

New UN health agency regulation guideline aim to help countries end 'reign' of tobacco industry

The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) on Friday launched new guidelines on the role that tobacco product regulations can play in saving lives by reducing the demand for tobacco and tobacco products – estimated to kill over seven million people annually.

The new guide together with an accompanying publication will help governments “do much more” to implement regulations and address the exploitation of tobacco product regulations, highlighted the UN health agency.

“The [tobacco industry has enjoyed years of little or no regulation](#), mainly due to the complexity of tobacco product regulation and lack of appropriate guidance in this area,” said Douglas Bettcher, the Director of the WHO Department for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases.

“Tobacco product regulation is an under-utilized tool which has a critical role to play in reducing tobacco use [and] these new tools provide a useful resource to countries to either introduce or improve existing tobacco product regulation provisions and end the tobacco industry ‘reign’,” he added.

The guide, titled [Tobacco product regulation: Building laboratory testing capacity](#), provides practical and stepwise approaches to implementing tobacco testing relevant to a wide range of countries, especially those with inadequate resources to establish testing facilities.

It also provides regulators and policymakers with comprehensible information on how to test tobacco products, what products to test, and how to use testing data in a meaningful manner to support regulation.

The guidelines will also assist in the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control – a global treaty combatting the tobacco epidemic – through strengthening tobacco product regulation capacity in WHO member States.

We [need more countries to introduce and increase](#) tobacco taxes to drive down smoking rates and generate revenues to fund health systems – *Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General*

According to Vinayak Prasad, the head of the Tobacco Free Initiative at WHO, most countries “hesitate” to implement policies, due in part to the highly technical nature of such policy interventions and the difficulties in translating science into regulation.

“Failure to regulate is a missed opportunity as tobacco product regulation – in the context of comprehensive control – is a valuable tool that complements other tried and tested tobacco control interventions, such as raising taxes, and ensuring smoke-free environments,” he explained.

The accompanying publication, [Case studies for regulatory approaches to tobacco products – Menthol in tobacco products](#), includes practical steps as well as policy options countries can employ to make regulations more effective, such as the regulators’ enforcement of a total ban on the use of flavours in tobacco products such as menthol.

The guidance document and the accompanying publication were launched at the 2018 World Conference on Tobacco or Health in Cape Town, South Africa.

[Nigerian women artists unite at UN to change perceptions of women and Africa](#)

Three Nigerian women will spotlight themes such as human trafficking, suicide bombing, and sexism and sexual harassment at the United Nations, showing the strength of women as agents of change in African societies often dominated by men.

“We have to see ourselves as part of the solution, not just as women reserved for sex or for the kitchen,” author and Queen Blessing Itua told *UN News* ahead of a special event planned for this Sunday in the UN General Assembly Hall.

“Unity in Diversity: An Evening of Art and Hope with Nigerian Women” will feature excerpts from Ms. Itua’s book “We Are the Blessings of Africa,” as well as monologues from Ifeoma Fafunwa’s HEAR WORD! and Nadine Ibrahim’s films “Tolu” and “Through Her Eyes.”

The event is organized by UN WOMEN, UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Nigerian Mission to the UN, with other partners.

“Africa is a diverse continent, rich with different countries and different cultures, and natural resources. Africa has the talent – men and women,” said Ms. Itua. “When men in Africa look at women, women are reserved just in the kitchen or at home. So there’s a need to shift thinking that women can be powerful agents of development, then they’re able to support and empower women.

“If women understand that they have a critical role to play, they do not see themselves as just wives or women at home, they also raise up into mental engagement with the men and hopefully strategize about developing our Mother

Land,” Ms. Itua continued.

Born in Nigeria and living in the United States, Ms. Itua said she wants to create awareness and give voice to women who do not have a platform to speak out about social ills, particularly rural women.

Her latest film, *Mrs. Adams*, – which will premiere during the Commission on the Status of Women next week – follows human trafficking routes in Nigeria and Europe. It is meant to be a statement not just about brutalization of women and sexual violence, but also highlight the economic reasons that people choose to migrate in the first place – to change some of the misinterpretations about exploitative work practices, forced labour and smuggling.

