

[Access to legal abortion services needed, to prevent 47,000 women dying each year – UN rights experts](#)

States across the world should act now to decriminalise abortion and make every effort to ensure women and girls have the right to make their own decisions about pregnancy, said a group of United Nations human rights experts on Friday, in a [statement](#) marking International Safe Abortion Day.

“Unsafe abortions cause the deaths of some 47,000 women each year and a further five million suffer some form of temporary or permanent disability,” said the UN [Human Rights Council Working group, on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice](#).

The group highlighted that the ability for a woman or girl to make her own decisions about pregnancy “is at the very core of [her] fundamental right to equality, privacy and physical and mental integrity and is a precondition for the enjoyment of other rights and freedoms”.

Currently, an estimated 225 million women worldwide are deprived of access to modern contraception, often leading to unplanned pregnancies. For girls, issues arising from pregnancy and childbirth are some of the most common causes of death in developing countries. Girls under the age of 15 are five times more at risk.

“Legal frameworks for abortion have typically been designed to control women’s decision-making through the use of criminal law,” the experts said.

[Data](#) from the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) demonstrates that criminalising the termination of pregnancy does not reduce the number of women who resort to abortion procedures. Rather, it is likely to increase the number who end up having unsafe “back street” procedures.

In addition, “too many women are physically and verbally mistreated or simply denied emergency medical care after abortions”, which the experts said, “amounts to another means of punishment which violates international law and, in many instances, national laws and policies”.

“Governments have a duty to ensure that women and girls who have abortions are treated humanely and without judgement or assumption of violating laws, in particular in cases of miscarriages,” they stressed.

The experts added that they hoped that “important steps” already taken in some countries to “reclaim women’s reproductive rights through referendums, legislative and judicial action” can be followed by others.

They called for “concerns about unsafe abortion” to be addressed through public health, relevant medical malpractice and civil law.

“It is therefore crucial that countries demonstrate their commitment to eliminating discrimination against women in their legislation and to advancing women’s and adolescents’ sexual and reproductive rights, in accordance with international human rights standards.”

[Violence and displacement in Ebola-hit DRC threaten humanitarian response](#)

Increasing violence in Ebola-affected areas of north-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) threatens the safety of tens of thousands of people there, the UN Refugee Agency, [UNHCR](#), said on Friday.

People in the city of Beni – where more than 20 people were killed last Saturday – have been left “angry” and in shock, said agency spokesperson, Babar Baloch, briefing journalists in Geneva, adding that “they have a feeling they’ve been abandoned”

In a more positive development, the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) confirmed that staff resumed critical Ebola contact-tracing work in Beni city on Wednesday, following a two-day suspension of activities due to the deadly attack at the weekend.

While these groups have previously been active around Beni, it is the first time that fighting has reached the city itself – *Babar Baloch, UNHCR Spokesperson*

According to WHO, 101 people have died in the latest Ebola outbreak – DRC’s tenth in the last 40 years – and there have been 154 reported cases – 123 confirmed and 31 probable cases.

Speaking in Geneva, Mr. Baloch explained that there has been a sharp rise in attacks and displacement in recent months in the Beni area of North Kivu province and further north, in Ituri province.

“It is estimated that more than a million people are displaced in North Kivu,” he said. “An estimated half a million have been forced from their homes this year alone.”

Some 13,000 people fled their homes in August around Beni, the UNHCR spokesperson added, before underlining the significance of the attack on the city, where residents have been effectively under siege for two months, by armed militia.

“While these groups have previously been active around Beni, it is the first

time that fighting has reached the city itself,” he said. “Security is what they want. And security from all risks as well.”

In a separate attack on Oicha town near Beni, Mr. Baloch said that an armed group believed to be Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), shot dead a 47-year-old man, abducted at least nine children, then looted and burned houses.

In addition to [WHO's](#) essential work in north-eastern DRC, other UN agencies and their partners are continuing important awareness-raising campaigns among local communities.

[UNICEF](#), the [UN Children's Fund](#), has more than 50 staff in the Ebola-affected areas including Beni, Mangina and Butembo.

It has deployed specialists in community communications, education and psycho-social assistance, in addition to water, sanitation and hygiene experts to help contain the disease and avoid any further spread.

