

# Ahead of International Day of Women and Girls in Science, UN calls for smashing stereotypes

9 February 2018 – It is time to support and invest in women and girls who want to pursue careers in scientific research, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres said in a message to mark the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, observed annually on 11 February.

Mr. Guterres said that although both girls and boys have the potential to pursue their ambitions in science and mathematics, in school and at work, [systematic discrimination](#) means that women occupy less than 30 per cent of research and development jobs worldwide.

“We need to encourage and support girls and women achieve their full potential as scientific researchers and innovators. Women and girls need this, and the world needs this, if we are to achieve our ambitions for sustainable development on a healthy planet,” he stated.

The UN chief called for “concerted, concrete efforts” to overcome stereotypes and biases, such as media representations of scientists and innovators as being mainly men.

His concerns are being echoed by two other top UN officials.

In a [joint statement](#) on the Day, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), Audrey Azoulay, and the Executive Director of [UN Women](#), Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, stressed that such imagery makes it difficult for girls to believe they can be scientists, explorers or inventors, for example.

They said the future will be marked by scientific and technological progress which “will be the greatest when it draws on the full talent, creativity and ideas of women and girls in science.”

They added that the rapidly growing science and technology sectors are “vital” to national economies.

However, UNESCO [data](#) shows only around 30 per cent of all female students in higher education select the so-called STEM subjects – science, technology, engineering or mathematics. One of the main tools for tackling gender inequality in the sciences is dismantling the barriers to girls and women, at home, in the classroom and in the workplace. This requires a change in attitudes and the challenging of stereotypes, they said.

“We need to tackle biased perceptions amongst teachers, employers, peers and parents of the suitability of girls and young women to learn science – or learn at all – to pursue scientific careers or to lead and manage in academic spheres,” the UN officials stressed.

They went on to stress that: “Tackling some of the greatest challenges of the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development – from improving health to combatting climate change – will rely on harnessing all talent.”

“That means we need to achieve a significant increase in the number of women entering and remaining in STEM careers.”

In December 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution that established the annual [International Day](#) to recognize the critical role women and girls play in science and technology communities.

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## [Women and children threatened by sexual violence at refugee reception centres in Greek islands – UN](#)

9 February 2018 – Asylum seekers are reporting sexual harassment and violence at some sub-standard reception centres on Greek islands – where even bathing during the daytime can be dangerous – despite Government measures to address the dire living conditions, the United Nations refugee agency warned on Friday.

“In 2017, UNHCR [the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees] received reports from 622 survivors of [sexual and gender-based violence](#) on the Greek Aegean islands, out of which at least 28 per cent experienced [such violence] after arriving in Greece,” UNHCR spokesperson Cécile Pouilly said Friday at the regular press briefing in Geneva.

Women reported inappropriate behaviour, sexual harassment and attempted sexual attacks as the most common forms of such violence.

“The situation is particularly worrying in the Reception and Identification Centres (RIC) of Moria (Lesvos) and Vathy (Samos), where thousands of refugees continue to stay in unsuitable shelter with inadequate security,” she added.

Some 5,500 people are in these centres, which is double their intended capacity. Reports of sexual harassment in Moria are particularly high.

“In these two centres,” Ms. Pouilly continued, “bathrooms and latrines are no-go zones after dark for women or children, unless they are accompanied. Even bathing during daytime can be dangerous. In Moria, one woman told our teams that she had not taken a shower in two months from fear.”

Identifying and helping survivors is hampered by a reluctance to report assaults out of discrimination concerns, stigma and retaliation, helplessness

and insufficient trust to open up – including to UNHCR and medical and mental health experts from national services. Therefore, the actual number of incidents is likely to be higher than reported.

Over the past weeks, the authorities have accelerated transfers to the mainland, slightly reducing overcrowding, but crowded conditions continue to hinder outreach and prevention activities.

“Insecurity is another problem,” the spokesperson stressed. “Although there are police patrols, these remain insufficient, particularly at night, and don’t cover extended areas adjacent to the RICs, where people stay in tents without any security presence.”

Conditions are also building frustration among people, leading to a difficult and tense security environment, further raising the risk of sexual and gender-based violence.

While UNHCR welcomes Government measures to reduce the risk of sexual and gender-based violence, further steps must be taken to protect those in reception centres, including children, women and men.

Ms. Pouilly listed the steps, which involved gender separation – including separate shelters and secure and well-lit wash areas; improved conditions and services; greater police presence – with additional policewomen; more lighting in public areas; increased mainland transfers to ease overcrowding; additional staff dedicated to deal with the issue; and enhanced awareness-raising activities.

Exposure to sexual and gender-based violence worsens the already precarious experience of those fleeing war-torn countries and crossing sometimes dangerous territory to reach a safe haven.

“UNHCR will continue to work with and remains ready to support the Government to strengthen its operational response and build capacity, to prevent sexual and gender-based violence and to identify and refer survivors of [such violence] to appropriate services and shelters,” Ms. Pouilly concluded.

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## **Syria: Life ‘living nightmare’ for children in East Ghouta, UNICEF chief warns**

9 February 2018 – Following reports that dozens of children have been killed in violence this week alone in Syria, a senior United Nations official on Friday stressed the need for unconditional evacuations of sick and wounded children from East Ghouta and other sieged areas.