The issue is personal, Ms. Itua said. She hails from Edo state, which recently inaugurated a migration resource centre, and which has been cast in the spotlight after reports of Nigerians from that area being sold in modern slave markets in Libya.

“As an African woman, I believe that my goal is to work with other women in creating awareness. Together we are stronger. Working together to be stronger to change the narrative coming out of Africa,” Ms. Itua said.

She will be joined this Sunday by 24-year-old Nadine Ibrahim, whose film *Through Her Eyes* follows the internal struggle of a 12-year-old female suicide bomber in northern Nigeria.

Ms. Ibrahim, who is a Muslim, has said that she wants people to understand the rich and beautiful culture surrounding women, Islam and north-eastern Nigeria.

The film was filmed with security on location and after the original actress’s mother pulled the daughter out of the film for fear of safety.

The Sunday night event will also feature Ifeoma Fafunwa, whose stage play “HEAR WORD! Naija Women Talk True” is a collection of monologues based on true-life stories of Nigerian women challenging social, cultural and political norms in the country.

A line from the play declares: “I have a vital contribution to my nation’s transformation. I am a force, a tidal wave, and I won’t hide. My destiny is not for you to decide.”

[UN envoy on conflict-related sexual](#)

violence reports on visits to Iraq and Sudan

A senior United Nations official has stressed the need to ensure survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Iraq are fully protected and that perpetrators are brought to justice.

[Pramila Patten, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict](#), this week concluded a visit to the country, where thousands of women and girls have suffered at the hands of the extremist group the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Da'esh).

She undertook an eight-day mission to [Iraq](#), which ended on Monday, prior to which she was in [Sudan](#) from 18 to 25 February.

In Iraq, Ms. Patten met with Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and other Government officials in the cities of Baghdad, Erbil and Mosul, as well as with civil society groups, religious leaders and other stakeholders.

"I heard first-hand the heart-wrenching accounts of survivors of Da'esh sexual violence," she told journalists at UN Headquarters in New York on Friday.

"Many of the women who remain displaced expressed serious safety concerns regarding their return to their homes due to activity from different militia groups and the reported presence of former Da'esh combatants within their community. Sunni women in particular shared their fear of reprisals on account of the wrong perception of affiliation with Da'esh."

Ms. Patten characterised the plight of survivors who have returned home with children fathered by the extremists as "extremely disturbing."

"While some religious leaders may show some empathy, the tribal leaders display a profound reluctance to accept children born of rape. And I was informed by the provincial authorities of Mosul of the setup of different orphanages with thousands of children," she said.

Ms. Patten was invited to Iraq by the Government, which in 2016 signed an agreement with the UN aimed at preventing and addressing conflict-related violence.

It envisions support in areas such as evidence collection, strengthening of the legal framework and victim compensation.

In her talks with the authorities, Ms. Patten said she stressed the importance of ensuring that alleged Da'esh perpetrators are held accountable – not only for terrorism-related charges but also for sexual violence crimes.

Regarding Sudan, Ms. Patten said her visit marked the first time the UN

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict has been invited to the country.

She travelled to the capital, Khartoum, and two states in Darfur, where millions are still living in camps more than a decade after fighting broke out between armed rebel groups and Government forces and allied militias.

Despite an apparent improved security situation in the province, Ms. Patten said talks with displaced women and girls in two camps revealed how precarious things are there.

“I learned that the women and girls are especially at risk of sex violence when they step out of the camps, especially to pursue their livelihood activities,” she said.

“In El Genaina (capital of West Darfur state), I heard from women who are unable to return to their pre-war homes due to security concerns and fear of being raped. In addition, some women told me about sexual violence committed in the context of intercommunal conflicts over land and natural resources,” she said.

And in that regard, she said the initiative of the Government to collect illegal arms and ammunition “is quite positive and is a critical measure in the right direction to improve the security of women and girls.”

However, Ms. Patten noted there is what she described as “a deep-seated culture of denial of sexual violence” in Sudan, making it difficult to address the crime.

She hoped one outcome of her visit will be the country’s adoption of a cooperation framework with the UN to address conflict-related sexual violence.

