

Citing Uruguay's commitment to human rights, UN rights chief urges more efforts to tackle violations

27 October 2017 – While Uruguay's commitment to human rights at home and abroad is clear, a series of challenges must be addressed, including "inhumane" prison conditions and widespread violence against women, the UN human rights chief said Friday.

"The Uruguayan authorities have made [significant efforts to integrate human rights](#) into public policy, and there is clear political will to make progress in this area," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein after a two-day visit to the country.

Noting that Uruguay's efforts to improve its overall situation are recognised domestically and internationally, Mr. Zeid also highlighted that the country had adopted laws to tackle discrimination, reduce poverty and enhance the rights of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons.

"Uruguay is a country with tremendous potential, which has dared to make a difference in many areas," he continued. "However, the progress made to date is not enough: the country can do more to tackle the serious human rights violations that continue to occur."

According to Mr. Zeid, Uruguay must address its challenges with human rights-based strategies, in which "the Government, Congress and, very importantly, the judiciary, uphold and implement the country's obligations under international human rights law."

During his meetings with Uruguayan authorities and civil society representatives, the High Commissioner expressed concern about serious human rights issues in the country, such as the reportedly "appalling and inhumane" conditions of many detention centres.

Mr. Zeid also voiced alarm at the situation of adolescents in conflict with the law, particularly the excessive duration of pre-trial detention and called on Uruguay to ensure their protection from violence and discrimination.

"In a country aging as rapidly as Uruguay, the whole of society needs to realise that youth is their hope for the future," he said.

Mr. Zeid also called on the Government to make every effort to ensure that all allegations of torture or ill-treatment are investigated properly, emphasizing "Uruguay needs to use imprisonment as a last resort, implement more non-custodial sentences and introduce more rehabilitation programmes."

Mr. Zeid called "troubling," the persistently high rates of gender-based

killings of women, along with the difficulty many women victims of violence face in accessing justice. He also urged the Government to remove any restrictions and barriers to reproductive health services, including safe abortion procedures, which were decriminalised in 2012, and post-abortion care.

While acknowledging the Government's attempts to address impunity during the military dictatorship of 1973 to 1985, Mr. Zeid said "it is 32 years since the dictatorship ended, but Uruguay has yet to deal adequately with a brutal period in its recent history. This is essential for society to look to the future without fear and for this, international human rights law is key."

"I am convinced that the country is capable of overcoming its most pressing human rights challenges for the benefit of its people," he stressed, adding that his Office stands ready to continue providing support in this endeavour.

[Action needed to stop violations of LGBT people's rights worldwide, expert tells UN](#)

27 October 2017 – Immediate action is needed to stop the horrific violations of human rights of people around the world based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, a United Nations independent expert said Friday, delivering his first report to UN Member States in New York.

"It is unconscionable that people with an actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression different from a particular social norm, [are targeted](#) for violence and discrimination in many parts of the world," said Vitit Muntarbhorn, the UN's first independent expert on the matter.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people suffer a crucible of egregious violations, including killings, rape, mutilation, torture, arbitrary detention, abduction, harassment, physical and mental assaults, he said, noting that they are subjected to lashings and forced surgical interventions, bullying from a young age, incitement to hatred and pressures leading to suicide.

"More than 70 countries around the world today still criminalize same-sex relations, and in some of them the death penalty may be applied," he added, presenting his report to the UN General Assembly's main body dealing with human rights and social and humanitarian issues ([Third Committee](#)).

Mr. Muntarbhorn said all laws criminalizing same-sex relationships should be

removed from the statute books.

“There is a need for effective anti-discrimination measures covering both the public and private spheres,” the expert said, stressing the need to build a community open to understanding and respecting sexual and gender diversity.

Human rights defenders are also increasingly targeted for their work in raising issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, the expert said, adding that this is another area of great concern.

“Non-governmental organizations, human rights defenders and activists, as well as independent national human rights institutions, play a crucial role in the advancement of an inclusive agenda for all without discrimination and distinction, including through the promotion of understanding of and respect for human rights and gender diversity,” Mr. Muntarhorn said. “They are agents of change which can activate significant reform processes.”

He said the establishment last year of his mandate to promote action against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity was a major step forward.

