

Peace, human security at forefront of UN global intercultural dialogue forum

4 May 2017 – The integration of migrants in cities, countering the rise of violent extremism, as well as youth radicalization on the Internet are just some of the issues being discussed at a United Nations conference opening on Friday in Baku, Azerbaijan.

The [Fourth World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue](#), hosted by the Government of Azerbaijan in partnership with the UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), will provide an opportunity to examine effective responses to challenges facing human security, including massive migration, violent extremism and conflicts.

The Forum brings together heads of government and ministers, representatives of intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, policy-makers, cultural professionals, journalists and civil society activists under the theme ‘Advancing Intercultural Dialogue – New avenues for human security, peace and sustainable development.’

Speaking to *UN News*, Nadia Al-Nashif, UNESCO Assistant Director General for Social and Human Sciences, said the Baku Forum has a “very strong vision and resonates deeply with UNESCO’s mandate to build peace in the minds of men and women.”

“The world has become a very complicated place,” she noted. “We are looking at huge innovations in technology but at the same time, we are facing increased tensions, a result of the lack of general trust that stems from how much insecurity there is in the world.”

Ms. Al-Nashif said the UN intercultural dialogue is a platform for people to debate the notion of coexistence and what that means in regards to the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development that seeks to “promote norms for social justice, advocate for social inclusion, integration, acceptance, and not just tolerance but empathy.”

UNESCO is hosting 13 sessions at the Forum, showcasing the agency’s diverse work on intercultural dialogue to address issues such as the integration of migrants in cities, countering violent extremism as well as the growth of youth radicalization on the Internet.

“This is not just an academic forum where we are just preaching to the converted,” underscored Ms. Al-Nashif. “We bring our UNESCO Chairs but also the focal points from cities and local authorities.”

The Organization has been developing tools to help cities cope better with the flow of migrants into cities. A ministerial forum on culture and tourism is also scheduled to be held on the margins of the Baku Forum.

Furthermore, a number of its products will be launched on Friday, among them

a research publication entitled “Interculturalism at a crossroads, comparative perspectives on concepts, policies and practices” an initiative by the UNESCO Chairs in Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue; and two innovative online platforms: an e-Learning platform on intercultural competences financed with the support of Azerbaijan and another on the Muslim-Arab Legacy in the West.

“What the Baku Forum and UNESCO is doing,” Ms Al-Nashif said, “is finding a common access where we continue to engage, to inform scientific evidence for why it doesn’t make sense to be racist, why discrimination hurts socially and economically as well.”

Ahead of the Forum, the network of the [UNESCO Silk Road Online Platform](#) met at the Baku Congress Centre today, to examine progress made in its 2016-2018 Action Plan.

[In Bogota, Security Council pledges support to Colombia’s efforts to implement peace process](#)

4 May 2017 – In Colombia to acknowledge and to witness first-hand both the progress and the challenges of carrying out the aims of a hard-won peace deal, a delegation from the United Nations Security Council today met President Juan Manuel Santos and applauded the country as an example for overcoming difficulties and setbacks to bring to an end more than a half a century of conflict.

Speaking to reporters in Bogota, Elbio Roselli, of Uruguay, which holds the Council’s presidency for the month, [said](#) that “with the process of pacification of Colombia, the American continent is the only region of the world in which there is no active conflict.”

“We thank you for the example you are giving. These processes are never linear, they have ups and downs, they may have setbacks but what matters is to maintain the effort. This Security Council is committed to providing the support that Colombians want and deserve, “said Mr. Roselli.

In early October 2016, Colombian voters narrowly rejected the historic peace accord between the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army (FARC-EP). That deal was the culmination of four years of talks hosted in Havana, Cuba, between the two sides, and which led to a cessation of hostilities and agreements on key issues such as political participation, land rights, illicit drugs and victims’ rights and transitional justice. The two sides signed a new agreement in late November 2016.

The Council delegation also met with Chancellor María Ángela Holguín, Ambassador María Emma Mejía, and the post-conflict cabinet. The Council gave a clear message of support to the implementation of the peace process in Colombia.

In his remarks to the press, president Santos said: "I want to highlight the way the United Nations has helped us to manage the cease-fire. More than 2,670 lives have been saved so far in the peace process."

United Kingdom Ambassador Matthew Rycroft, co-leader of the visit with Uruguay, highlighted the full support of the Security Council and the international community to make the peace process a reality.

