

Join global treaty to root out the scourge of illegal fishing, urges UN food security agency

6 October 2017 – Calling for strengthening the fight against illegal fishing, the United Nations food security agency has urged all countries to join a landmark global treaty that aims to rid the world of the multibillion-dollar scourge.

The Port State Measures Agreement ([PSMA](#)) – approved by the Conference of the Food and Agricultural Organization ([FAO](#)) in November 2009 – entered into force last June, making it legally binding on its parties to conduct rigorous inspections of vessels by port rather than flag States.

[According to](#) José Graziano da Silva, the Director-General of FAO, the PSMA is not only the “main tool” to tackle illegal fishing, it also helps to tackle other serious problems including trafficking of drugs and persons.

“We need all countries around the world to be part of the [the Agreement] for it to be highly effective,” he said, speaking at a conference in Malta.

So far about 50 countries are parties to the treaty, but many more are needed, added Mr. Graziano da Silva.

As part of its commitments to implement the Agreement, FAO has set aside seed money to fund support programmes for poorer countries develop their technical, scientific and legal capacity. These resources will be bolstered by voluntary contributions.

Also in his remarks, the FAO Director-General announced pledges of \$41.9 in funding initiatives for programs aimed at the fisheries sector, including improving fisheries management and livelihoods around the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

With these funds FAO aims to reverse the trend of overexploitation of fish stocks and strengthen the livelihoods of poor coastal communities, which depend heavily on small-scale fishing.

The UN agency also announced today that it will spend some \$1 million to assist small island developing States through its [Blue Growth](#) initiative, geared at providing developing countries with a framework which allows them to rebuild and grow their aquatic economies in a sustainable ecological manner while benefitting coastal communities.

UN study tackles violence against women in Arab region using economic model

6 October 2017 – An economic model to estimate the costs of intimate partner violence – the most common form of violence against women in the Arab world – was spotlighted this week at the United Nations regional commission, based in Beirut, Lebanon.

“Our ultimate goal has always been to translate the findings of our studies into practical projects with a view to empowering women and enhancing their position in society,” said Mohamed Ali Alhakim, the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia ([ESCWA](#)), which serves 18 Arab States.

According to the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), 37 per cent of “ever married women” in the East Mediterranean region – which encompasses most Arab States – have experienced physical or sexual partner violence.

Speaking at the [opening](#) of ESCWA’s [Committee on Women](#), Dr. Alhakim noted that despite progress in developing national plans to address gender-based violence, Arab countries need to do more to end the grave violations still being perpetrated against women.

To support these efforts, ESCWA and [UN Women](#) developed a regional project to estimate the cost of violence against women and use the costings as an instrument for policy reform and advocacy.

“We aim to utilize it as an advocacy tool with policymakers to substantiate that if we work in a holistic manner to end violence against women, it will not only be the right thing to do, but it will also be the smart thing to do,” said Mohammad Naciri, the Director of UN-Women’s regional office in Egypt.

“My heart aches when we try to quantify [the violence] because the emotional and psychological scars that women and girls live with as a result of the violence exerted on them cannot necessarily be quantified,” he continued. “That’s why I said it’s a smart thing to do, but the right thing to remember is that it’s the absolute right of every single woman and girl to end the violence against them.”

According to UN-Women, the dire economic, political and security situation in many Arab countries fuels the problem given direct correlation between crises and domestic violence. During the last conflict in Gaza, intimate partner violence reportedly rose by 700 per cent due to feelings of hopelessness, humiliation, and lack of opportunities.

While the drivers of violence are not contested, there are multiple

approaches to costing the phenomenon. The two main methods involve estimating the cost of inaction—measuring the direct and indirect, tangible and intangible costs of violence to survivors, their families, and the community, including missed paid or unpaid work; and estimating the costs of implementing policies to prevent and address the violence – or the cost of the solution.

Dr. Nata Duvvury, the Director for Global Women’s Studies at the National University of Ireland, has been working closely with ESCWA to develop the model and create this important “accountability tool.”

“Direct costs have been largely focused on the costs of service provision incurred by governments to provide police stations, health services, social services, and others,” she explained.

“But there is another aspect of direct costs that has not been captured very carefully across countries, which are the costs incurred by women to access services,” Dr. Duvvury stressed, noting that paying bribes is not uncommon for women in the Arab region, in addition to other fees to access physical and psychosocial support.

As the eighth session of the Committee on Women inched to its end on Thursday, small pins were distributed by Dr. Naglaa Al-Adly from Egypt’s National Council of Women, featuring an Arabic letter called the *Taa Marbouta*.



Dr. Naglaa Al-Adly, Representative of Egypt’s National Council of Women, speaks to the media wearing the Taa Marbouta campaign pin on her jacket. Photo: ESCWA/Daniela Abraham

“We use this letter as the secret of our power as women,” Dr. Al-Adly explained. “We’re stressing the idea to not be afraid, fight for your rights, be strong, we are behind you.”

‘Taa Marbouta’ is added to words that are feminine to denote grammatical gender; it is also associated with several powerful words in the Arabic language such as ‘dignity,’ ‘power’ and ‘willingness.’

Launched one year ago by Egypt’s National Council of Women and the UN, the ‘Taa Marbouta’ campaign promotes women’s social, political and economic empowerment in the North African country.

“Because it’s an Arabic letter it is also relevant to women in many other countries,” she added, indicating that the “secret” of women’s power can only be stronger when they come together.

September 'deadliest month' of 2017 for Syrians, UN relief official reports

6 October 2017 – Hospitals, ambulances, schools and displaced people escaping violence are being routinely targeted by airstrikes in Syria, resulting in high numbers of deaths and injuries, and making September the deadliest month of the year, according to the United Nations regional relief coordinator for the crisis.

