

'Time to stamp out human trafficking,' says Guterres; UN pledges action to eradicate 'heinous crime'

27 September 2017 – With tens of millions of human trafficking victims worldwide, “now is the time to stand together and stamp out this abominable practice,” [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today told a high-level meeting at which Member States adopted a political Declaration reaffirming their commitment to implement a United Nations action plan to end the scourge.

“Human trafficking is [all around us](#), in all regions of the world,” said Mr. Guterres, referring to such practices as forced labour, sexual servitude, recruitment of child soldiers and other forms of exploitation and abuse.

The Assembly’s [high-level meeting](#), convened to examine progress achieved and challenges remaining in the implementation of the seven-year-old [Global Plan of Action](#) to Combat Trafficking in Persons, opened today and closes tomorrow.

In the [Declaration](#), adopted without a vote, UN Member States demonstrated their strong political will to take decisive concerted action to end the heinous crime.

As millions of children, women and men spill out of their countries towards safety, they find themselves at the mercy of merciless people

In recent years, rising conflict, insecurity and economic uncertainty have brought new tests.

“As millions of children, women and men spill out of their countries towards safety, they find themselves at the mercy of merciless people,” Mr. Guterres said.

These criminal networks are global, well-organized, technologically savvy, and highly proficient in taking advantage of gaps in governance and weaknesses in institutions, he added.

Fighting human trafficking requires greater use of relevant instruments, including the UN conventions against transnational organized crime and against corruption, and next year’s expected adoption by the General Assembly of a global compact on safe, orderly and regular migration is a further potential milestone, he said.

The [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development, adopted by Member States in 2015, also addresses some of the root causes that make people vulnerable to trafficking. Often, trafficking is abetted by poverty and inequality.

“Fighting trafficking and advancing sustainable, inclusive development go hand in hand,” Mr. Guterres said.

Also addressing the meeting, Yuri Fedotov, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)), said “this appraisal and the adoption of the political Declaration can help us take this commitment forward and sharpen responses to an odious crime that continues to exploit and victimize the most vulnerable, in all parts of the world.”

To build a robust evidence base, UNODC is currently working with the academic community to develop innovative methodologies to measure the size and scope of the trafficking problem, he added.

General Assembly President Miroslav Lajčák also addressed the meeting, as did Ms. Mira Sorvino, UNODC Goodwill Ambassador for the global fight against human trafficking and Grizelda Grootboom, a civil society representative and victim of human trafficking.

[UN chief welcomes Saudi Arabia's decision to lift ban on women drivers](#)

27 September 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has welcomed the decision by Saudi Arabia to allow women to drive cars in the country.

In a tweet, the UN chief noted that ending the restrictions represents an “[important step](#) in the right direction.”

According to reports, under the new law, women can legally obtain a driving licence without asking a male guardian for permission.

Also welcoming the announcement, the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women ([UN Women](#)) said the event was a milestone for women's rights in the country.

“We have received this with a lot of gladness [...] it is a very symbolic [step] by Saudi Arabia towards [strengthening] the rights of women [in the country],” Mohammad Naciri, Regional Director for Arab States at UN Women, told *UN News*.

He added that the UN agency would continue to explore avenues to build on the important event to advance the cause of women's rights both within Saudi Arabia, as well as the wider region.

Colombia: New UN Mission begins operation; focus on reintegrating ex-fighters

27 September 2017 – The second post-conflict United Nations mission in Colombia has started its operations, succeeding the UN entity which was mandated to verify the implementation agreement between the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) concerning the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities, and laying down of arms.

"We are pleased that the laying down of weapons has been successfully concluded," said Jean Arnault, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Colombia and the head of the UN Verification Mission in the country, in a [news release](#) yesterday.

Noting that the transition has offered an opportunity to redouble efforts to bring peace to all corners of the country, he added: "Through our follow-up and verification activities, [we] will continue to support Colombia in its process of building a firm and lasting peace."

Established by the UN Security Council in July, the purpose of the [Mission](#) is to accompany the parties and verify their commitments regarding points 3.2 and 3.4 of the [Final Peace Agreement](#) on the reintegration of former FARC-EP members, and the implementation of measures of protection and security for communities in territories most affected by the conflict.

Across the country, the Mission will have ten regional offices and will continue to maintain presence at the twenty-six Territorial Area for Training and Reincorporation. In addition, it will also establish seven sub-offices in different parts of the country.

