

State of emergency should not overshadow rights protection, UN experts stress ahead of Turkey referendum

13 April 2017 – Ahead of this Sunday’s plebiscite on proposed constitutional amendments in Turkey that would, among other things, empower the President alone to declare states of emergency and determine the measures to be taken, a group of United Nations human rights experts have reiterated that even under such circumstances, protection of human rights must not be compromised.

In a [news release](#) today, the UN Special Rapporteurs on [extreme poverty and human rights](#); the [right to freedom of opinion and expression](#); the [rights to freedom of peaceful assembly](#) and of association; and the [right to education](#) also voiced concern over closure of some 200 media outlets in the country and said that the move not only caused thousands of journalists to lose their jobs and livelihoods, it also undermined the possibility of an informed debate over the referendum proposals.

Moreover, around 1,000 schools and 15 universities are estimated to have been closed by emergency decrees issued since July 2016, the release added.

Underlining that even under a state of emergency, economic, social and cultural rights can only be limited in ways that respect the basic rights themselves and are ‘solely for the purpose of promoting the general welfare in a democratic society,’ the experts said: “But there has been no attempt to show that these blanket measures, which have destroyed the careers and livelihoods of tens of thousands of persons, satisfy such criteria in each case.”

“The dismissal of up to 134,000 public servants, without due process, compensation, or access to a proper remedy, for alleged links with organizations that the Government has chosen to proscribe, cannot be justified by reference to Turkey’s longstanding international human rights obligations,” they added.

The experts also said that given the arbitrary and sweeping nature of the emergency decrees since July last year, “there is serious concern that such powers might be used in ways that exacerbate the existing major violations of economic, social and cultural rights.”

In the release, the UN Special Rapporteurs also noted that they in contact with the Turkish Government over the issues.

Special Rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor

are they paid for their work.

[PODCAST: Biking from India to Sweden for love – a tale of happiness](#)

13 April 2017 – Love at first sight. An inevitable separation. A seemingly impossible journey for love mixed with a dash of art and late 1970s ‘hippie culture.’ This is the amazing true story of an Indian man who cycled across eight countries to be reunited with his sweetheart.

Pradyumna Kumar Mahanandia, known as ‘PK,’ made this incredible journey some 40 years ago. Born in a poor family in a village in eastern India, PK met Charlotte von Schedvin a Swedish girl who had heard of him and had come to India to get her portrait drawn.

They fell in love and were married, but in 1975, Charlotte had to return to school in Sweden. PK wanted to finish his studies as well, and could not accompany her. For some time after, he tried to figure out a way to get to her until finally, in 1978, he decided to sell all his belongings and set out on an impossible overland journey.

He biked for four months, through Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Bulgaria, (former) Yugoslavia, Germany, Austria and Denmark to be reunited with the love of his life in Sweden.

He and Charlotte, known as ‘Lotte,’ have been together ever since.

Their story is told in the book *The Amazing Story of the Man Who Cycled from India to Europe for Love* by Swedish journalist and travel writer, Per J. Andersson.

All three sat down with *UN News* and United Nations Headquarters in New York, to record a truly heart-warming episode of our podcast series [The Lid is On](#).

UN staff and visitors got to meet PK, Lotte and Per during a book signing held at UN Headquarters to mark the [International Day of Happiness](#), observed annually on 20 March.

AUDIO: The Lid is On – Dianne Penn talks with Pradyumna, Charlotte and Per at UN Headquarters in New York, on a wide-ranging conversation about love, life and happiness.

The UN has [celebrated](#) the International Day since 2013 as a way to recognize the importance of happiness in the lives of people everywhere.

At the book signing, PK wore a pin promoting the 17 Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) which seek to end poverty, reduce inequality and protect the planet.

The UN believes these are three key aspects that contribute to well-being and happiness.

“We love to share our love, but the story has its own life and energy,” PK told *UN News*, adding that the UN is the ideal platform as it brings the world’s people together.

[Security Council decides UN Mission in Haiti will close by October; approves smaller follow-on operation](#)

13 April 2017 – Recognizing the “major milestone” Haiti has achieved toward stabilization following recent elections, the Security Council today extended mandate of the United Nations mission in the island nation for a final six-month period and authorized a smaller successor peacekeeping mission.

Unanimously adopting a new resolution, the Council decided that, after over 13 years operating in its current form, the UN Stabilization Mission, known by its French acronym, MINUSTAH, would gradually draw down its military component during the next six months, finally withdrawing from Haiti by 15 October 2017.

Acting on the [recommendations](#) of the Secretary-General, the Council also decided to establish a successor operation, the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH), which would be mandated to assist the Haitian Government to strengthen rule of law institutions; further support and develop the National Police; and engage in human rights monitoring, reporting, and analysis.

