

Service and sacrifice of African peacekeepers 'at the forefront of our minds': UN chief

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has thanked African Member States and the African Union Commission for supporting peace operations in Africa, saying that the service and sacrifice of African peacekeepers is “at the forefront of our minds.” The UN chief’s praise for the work of Blue Helmets and other peacekeeping personnel was part of his address to Heads of State gathered at the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on Sunday.

Mr. Guterres was speaking the day after three Ethiopian peacekeepers serving in the United Mission in Abyei ([UNISFA](#)) were killed, when a military helicopter carrying troops crashed in the Mission compound whilst on a routine operation. Ten passengers were injured, and three are reportedly in critical condition.

Addressing the fact that African countries provide almost half of all UN peacekeeping troops – including some two-thirds of all women peacekeepers and the majority of UN police – the UN chief went on to acknowledge the sacrifice of African soldiers in AMISOM (the African Union Mission in Somalia); the G5 joint force, which counters violent extremism and terrorism in the Sahel region of North Africa; and the Multinational Joint Task Force in the Lake Chad Basin, set up to restore security in areas of the Lake Chad Basin affected by the Boko Haram terror group. “To be fully effective,” he said, “these African peace operations require robust mandates from the Security Council and predictable, sustainable financing, including assessed contributions.”

United Nations peacekeeping operations, the UN chief added, are “increasingly being called into areas where there is no peace to keep,” explaining that this is why he has repeatedly expressed support for peace enforcement and counter-terrorism operations, and launched the Action for Peacekeeping ([A4P](#)) initiative in 2018, which aims to provide UN missions with the means to be more effective, better equipped, safer and more robust.

Mr. Guterres went on to impress upon his audience the “critical” role that women’s “equality, meaningful participation and leadership” have to play in ensuring lasting peace, citing the invaluable contributions made by FewWise – the African Women’s Network on Mediation – and the African Women Leaders Network, describing both groups as important initiatives for joint UN-AU collaboration.

Female African coders 'on the front-line of the battle' to change gender power relations: UN chief

Young female African coders are “on the front-line” of the battle to change traditionally male power relations and bring about a more equitable balance between men and women, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said during his visit to Ethiopia to attend the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa.

The UN chief was speaking after meeting girls from across the continent taking part in the [African Girls Can Code Initiative](#), a joint initiative from the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and [UN Women](#). This new programme saw more than 80 girls from 34 African countries join the first Coding Camp in Addis Ababa for 10 days in August 2018.

The girls attending the courses learn about digital literacy, coding and personal development skills, including enterprise know-how to ensure their financial security. They are trained as programmers, creators and designers, so that they are well equipped to compete for careers in areas such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and coding. The initiative will run until 2022 and is expected to reach more than 2,000 girls through 18 Coding Camps.

Mr. Guterres said that one of the fundamental problems in the world is that power is in the hands of men, leading to a male-dominated culture. In Africa, this is one of the reasons why it is so difficult for girls to go to school. In technology professions, the problem is particularly acute, with an overwhelming majority of men.

ITU [data](#) from 2017 shows that, as well as having the lowest rates of Internet penetration, the African region has the widest digital gender gap in the world: only 18.6 per cent of women use the Internet, compared with 24.9 per cent of men.

The UN chief recalled his time studying electrical engineering, when there was just one woman female in a class of 300: “This is what we need to change, and we are not yet there. We need more girls to take technology courses. This is absolutely crucial. If girls and women are not more involved in technology professions, power relations will remain very male dominated.”

Monday is the 2019 [International Day of Women and Girls in Science](#), which raises awareness of the fact that women and girls continue to be excluded from participating fully in science, importance of changing this trend: According to UN [data](#), only around 30 per cent of all female students select fields related to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) in higher education, and less than 30 per cent of researchers worldwide are women.

[African continent 'an example of solidarity' towards migrants and refugees: UN chief](#)

African nations are setting an example for richer countries when it comes to the treatment of refugees, UN Secretary-General António Guterres [said in a press conference](#) on Saturday, following a meeting with the Chairperson of the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The UN chief is in the Ethiopian capital to attend the annual African Union summit, which brings together Heads of State from across the continent. This year's event, which begins on Sunday, will focus on the issue of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Mr. Guterres, who spent 10 years as the UN's High Commissioner for Refugees, before taking up his position at the head of the organization, said that, in Africa, borders are open for refugees, and that the continent is in the leadership when it comes to addressing migration flows.

The UN chief pointed out that, contrary to popular perception, there are more African migrants in other African countries than in Europe, and migration has been dealt with in a much more humane way. Mr. Guterres appealed for the UN's global compacts on [Migration](#) and [Refugees](#) to be fully implemented.