UN independent experts and Special Rapporteurs 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.

[Security Council debate on ‘women, peace and security’ spotlights prevention and gender equality links](#)

27 October 2017 – At the Security Council today, a senior United Nations official called on Member States, regional organizations and civil society for greater partnership to boost women’s participation at all levels and help ensure UN peace efforts are stronger and more sustainable.

“We will ensure our prevention initiatives and monitoring include a focus on women’s rights violations [and] we will tackle the structural and root causes of crisis, including gender inequality,” Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, the Chef de Cabinet, speaking on behalf of the Secretary-General, told a day-long [debate](#) in the Security Council, underlining the need for more action on the ‘women, peace and security agenda’ – with prevention as a core pillar.

Noting the importance of gender equality and security of women as reliable indicators for peace, she added: “We will [also] strengthen the collection and analysis of gender statistics and encourage Member States to monitor

gender equality indicators as part of their work to implement the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).”

In her briefing, the Chef de Cabinet spoke of the need to ensure adequate representation of women in the security sector both to reduce their exposure to harm as well as to realize their potential in conflict prevention.

Noting, further, that only three per cent of peacekeepers are women, she informed the 15-member Council of the Secretary-General’s efforts with troop- and police-contributing countries to increase the number of female uniformed personnel.

Ms. Viotti also noted that 17 years after its adoption, Security Council resolution 1325 on women and peace and security was too often being implemented on in an ad hoc fashion, and called on UN Member States to share evidence and examples in order to examine gaps and successes.

‘Women, peace and security’ agenda central pillar of global affairs

Also briefing today, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the Executive Director of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women ([UN Women](#)) [said](#) said that while atrocities against women and girls in armed conflict are now the focus of attention and documentation, it is critical that perpetrators are brought to justice, and that survivors are accorded dignity and support.



Michaëlle Jean, Secretary-General of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (La Francophonie), addresses the Security Council’s open debate on women, peace and security. At left is Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). UN Photo/Kim Haughton

“This impunity cannot be allowed to continue,” she underlined.

Further, informing the Security Council of an overall decline in women’s participation in UN-led peace processes, inclusion of gender-sensitive provisions in peace agreements and consultation with women’s civil society organizations, in comparison with one year ago, Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka said that the political marginalization was not only limited to peace talks.

Only 17 countries have an elected woman Head of State or Government and the proportion of women parliamentarians in conflict and post-conflict countries has stagnated at 16 per cent in the last two years.

“The use of quotas and temporary special measures would help,” she said, noting examples from Somalia and Mali, and called on donors to continue supporting efforts targeted at women’s empowerment and highlighted the importance of ensuring gender-conscious funding for policies and programmes.

Concluding her remarks, the head of UN-Women stressed that women, peace and security agenda is now an essential pillar of global affairs.

“This is only the beginning. The chorus of voices that are appalled by the persistent political marginalization of women in decision-making is speaking louder [...] this agenda unites us because people from all over the world, every day, look up to the United Nations for peace, equality and inclusion,” she said.

Also speaking today were Charo Mina-Rojas of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, and Michaëlle Jean, Secretary-General of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, who underscored the need to effectively combat sexual and gender-based violence and end impunity.

“The silence around these crimes is as appalling as the crimes themselves,” stressed Ms. Mina-Rojas.

They also called for greater participation of women’s organizations and community leaders in the design and implementation of security and peacebuilding efforts.

“More than lip service should be paid to ensuring that women were invited to participate in national dialogues,” said Ms. Jean.

[Ethiopia begins civil registration for refugees – UN agencies](#)

27 October 2017 – In an historic first, starting today all refugees in Ethiopia will be able to register their vital life events, including birth, death, marriage and divorce, directly with national authorities, the United Nations refugee agency announced on Friday.

“This is a historic first and a [ground-breaking development for refugee protection](#) in Ethiopia, not previously realized over decades,” Babar Baloch, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), said at the regular press briefing in Geneva.

Civil registration for refugees has been made possible following an amendment to an existing legislation. UNHCR and the UN’s Children Agency ([UNICEF](#)) collaborated with the Government of Ethiopia in the preparation of the amendment.