Her proposal is that it will focus on five areas, including survivors’ access to medical, psycho-social and legal services; security sector training and engagement with religious leaders and civil society.

[Syria: UN aid convoy returns to eastern Ghouta](#)

The United Nations and partners on Friday reached the Syrian city of Douma in Eastern Ghouta to complete the distribution of food aid after intense shelling cut short deliveries to the war-torn enclave earlier this week.

“The United Nations and our partners were able to go back into Douma today to deliver the remaining food assistance,” said Marwa Awad, Communications

Officer of the World Food Programme (WFP), from the conflict-ravaged country's capital, Damascus.

The assistance consisted of food baskets and wheat flour bags prepared by the WFP and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The WFP and its partners, namely ICRC and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, "look forward to our ability to enter again in the future to continue delivering the much-needed humanitarian and food assistance to the people inside Eastern Ghouta," she added, calling on all parties to the conflict to grant humanitarians safe access to deliver the much-needed food and other assistance.

Meanwhile at UN Headquarters in New York, Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric told reporters that while the convoy was underway, shelling occurred in the proximity of operations, despite prior assurances of safety from all parties.

Despite such risks, today's delivery completed the planned food relief for 27,500 people, along with health and nutrition items. The UN is waiting for access authorization to cover all 70,000 people in Douma that was initially approved by the Syrian authorities.

In Geneva, the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) warned that there has been a marked increase in violent attacks on health care in Syria.

"Every attack on health represents a loss that shatters families and communities and ripples through health systems. Health workers and health facilities are not a target. It has to stop," Christian Lindmeier, WHO communication officer, told reporters.

According to a monthly report from the health cluster based in Gaziantep, Turkey, 43 incidents of violence against health care facilities, services and workers were reported in February, of which 39 were verified by external monitors and four are still being verified.

That compares to 31 incidents last month, of which 28 were verified.

In all, the 67 verified attacks on health facilities and workers in the first two months of this year amount to more than 50 per cent of verified attacks in all of 2017, which totaled 112.

Of February's verified incidents, 28 were in eastern Ghouta, 10 in Idleb and one in Homs. The attacks targeted 20 hospitals, 16 health facilities, two ambulance stations and one medical supplies warehouse.

These unacceptable attacks resulted in the deaths of 19 people, among them four health workers. The attacks also left 28 people injured, seven of them medical staff, he said.

UN rights chief denounces 'unacceptable' charges of terrorism by Philippine's Duterte against UN expert

Flinging terrorism charges at a United Nations human rights expert is just one act in a litany of profane and inflammatory comments made by Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte against the rapporteur, prompting the UN rights chief to question the leader's mental stability.

"He needs to submit himself to some sort of psychiatric examination," Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussen, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, told reporters on Friday during a press conference in Geneva, which covered a range of other issues, including the situations in Venezuela and Myanmar.

Mr. Zeid said the Philippine Government had added UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Victoria Tauli-Corpuz's name to the "alleged membership of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army," which has been designated a terrorist organization.

According to Mr. Zeid, Ms. Corpuz believes that she has been targeted because of her comments on the attacks and killings of indigenous people in Mindanao.

"This is of course unacceptable for a special rapporteur acting on behalf of the international community whose expertise is sought by the Human Rights Council to be treated in this way," the High Commissioner said.

"And I hope and expect the Human Rights Council to respond accordingly," he added.

Turning to the "outrageous attacks" made by Mr. Duterte against Agnes Callamard, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extra-Judicial summary or arbitrary Executions, Mr. Zeid stressed: "These attacks cannot go unanswered."

Mr. Zeid called it "absolutely disgraceful that the president of a country could speak in this way, using the foulest of language against a rapporteur that is highly respected."

Since 1 July 2016, the year Mr. Duterte took office, thousands of people in the Philippines have reportedly been killed for their alleged involvement in illegal drug use or trafficking. While some killings have reportedly occurred in the context of clashes between or within gangs, it is suspected that many incidents involved extra-judicial killings in the course of police anti-drug operations, according to the Court.

In February, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court ([ICC](#)) announced that she would open preliminary examinations into the Government of the Philippine's "war on drugs."