The UN Refugee Agency [UNHCR](#) says that Sub-Saharan Africa hosts more than 26 per cent of the world's refugee population. 18 million people in the region are of concern to UNHCR, with conflicts and ongoing crises in the Central African Republic (CAR), Nigeria and South Sudan, as well as Burundi and Yemen, driving large increases in the numbers of refugees and displaced people.

On the eve of the summit, the UN Childrens' Fund, [UNICEF](#), published a [press release](#) warning that 13.5 million children have been uprooted in Africa – including those displaced by conflict, poverty and climate change – and called on African leaders to implement policies and programmes to protect, empower and invest in refugee, migrant and displaced children.

Mr. Guterres struck a generally positive note in the press conference, pointing to recent peace deals and conflict de-escalation across Africa. He cited the reconciliation between Ethiopia and Eritrea; the establishment of peace agreements in South Sudan; and elections in Madagascar, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Mali, that took place in a peaceful context. The combined efforts of the African Union and the UN, he said, are producing results in conflict resolution and the prevention of conflicts, and Africa is seeing a "wind of hope" that can be extended to other parts of the world.

However, he went to say that there cannot be peace without development, and that the international community must show more political will in this area, particularly in climate action, and show ambition for mitigation, adaptation, and finance: “We are losing the race with climate change and this can be a disaster for Africa and for world. Africa will pay an even higher price because of the dramatic impacts in the continent.”

[FROM THE FIELD: For refugees and migrants in Europe, healthcare’s essential but a challenge to find](#)

There are some 68.5 million people currently displaced around the world, with 25.4 million crossing national borders in search of safety.



WHO/Francesco Bellina

For reasons including their legal status, language barriers and discrimination, refugees and migrants can face challenges in accessing health care., by WHO/Francesco Bellina

Even a healthy migrant or refugee can fall sick, while traveling to – or sheltering in – a receiving country. Poor living conditions and lifestyle adjustments to a totally new environment, are just two possible reasons why,

according to the [World Health Organization](#)'s (WHO) first [Report on the health of refugees and migrants](#) in the WHO European Region.

It may come as no surprise that children without parents or a guardian are especially vulnerable, and at risk of suffering both health and social problems.

The WHO report, which was developed in partnership with the Italian National Institute for Health, Migration and Poverty, summarizes the latest evidence on the health of refugees and migrants in various parts of Europe, along with the progress made by countries to promote their health.

[Here](#)'s the full story.

[Scale of displacement across Myanmar 'very difficult to gauge', says UN refugee agency](#)

Concern over escalating violence in Myanmar's Chin and Rakhine states continues to grow, with civilians reportedly forced to flee both internally, and across the border into Bangladesh, where hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have already sought shelter.

Andrej Mahecic, spokesperson for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) expressed deep concern over the humanitarian impact of the continuing violence and the "potential for both further internal displacement and the outflow of refugees".

"As part of inter-agency efforts, UNHCR stands ready to support the humanitarian response in the affected areas in Myanmar", he stated, noting that more than 720,000 mostly-Muslim Rohingya had fled a 2017 military operation in Rakhine state, which was condemned at the time as being tantamount to genocide, by the then UN [High Commissioner for Human Rights](#).

UNHCR Special Envoy Angelina Jolie visits Rohingya refugee camps in Chakmarkul camp, Cox's Bazar, south-east Bangladesh, while on mission with the UN Refugee Agency., by © UNHCR/Santiago Escobar-Jaramillo

"The scale of it is very difficult to gauge", said Mr. Mahecic. "We understand from some of the reports that say 200 people have sought shelter", but "without effective access in Rakhine, and without effective access in other parts, we can't assess the scope of the current internal displacement as a result of the violence which flared up some time in December last year."

The refugee agency has called on the Government of Bangladesh to continue its policy of offering shelter and support and offered to assess and respond to the needs of civilians who have arrived in the past few weeks, seeking safety from violence in Myanmar.

Since August 2017, nearly 700,000 minority Muslim Rohingyas have fled violence in Myanmar across the border into Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, joining several hundred thousand more that were already settled there in overcrowded camps.

"UNHCR is grateful to the Government of Bangladesh for its generosity and the leadership it has shown", Mr. Mahecic said.

During a visit early in the week to the world's largest refugee camp, Kutupalong camp in Bangladesh, UNHCR Special Envoy Angelina Jolie said that it was "deeply upsetting" to meet the families who "have only known persecution and statelessness their whole lives, who speak of being 'treated like cattle'".

She also met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen in the capital of Dhaka, where she expressed UNHCR's gratitude to the Government and the people of Bangladesh, for their kindness.