

'Informing is not a crime' UN chief calls for better protection of journalists, press freedom

Paying tribute to reporters around the world who “put their lives on the line” to tell important stories, UN chief António Guterres lamented on Monday that freedom of the press was increasingly “shrinking” worldwide, and called on decision-makers to better protect journalists and media workers.

“We’ve come a long way towards realizing freedom of expression, and other fundamental freedoms. The right to access to information is entrenched in law in over a hundred countries,” said Secretary-General Guterres during the event, which marked the 70th anniversary of the Geneva Association of UN Correspondents ([ACANU](#)). “But despite these advances, in recent years, civic space has been shrinking worldwide at an alarming rate”, he explained.

In just over a decade, more than 1,000 journalists have been killed while carrying out their work. In nine out of 10 cases, no one was held accountable. Last year alone, the UN agency advocating for freedom of the press, [UNESCO](#), reported that at least 99 journalists were killed and thousands more were attacked, harassed, detained or imprisoned on spurious charges, without due process. Women journalists are often at greater risk of being targeted, including through online threats of sexual violence.

The Secretary-General stressed that the vast majority of those detained and attacked are local journalists working in their own countries and communities, and that “most of the journalists and media workers killed, injured and detained were covering politics, crime, corruption and human rights,” not conflict.

Calling this state of affairs “outrageous,” the UN chief stated that “when journalists are targeted, societies as a whole pay a price” as “no democracy is complete without press freedom”.

“Journalism and the media are essential to peace, justice, sustainable development and human rights for all – and to the work of the United Nations,” he noted, paying tribute to reporters who “go to the most dangerous places on earth, to bring us important information, to give a voice to people who are being ignored and abused, and to hold the powerful to account”.

“In the two years since I became Secretary-General, the media has brought to light dramatic human suffering in conflict zones, major cases of corruption and nepotism, ethnic cleansing, premeditated sexual and gender-based violence and more, from every corner of the globe,” said Mr. Guterres. “In some cases, these reports were the basis for further investigations by independent observers and human rights reporters”.

The UN chief called on Governments and the international community to “protect journalists and media workers, and to create the conditions they need to do their essential work, and to investigate and prosecute the perpetrators of attacks on them”.

The United Nations [General Assembly](#), the [Security Council](#) and the [Human Rights Council](#) have condemned attacks on journalists and expressed their support for media freedom through many different frameworks and processes, including the [UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity](#), a strategy to support the environment journalists need, to perform their vital work. In addition, the UN General Assembly has designated 2 November as the [International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists](#).

Deploing the increasing amount of misinformation in the digital age, Mr. Guterres went on to explain that the UN is stepping up its work in media and information literacy, to help people with the knowledge and skills they need to detect deliberate disinformation, counter hate-speech and defend media freedom. The organisation is also working on monitoring violence against journalists, “an important indicator for sustainable development”.

Finishing on what he termed “a positive note,” the UN chief said that the digital age is also full of opportunities.

“There are many clear signs that the public is starting to understand how important it is to look for information sources that are authoritative,” said Mr. Guterres. “The public will always need reliable information and analysis provided by free and diverse media,” he noted.

“Your work reminds us that truth never dies, and that our attachment to the fundamental right that is freedom of expressions must also never die... Informing is not a crime,” he concluded.

[UK must end ‘unlawful’ administration of Chagos Archipelago ‘as rapidly as possible,’ top UN court rules](#)

The UK Government is “under an obligation” to end its administration of the Chagos Archipelago “as rapidly as possible” the [International Court of Justice](#), the principal judicial body of the UN, stated in an [Advisory Opinion](#) released on Monday. The Opinion calls the continued administration of the archipelago “unlawful,” and “a wrongful act.”

The Chagos Islands were retained by the United Kingdom during negotiations

over independence for the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius, which came to fruition in 1968. The islands have since been used for defence purposes by the UK and the United States, which established a military base on the island of Diego Garcia.

The entire Chagossian population was forcibly removed from the territory between 1967 and 1973, and prevented from returning. The former islanders are dispersed in several countries, including the UK, Mauritius and Seychelles. For the Court, ending the UK administration of the territory is a necessary step to the full decolonization of Mauritius in a manner “consistent with the right of peoples to self-determination.”

It includes a reminder that all Member States have an obligation to cooperate with the United Nations in bringing about the full decolonization of Mauritius. This would include the resettlement of Mauritian nationals on the Chagos Archipelago, an issue described as relating to the “protection of the human rights of those concerned.”

It states that, after a review of the circumstances in which the Council of Ministers of the colony of Mauritius agreed in principle to the detachment of the Chagos Archipelago, “the Court considers that this detachment was not based on the free and genuine expression of the will of the people concerned.”

