

UN rights team heading to Venezuela may pave way for official mission led by Bachelet

A United Nations human rights team is to begin an official visit to Venezuela on Monday at the invitation of the Government, potentially paving the way for an official mission to Caracas by the UN's top rights official, [Michelle Bachelet](#).

Five staff members are to tour the country from 11 to 22 March, her office, [OHCHR](#), said on Friday, amid a [protracted crisis](#), arising from a faltering economy, political instability, and violent anti-Government demonstrations.

The announcement follows an initial invitation last November from President Nicolas Maduro to High Commissioner Bachelet, which was reiterated by Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza at the current [Human Rights Council](#) session in Geneva.

"During its visit, the team will seek to meet with Government officials, representatives of the National Assembly, civil society organisations and victims of human rights violations," OHCHR said in a statement. "The team will visit Caracas, as well as other cities in a number of states in Venezuela."

'Standard practice' ahead of High Commissioner visit

The High Commissioner's office added that it is "standard practice" for a technical team to be deployed ahead of a "possible" visit by her.

This is to ensure that Ms. Bachelet would have "unfettered access to the people and places she would need to visit, to be able to gain a clear understanding of the human rights situation in the country", OHCHR's statement explained.

UNHCR centre opens in Colombia for vulnerable Venezuelans

In another development, the UN refugee agency, [UNHCR](#), announced on Friday that it has opened a reception centre in Colombia for the most vulnerable Venezuelans crossing the border.

Thousands of Venezuela nationals are still leaving the country every day and UNHCR spokesperson Andrej Mahecic said that many of them have resorted to living on the streets in neighbouring Colombia.

The new facility in the border city of Maicao, in La Guajira region, has space for 350 people, with room for expansion if necessary, the UNHCR official explained.

"A significant number of Venezuelans in Maicao are living on the streets or

in informal settlements and 81 per cent of those interviewed, said that they required shelter,” Mr. Mahecic said.

Colombia’s generosity praised but reception capacity ‘overwhelmed’

Colombia now hosts more than one million Venezuelans, who despite the authorities’ generosity and open-border policy, have overwhelming humanitarian needs, according to UNHCR.

“Over 3.4 million Venezuelans are living abroad, of whom 2.7 million have left the country since 2015,” Mr. Mahecic said. “Colombia is the country that is most affected by the outflow, with over 1.1 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants.”

To help them, the new centre will provide shelter, food, water, basic medical care, and other services in the centre, on a short-term basis.

“It’s a reception centre which will basically serve to provide immediate support to the most vulnerable categories” Mr. Mahecic said.” That may involve unaccompanied children, children who may have been separated from their families, vulnerable women, people who have disabilities, and so on. It is not meant to provide a permanent shelter on a long-term basis.”

‘5,000 people leave Venezuela every day’

This year, the UN agency is appealing for more than \$730 million to help more than nearly three million Venezuelans and host communities in 16 countries.

“On average, we still see that about 5,000 people cross into the neighbouring countries, and from those neighbouring countries then proceed into other nations in the region,” Mr. Mahecic said. “Those numbers obviously fluctuate, but this is the average that we have been seeing for quite some time.”

To complement Colombia’s efforts to provide international protection to those arriving at the border, UNHCR continues to scale up shelter, legal advice and access to basic services for people in “dire” need.

Joint UN, OSCE engagement can address crisis in Ukraine, other ‘dark spots of conflict’ in Europe

What is happening in and around Ukraine is “unacceptable, the Chairperson-in-Office for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) told the United Nations Security Council on Thursday.

“The crisis goes against everything the OSCE and the UN stand for,” continued Slovakian Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák in his briefing on OSCE’s activities.

In late February 2014, the situation in Ukraine went from political crisis, to violent confrontation and, later, became a full-scale conflict between Government forces and separatists, in the country’s east.

Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák of the Slovak Republic, Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and former President of the General Assembly, briefs the Security Council., by UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

While stressing the importance of the various accords on the situation in Ukraine, including the [Minsk Agreements](#), the only “agreed framework” for halting the guns in eastern Ukraine and the Trilateral Contact Group, consisting of OSCE, Russia and Ukraine, he spelled out: “We cannot simply wait patiently for progress to happen. There are too many people suffering, as we speak.”

Mr. Lajčák shared his experience in traveling to the country in January, saying “It was my first trip as Chairperson. And it is not one I will forget.”

