

UN agency chief calls Ethiopia's revised refugee law 'one of most progressive' in Africa

Ethiopia has revised its existing refugee law, making it easier to obtain work permits, drivers' licenses and access primary school, a move being hailed by the head of the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR).

"The passage of this historic law represents a significant milestone in Ethiopia's long history of welcoming and hosting refugees from across the region for decades," [said](#) Filippo Grandi, [UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#).

He said the move makes Ethiopia "a model" for other refugee-hosting nations around the world.

In a statement released one day after the Ethiopian Parliament adopted the revision, UNHCR called it "one of the most progressive refugee policies in Africa."

Ethiopia hosts over 900,000 refugees, primarily from neighbouring South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan and Eritrea, as well as smaller numbers of refugees from Yemen and Syria.

UNHCR was involved in the drafting process of the refugee law revision, which was led by Ethiopia's Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs, ARRA.

'The best-selling brand today is fear': UN chief highlights urgent need to address global 'deficit of trust'

Warning against the dangers of widespread fear and mistrust in our planet, the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, [told journalists](#) on Friday he wants to reaffirm the UN as a "platform for action to repair broken trust in a broken world."

"The best-selling brand in our world today is indeed fear," stated Mr. Guterres. "It gets ratings. It wins votes. It generates clicks," he added, during the press conference, held at UN headquarters in New York.

"I believe the biggest challenge that governments and institutions face today

is to show that we care – and to mobilize solutions that respond to people’s fears and anxieties with answers, with concrete answers,” he explained.

The Secretary-General was speaking two days after [presenting his areas of action for the UN for 2019](#) to the 193 Member States, who, he said, widely responded to his remarks by highlighting the importance of multilateralism.

“As we look to the challenges we face – from climate change to migration to terrorism to the downsides of globalisation – there is no doubt in my mind that global challenges require global solutions,” he noted. “No country can do it alone. We need multilateralism more than ever.”

Hate speech and hate crimes are direct threats to human rights, sustainable development and peace and security – UN chief Guterres

The UN chief noted that “dismissing or vilifying the doubters of multilateralism will lead nowhere,” and insisted on the importance of understanding why “many people around the world are not convinced of the power and purpose of international cooperation.”

Citing the fact that, in the process of globalisation and technological progress, many people, sectors, and entire regions were left behind, he explained the UN needs to focus on addressing the root causes of this widespread mistrust, anxiety, anger and fear, over three key areas of work: accelerating sustainable development, strengthening the added value of the United Nations through reform, and engaging societies to put an end to the rise of hate speech, xenophobia and intolerance.

“We hear troubling, hateful echoes of eras long past. Poisonous views are penetrating political debates and polluting the mainstream,” warned Mr. Guterres, as he stressed the need to remember the lessons of the 1930s and the Second World War.

“Hate speech and hate crimes are direct threats to human rights, sustainable development and peace and security,” he said.

Stressing that “words are not enough,” the UN Secretary-General announced he has tasked his Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, to bring together a team to develop a UN-wide strategy and urgent global plan of action against hate speech and hate crimes.

Mr. Guterres stated that his “absolute priority for 2019” is to make sure the United Nations is a “platform for action to repair broken trust in a broken world and deliver for people”.

Following his opening remarks, the Secretary-General answered questions from members of press on various issues handled by the UN, including the situation in Venezuela, in Syria, and in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the plight of migrants and refugees worldwide, recent uncertainty around the elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as UN funding challenges.

UN rights office calls on Zimbabwe Government to end 'crackdown' in response to fuel protests

In Zimbabwe, violence and the reported use of live ammunition by State security officials against protesters that has led to “a number of deaths” should be investigated thoroughly and transparently by the Government, the UN human rights office, [OHCHR](#), said on Friday.

“We are deeply troubled by the socio-economic crisis that is unfolding in Zimbabwe and the repression of large-scale protests in the country, following the Government’s decision to increase fuel prices,” said spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani.

“We call on the Government to find ways of engaging with the population about their legitimate grievances and to stop the crackdown against protesters.”