The violence shows no sign of abating, said UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Executive Director Henrietta H. Fore in a statement. For children who remain trapped under siege and under wanton, heavy violence across Syria, life is a [living nightmare](#). They are struggling just to stay alive.

Violence is intensifying in several parts of Syria, and in East Ghouta alone, hundreds of children are in urgent need of medical evacuation, she said, noting that four years of siege have crumbled health and other basic services and over the past few months, malnutrition has increased five-fold.

#### *Evacuation of sick children 'not a bargaining chip'*

Children, wherever they are in Syria, must have access to healthcare. The evacuation of sick and wounded children from besieged areas should be a given, not part of bargaining efforts, she warned.

I am heartbroken by what the children of Syria continue to suffer because of actions taken by adults actions that show total disregard for the protection, safety and wellbeing of children, she added.

Protection of children must be paramount at all times, and schools, hospitals and playgrounds should be places of safety, never targets, she stressed, calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities in Syria.

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## [In Seoul, UN chief says Global Goals must be a blueprint for fair globalization](#)

8 February 2018 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Thursday highlighted the importance of engagement and empowerment to transform the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) into benefits for all people worldwide and called on all sectors of the society to actively involve themselves in this endeavour.

Speaking at the inaugural Global Engagement & Empowerment Forum on Sustainable Development, held at Yonsei University in Seoul, the capital of the Republic of Korea, the Secretary-General stressed that efforts to implement the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development need to “go beyond diplomatic efforts and Government programmes.”

The civil society, academia and the private sector – all have to be mobilized – to find the resources needed to achieve the Goals and apply them in the best possible way.

Mr. Guterres also cautioned against rising inequality across the globe and said that this feeling of being “left behind” undermines the confidence of people, communities and regions, in governments as well as international organizations like the UN.

He told the audience, which included former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the President of the General Assembly Miroslav Lajčák that this undermining of trust ultimately results in increased instability.

At the same time, massive challenges such as climate change, rapid population growth, unplanned urbanization, large scale movement of people, food insecurity and water scarcity also contribute to further fragility multiply the negative impacts of the threats to global security.

“This means that we need enormous efforts, engagement and empowerment to make the blueprint of the [SDGs](#) the tools with which we are able to reach a fair globalization,” said the UN chief.

He also highlighted that financing is critical to ensure that there are sufficient resources to implement the sustainable development agenda and in that context, urged the international community to strengthen their fight against tax evasion, money laundering, and illicit flows of capital.

For instance, in Africa, these illicit activities account for more than total official development aid (ODA) that flows into the continent, said Mr. Guterres.

Further, in the implementation of the SDGs, he urged everyone to not only respond to the problems of the past but also respond to the problems of the future and on all actors to create conditions for these transformations to be absorbed by the society to enable people to adapt to new scenarios.

It is critical that everyone joins into these discourses to ensure that we can translate all these new tools into tools that work for the improvement of humankind, said Mr. Guterres.

While at Yonsei University, Secretary-General Guterres also held a meeting with his predecessor, Ban Ki-moon.

Also today, the current and former Secretaries-General, along with the President of the General Assembly, met with met with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea, Lee Nak-yeon.

Departing Seoul, the Secretary-General and his delegation drove to the site of the PyeongChang Olympic Winter Games. On site, he toured the Olympic village at Gangneung, where he was able to meet with a number of athletes, including Cheyenne Goh, the first Singaporean ever to qualify for the Olympic Winter Games. The Secretary-General also met and encouraged competitors from Switzerland, Hungary and China.

In the evening, the Secretary-General attended the official dinner hosted by the President of the Olympic Committee, Thomas Bach, for visiting dignitaries.

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## International community must stay 'one step ahead' of ISIL, stresses UN official

8 February 2018 – Despite military successes against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), the terrorist group and its affiliates continue to pose a significant threat around the world, the top United Nations counter-terrorism official told the Security Council today, urging strengthened international cooperation to address violent extremism and bring those behind it to justice.

“The rapidly evolving and transnational threat from ISIL presents a difficult challenge for Member States and the international community,” said Vladimir Voronkov, the head of the UN [Counter-Terrorism Office](#) at a Security Council [meeting](#), on threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts.

“ISIL is no longer focused on conquering and holding territory. It has been forced to adapt and focus primarily on a smaller and more motivated group of individuals who remain committed to inspiring, enabling and carrying out attacks,” he added.

Countering the changing threat implies the “need to stay one step ahead of ISIL” as it continues to adapt and evolve, stressed the UN official.

In particular, Mr. Voronkov called for a strong international framework to counter the threat from ISIL through the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy as well as relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, as well as effective implementation of existing multilateral tools and legal instruments, conventions and protocols.

Addressing the ISIL threat also requires addressing its underlying conditions which sway young men and women towards violent extremism, he added.

He also urged the international community to address the “deficit” in counter-terrorism cooperation at the global, regional and national levels and called on countries to engage fully at the first ever UN Summit of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies (to be held in June.)

The UN official informed the 15-member council of the evolving activities of ISIL and its affiliates in different parts of the world, including efforts to fund its illicit activities and spread propaganda.

He also warned that ISIL members and its sympathizers continue to abuse social media, as well as technology such as encryption methods and communication tools within the dark web, to communicate, coordinate and

facilitate their activities and perpetrate attacks.