The Verification Mission starts its activities immediately upon the conclusion of the mandate of the first UN Mission in Colombia, which was established by the Security Council in January last year 2016. That Mission was mandated with the verification of the Agreement between the Government and FARC-EP on the Bilateral and Definitive Ceasefire and Cessation of Hostilities and Laying down of Arms (Ceasefire Agreement).

[Hanging of 42 prisoners in Iraq raises concern over flawed due process – UN rights chief](#)

27 September 2017 – The mass hanging of 42 prisoners on Sunday in a prison in southern Iraq raises massive concerns over the country's use of the death penalty, the UN human rights chief said Wednesday.

"I am [appalled](#) to learn of the execution of 42 prisoners in a single day," UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said in a press release from his Office ([OHCHR](#)), referring to the hanging at Al Hoot prison in the city of Nasiriyah.

"Under international law, the death penalty may only be imposed after a strict set of substantive and procedural requirements have been met," he added.

Mr. Zeid said it was "extremely doubtful" that these strict due process and fair trial guarantees – including the men's rights to effective legal assistance and a full appeals process, and to seek pardon or commutation of their sentence – had been met in every one of these 42 individual cases.

Iraqi government officials have stated that the executed prisoners were Iraqis affiliated to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) or al-Qaeda, who had been charged under anti-terrorism laws with offences including kidnapping, killing members of the security forces, carrying out armed robberies, and detonating improvised explosive devices.

However, no information has been released about their names, places of residence, exact crimes, trials, date of sentencing, or the appeals processes which Iraqi officials say they have exhausted.

Iraqi officials have stated that around 1,200 of the estimated 6,000 prisoners held in Nasiriyah have been sentenced to death.

OHCHR has repeatedly warned that the Iraqi justice system as a whole is too flawed to allow for any executions, expressing concern over reports that Iraq may be planning to expedite the process of executing prisoners already sentenced to death while urging the Government to step back from its policy of accelerated or mass executions.

Mr. Zeid called on the Government to establish a special judicial oversight body to make recommendations on legal reforms that would ensure respect for due process and fair trial standards, as well as to monitor any future trials related to capital punishment.

He also urged the authorities to halt all imminent executions and to establish an immediate moratorium on the use of the death penalty.

[Amid cholera outbreak in north-east Nigeria, UN steps up aid, warns pregnant women most vulnerable](#)

26 September 2017 – Large-scale displacement and a health system in tatters as a result of persistent violence by the Boko Haram terrorist group have left many – most worryingly, pregnant women and their unborn babies – vulnerable to cholera in the wake of an outbreak in August, the United Nations Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)) has warned.

“Studies show that [cholera](#) infections during pregnancy can lead to sudden loss of the foetus, premature delivery, stillbirth and an increased mortality and morbidity, both for the baby and the mother,” said Homsuk Swomen, a UNFPA reproductive health specialist in Maiduguri, north-eastern Nigeria, one of the worst affected areas by the Boko Haram violence.

Due to the ongoing conflict, many pregnant women are malnourished, aggravating their vulnerability to cholera and the consequences if they fall ill.

Furthermore, the “traditional role” played by women and girls in the region is making them all the more susceptible to the disease.

According to Sylvia Opinia, a UNFPA expert in gender issues, it is usually women and girls who care for sick family members, clean latrines, fetch and handle untreated water, and prepare food for the family.

“We need to understand that [cholera is not gender neutral](#),” she underscored.

On its part, the UN agency is working with local health staff, community and social workers in the camps to impress upon them the need to include women and girls in education messages on the disease, and especially targeting pregnant women with those messages. It is also engaging health workers to identify vulnerable women and girls, including pregnant women, for referral to appropriate care.

But funds are needed.

Last Sunday, the UN and partners [launched a \\$9.9 million appeal](#) to respond to the current outbreak in Borno state (north-east Nigeria) and to prevent further outbreaks in high-risk areas. A [Cholera Response and Prevention Plan](#) has been developed to address the immediate needs of 3.7 million people that could be affected by the outbreak.

In related news, the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), the UN health agency, [concluded](#) an oral cholera vaccination campaign around Maiduguri this weekend,

inoculating some 844,000 people in affected areas.

According to WHO, it takes those immunized about a week to develop the immune response that should protect against the disease, and most individuals vaccinated should be protected for up to six months.

As of 25 September, 3,934 suspected cases of cholera including 54 deaths have been reported in and around Maiduguri. About 14 million people are affected by the crisis in north-eastern Nigeria (Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states), of whom 6.9 million need health assistance.