

# UN forum explores ongoing discrimination faced by people of African descent

24 November 2017 – Participants from Europe, Central Asia and North America gathered this week at a United Nations forum in Geneva to explore ways to combat racial discrimination and to ensure effective promotion and protection of the human rights of people of African descent.

Speaking at the opening of the two-day [meeting](#), held on 23 and 24 November, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said that people of African descent continue to endure pervasive discrimination in law as well as in practice, extending from neighbourhoods and schools to workplaces, political representation and justice.

“Whether they are descendants of the victims of slavery brought to North America and Europe against their will, or more recent migrants, [people of African descent are frequently denied rights](#) and experience exclusion, humiliation and impoverishment as a result of racial discrimination,” said the High Commissioner.

In particular, he raised concern over practises of racial profiling and patterns of police violence in the United States, as well as the disproportionate imposition of capital punishment on people of African descent and other racial minorities.

He also voiced concerns over “systemic anti-Black racism” in the Canadian criminal justice system, including evidence of extensive patterns of racial profiling by law enforcement, as well as under-representation of people of African descent in political spheres across many countries in Europe.

“We – all human beings – are equal; and therefore should enjoy an equal right to dignity,” he added, noting that just and peaceful societies for all can be created only when nobody is subjected to prejudice and segregation.

The meeting was held as part of the awareness-raising campaign for the [International Decade for People of African descent](#) (2015-2024).

Also [speaking](#) at the occasion, Sabelo Gumedze, the Chairperson of the Working Group of Experts on people of African descent, stated that the International Decade is an important instrument to address the common issues facing people of African descent, such as racial discrimination, xenophobia, Afrophobia and related intolerance; underrepresentation in political and judicial sectors; and inequality access to quality education, health services and housing.

Underscoring the need to combat extreme violence, racial bias and hate speech which people of African descent continue to face, he called for urgently addressing the root causes of racial discrimination “in an honest debate

about history and its connection to modern day racism.”

Other key speakers at the meeting included Opal Tometi, the Co-founder of Black Lives Matter and Executive Director of the Black Alliance for Just Immigration; Anastasia Crickley, Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and Rokhaya Diallo, French journalist and activist.

The meeting also saw three panel discussions on the themes of recognition, justice and development.

Organized by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), the meeting is one of five regional meetings that focus on trends, priorities and challenges at the national and regional levels to effectively implement the Decade’s Programme of Activities.

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## [Situation on Australian offshore processing facility at risk of further deterioration, UN warns](#)

24 November 2017 – Stating that the beating of refugees and asylum-seekers at the former regional processing centre on Manus Island by uniformed officers is both “shocking and inexcusable,” the United Nations refugee agency has urged the Australian Government to take immediate action to ensure their safety and protection.

“The situation still unfolding on Manus Island presents [a grave risk of further deterioration](#), and of further damage to extremely vulnerable human beings,” said Thomas Albrecht, the Regional Representative for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) in the Australian capital, Canberra, in a news release.

“[We] renew [our] call for all Australian parliamentarians and leaders to take immediate action to provide protection and safety for all refugees and asylum-seekers transferred to Papua New Guinea,” he added.

According to the news release, the beatings – including with metal poles – has been seen on footage released today. UNHCR staff have also received reports that several men remaining inside the regional processing centre have been seriously injured.

Limited access, however, has hampered the UN agency’s officials from gaining a better picture on the ground and the agency is seeking additional information from the Governments of Australia and Papua New Guinea.

“Medical treatment for all refugees and asylum-seekers who require it is of paramount importance,” said UNHCR in the release.

The UN agency further added that it had “unequivocally” advised Australia and Papua New Guinea prior to closure of the regional processing centre that comprehensive, intensive support for refugees and asylum-seekers is critical.

“Despite this, medical care remains inadequate, and caseworkers, interpreters, and torture and trauma counselling are completely unavailable,” it said, adding that similar concerns have also been raised by the authorities in Papua New Guinea, who lack the means and infrastructure to provide such services without further resources.

#### ***Recognized refugees still being offered ‘enticements’ to ‘voluntarily’ return – UNHCR***

Also in the release, UNHCR voiced particular concern that recognized refugees are still being offered enticements to “voluntarily return” to their home countries.

According to the news release, these places include countries where human rights conditions have significantly deteriorated in the past 12 months.

“Severely inadequate services and conditions may now further coerce refugees with a well-founded fear of persecution to nevertheless return to their countries of origin,” said the UN agency.

It added that it is aware, for example, of a refugee who recently returned to his home country, despite the precarious situation there, given fears for his safety and health in Papua New Guinea.

“Having been attacked by machete, and unable to get required medical treatment for a serious existing medical condition that had then been exacerbated, he felt he had no choice but to go back,” it noted.

According to the UNHCR, Manus Island (located some 320 kilometres or 200 miles off the northern coast of Papua New Guinea) has been the focus of Australia’s off-shore processing policy. Of the approximately 3,000 refugees and asylum-seekers forcibly transferred by Australia to facilities in Nauru and Manus, some 1,200 remain in Nauru and 900 in Papua New Guinea.