“It is one of the nine pledges made at the Leaders’ Summit held in New York in September 2016,” continued Mr. Baloch. “Other commitments included to grant work permits to refugees, strengthen access to education, to allow a significant number of refugees to reside outside of refugee camps and to locally integrate long-staying refugees.”

At the launch today, 11 refugees were issued with certificates in the capital

of Addis Ababa. Civil registration offices have also been established in each of the 26 refugee camps, as well as in the seven locations with a high concentration of refugees.

More than 70,000 refugee children born in Ethiopia over the last decade have not had their births registered and will soon be issued with birth certificates. Children born before the new law came into force can also now obtain a birth certificate retroactively.

“Birth registration is an important protection tool – ensuring basic human rights, particularly in situations of displacement. It establishes a child’s legal identity and can help prevent statelessness,” underscored Mr. Baloch.

Civil registration is also important for policy development and planning in Ethiopia’s Development Agenda – in line with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which aims to enhance refugee self-reliance and inclusion; provide refugees with better possibilities to solve their plights; and ease pressure on host countries.

Ethiopia, which is among the first countries to roll out CRRF, Ethiopia currently hosts more than 883,000 refugees – mainly from South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen.

[Linking past and present, audiovisual heritage is ‘part of our common history,’ UNESCO says on World Day](#)

27 October 2017 – Through sound recordings and moving images, audiovisual heritage provides priceless insight to the past while preserving unique documentation for future generations, the United Nations cultural agency said on the day set aside to raise global awareness about the importance of the fragility of this heritage.

“This [heritage carries memories and testimonies](#), knowledge and ideas, in ways that are vivid and moving and that lay the foundations for better understanding and dialogue between and within generations, as well as between and within societies,” said Irina Bokova, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) in her message the [World Day for Audiovisual Heritage](#).

“Linking the past to the present, this heritage is part of our common history, and must be safeguarded and shared as a wellspring of identity and belonging, innovation and creativity,” she added.

Ms. Bokova pointed out that archives of films, recorded sound materials,

radio and television programmes are essential for preserving this heritage, “offering us a chance to look to our history and that of others as threads in the great mosaic story of all humanity, on the basis of respect and tolerance.”

Threats to these archives come from many directions, starting with neglect and chemical decay and include technological obsolescence.

“This is why UNESCO is working with Governments across the world to safeguard audiovisual heritage as a source of strength for all to share – to allow women and men today and tomorrow to continue discovering, remembering and sharing the heritage that makes us who we are,” she underscored.

UN digital archiving project

Since its creation in 1946, the UN Department of Public Information (DPI) has played a crucial role in the accessibility and preservation of the Organization’s historic and unique audiovisual archives.

DPI maintains photographs, films, videos and audio recordings of major meetings and events, including the General Assembly, Security Council, press conferences and concerts. It also acts as a repository for UNTV and Radio productions, as well as raw footage covering UN work in field operations globally – in a wide variety of formats, topics and languages.

After more than 70 years, this audiovisual heritage is being threatened by the natural decay of original analogue media, obsolescence of media formats and playback equipment as well as inadequate temperature and humidity storage, among other factors.

Acute challenges include a lack of funding, disaster preparedness measures and a long-term strategic digitization programme. Additionally, there is a need to mitigate the obsolescence, deterioration and natural decay of existing media formats and increase DPI’s capacity to maintain and preserve AV records and archives for the long-term.

Digitization is the only way to preserve these collections, to make them available well into the future.

In 2015, Oman stepped in with a voluntary contribution of \$4.5 million to assist UN efforts in digitizing old video footage and audio archives.

Over the course of five years, DPI’s AV Digitization Project aims to digitize selectively 70 per cent of the UN historical collections; facilitate collection access via the Audiovisual Library web platform and preserve the UN audiovisual heritage for future generations; and to apply international standards, procedures and best practices for long-term preservation and sustainable management.

“Preserving the audiovisual heritage of the United Nations is a key task of the Department of Public Information,” said Alison Smale, Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications, adding, however, that DPI “knew we could not do it alone, and Oman has been an incredible partner.”

“With their contribution, we have now started a major digitization project. Today we are sharing with Oman the first copies of recordings that are now available in a digital format on this special day. The public also will now have access to the UN’s historical films and meetings, which is a major benefit of this effort,” Ms. Smale underscored.