

'Sexual violence is a threat to every individual's right to a life of dignity' – UN chief

19 June 2017 – Marking the [International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict](#), United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today paid tribute to the women, girls, men and boys who have suffered the atrocity of sexual violence in conflict, and reaffirmed our global commitment to eliminate this scourge.

Rape and sexual violence in conflict are [tactics of terrorism and war](#), used strategically to humiliate, degrade and destroy, and often to pursue a campaign of ethnic cleansing, the Secretary-General said in his message for the International Day.

They should never be downplayed as war's inevitable by-product, he continued. Sexual violence is a threat to every individual's right to a life of dignity, and to humanity's collective peace and security.

This year, the Day is being observed this year under the theme 'Preventing Sexual Violence Crimes through Justice and Deterrence.'

Mr. Guterres underscored that the UN is making every effort to address the root causes of conflict-related sexual violence by using preventive diplomacy, fostering peacebuilding and development, encouraging national action, and ending gender discrimination.

We will continue to monitor, report, provide care for survivors and spare no effort in pressing for perpetrators to be held accountable, he continued.

The Secretary-General stressed, The United Nations is constantly striving to enhance the capacity of our peacekeeping personnel to protect vulnerable civilians and to pursue justice in the case of all abuses. Each and every one of us has a responsibility to help put a stop to these crimes.

Mr. Guterres concluded by urging that everyone use this Day to rededicate ourselves, on behalf of every survivor, to ending sexual violence in conflict and providing peace and justice for all.

A [panel discussion](#) to commemorate the second annual International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict will be held at UN Headquarters in New York tomorrow.

In June 2015, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 19 June as the International Day to highlight the need to end conflict-related sexual violence, to honour the victims and survivors of sexual violence around the world and to pay tribute to all those who have courageously devoted their lives to and lost

their lives in standing up for the eradication of these crimes.

[UN urges 'reboot' of drought responses to focus more on preparedness](#)

19 June 2017 – Investing in preparedness and building the resilience of farmers is fundamental to cope with extreme drought, because responding to such situations when they hit might be too late, the head of the United Nations agricultural agency said today.

“People die because they are [not prepared to face the impacts](#) of the drought because their livelihoods are not resilient enough,” Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Director-General José Graziano da Silva told an international seminar in Rome, Italy, recalling that more than 250,000 people perished from hunger in the 2011 drought in Somalia.

“Saving livelihoods means saving lives – this is what building resilience is all about,” he added, noting that for years, the focus has been responding to droughts when they happen, rushing to provide emergency assistance and to keep people alive.

While these emergency responses are important, investing in preparedness and resilience puts countries on a footing to act quickly before it is too late, meaning that farmers and rural communities are better positioned to cope with extreme weather when it does hit.

The need for a global drought re-boot is pressing. The many impacts of drought drive not only hunger and instability but cause economic losses up to \$8 billion each annually.

As the planet’s climate changes, severe dry-spells are becoming more and more frequent. Since the 1970s, the land area in the world affected by situations of drought has doubled.

People die because they are not prepared to face the impacts of the drought
FAO Director General

The burden is especially high in developing countries, where agriculture remains an economic mainstay. Over 80 percent of damage and losses caused by drought are born by agriculture in the developing world, FAO studies have shown.

And Africa in particular has borne the brunt. Between 2005 and 2016, 84 droughts affected 34 different African nations.

At today's event, FAO and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) signed a memorandum of understanding to deepen their cooperation. They will cooperate in improving agro-meteorological data, tools and methods as well as enhancing access by small farmers to products and services to help them anticipate and proactively prepare for droughts.

WMO provides guidance and scientific information to strengthen national services responsible for addressing drought risks to agriculture," said WMO Secretary General Petteri Taalas. "We encourage countries to take early action against drought and to move towards a more proactive approach."

International Fund for Agriculture Development ([IFAD](#)) President Gilbert F. Houngbo in his remarks emphasized the need break the cycle of crisis, disaster and relief, calling on the international community to be proactive and to think not just of today's emergencies, but also of how to prevent tomorrow's.

"This means investing in smallholder farmers to help them address productivity challenges, give them access to markets and finance and most importantly encourage climate-smart agriculture so that when the drought inevitably comes, they have the tools they need to survive and thrive," said Mr. Houngbo.

[Violence and persecution uprooted record 65.6 million people in 2016, UN reports](#)

19 June 2017 – Nearly 66 million people were forcibly displaced from their homes last year, the United Nation refugee agency today reported, stressing the "very high" pace at which conflict and persecution is forcing people to flee their homes.

The figure equates to "one person [displaced every three seconds](#)" less than the time it takes to read this sentence.

The report [Global Trends](#), released by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), marks a jump of 300,000 since the end of 2015.

"By any measure this is an unacceptable number," said UN High Commissioner Filippo Grandi, urging "solidarity and a common purpose in preventing and resolving crisis."

He also called for properly protecting and caring for the world's refugees, internally displaced and asylum-seekers who currently number 22.5

million, 40.3 million, and 2.8 million, respectively.

