

UN calls on Maldives to respect Supreme Court decision, says 'ready' to help ease political impasse

3 February 2018 – Following the Maldives' Supreme Court decision ordering the release of convicted opposition leaders and the reinstatement of 12 parliamentarians, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has expressed the world body's continued readiness to facilitate all-party talks in finding a solution to the Indian Ocean nation's political stalemate.

The Secretary-General takes note of [the important ruling](#) by the Supreme Court and calls on the Government to respect it, said a statement issued overnight by his Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric.

The Secretary-General reiterates his belief in finding a solution to the political stalemate in the Maldives through all-party talks, which the United Nations continues to stand ready to facilitate, the statement added.

On Friday, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) also urged the Government of the Maldives to [fully respect](#) the Supreme Court decision, which also overturned the conviction of former President Mohamed Nasheed and ordered to retry his case.

We are concerned by what appears to be an initial heavy-handed reaction by security forces in the capital Malé against people celebrating the Court's decision, Spokesperson Rupert Colville told reporters at a press briefing in Geneva, Switzerland, urging them to show understanding and restraint, and to act in full accordance with international laws and standards governing the policing of protests and other forms of public assembly.

We also urge all those celebrating, or protesting, to do so in a peaceful fashion, he added.

UN forum's key message: Young people must be meaningful participants in policy-making

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2 February 2018 –

Young people must be involved at all levels of policy-making and in all processes that affect them, including in the design of national plans, according to a summary statement issued at the end of a United Nations forum on youth.

The [statement](#) – issued by the President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Marie Chatardová – highlights key messages and recommendations emerged from discussions during the 2018 ECOSOC [Youth Forum](#), held on 30 and 31 January in New York.

The Forum, which the Council has been convening since 2012, continued to grow in size and stature, bringing together 38 Ministers and senior officials, the largest number to date, and more than 700 youth participants from around the world, the statement said.

Through plenary discussions and breakout sessions, the Council listened to a wide diversity of voices and ideas from young people across all regions.

“We were inspired by [young people's proposals](#) to climate change and social inequity – smart water, energy efficiency, compost and recycling, decentralized economy think tanks, biodiversity and forest conservation and preservation of indigenous knowledge,” the statement said.

Policymakers shared their approaches to engaging young people in decision-making and implementing of the [2030 Agenda](#) and addressing their priorities in their national Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) implementation strategies.

Youth focused their attention on access to water, sanitation (SDG 6), and energy (SDG 7); sustainable and inclusive cities (SDG 11), sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12); sustainably managed forests (SDG 15); use of science, technology and innovations in facilitating youth engagement, development and resilience (SDG 17).

The Forum called on Member States to ensure that young people have the institutional and political space to contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at country, regional and global levels.

“The voices of young people can be amplified at the global level if they are included as youth delegates at the UN and if they are part of national delegations for the review of implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the High-Level Political Forum,” the statement said, adding that they should hold their Governments accountable for their commitments, including through vigorous shadow reporting.

Full Text of Presidential Statement on Economic and Social Council Youth Forum[here](#)

The statement also said that “ministries responsible for the youth portfolio have a huge responsibility to ensure young people are prioritized.”

They were urged to do this through collaboration with other line Ministries while fostering partnerships with youth and other civil society organizations.

The Forum was also told about the need to channel resources from all sources – public, private, philanthropic and official development assistance – to promote direct investment in the priority issues that affect young people, including youth initiatives and enterprises, youth organizations, and in productive sectors and activities that benefit them most.

Partnership key to ensuring all children can access education – senior UN officials

2 February 2018 – Stressing the importance of quality education for the future of young people and children, senior United Nations officials, including the head of its education agency and the UN youth envoy, called for cooperation to strengthen education and learning programmes in all corners of the world.

“No single country or agency can tackle the challenges of demographics, persisting conflicts, unequal access of girls and women to education, radicalization by groups with vested interests or environment degradation,” Audrey Azoulay, the Director-General of the UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), said in a [Tweet](#) (in French), referring to her participation at the Global Partnership for Education Financing Conference.

“Partnership is the only way to make this possible,” she added.

Convened by the Presidents of France and Senegal, in Dakar, the Conference seeks to raise funds to support education efforts in both humanitarian and non-humanitarian contexts. It is also the first time that a donor and a developing country are co-hosting the event.

Also speaking at the Conference, Jayathma Wickramanayake, the UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, highlighted the importance of empowering young people with the skills they would need to adapt in a fast changing work.

“In a world of rapidly advancing digital technologies and artificial intelligence that will impact the outlook of the future of work, we have to rethink our approaches on skills development,” said Ms. Wickramanayake.

“Beyond traditional classroom interventions, investing in non-formal and informal learning is essential to developing skills that fit the world of tomorrow,” she added.

With over half the global population under the age of 25, the world “cannot afford to not invest in education,” expressed Ms. Wickramanayake and urged leaders and policy makers to redouble their efforts to ensure that every young person can enjoy their universal right to education.