The Opinion was delivered following a request by the UN General Assembly, and a request by Mauritius for the British Indian Ocean Territory, which includes the Chagos Archipelago, to be disbanded and the territory returned to the country, as well as a legal challenge by Mauritius to the UK Government’s creation of a marine protected area around islands.

[Not a single child spared the ‘mind-boggling violence’ of Yemen’s war](#)

Four years of “mind-boggling violence” in Yemen “has not spared a single child”, a top UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) official said on Monday, on the eve of a pledging conference in Geneva to help alleviate the suffering of millions across the country.

“In Yemen today, nearly 1.2 million children continue to live in 31 active conflict zones including Hudaydah, Taizz, Hajjah and Sa’da – in areas witnessing heavy, [war-related violence](#)”, said Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

Since the [Stockholm Agreement](#) was reached following UN-brokered consultations last December between the Yemeni Government and Houthi rebel leaders, not

enough has changed for the children there, the senior agency official declared.

The impact of the conflict in Yemen runs deep and has not spared a single child – *UNICEF Regional Director*

Every day since then, he said, children have been killed or injured, mostly while playing outdoors or on their way to or from school.

“The impact of the conflict in Yemen runs deep and has not spared a single child”, spelled out Mr. Cappelaere. “Mind-boggling violence over the past four years, high levels of poverty, and decades of conflicts, neglect and deprivation, are putting a heavy strain on Yemeni society, tearing apart its social fabric – fundamental for any society and especially for children”.

UNICEF and its humanitarian partners have stepped-up efforts to tackle the world’s largest humanitarian crisis, with the World Bank and UNICEF providing 1.5 million of the country’s poorest families with emergency cash assistance, to help prevent illegal child labour practices, marriage or recruitment into rebel forces.

“In 2019, UNICEF is appealing for \$542 million to continue responding to the massive needs of children in Yemen,” the Regional Director said.

Noting that generosity alone “will not bring an end to children’s suffering in Yemen”, he again called on all warring parties to “put an end to violence in hotspots and across all of Yemen, protect civilians, keep children out of harm’s way and allow humanitarian deliveries to children and their families wherever they are in the country.”

As the international community meets in Geneva for a high-level pledging event for the humanitarian crisis on Tuesday, UNICEF appealed for “unconditional contributions to provide lifesaving assistance” to Yemen’s children and urged a “massive re-investment” in the country to help Yemeni children have the future every parent aspires to for their own children.

“This is the only way that Yemen can stand back on its feet, stressed Mr. Cappelaere. “If not, Yemen will be riddled with violence and its future will hang by a thread – with disastrous consequences for children.”

Darfur peace process at a ‘standstill’ as demonstrations against Sudanese

Government continue

Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, Bintou Keita, was briefing members on the operation of the UN-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur ([UNAMID](#)), conceding that it has “yet to be assessed” how recent political developments in Khartoum will impact peace in the troubled Darfur region.

Against the backdrop of more than ten weeks of protests across Sudan against fuel and cash shortages, which threaten to bring an end to his 30-years in power, President Bashir declared a state of emergency on Friday.

The president reportedly sacked his vice-president after declaring the state of national emergency, adding those duties to the current defense minister’s portfolio. He also dissolved elected regional governments, replacing them with “18 new governors from the military and security apparatus”, Ms. Keita told the Council, adding that “the Sudan armed forces are tasked to deliver law and order, in addition to national defense”.

“These developments have come at a time when the Darfur peace process had come to a standstill – once again – in the context of the ongoing demonstrations against the economic and political conditions in Sudan”, she continued.



UN Department of Field Support/Cartographic Section

Map No. 4458 Rev.2, UNITED NATIONS March 2012, by UN Department of Field Support/Cartographic Section

To enlarge, click [here](#).

The Mission was established in 2007, following a brutal civil war that broke out in 2003 that led to the deaths of tens of thousands of Darfuris and the displacement of nearly two million civilians, amidst allegations of ethnic cleansing of non-Arabs. During the fighting between Sudanese Government troops, militias and other armed rebel groups, widespread atrocities, including murder and rape, were reported.

At the end of last month, President Bashir declared an open-ended cessation of hostilities and 12 days later, government opposition factions extended for three more months a unilateral cessation of hostility in Darfur, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States.

“The impact of the recent developments in Khartoum on the dynamics related to the peace process in Darfur is yet to be assessed,” she explained, but the replacement of all civilian governors “will have a bearing on the process and some rebel groups have demonstrated a stiffening of their position”, she added.

On a recent fact-finding visit to Sudan, Ms. Keita met with internationally displaced persons (IDPs) who “all expressed their deep concern over the departure of UNAMID in the absence of trusted and professional law enforcement agencies.”