He spoke of the elderly in the Luhansk region “on sticks or in wheelchairs” who each day make a risky journey across a bridge severely damaged by the conflict because it is the only open entry-exit point.

“More than 10,000 people cross daily”, he explained. “They suffer; they feel hopeless, neglected and abandoned” because commitments are not upheld, trust keeps eroding and the space for dialogue is disappearing.

Engaging with the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission, which he called “the eyes and ears of the international community on the ground”, along with the Project Coordinator in Ukraine, UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)), International Committee of the Red Cross and the European External Action Service yielded improvement proposals, including to repair the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge and to demine.

Turning to suggestions on the creation of a UN mission in Ukraine, he pointed out: “This is not a new discussion”, saying he had nothing to add, “except to reaffirm that we stand ready to engage on any concrete proposals, or decisions coming out of this esteemed body”.

In addition to the Ukraine, there are “other dark spots of conflict” in the OSCE area, he continued, citing Transdnistria, Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

“The OSCE has a lot to learn from closer UN engagement”, including operational readiness and capacities and capabilities at various conflict stages Mr. Lajčák stated.

“But”, he added quickly, “the OSCE has a lot to give too”, citing tailored regional knowledge and niche expertise.

In a climate of eroding global arms control, he flagged that the OSCE can be “a platform for confidence-building and increased transparency”.

He highlighted the benefits of even more engagement in the future, “because there is absolutely no alternative when it comes to the legitimacy the UN brings and the reach it allows” and “absolutely no alternative to local know-how and field presence” of the OSCE.

“When mobilized effectively and pulled together, the results can be historic” concluded the OSCE chairperson.

Human rights ‘core to sustainable development’: deputy UN chief

“Human rights are core to the [2030 Agenda](#), and sustainable development is a powerful vehicle for the realization of all human rights,” the UN’s Deputy Secretary-General, Amina Mohammed, said in a speech to the Human Rights Council, on Thursday.

The 2030 Agenda, the UN’s “plan of action for people, planet and prosperity,” contains a commitment to “realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls,” through the implementation of the Agenda’s 17 [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#).

“Realizing the objectives of the SDGs means that people are able to fulfil their rights to adequate housing, clean water, health care, education and food as well as their right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives,” continued Ms. Mohammed, who assured the Council of the UN’s “rock-solid commitment to delivering on people’s rights and well-being through implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.”

I want to reinforce our rock-solid commitment to delivering on people’s rights through the Sustainable Development Goals *Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed*

The deputy UN chief reminded delegates that the Agenda is “a promise to secure peace and prosperity, founded in the respect for people’s rights and their dignity,” and a pledge to go beyond “business as usual” and address emerging global challenges.

However, Ms. Mohammed warned the Council that the world is off track to

achieving the 2030 Agenda. “We are falling behind in achieving the promise to ‘leave no one behind’. We say that youth are the future, and yet youth unemployment is at record highs. And where is the leap forward we promised women and girls?”

Other targets are not being hit, she added, due to low investment in the poorest countries, unregulated migration and insufficient climate action. This is often, she said, a result of “entrenched patterns of inequalities and discrimination, and policy choices at both the national and global levels.”

The way to address the problem and “stop the slide and reset the ambition with urgency,” is for global cooperation to bring about human rights for all, said Ms. Mohammed, using all parts of the UN system to help countries to implement the 2030 Agenda at a national level.

Despite the many challenges, she expressed her conviction that the international community will bring about a world that leaves no one behind, and respects human rights for all: “let’s keep hope alive for the millions who live a life of hunger, fear, and atrocities beyond our imagination. It is our job to be their voice, so they may all know peace, prosperity and a life of dignity.”

[Women’s empowerment ‘essential to global progress’ says Guterres, marking International Day](#)

Women’s empowerment and gender equality are “essential to global progress”, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres stressed in his message for [International Women’s Day](#) which this year puts “innovation by women and girls, for women and girls”, at the heart of efforts to achieve gender equality.

“Last year, for the first time, we achieved gender parity in the UN’s Senior Management Group and among those who lead UN teams around the world”, the UN chief said, adding that the Organization is “working to achieve parity across the whole United Nations system within a decade.”

The UN began celebrating the International Day in 1975, which was designated [International Women’s Year](#). Over the decades it has morphed from recognizing the achievements of women to becoming a rallying point to build support for women’s rights and participation, in the political and economic arenas.