Spokesperson Christophe Boulierac said it would be “a big mistake” to underestimate the risks associated with the violence.

“I talked to my colleagues on the ground in the field this morning. We go deep into villages”, he said, indicating that security was now a major concern: “What has changed is, we were cautious, but we are as my colleague says, increasingly cautious, and we are assessing each activity, each movement.”

[On day three, of UN Assembly debate, Israel and Palestine put sharp focus on complexities thwarting peace](#)

As the United Nations General Assembly's annual general debate reached its halfway mark on Thursday, one of the world's longest-running and most intractable crises, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, almost as old as the UN itself, came into stark relief under the same roof with the two sides laying out diametrically opposed positions that have bedeviled peace efforts for over 70 years.

More common themes, such as multilateralism and climate change, dominated the debate's first two days, but on Thursday, the very *raison d'être* of the UN's foundering in 1945 – the prevention of war – played out from the same podium in the same hall before assembled world Heads of State and Government, though neither of the two protagonists attended the other's speech.

Within a couple of hours of each other, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas propounded opposing narratives on indigenous origins, the holy city of Jerusalem and the very nature of a Jewish State, which have divided two peoples claiming the same strip of land as their nation's homes, putting in high relief the monumental problems that the UN faces here and in other peace mediation efforts across the world.

Many leaders who have spoken so far during the debate, which began on Tuesday, have made passing reference to the Middle East conflict, generally declaring their support for the UN-backed two-state solution, with Israel ending its occupation of Palestinian territories and both States living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders.

But on Thursday the Assembly witnessed the very heart of the problem, straight from the leaders themselves, in all its detailed complexity, devoid of the generalities that have been the rule so far.

President Abbas [said](#) of the Palestinians: "We are an indigenous people and our roots are deep across five thousand years."

Mr. Netanyahu [declared](#): "Ever since Abraham and Sarah made their journey to the Promised Land nearly 4,000 years ago, the Land of Israel has been our homeland. It's the place where Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob, Leah and Rachel carried on their eternal covenant with God."

Mr. Abbas took particular umbrage at a recent Israeli law declaring Israel the Nation-State of the Jewish People.

"[This is] a racist law that crossed all the red lines," he said. "This law denies the connection of the Palestinian people to their historic homeland and dismisses their right to self-determination and their history and heritage," he added, warning that it will inevitably lead to the creation of one racist State, an apartheid state, and nullifies the two-state solution.

Mr. Netanyahu, who had the good fortune to be scheduled to speak second, took this up directly. "Moments ago, President Abbas outrageously said that Israel's Nation State Law proves that Israel is a racist, apartheid state," he said.

"President Abbas, you should know better. You wrote a dissertation denying the Holocaust. Your Palestinian Authority imposes death sentences on Palestinians for selling land to Jews. Did you hear that? If a Jew buys an apartment, a piece of land anywhere in the Palestinian territories, the Palestinian who sold him that land is executed. That's what the law says," he added, pointing to what he saw as racism on the other side.

So there it was – both sides live.

The UN has been focused on the Middle East conflict ever since 1947 when the General Assembly voted for the partition of Palestine, then under British mandate, into Jewish and Arab homelands.

Seventy-one years and four full-scale wars later, after countless Security Council resolutions, UN speeches, and tit-for-tat condemnations from the two sides, it's almost as if the conflict is back at square one, at least listening to the two leaders.

And yet, again today President Abbas today reaffirmed his commitment to peace and the two-state solution and the path of negotiations to achieve them.

And Prime Minister Netanyahu said Israel hoped the day would soon arrive when Israel "will be able to expand peace, a formal peace, beyond Egypt and Jordan to other Arab neighbors, including the Palestinians."

Beyond that, a full roster of leaders mounted the Assembly's podium on the debate's third day, with calls for multilateralism, action against climate change and momentum to attain the ambitious Agenda 2030 of Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) that seek to eliminate a host of social ill, including full access to proper nutrition and health for all, by 2030.

As for the Middle East conflict, it barely even figured in the third day's speeches, even with the rote two-state reference. One of the few to [allude to it](#) was President Nicos Anastasiades of Mediterranean island neighbour Cyprus – with as single phrase.