“Conflict-related sexual violence remains a threat to the population in Darfur, especially displaced women and girls who face particular risk when they engage in livelihood activities outside IDP camps,” stressed Ms. Keita. “The fear of sexual violence also hampers the return of civilians to their places of origin.

UNAMID and the UN Country Team (UNCT) are continuing to work together towards a smooth transition from peacekeeping in Darfur to sustainable peacebuilding, said Ms. Keita who added that new Mission Headquarters in Zalingei is now “fully operational” and the office of the Joint Special Representative has relocated to Khartoum.

Flagging the “considerable political, humanitarian, and peacekeeping investments” made by the UN, she spelled out that it was “our collective responsibility to ensure that the exit of UNAMID does not create a vacuum that leads to persistent local level tensions or new risk factors”.

On drawing down the Mission in less than two months, she said that international efforts should be made “in earnest” to mobilize the needed resources to support UNAMID’s exit “while focusing on a difficult economic and social and humanitarian context in the larger Sudan.”

Noting that there are still close to two million IDPs in Darfur, she emphasized that “human rights, issues, including the protection of women, children, and vulnerable youth from violence, remain significant,” and that the local capacity for rule of law needs strengthening.

Ms. Keita concluded by saying that “UNAMID will spare no efforts” in its focus on protecting civilians, human rights, rule of law, the humanitarian situation and disarmament.

[Make progress or risk redundancy, UN chief warns world disarmament body](#)

A new global vision for arms control is needed and States must not “sleepwalk” into a new nuclear arms race, the [UN Secretary-General](#) said on Monday.

In an address to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, António Guterres highlighted several threats to world security, from chemical weapons to lethal autonomous weapons and hypersonic missiles.

His comments – which called for action to “alleviate tensions and take us back from the nuclear brink” – come ahead of a second planned summit later this week between US President Donald Trump and the leader of North Korea, known officially as the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), Kim Jong-un.

“Key components of the international arms control architecture are collapsing,” the UN chief said. “The continued use of chemical weapons with impunity is driving new proliferation. Thousands of civilian lives continue to be lost, because of illicit small arms and the use in urban areas of explosive weapons designed for open battlefields.”

In addition, new weapon technologies were intensifying risks “in ways we do not yet understand and cannot even imagine”, the UN Secretary-General added.

The past 70 years have seen major successes in disarmament initiatives, he insisted, noting that the most successful ones were those that were led by the “major powers”.

But these gains are in “increasing jeopardy” amid a new arms race rendered “particularly dangerous” because of renewed uncertainty over nuclear weapons, Mr. Guterres said.

Highlighting the dangers of allowing the 1988 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty between Russia and the US and Russia to lapse, the UN chief warned that European States would be among the first where any insecurity “will be keenly felt”.

Efforts must also be made to extend the “New START” arms reduction treaty between the US and Russia before it expires in 2021, he continued, since it

was “the only international legal instrument limiting the size of the world’s two largest nuclear arsenals”.

Its inspection provisions represented important confidence-building measures that have benefited everyone, Mr. Guterres said, noting that “in the absence of trust, governments had sought “the strictest verification measures”.

Such arms control procedures have been “one of the hallmarks” of international security for 50 years, he continued, adding that the joint Russia-US effort had resulted in global stockpiles of nuclear weapons decreasing to only one-sixth of what they were in 1985.

Today, however, “that legacy is in grave danger”, the UN Secretary-General said, before reminding the forum that only last year, [he launched his Disarmament Agenda – “Securing Our Common Future”](#) – with 40 specific commitments to support disarmament.

His Agenda was a guide for action he noted, but also created to support Member States who have a “responsibility” to develop transparency and confidence-building tools that would help to “alleviate tensions and take us back from the nuclear brink”.

Such steps should take into account regional nuclear challenges, the Secretary-General maintained, as well as technological developments including cyber security, artificial intelligence and the next generation of hypersonic weapons that could be used to launch attacks at unprecedented speed.



UN Photo/Antoine Tardy

The UN Conference on Disarmament body, during the opening day of it’s High-Level Segment, 25 February, 2019.

While noting that a majority of Member States sought the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, he noted that the Conference on Disarmament – the world’s only multilateral disarmament negotiation forum – has not

undertaken any disarmament negotiations in two decades.

This had resulted in arms control negotiations increasingly taking place elsewhere, including the [UN General Assembly](#), or outside the United Nations framework, Mr. Guterres said.

“The history of this chamber is a cautionary tale,” he explained. “The failure of the Council of the League of Nations to grapple with the most pressing security challenges of its day was an important factor in its slide into irrelevance.”