"I am appalled by reports of high numbers of civilian [casualties due to heavy air attacks](#) in Syria," said Panos Moutzsis, the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis .

"September was the deadliest month of 2017 for civilians with daily reports of attacks on residential areas resulting in hundreds of conflict-related deaths and injuries," he added in a news release issued by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)).

This week, airstrikes on Raqqa City killed dozens of people and injured many others while some 8,000 others remain trapped there.

Between 19-30 September, airstrikes on residential areas in Idlib killed at least 149 people – the majority of whom were women and children.

"Attacks on medical facilities are depriving people in need of their right to life-saving medical care," stressed Mr. Moutzsis.

Schools and hospitals in Idlib have been forced to close for fear of being targeted. Three explosions in Damascus city caused the death of 20 people and injured 15 more. Civilian casualties were also reported in Rural Damascus, Hama, Aleppo and Deir-ez-Zor.

"I would like to praise the phenomenal work carried out by humanitarian workers and in particular national staff," he continued, noting that rescue workers on a daily basis risk their lives to help others.

"The UN calls on all parties to the conflict to immediately take all measures to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure throughout Syria," underscored the Mr. Moutzsis. He asserted that targeting civilians and facilities, including hospitals and other medical facilities is "simply unacceptable and constitute a grave violation of human rights and international humanitarian law and may amount to war crimes."

"All parties to the conflict must respect their international obligations and act in a way that ensures the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers," concluded Mr. Moutzsis.

Cameroon: UN rights office urges meaningful dialogue to address decades-long grievances

6 October 2017 – Voicing concern over tensions in Cameroon, the United Nations human rights wing has urged the Government and dissatisfied groups to engage in a meaningful political dialogue to fully address long standing grievances.

Speaking to the press today in Geneva, Rupert Colville, the Spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) also called on the authorities in the African nation to conduct impartial and effective investigations into Sunday's violence in which at least 10 people were killed.

"Credible sources indicate that some of these deaths resulted from excessive use of force by the security forces," [said](#) the Spokesperson at the regular news briefing.

Cameroon's Anglophone regions have seen multiple strikes and demonstrations over the past year as resentment and tensions have built at what, he said, English-speakers see as discrimination against them in favour of the majority French-speaking population.

Noting that over the past few months, public and private property has been damaged, including arson attacks on a number of schools, Mr. Colville called on all people to pursue peaceful means to make themselves heard.

In the same vein, he also urged the authorities to ensure that the security forces exercise restraint and take measures to prevent the use of force when policing demonstrations.

"People should be allowed to exercise their right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, including through having uninterrupted access to the internet," he stated.

Further at the briefing, he noted that OHCHR welcomed the comments by President Paul Biya, on Sunday, in which the President condemned all forms of violence, irrespective of the perpetrators, and called for dialogue as the only way to find a durable solution.

UN peacekeeping chief seeks Security Council support for speedy deployment of uniformed personnel

5 October 2017 – The United Nations peacekeeping chief today said rapid deployment of uniformed personnel to the field is a costly, complex and difficult process that requires the commitment of the contributors, the host country and neighbors, as well as the support of the Security Council.

“Generating uniformed personnel for UN peacekeeping is a tireless and enormous task,” said Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for UN Peacekeeping Operations, in a briefing, noting that this is the first time the Council has dedicated a meeting to this issue – strategic force generation.

A small team of dedicated officers is in charge of generating and rotating more than 300 units – including 76 infantry battalions – with tens of thousands of troops and police from over 120 countries, while selecting and deploying several thousand individual staff and police officers throughout the year, Mr. Lacroix explained.



Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, addresses the Security Council meeting on strategic force generation for United Nations peacekeeping operations. UN Photo/Cia Pak

In the weeks and months that pass from the issuance of a mandate by the Security Council, until a mission reaches a minimum operating capacity, lives can be lost. There are financial implications of long deployment timelines as well, as a peacekeeping operation deployed too late will have a more intractable situation to address, potentially requiring a larger footprint and prolonging the life of that mission, he stated.

The peacekeeping chief noted significant progress made towards more rapid deployment. For example, a battalion in the UN mission in the Central African Republic that was facing conduct and discipline issues has been replaced in less than 60 days.

He also said that his office recently received sufficient pledges to fulfil nearly all the requirements for a Vanguard Brigade of roughly 4,000 troops and police for the remainder of 2017 and the first half of next year.

Despite the success of the last two years, a number of specialized capabilities remain in short supply, particularly high-value enablers, such as helicopters, quick reaction forces, and units trained to dispose of explosive ordnance.

There is also a lack of progress towards targets for deployment of female peacekeepers.

He highlighted a crucial role the Security Council plays in defining and helping meet the capability requirements of UN missions, encouraging Council Members to come forward with new, innovative contributions, including through the provision of tailored and sustained training and capacity building efforts to address mid- to long-term capability gaps. The trilateral partnership between Japan and several African troop-contributing countries is a good example of this kind of initiative, he added.

The Council can also take into account current or potential capability gaps, such as those in the UN Mission in Mali, when drafting or renewing mandates. For missions like that in South Sudan, the Council should engage collectively and individually to ensure that host governments fully comply with status of mission agreements; and that the Council act accordingly when host governments fail to do so, he said.

The Council can also ensure the full implementation of performance, training and conduct requirements, and in cases of underperformance or misconduct, the UN Secretariat relies on the Council's consistent support to address them.

The Council can also back UN efforts to foster a culture of continuous improvement and adaptation through strategic force generation and other reform efforts.

"Strategic force generation is an important and still relatively new initiative," he said, stressing that it should be seen as only one part of a broader, ongoing effort by the Secretariat to make peacekeeping operations a more efficient, effective and accountable tool for the international community.