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## **[In Iran, UN aid chief expresses readiness to support post-quake relief efforts](#)**

humanitarian official said the Organization is ready to fill any gaps in the relief efforts following the devastating earthquake on 12 November that struck the Iran-Iraq border.

“I commend the Government’s efforts to save lives and alleviate the suffering of hundreds of thousands of people in the earthquake zone,” Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock said Thursday.

“During my visit, I also reiterated the UN’s readiness to support the Government by providing humanitarian aid if it is required to fill any gaps in the response.”

In his meetings with senior officials, Mr. Lowcock discussed the promotion of emergency preparedness efforts, international cooperation in disaster response, enhancing the capacity of the urban search and rescue teams, and exchange of technical expertise and knowledge with Iran.

He welcomed the “Getting Airports Ready for Disasters” exercise which will take place in Iran at the end of November.

Mr. Lowcock’s discussions with the Government also covered major humanitarian crises, including in Syria and in Yemen, and the situation of the Rohingya refugees. He urged the Iranian Government to help facilitate response efforts, assistance and protection for the crisis-affected people, and humanitarian access.

Among those he met with were Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif and Deputy Minister of Interior Shojaei Kiasari.

Meanwhile, the UN Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)) has scaled up its emergency response to meet the needs of women and girls in Iraq, in the wake of the 7.3-magnitude earthquake, which struck an area 30 km southwest of Halabja.

Access to essential, life-saving reproductive health services was also disrupted, with three health facilities damaged in Darbandixan and Halabja alone.

To provide natural delivery services around the clock, UNFPA has deployed a mobile gynaecology clinic to the Shahid Azadi Mama Alaa primary health clinic, the only functioning health facility in Darbandixan, the area that has suffered the most serious damage.

UNFPA is also distributing medicines, reproductive health kits, and dignity kits, which contain essential hygiene supplies including soap and sanitary napkins.

In addition, the agency is providing much-needed psychosocial support in Darbandixan and plans to conduct psychosocial sessions in Halabja as well.

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## [Egypt: UN chief and Security Council condemn attack on Sinai mosque](#)

24 November 2017 – [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres and the United Nations Security Council have condemned “in the strongest terms” the attack on al-Rawdah Mosque during Friday prayers in the town of Bir al-Abed in North Sinai, Egypt, that left scores of people dead and wounded.

“The Secretary-General [extends his deepest condolences](#) to the families of the victims and to the Government and people of Egypt and wishes a swift recovery to those who have been injured,” his spokesperson, Farhan Haq, said in a statement.

“The Secretary-General calls for those responsible for today’s horrific attack to be swiftly brought to justice,” he added.

In a statement issued to the press by Ambassador Sebastiano Cardi of Italy, which holds the presidency of the Security Council for November, the 15-member body also strongly condemned the “heinous and cowardly terrorist attack” which reportedly left at least 235 people dead and over 100 injured.

Council members reaffirmed that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security, and underlined the need to bring perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these “reprehensible acts of terrorism” to justice.

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## [UN experts urge China to ‘immediately and unconditionally’ release human rights lawyer](#)

24 November 2017 – Voicing concern that the trial of a human rights lawyer – leading to his imprisonment – fell short of international standards, a group of United Nations rights experts has appealed to the Government for the lawyer’s immediate and unconditional release.

According to a [news release](#) issued Thursday by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), the lawyer, Jiang Tianyong, was jailed for two years after being found guilty of inciting subversion of the State’s power.

“Mr. Jiang’s trial clearly fell short of international standards and his

conviction represents an unfair and arbitrary punishment of a human rights lawyer and defender, whose only crime was to exercise his rights to free speech and to defend human rights,” the experts said in the [release](#).

“Domestic judicial procedures should be in compliance with China’s international human rights obligations,” they added.

According to the news release, Mr. Jiang, whose wife and daughter are in exile in the United States, was an outspoken defender of his fellow human rights lawyers who were arrested in an unprecedented crackdown in July 2015.

On Tuesday, 21 November, he was found guilty of the incitement charge by the Changsha Intermediate People’s Court after a supposed confession in August, the release noted, adding that the UN experts had previously expressed concern that his confession may have been coerced by the use of torture, in contravention of the Chinese Criminal Procedures Law and international human rights standards.

Those adding their voice to the call on the Government are Philip Alston, the Special Rapporteur on [extreme poverty and human rights](#); Michel Forst, the Special Rapporteur on the [situation of human rights defenders](#); David Kaye, the Special Rapporteur on the [promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression](#); José Antonio Guevara Bermúdez, the Chair-Rapporteur of the [Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#), and the [Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances](#).

he release also noted that last August, during a visit to China, Mr. Alston had met with Mr. Jiang, and, in December, [expressed](#) concern that Mr. Jiang’s enforced disappearance may have occurred, at least in part, in reprisal for the lawyer’s cooperation with the UN during his visit.

The rights experts have been in contact with the Chinese Government on several occasions to raise their concern, it added.

UN Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.