"Bearing in mind the ongoing unstable situation and conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Nigeria, Myanmar, Afghanistan, the Sahel, the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and, of course, the still unresolved problem of the forcible division of my country, we should attach particular importance to the peace and security pillar reform," he said.

Bangladesh 'disappointed' at lack of progress in alleviating plight of Rohingya, Prime Minister tells UN Assembly

The world cannot ignore or remain silent over the plight of the Rohingya people – driven from their homes in Myanmar and sheltering in Bangladesh – Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, said on Thursday, urging world leaders for an early and peaceful solution to the massive refugee crisis.

"Myanmar is one of our neighbours. From the outset, we have been trying to find a peaceful solution to the Rohingya crisis through bilateral consultations," said the Bangladeshi leader, noting that her country has concluded three refugee repatriation arrangements with Myanmar.

However, despite Myanmar's verbal commitment to take back the Rohingya, the country is yet to accept them back, she added.

Prime Minister Hasina also recalled the five-point proposal she presented to the General Assembly last year, which outlined a durable and peaceful solution for the plight of the forcibly displaced Rohingya.

"We are disappointed that despite our earnest efforts we have not been able to begin Rohingya repatriation in a permanent and sustainable manner."

She went on to note that the Bangladeshi Government is hosting some 1.1 million members of Myanmar's minority Muslim Rohingya community and, supported by humanitarian organizations, including UN agencies, providing them with food, clothing, healthcare and security. Work is also underway to provide improved housing, as well as education and other services.

"I call upon international organizations to join hands with us in this initiative. I also seek their assistance to help relocate the Rohingya to the facility," she added.

In her address, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh also spoke of her country's commitment to UN's peace efforts in various parts of the globe.

She also highlighted Bangladesh's socio-economic progress, steps to strengthen gender equality and women's empowerment, work to implement Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

[Full statement available here.](#)

[Now is the time for cooperative leadership, not nationalist rhetoric, Spain's President says at UN](#)

The world is facing enormous global challenges, Pedro Sánchez Pérez-Castejón, President of Spain, told the United Nations General Assembly on Thursday, underscoring that these times "do not need nationalist or non-inclusive rhetoric."

"Now is the time to cultivate a new cooperative leadership, based not only on a willingness to listen to others, but also on a readiness to understand their motivations," he said, observing that "no single person has a monopoly on the truth."

We need leadership that can build consensus and forge agreements; that can

find solutions and make the most of synergies,” he added.

He stated that the UN’s real strength lies in “everything it can do to shape the future,” saying “we are the last generation that will have the chance to halt the consequences of climate change” and the first to eradicate global poverty.

“It is not a question of seeing obstacles,” he continued, but of identifying opportunities” for making sustainable development.

He urged the global leaders to look beyond the dictates of today’s fast-moving times and instead focus on the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development.

“Without dignity, without equality between women and men, without respect for human rights, there will be no peace and no development,” he stated.

Saying that humankind must not tolerate gender discrimination, Mr. Sánchez told the Assembly that he leads by example, pointing out that his cabinet of Ministers is 60 per cent women.

He argued that companies, education and society as a whole are “the battleground,” asserting that glass ceilings remain in leaderships “simply due to inertia.”

“We must develop a truly global roadmap to eradicate all forms of discrimination still suffered by women,” he stressed, pledging Spain’s support in promoting the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, because “it is crucial that women participate as peace brokers in all phases of conflict.”

Turning to the refugee and migration crisis, he stated: “There are no shortcuts or quick fixes.”

“Humanity cannot simply accept as inevitable the fact that 68 million people have been forcibly displaced around the world, of whom more than 25 million are refugees, and over three million are asylum seekers.”

Calling the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) “a great leap forward,” he flagged that 85 per cent of the world’s refugees and asylum seekers are in developing countries.

Noting that Spain was one of the hardest hit Western European countries during the economic crisis, he took pride in saying that “the vast majority of Spanish society has never turned its back on the tragedy resulting from migration.”

“These States need our empathy and commitment,” underscored President Sánchez, adding “we all have the obligation to help.”

He believes that safe, orderly and regular migration can yield positive impacts, as opposed to fortified countries, with exclusionary and xenophobic narratives.

“For the multilateral system to be effective, we must renovate and reinforce,” he asserted. “In so doing we will be defending everything that we believe in.”

[Full statement available here.](#)