families in detention to safe shelters.

“UNHCR will continue to assist the Greek authorities through the provision of technical and material support, including blankets, clothing, hygiene items, solar-powered lamps and other non-food items,” he concluded.

[Colombia: UN food relief agency seeks urgent funds to help 350,000 Venezuelan migrants](#)

The United Nations emergency food relief agency has issued an urgent appeal for nearly \$46 million to feed some 350,000 impoverished migrants who crossed the border from Venezuela into Colombia, as well as host communities with pre-existing vulnerabilities.

“We [urgently need funds](#) so that we can bring vital aid to migrant families who have left their homes behind, and don’t know where their next meal is coming from,” said Miguel Barreto, the Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean at the UN [World Food Programme](#) (WFP).

“We also need to support host communities, many of them already poor, who have shown great generosity as they bear the brunt of this crisis,” he added, referring to the deepening socio-economic turmoil inside Venezuela.

In a news release Thursday, WFP announced that as part of an eight-month response, it will provide food assistance to migrants – especially women and children – living in temporary shelters; emergency support for school meals; as well as help Venezuelan families trying to integrate.

These efforts are part of a larger integrated response plan, drawn up by UN agencies in Colombia – at the request of the Government – to help address the crisis.

Support will be extended to vulnerable indigenous communities coping with the influx, where in some areas migrants now make up more than half of the population, said WFP.

At present, the UN agency is working with temporary shelters or community kitchens run by religious organizations and other partners, purchasing the food needed to prepare hot meals for newly arrived migrants.

[Israel must address excessive use of force and deaths in Gaza protests – UN rights chief](#)

With over 40 Palestinians killed and more than 5,500 injured during protests

in Gaza over the past month – many by live ammunition – the top United Nations human rights official on Friday called on Israel to ensure that its security forces do not resort to use of excessive force amid the ongoing demonstrations.

[“Every week, we witness instances of use of lethal force against unarmed demonstrators,”](#) said Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in a news release Friday.

“Warnings by the UN and others have seemingly gone unheeded, as the approach of the security forces from week to week does not seem to have changed.”

According to the High Commissioner’s Office, OHCHR, 35 of those killed were taking part in the ‘Great March of Return’ demonstrations. Most of them appear to have been unarmed or not presenting an imminent threat to the Israeli Security Forces (ISF) at the time of their killing or injury. 1,739 individuals were injured by live ammunition fire by ISF.

“The loss of life is deplorable, and the staggering number of injuries caused by live ammunition only confirms the sense that excessive force has been used against demonstrators – not once, not twice, but repeatedly,” added the High Commissioner.

Also concerning is that over the last four weeks of protest, four children were shot dead by Israeli forces, three of them by a bullet to the head or neck. A further 233 were injured by live ammunition, with some sustaining injuries that will result in lifelong disabilities, including through the amputation of limbs, stated the news release.

“The use of excessive force against any demonstrator is reprehensible, but children enjoy additional protection under international law,” Mr. Zeid said.

It is difficult to see how children, even those throwing stones, can present a threat of imminent death or serious injury to heavily protected security force personnel – *High Commissioner Zeid*

“It is difficult to see how children, even those throwing stones, can present a threat of imminent death or serious injury to heavily protected security force personnel [...] Images of a child being shot as he runs away from Israeli security forces are downright shocking.”

According to OHCHR, a 14-year-old boy, Mohammad Ayyoub, was killed by a bullet to the head on 20 April.

“It is difficult to see how tire-burning or stone-throwing, or even Molotov-cocktails thrown from a significant distance at heavily protected security forces in defensive positions can be seen to constitute such threat,” read the news release.

High Commissioner Zeid also underscored the obligation of every country to

ensure that all loss of life and serious injury is investigated and those responsible held to account. Any investigations into the events in Gaza “must fulfil this purpose,” he stressed.

He also voiced concern that continued lack of accountability could lead to future human rights violations in relation to the protests.

“By the end of today – and next Friday, and the Friday after that – more unarmed Palestinians who were alive this morning will have been killed, simply because, while exercising their right to protest, they approached a fence, or otherwise attracted the attention of the soldiers on the other side,” Mr Zeid said.

“Israel’s failure to consistently prosecute violations committed by members of its security forces, encourages them to use deadly force against their fellow unarmed human beings, even when they present no threat.”