“Gender equality is essential to the effectiveness of our work, and we cannot afford to miss out on the contributions of half of the world’s population”,

Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed explained.

Moreover, “women’s equal participation in the labor force would unlock trillions of dollars for global development” she continued.

“Let us be clear,” she spelled out: “We cannot build the future we want and achieve the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) without the full participation of women”.

Achieving a [gender-equal world](#) requires social innovations that work for both women and men and leave no one behind, according to the overarching UN strategy. E-learning platforms that take classrooms to women and girls; affordable and quality childcare centres; and technology shaped by women, are a few examples of the innovation needed to meet the 2030 deadline set out in the [Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

“And we need more women leaders participating in public life and taking decisions”, flagged [General Assembly President](#) Maria Fernanda Espinosa, urging everyone to redouble their efforts “against the discrimination and violence women and girls face every day”.

For her part, UN Youth Envoy Jayathma Wickramanayake, is drawing attention to the millions of young girls preparing to start their working life, saying that far too often, “they don’t get the opportunity to realize their dreams and grow into their power.”

“Let’s invest in girls’ education and skills so they become the leaders and innovators they were born to be,” she added.

In her message for the Day, the Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, pointed out that “women and girls around the world still face many challenges”, arguing that changes begin with making sure that their needs and experiences are integrated and enhanced by new technology and innovation.

“On International Women’s Day, we ask all to join us to ‘Think equal, build smart, and innovate for change’”, concluded the head of UN Women.

[Women still struggle to find a job, let alone reach the top: new UN report calls for ‘quantum leap’](#)

Women’s job opportunities have barely improved since the early 1990s, UN labour experts said on Thursday, warning that female workers are still penalized for having children and looking after them.

Released on the eve of International Women's Day, celebrated on 8 March, the [International Labour Organization \(ILO\) report](#) found that 1.3 billion women were in work in 2018, compared with two billion men – a less than two per cent improvement in the last 27 years.

Men still dominate top job sector

“Glass ceiling” concerns over the lack of upward mobility at work also persist, given that fewer than one third of managers are women.

“Women are still under-represented at the top, a situation that has changed very little in the last 30 years,” ILO's report states. “This is despite that fact that they are likely to be better educated than their male counterparts...education is not the main reason for lower employment rates and lower pay of women, but rather that women do not receive the same dividends for education as men.”

According to the ILO's findings, women's pay is 20 per cent lower than men's, as a global average.

This discrepancy is linked to a career-long “motherhood wage penalty”, which contrasts with the fact that fathers enjoy a “wage premium”.

Worryingly, between 2005 and 2015, there was also a 38 per cent increase in the number of working women who did not have young children, compared to those who had.

This is despite an ILO-Gallup 2017 global report which found that 70 per cent of women prefer working rather than staying at home – something men largely agree with, the organization noted.

'It will take 209 years to achieve parity in unpaid care work'

“A number of factors are blocking equality in employment, and the one playing the largest role is caregiving,” said Manuela Tomei, Director, ILO Conditions of Work and Equality Department. “In the last 20 years, the amount of time women spent on unpaid care and domestic work has hardly fallen”, she said, while men's participation has increased “by just eight minutes a day. At this pace of change it will take more than 200 years to achieve equality in time spent in unpaid care work.”

Women often resort to more 'informal' jobs

In 2018, according to the report, women were more likely to work in low-skilled occupations and face worse employment conditions than men.

Women are also “more exposed” to informal jobs lacking social protection in more than 90 per cent of sub-Saharan countries, 89 per cent of Southern Asian States and almost 75 per cent of Latin American nations.

“Women are also often found in occupations that are the most vulnerable...such as in domestic, home-based or contributing to family work,” the ILO report

notes.

Solutions are available, but it will take a 'quantum leap'

In terms of solutions that can help create a better future of work for women, the report calls for a "quantum leap" of transformative policy choices.

These include creating or reviewing laws to establish equal rights for all sexes in the world of work, and repealing bans on women entering certain professions, or from working at night or underground.

Efforts are also needed to create "time to care", the ILO report stresses, explaining that "greater time sovereignty is needed to allow workers to exercise more choice and control over their working hours."

Those with families would benefit particularly, it explains, while Ms. Tomei added that when men share unpaid care work more equally, "more women are found in managerial positions" as well.