

# Female genital mutilation ‘not acceptable’ in the 21st century – UN envoy on youth

5 February 2018 – Speaking a day ahead of the International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation, the United Nations youth envoy people underscored that the ghastly practice is an aversion to the human rights of millions and keeps them from achieving their full potential.

“This is not acceptable and this is done in the name of tradition, culture, religion or in the name of ensuring that women are to take on subservient roles to the men they will eventually marry,” said Jayathma Wickramanayake, the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, speaking at an international forum in the Gambia on strategies to combat the practice.

“This is not acceptable in the 21st century.”

Globally, over 200 million women and girls are estimated to have undergone some form of genital mutilation and girls aged 14 and younger account for about 44 million of those who have been “cut.”

According to the UN Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)), although the practice is declining in many countries where it is prevalent, many of these countries also experiencing a high rate of population growth – meaning that the number of girls who undergo genital mutilation will continue to grow if efforts are not significantly scaled up.

The in one of its Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development – agreed to by all UN Member States – has called for eliminating female genital mutilation as well as other harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage ([target 5.3](#)).

Countries too have also stepped up their efforts.

For instance, in November 2015, Gambia [banned](#) and subsequently criminalized female genital mutilation. Many other African countries also now have legislation that that forbids the practice.

In addition to implementing the law, the Envoy on Youth also called on all countries and stakeholders to address any existing gaps in their legal frameworks and reiterated the support from the UN in overcoming the harmful practice.

“History has taught us that human societies can come up with reprehensible social practices – that are justified under false guises – to strengthen the power structures or maintain the status quo for certain groups in society,” she said.

“Luckily we also know that social practice is not static and that it can

change as our understanding evolves.”

Marked annually on 6 February, the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation aims to strengthen momentum towards ending the practice which is globally recognized as a violation of the human rights of girls and women as well as perpetuates deep-rooted inequality between the sexes.

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## [UN chief congratulates US, Russia on nuclear arsenal cuts, urges further disarmament](#)

5 February 2018 – United Nations Secretary-General on Monday congratulated the United States and Russia on successfully reducing their strategic nuclear forces to the level required by a new bilateral treaty signed in 2010, calling on both sides to engage in the necessary dialogue that will lead to further arsenal reductions.

“The Secretary-General stresses that at a time when global anxieties about nuclear weapons are higher than at any time since the Cold War, [efforts in nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control](#) are more vital than ever,” said a statement issued by his Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric.

“These endeavors can play significant roles in building trust and confidence, and preventing, mitigating and resolving conflicts,” the statement added.

Known as “New START,” the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms reduces deployed nuclear weapons to 700 delivery vehicles and 1,550 warheads.

It is a part of a series of bilateral nuclear arms control agreements between the two nations that “have significantly reduced the dangers posed by nuclear weapons and are steps towards the common aspiration of a world free of nuclear weapons,” the statement noted.

Mr. Guterres called on them “to engage in the necessary dialogue that will lead to further arsenal reductions” and “to continue to display the historic leadership across the multilateral disarmament agenda that has proven so valuable to our collective security,” the statement said.

The new Treaty was signed in Prague on 8 April, 2010 and came into force on 5 February, 2011.

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## Proof of chemical weapons use in Syria should be met with 'meaningful response,' UN disarmament chief

5 February 2018 – Evidence of the use, or likely use, of banned chemical weapons in Syria should be met with a “meaningful response” within the Security Council, the United Nations disarmament affairs chief said on Monday.

UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu was [briefing](#) the Council on the work being undertaken by the UN and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact Finding Mission (FFM) to look into all allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

“New reports by the FFM are pending. Should they conclude that there has been the use, or likely use, of chemical weapons in any of these alleged incidents, our obligation to enact a meaningful response will be further intensified.”

She said that the complete destruction of the Government’s 27 above-ground facilities should be completed within two months, and added that the FFM was due to submit a report “very soon.”

The majority of allegations involve the use of chlorine gas.

Meanwhile, allegations of chemical weapon use were continuing, she said, “including only this past weekend in the town of Saraqeb.”

According to news reports, nine people have been treated with breathing problems, after a bomb believed to be filled with the toxic gas was dropped on the opposition-held town, in Idlib Governorate.

High Representative Nakamitsu said that the situation made it “abundantly clear our continuing and collective responsibility to ensure that those responsible are held to account.” She said that another FFM team has been looking into allegations of the use of chemical weapons by other warring parties, brought to their attention by the Syrian government. She said its report was pending.

Ms. Nakamitsu said that should any of the reports conclude that there had been “the use, or likely use, of chemical weapons in any of these alleged incidents, our obligation to enact a meaningful response will be further intensified.”

“It is my hope, and the hope of the Secretary-General, that such a response will favour unity, not impunity,” she added.

In November last year, the Security Council failed to adopt a resolution to renew the mandate of an international panel investigating the use of chemical weapons in Syria, due to the use of the veto by permanent member, Russia.