"This is a once in a lifetime opportunity for Colombians, make sure that all the parties fulfil all of the commitments and finally the peace that your country deserves will be a reality, from which there cannot be a turning back," said Ambassador Rycroft.

Before leaving New York, Mr. Roselli [noted](#) that it is time for the Council to make contact with all parties in the process, in order to see how the UN is helping and can continue to do so.

The visit follows a recent announcement by the [UN Mission in Colombia](#) that it hopes to receive [60 percent](#) of all FARC-EP arms.

Mr. Roselli also said that the Council not only wants to recognize the importance in relation to the Colombian ceasefire and the laying down of arms, but also inform itself about the substantive part.



Jean Arnault, Special Representative of the Secretary General and Mission chief, shakes hands with the President of Colombia Juan Manuel Santos while Elbio Roselli, President of Security Council, looks on. Photo: UN Photo/ Juan Manuel Barrero Bueno

Late September last year representatives of the Government of Colombia, as well as members from the FARC-EP and international observers from the UN mission in the country started working together at the joint Monitoring and Verification Mechanism headquarters in Bogota.

Verification of the bilateral ceasefire and cessation of hostilities in Colombia is part of the Mechanisms task, and according to the UN Mission in the South American country, they also have been planning and coordinating logistics for the regional offices and the zones where the separation of forces has been taking place.

Earlier this year UN News [reported](#) that at eight regional and 26 local sites, FARC-EP and Government members, along with 350 UN observers, have been working together to verify the parties' commitments towards the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities.

The UN Mission in Colombia reported [today](#) that to-date they have received and stored a thousand weapons from FARC-EP combatants. The combatants are currently in camps established for their transition and reintegration into civilian life, but also to ensure the safety of the civilian population and of FARC-EP and Public Force members.

[Nigeria: UN report details 'grave violations' against children by Boko Haram](#)

4 May 2017 – Children in north-east Nigeria continue to be brutalized as a result of Boko Haram's insurgency in the region and the ensuing conflict, a first-of-its-kind United Nations report has concluded.

"With tactics including widespread recruitment and use, abductions, sexual violence, attacks on schools and the increasing use of children in so-called 'suicide' attacks, Boko Haram has inflicted unspeakable horror upon the children of Nigeria's north-east and neighbouring countries," said Virginia Gamba, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, in a press release from her Office.

The [report](#) of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Nigeria documents the impact on children of the severe deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in the country between January 2013 and December 2016.

Violations committed by Boko Haram

During the reporting period, attacks by Boko Haram on communities and confrontations between the group and security forces resulted in at least 3,900 children killed and 7,300 more maimed.

Suicide attacks became the second leading cause of child casualties, accounting for over one thousand deaths and 2,100 injuries during the reporting period. The UN verified the use of 90 children for suicide bombings in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger, the majority of whom were girls.

The UN verified the recruitment and use of 1,650 children. Testimonies from children separated from Boko Haram indicate that many were abducted, but that others joined the group due to financial incentives, peer pressure, familial ties and for ideological reasons. In some instances, parents gave up their children to obtain security guarantees or for economic gain.

The children were used in direct hostilities, for planting improvised explosive devices, to burn schools or houses and in a variety of support

roles.

Schools have been targets of choice for Boko Haram and the UN estimates that 1,500 were destroyed since 2014, with at least 1,280 casualties among teachers and students.

Response to Boko Haram also raises concerns

The response to Boko Haram's insurgency also generated protection concerns, including allegations of extra judicial killings.

The UN documented the recruitment and use of 228 children, including some as young as nine by the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), created in Borno state to assist the Nigerian Security Forces.

Children were used mainly for intelligence-related purposes, in search operations, night patrols, for crowd control and to guard posts.

She urged all parties to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law and to ensure civilians are protected during armed clashes.

[UN health agency to examine lower-cost 'biosimilar' drugs in effort to expand access to cancer treatment](#)

4 May 2017 – As a step towards making some of the most expensive treatments for cancer more widely available in low- and middle-income countries, the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) said today that it will launch a pilot project for prequalifying so-called "biosimilars," or lower cost drugs.

Biotherapeutic medicines, which are produced from biological sources, such as cells rather than synthesised chemicals, are important treatments for some cancers and other non-communicable diseases. Like generic medicines, biosimilars, which are usually manufactured by other companies once the product's original patent has expired, can be much less expensive versions of innovator biotherapeutics.