According to the report, Syria remains the world's biggest producer of refugees with 12 million people living in neighbouring countries and away from the region. There are 7.7 million displaced Colombians, 4.7 million Afghans and 4.2 million Iraqis.

However, in 2016, South Sudan became the biggest new factor when peace efforts broke down in July resulting in some 737,400 people fleeing by the end of the year.

Nyawet Tut, a South Sudanese mother of five in her 30s, described how soldiers set fire to her village and she had to run for her life with her own five children and five others of relatives killed in the conflict.

My husband was killed in the war which, in addition to the shortage of food, made me decide to leave my home, everything, behind, she told UNHCR staff during an interview at a temporary way station in Ethiopia.

In total, about 3.3 million South Sudanese had fled their homes by the end of the year, in what is known as the fastest-growing displacement of people in the world.

Youngest faces of war

About half of the refugee population last year were children younger than 18 years of age, according the report.

This is in contrast to the fact that children make up only about 31 per cent of the total world population.

Among its findings, the report noted that some 75,000 asylum claims were received from children travelling alone or separated from their parents. These include youngsters like Tareq, 16, who dodged armed combatants to walk out of Syria into neighbouring Turkey.

There was no future where we lived, he told UNHCR. There was no university and no work. There were troops grabbing young children like me, and they send them to war, and they get killed. I wanted to study.

Seeking refuge in poor countries

Developing countries are hosting the majority of the world's refugees, UNHCR reported.

About 84 per cent of the people were in low- or middle-income countries as of end 2016. Of that figure, one in every three people, roughly 4.9 million people, were hosted by the least developed countries.

This huge imbalance reflects several things including the continuing lack of consensus internationally when it comes to refugee hosting and the proximity of many poor countries to regions of conflict, the UN agency said.

In addition, the figure illustrates the need for countries and communities supporting refugees and other displaced people to be robustly resourced and supported, UNHCR said, warning that the absence can create instability in the host countries.

Today's report is being released on the eve of World Refugee Day, marked annually on 20 June.

[Nineteen-year-old education activist and Syrian refugee appointed UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador](#)

19 June 2017 – In a historic first, the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has appointed 19-year-old Muzoon Almellehan, who has been advocating for girls' education since fleeing war-torn Syria in 2013, as its newest and youngest Goodwill Ambassador.

As a refugee, I saw what happens when children are forced into early marriage or manual labour they lose out on education and they lose out on possibilities for the future, said Ms. Almellehan, recalling that when she fled, the only belongings she was able to take with her were her school books.

[I am proud to be working with UNICEF to help give these children a voice](#) and to get them into school, she added.

Ms. Almellehan, is also the first person with an official refugee status to become an Ambassador for the UN agency. Since fleeing her homeland, she had been living in Jordan for three years, before being resettled in the United Kingdom.

In a news release today, UNICEF noted that it was during her 18 months in the Za'atari camp (in Jordan) that she began advocating for children's access to education, particularly for girls.

Muzoon's story of bravery and fortitude inspires us all, said Justin Forsyth, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, in the release, adding: We are very proud she will now become an Ambassador for UNICEF and children around the world.

In April this year, Ms. Almellehan dubbed 'the Malala of Syria' travelled to areas affected by the Boko Haram conflict in the Lake Chad region where she met with children forced out of school due to the violence.



UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Muzoon Almellehan meets students at the School of Peace at a internally displaced peoples site in the Lake Region, Chad, during her visit to the region in April 2017. Photo: UNICEF/Sokhin

RELATED: [Girls worst affected as conflict keeps more than 25 million children out of school](#)

Since her return, Ms. Almellehan has been working to promote understanding of the challenges children affected and uprooted by conflict face in accessing education, noted the UN agency.

According to UNICEF data, an estimated 25 million children of primary and secondary school are out of school in conflict zones around the world. For children living as refugees, only half are enrolled in primary school and less than a quarter are enrolled in secondary school.

Furthermore, education in emergencies also suffers with severe underfunding.

Since 2010, less than 2 per cent of humanitarian funding has been spent on education. At present, some \$8.5 billion are needed annually to close this widening gap.

[UN chief 'deeply saddened' by the many lives claimed by raging wildfires in Portugal](#)

18 June 2017 – 'Shocked and horrified' at the many lives claimed by the devastating fires that hit the Pedrógão Grande region of Portugal, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today expressed his deep sadness and condolences to the Portuguese Government and people.

In a [statement](#), the Secretary-General said he spoke earlier today with the President of Portugal, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, and with the Prime Minister, António Costa, expressing his "deep sadness."

According to news reports, the fast-moving wildfires ripped through the forested Pedrógão Grande central region of Portugal, some 150 kilometers (95 miles) northeast of Lisbon, leaving dozens dead and more injured.

"I wish a speedy recovery to the injured. At this time of loss, my thoughts and prayers are with the families and loved ones of the victims," said Mr. Guterres.

The UN chief went on to commend the Government, firefighters, emergency responders and civil society organizations who are sparing no efforts to

battle the wildfire and help people in need.

“The United Nations stands ready to assist in any way possible,” the Secretary-General concluded.