Further to the resolution, MINUJUSTH would be composed of up to seven Formed Police Units – or 980 FPU personnel – and 295 Individual Police Officers for an initial period of six months from 16 October 2017 until 15 April 2018, and emphasized the importance of reaching those levels. The current Mission has just over 1,000 individual police and 11 police units.

The new Mission was also authorized to “protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence, within its capabilities and areas of deployment, as needed.”

Briefing the Security Council early last week, MINUSTAH chief Sandra Honoré said Haiti had made [significant progress](#) in consolidating democracy and

maintaining security and stability with the inauguration of Jovenel Moïse as President on 7 February, marking the restoration of constitutional order. Yet, in spite of these gains, pockets of fragility persisted and political challenges remained.

It is time, she said, to reshape the partnership among the international community, the United Nations and Haiti, with a view to monitoring concerns such as human rights issues and ensuring that progress made since MINUSTAH's 2004 establishment endure.

With the Council's support, said Ms. Honoré, the joint transition plan would guide the handover, underpinning the gradual transfer of tasks to the Government, the international presence and the United Nations Country Team, thereby allowing Haiti to seize the opportunity to "begin a new chapter in [its] history as the Mission transitions."

[Iraq: UN assessment reveals extensive destruction in western Mosul](#)

13 April 2017 – Using satellite imagery and local researches, the most recent evaluation confirms that western Mosul has undergone extensive destruction, "far greater than in the east," according to a senior United Nations aid official in the country.

"The [level of damage](#) in western Mosul is already far greater than in the east, even before the battle to retake the Old City begins," said Lise Grande, Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, in a news release issued by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)).

With more than 1,140 housing sites having been destroyed across the city, the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) confirms that damage to houses in western Mosul is two and a half times greater than in the eastern districts with one-third of the residential devastation reported to have occurred in the Al Jadeda neighbourhood.

Ms. Grande pointed out that nearly 300,000 civilians have already fled western Mosul and "hundreds of thousands more may in the days and weeks ahead."

She stressed that homes are being destroyed, schools and health centres damaged and that crucial public infrastructure, including electricity and water stations, are in ruins.

"Under international humanitarian law, parties to the conflict are obliged to do everything possible to protect civilians and limit damage to civilian infrastructure. Nothing is more important," concluded the Humanitarian

Coordinator.

[‘Radical’ investments needed to meet global water and sanitation targets – UN report](#)

13 April 2017 – Against the backdrop of almost two billion people around the world relying on sources of drinking-water contaminated with faeces, the United Nations has called on countries to “radically” increase investments in water and sanitation infrastructure not only to protect their populations from deadly diseases but also to ensure that they are able to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“Contaminated drinking-water is estimated to cause more than 500,000 diarrhoeal deaths each year and is a major factor in several neglected tropical diseases, including intestinal worms, schistosomiasis, and trachoma,” said Maria Neira, the Director of Department of Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health at the UN World Health Organization (WHO) in a news release today.

The UN report, [Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water 2017](#), notes that while countries have increased their budgets for water, sanitation and hygiene at an average annual rate of about 4.9 per cent over the last three years, 80 per cent of countries have reported that the increase is still insufficient to meet nationally-defined targets for those services.

Therefore, in order to meet the ambitious SDG targets, which aim for universal access to safely managed water and sanitation services by 2030, countries need to use financial resources more efficiently as well as increase efforts to identify new sources of funding.

The Global Assessment also highlights that these efforts are particularly important for developing countries where current national coverage targets are based on achieving access to basic infrastructure and which may not necessarily provide continuously safe and reliable services.

The report has been issued by WHO, on behalf of UN-Water “the inter-agency coordination mechanism for all freshwater-related issues, including sanitation.

Funding gap is vast but countries have the ability to mobilize resources

According to estimates by the World Bank, investments in infrastructure need to triple to \$114 billion per year “a figure which does not include

operating and maintenance costs.

While this funding gap is vast, there are recent examples of countries having demonstrated the ability to mobilize the needed resources to meet development targets.

For instance, 147 countries around the globe were able to successfully mobilize the resources required to meet the Millennium Development Goal ([MDG](#)) [target](#) of halving the proportion of people without an improved source of water, and 95 among them met the corresponding target for sanitation. 77 countries met both.

[According](#) to Guy Ryder, the Chair of UN-Water and the Director-General of the International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)), nations have the ability to address the challenges of meeting the ambitious SDG targets.

“Increased investments in water and sanitation can yield substantial benefits for human health and development, generate employment and make sure that we leave no one behind,” he said.