"Innovator biotherapeutic products are often too expensive for many countries, so biosimilars are a good opportunity to expand access and support countries to regulate and use these medicines," [said](#) Dr. Marie-Paule Kieny, WHO Assistant Director General for Health Systems and Innovation, in a press statement.

In September, the UN health agency will invite manufacturers to submit

applications for prequalification of biosimilar versions of two products in the WHO Essential Medicines List: rituximab (for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and chronic lymphocytic leukemia), and trastuzumab (to treat breast cancer).

The decision comes after a two-day meeting in Geneva between WHO, national regulators, pharmaceutical industry groups, patient and civil society groups, payers and policymakers to discuss ways to increase access to biotherapeutic medicines. WHO also plans to explore options for prequalifying insulin.

"Biosimilars could be game-changers for access to medicines for certain complex conditions," said Dr. Suzanne Hill, WHO's Director of Essential Medicines and Health Products. "But they need to be regulated appropriately to ensure therapeutic value and patient safety."

According to WHO, if it finds that biosimilars submitted for prequalification are comparable in terms of quality, safety and efficacy to originator products, it will list the medications and become eligible for procurement by UN agencies. As many low- and middle-income countries rely on WHO prequalification before buying medicines, an additional benefit could be to increase competition and further reduce the price of medicines.

WHO will also review its 2009 Guidelines on the evaluation of similar biotherapeutic products to ensure that WHO's guidance to national regulatory authorities reflects recent evidence and experience.

Increased use of biosimilars will also require patients and their physicians to understand and trust that the benefits of this type of medicine substantially outweigh any risks. WHO will be looking to countries with positive experience of biosimilars and partners for support in educating prescribers and patients on their benefits and in advocating for greater awareness of biosimilars.

In addition, WHO will advocate for fairer prices for all biotherapeutics to ensure that these treatments can truly benefit public health. This will include support to countries to develop price-setting strategies that foster sustainable markets to deliver treatments to patients, savings to payers and incentives to producers to keep manufacturing the medicines needed.

In Ethiopia, UN rights chief urges authorities for greater freedoms, especially space for critical voices

4 May 2017 – Speaking to the press during his mission to Ethiopia, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights today highlighted the need for greater and freer civic space, with "broader latitude for the contributions

of critical or dissenting views” to decision-making in the country.

“All governments need to be held to the mark by independent media and the vital action of civil society and human rights defenders,” High Commissioner Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein [said](#) at a press conference in the capital, Addis Ababa.

“I am convinced the Ethiopian Government will find its most important and productive investment will be in the rights of the people, which build strong and safe societies.”

In his remarks, the UN rights chief hailed the contributions of the Horn of Africa country ranging from its contributions to UN peacekeeping efforts as well as its commitment to protect the human rights of its people as illustrated by its accession to a number of human rights treaties and their reflection in the Ethiopian constitution.

He also expressed that the work of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission was heartening and called on the Government to continue further steps to grant the body more independence.

However, speaking on the unrest in the country in November 2015 and August 2016, and the response of the security forces, Mr. Zeid urged the authorities to allow access to UN human rights officials to visit the affected region and establish the facts.

“The extremely large number of arrests – over 26,000 – suggests it is unlikely rule of law guarantees have been observed in every case. I believe my staff ought to be given access to the affected areas, and I renew my request,” he added, noting that he would continue to follow-up on the case.

The High Commissioner also spoke on the importance of economic, social and cultural rights and stressed that progress on these rights would translate into civil and political rights advances.

He also offered his support and that of his Office, [OHCHR](#), to the Government and the people of Ethiopia in confronting the challenges posed by the drought plaguing large parts of the region.

SEE ALSO: [As new drought hits Ethiopia, UN urges support for Government’s ‘remarkable’ efforts](#)

During his visit, High Commissioner Zeid met with a number of senior Ethiopian officials, including the Prime Minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, Ministers, legislators, and human rights officials and defenders.

Also, while in Ethiopia, the UN top human rights official signed a Memorandum of Intent with the Government to strengthen OHCHR Regional Office in Addis Ababa programmes on capacity building for stakeholders across the region, including Ethiopia.

During his mission, Mr. Zeid also met with Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, and other senior African Union (AU) officials, with whom he discussed human rights priorities with the AU, as the

regional bloc's new leadership develops its vision and frameworks for impact across the continent.