Ms. Nakamitsu, also the head of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), told the Security Council that work still remains to be done to fully implement Council resolution 2118 as well as for the international community to have “shared confidence” that the Syria’s chemical weapons programme has been fully eliminated.

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## [World ‘failing to stop the war on children,’ says UNICEF Middle East, North Africa director](#)

5 February 2018 – Describing January as “a dark month” in crisis-torn Middle East and North Africa, the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) director for the region said Monday that the violence has had a devastating toll on children, who were being killed in ongoing conflicts or suicide attacks, or freezing to death as they fled active warzones.

“It is [simply unacceptable](#) that children continue being killed and injured every single day,” said Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

In the month of January alone, escalating violence in Iraq, Libya, the Palestine, Syria and Yemen has claimed the lives of at least 83 children.

“These children have paid the highest price for wars that they have absolutely no responsibility for. Their lives have been cut short, their families forever broken in grief,” he added.

Mr. Cappelaere said that as the Syrian conflict enters its eighth year, intensifying fighting has reportedly killed 59 children in the past four weeks.

Moreover, across Yemen the UN has verified the killing of 16 children in attacks and continues to receive daily reports of more killed and injured children amidst escalating fighting.

Additionally, a suicide attack took the lives of three children in Libya’s Benghazi while three others died playing near unexploded ordnance – a fourth child remains in critical condition after the blast.

Turning to the old city of Mosul in Iraq, a child was killed in a booby-trapped house, and in Palestine, a boy was shot dead in a village near

Ramallah.

Furthermore, 16 refugees, including four children, froze to death in a harsh winter storm in Lebanon – fleeing the war in Syria – where many more children were hospitalized with frost bite.

“We collectively continue failing to stop the war on children,” stressed Mr. Cappelaere.

He underscored, “not hundreds, not thousands but millions more children in the Middle East and North Africa region have their childhoods stolen, maimed for life, traumatized, arrested and detained, exploited, prevented from going to school and from getting the most essential health services; denied even the basic right to play.”

Mr. Cappelaere maintained that we have no justification, no reason to accept this as a new normal.

“Children may have been silenced. But their voices will continue to be heard. Their message is our message: The protection of children is paramount under all circumstances, in line with the law of war,” he argued.

“Breaching that law is a most heinous crime and jeopardizes the future – and not just for children,” concluded the UNICEF Regional Director.

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## [Development indicators trending downward for world's poorest countries, UN warns](#)

5 February 2018 – The least developed countries (LDCs) &#8211 nations categorized as requiring special attention from the international community &#8211 will fall short of goals set out in the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development unless urgent action is taken, new United Nations analysis has revealed.

The analysis by the UN Conference on Trade and Development ([UNCTAD](#)) also highlights that LDC growth averaged 5 per cent in 2017 and will reach 5.4 per cent in 2018, below the 7 per cent growth envisaged by target 1 of Sustainable Development Goal 8 on promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

In 2017, only five LDCs achieved economic growth of 7 per cent or higher: Ethiopia at 8.5 per cent, Nepal at 7.5 per cent, Myanmar at 7.2 per cent, Bangladesh at 7.1 per cent, and Djibouti at 7 per cent.

The international community should strengthen [its support to LDCs](#) in line with the commitment to leave no one behind,&#8221 Paul Akiwumi, Director of UNCTAD's Division for Africa, Least Developed Countries and Special Programmes, Mr. Akiwumi said.

With the global economic recovery remaining tepid, development partners face constraints in extending support to LDCs to help them meet the Sustainable Development Goals. Inequalities between the LDCs and other developing countries risk widening,&#8221 he said.

### ***Relying on commodities***

The analysis contends that too many LDCs remain dependent on primary commodity exports.

While international prices for most primary commodity categories have trended upwards since late 2016, this modest recovery barely made a dent to the significant drop experienced since 2011, particularly in the cases of crude petroleum and minerals, ores and metals.

In 2017, LDCs as a group were projected to register a current account deficit of \$50 billion, the second-highest deficit posted so far, at least in nominal terms.

In contrast, non-LDC developing countries registered current account surpluses, so did developing countries as a whole and developed countries.

Projections for 2018 suggest that the current account deficits of the LDCs are expected to grow further, making worse possible balance-of-payments weaknesses.

### ***Aid levels***

Special foreign aid commitments for LDCs amounted to \$43.2 billion, representing only an estimated 27 per cent of net aid to all developing countries &#8211 a 0.5 per cent increase in aid in real terms year-on-year.

This trend supports fears of a levelling-off of aid to LDCs in the wake of the global recession. In 2016, only a handful of donor countries appear to have met the commitments under target 2 of Sustainable Development Goal 17.

Denmark, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom provided more than 0.20 per cent of their own gross national income to LDCs, while the Netherlands met the 0.15 per cent threshold.

This analysis signals a clarion call for action,&#8221 said Mr. Akiwumi. &#8220The international community needs to pay increased attention to their commitments toward LDCs.&#8221

The analysis was presented to UNCTAD member States at a meeting of its governing body in Geneva, Switzerland, on 5 February.