Speaking to journalists in Geneva at the regular biweekly press briefing, Ms. Shamdasani called on the authorities to ensure that the country’s security forces handle protests and exercise their power – especially the use of firearms and live ammunition – strictly in accordance with the country’s international human rights obligations and the relevant principles.

These include legality, necessity, proportionality, precaution and accountability, she explained, before noting that there had also been also allegations of “generalized intimidation and harassment” by security forces, who had allegedly carried out door-to-door searches.

Last month, a national commission appointed by the Government of President Emmerson Mnangagwa found that the military’s use of live bullets during deadly post-election violence in August was disproportionate and unjustified, Ms. Shamdasani noted.

“The bottom line is that the use of live ammunition by security forces was used, excessive force was used,” she stressed in relation to the latest protests. “We don’t have verification on the exact number of people who were killed or injured, but there are doctors’ associations that are putting numbers out there, likely more than 60 people were treated in hospital for gunshot wounds. This is not the way to react to the expression of economic grievances by the population.”

Countrywide, more than 600 people have been arrested in the demonstrations to date, according to Zimbabwe’s Minister of National Security.

Among those detained are opposition leaders and prominent civil activists,

Ms. Shamdasani said, before appealing for the prompt release of all those held for exercising their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression.

Reports that access to the Internet had been cut were also of concern, the UN official added. "We understand that access to WhatsApp and Facebook was also blocked at some point, internet access was shut down and it apparently resumed," she said. "There are reports that it has been shut down again. The Government has been saying that this is to deal with misinformation that is spreading on social media."

Asked about the nature of the demonstrations, Ms. Shamdasani explained that some reports suggested protesters had burned tires and barricaded roads, while others had set buildings on fire and carried out looting, although it was difficult to identify those responsible.

"There was some use of violence by the protesters as well, fires were set," she said. "Shops and businesses were looted; as always, it's difficult to determine who did this. Was it opportunist taking advantage of the chaos to do that? Was it the demonstrators themselves? It's very difficult to understand that. It's very difficult to manage a situation like that."

FROM THE FIELD: Free tutorials in Mali, 'a life-saver' for Fatouma

After fleeing her home in Macina, a small village in central Mali, where she was due to be forced into marriage against her will, 16-year-old Fatouma took shelter with her brother.

Having failed the national high school exam twice, coupled with expensive school fees, Fatouma had little choice but to drop out to become a cleaner, earning around \$17 a month.

"Leaving school without a diploma meant that I could only find a job as an unskilled worker for the rest of my life" she said.

But listening to local radio one day, she heard about an education programme for girls and young women offered by UN Women. [Here's](#) what happened next.

Car bomb attack on National Police Academy in Colombia, 'strongly condemned' by UN

A car bomb attack at the National Police Academy in the Colombian capital Bogotá, which reportedly left at least nine dead and dozens injured, has been 'strongly condemned' by the United Nations.

The UN Office in Colombia, described it as "an unacceptable criminal act which goes against the efforts the country is making to steer away from violence and work with its people to build a more prosperous and peaceful future."

The UN in Colombia "expressed solidarity with the families of the victims and the National Police and wished a speedy recovery to all those who were injured in this criminal act", UN Spokesperson, Stéphane Dujarric told reporters at UN Headquarters on Thursday. "We join this condemnation of this attack", he added.

The Colombian Government signed an historic peace deal with the FARC rebel group in November 2016, ending five decades of armed conflict. The UN [Verification Mission](#) in the South American country, based on the agreement, has been overseeing the laying down of arms, after the bilateral ceasefire, and verifying the reintegration of former fighters into civilian life.

According to news reports, the bombing occurred shortly after a ceremony inside the General Santander Academy, in the south of the city. So far, the identity of the assailants or motivation for the attack is unknown.

The President of the UN General Assembly, María Fernanda Espinosa, a former Foreign Minister of Colombia's southern neighbour, Ecuador, also issued a statement condemning the "atrocious attack". On Twitter, she expressed her solidarity with the people of Colombia, "who continue to demonstrate their tireless commitment to achieving peace."

Her Spokesperson, Monica Grayley, said that Ms. Espinosa "expresses solidarity with the victims and their families, the people, and the Government of Colombia."