[UN will ‘not tolerate’ sexual harassment in its ranks – Guterres](#)

2 February 2018 – [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Friday made clear that the United Nations will not tolerate sexual harassment “anytime, anywhere,” within its ranks and laid out a five-point plan to ensure equality across the Organization, which he said was critical to tackle on the challenge of such behavior.

“I reaffirm my total commitment to the UN’s zero tolerance policy on [sexual harassment](#),” Mr. Guterres told the press at the Organization’s Headquarters in New York.

Noting that like sexual abuse and sexual violence, sexual harassment is rooted in the historic power imbalances between men and women, the UN chief said he is well aware of the male-dominated culture that permeates governments, the private sector, international organizations and even areas of civil society.

“This creates obstacles to upholding zero tolerance policies on sexual harassment, including here at the United Nations. I am determined to remove [those obstacles],” he said.

Because equal rights and representation are so important in this regard, he launched a gender parity strategy at the UN, and for the first time in its history, the same number of women occupy senior management positions as men at the UN Secretariat; In fact, 23 women to 21 men.

“This is a start,” he stressed, urging equality at all levels and outlining some concrete steps to address sexual harassment, including taking every allegation seriously, past and present, and making sure all staff affected know what to do and where to go for help.

He said a new helpline for staff within the Secretariat who seek confidential advice will be operational by mid-February.

Mr. Guterres has also established a Task Force of leaders from across the UN

system to step up efforts to tackle harassment and boost support for victims, including mandatory staff training on this issue.

He has also strengthened the protection of whistleblowers and reminded staff of their duty to call out sexual harassment and to support those affected.

A survey among Secretariat staff will be conducted soon to obtain better information on prevalence and reporting rates.

“In this effort and beyond, my message is simple: we will not tolerate sexual harassment anytime, anywhere,” he said. “And we will continue to change the dynamic and put greater power into the hands of women to prevent and end sexual harassment and all abuse of power in the UN.”

Russia-sponsored talks on Syria

The Secretary-General also addressed the topic of the Syrian political process and the Russia-sponsored Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue in Sochi, to which Mr. Guterres dispatched his Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura.

The UN chief highlighted three key points from the final Sochi statement.

First, it embraced a vision of Syria for all Syrians – as reflected by the 12 living intra-Syrian principles put forward by de Mistura in Geneva late last year.

Second, the Congress affirmed that a Constitutional Committee should be formed under UN auspices in accordance with Security Council [resolution 2254 \(2015\)](#).

He said that there is an understanding that such a Committee should at the very least comprise the Government, opposition representatives in the [intra-Syrian talks](#) in Geneva, Syrian experts, civil society, independents, tribal leaders and women. It would also include adequate representation of Syria’s ethnic and religious components.

Third, the Congress made it clear that a final agreement on the mandate, terms of reference, powers, rules of procedure, and selection criteria for the composition of the Constitutional Committee is to be reached in the UN-led talks in Geneva.

“My Special Envoy will now draw on this Sochi outcome to meet our shared goal: full implementation of Security Council Resolution 2254 and the Geneva Communique,” Mr. Guterres said.

Turning to the humanitarian situation in Syria, he noted that over the last two months, not a single convoy of life-saving relief has reached a besieged area – no medical supplies and no food.

He appealed for humanitarian access, strict respect for international humanitarian law and, in particular, the protection of civilians.

“I call on the Government and opposition delegations and all States with influence to cooperate with my Special Envoy,” he said, stressing that the UN-led process must move ahead in Geneva, credibly and seriously because “we don’t have a moment to lose.”

Cereal prices remain stable, dairy and sugar values dip – UN

2 February 2018 – Global food prices have remained largely unchanged since December 2017, with January prices stable for cereals and vegetable oils; weaker for dairy and sugar values; and steady for meat, the United Nations agricultural agency said Thursday.

In January 2018, the Food and Agriculture Organization’s ([FAO](#)) Food Price Index, which tracks the monthly change in international market prices for five key commodity groups, averaged almost [three per cent below](#) the corresponding period last year.

Cereal prices in January were up almost 2.5 per cent from December, and 6.3 per cent from January 2017. Despite large supplies, wheat and maize prices received some support from a weakened dollar and weather concerns. Meanwhile, renewed Asian demand continued to firm up international rice values in January.

Meat prices remained virtually unchanged since its slight December revision – 7.4 per cent higher than its January 2017 value and 19.5 per cent below its all-time high of August 2014. Driven by higher export availabilities amid weak import demand, poultry and pork prices continued to slide while beef prices rose marginally.

Weakening commodities

Although dairy prices dipped 2.4 per cent since December, pushing the index further down for the fourth consecutive month, they remain 41 per cent higher than during their April 2016 slump.

Abundant milk supplies in the northern hemisphere and Australia heavily influenced an international decline in butter and cheese prices. At the same time, the possibility for lower-than-expected seasonal milk production in New Zealand lent support to whole milk powder prices. Skim milk powder values also increased, mostly because of strong import demand.

Sugar prices were down 1.6 per cent from December and as much as 30.4 per cent below the corresponding month last year. Downward trending international sugar quotations were mostly driven by ample export availabilities in major producing countries.