

## [As Saudi women take the wheel, UN chief hopes end of driving ban creates more opportunities for kingdom's women and girls](#)

United Nations [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) has welcomed the lifting on Sunday of the driving ban for women in Saudi Arabia and expressed his hope that ending the prohibition will generate more new opportunities for women in the Kingdom.

A royal decree was [issued in September](#) announcing that the longstanding ban would end in June 2018. At that time, the Secretary-General and other senior UN officials said they saw the move as an important first step that could lead to increased participation of women in the job market, among other areas of public life.

Saudi Arabia ended the prohibition on women driving ended in at midnight on 24 June.

In a [statement](#) issued Sunday by his spokesperson, Mr. Guterres paid tribute to the women of Saudi Arabia for their efforts in achieving this important legal milestone, "which should contribute to women's economic and social mobility and the development of the country."

"He looks forward to witnessing Saudi Arabia's continuing journey toward substantive equality for women and girls," said the statement.

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## [UN chief condemns explosion at election rally in Zimbabwe that injured dozens, including senior politicians](#)

The [UN Secretary-General](#) has condemned an explosion which took place at an election rally in Zimbabwe on Saturday, not long after President Emmerson Mnangagwa left the stage after addressing the crowd, according to news reports.

The President, who also leads the ruling party, Zanu-PF, reportedly described the bombing in Bulawayo as an attempt on his life, and appealed for peace and national unity ahead of elections due to take place on 30 July. He vowed that the explosion would not derail the vote.

Mr. Mnangagwa took over the Presidency last November, following the resignation of Robert Mugabe, who ruled Zimbabwe for 37 years. The country's main opposition leader, Nelson Chamisa of the Movement for Democratic Change, also condemned the attack, saying that any political violence was "totally unacceptable", according to media reports.

In [a statement](#) released by his [Spokesperson](#) on Sunday, UN chief António Guterres said he was "disturbed" by news of the attack

"The Secretary-General condemns such acts of violence and calls for the perpetrators to be brought to justice. He wishes the injured a quick recovery," said the statement.

Two of the country's Vice Presidents was among the more than 40 reportedly hurt by the blast, as well as the Zanu-PF chairperson, together with members of a television crew from the state broadcasting network, and security personnel.

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## [Guterres expresses 'grave concern' following explosion at large political rally for reform-minded Ethiopian Prime Minister](#)

One person has reportedly died, and dozens were injured after an explosion ripped through a large crowd at a rally for the new Prime Minister of Ethiopia on Saturday, which the UN chief described as a matter of "grave concern".

Secretary-General [António Guterres](#) condemned the act of violence, which – according to news reports – Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, described as "an unsuccessful attempt by forces who do not want to see Ethiopia united".

Earlier this week, the UN chief [welcomed the "positive steps"](#) taken by Mr. Ahmed to accept and implement a stalled 2002 peace agreement with neighbouring Eritrea, which would end decades of conflict and tension between the two Horn of Africa countries.

The Ethiopian leader was reportedly escorted from the major political rally

in the capital, Addis Ababa, shortly after the blast, which resulted from a grenade being thrown into the crowd.

Mr. Abiy became Prime Minister, following the resignation of his predecessor in February, and is the first leader to hail from the majority Oromo ethnic group, which has been at the centre of anti-government protests for the past three years.

[A statement](#) from the [Spokesperson of the Secretary-General](#) said that “he conveys his condolences to the families of the victims and wishes a speedy recovery to those injured,” adding that the UN chief “expresses his solidarity with the Government and People of Ethiopia.”

The Ethiopian Prime Minister has implemented a large number of political reforms since taking office, and previously served in government as minister for science and technology.

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## [UN chief calls for ‘immediate end’ to escalation of fighting in southwestern Syria, as thousands are displaced](#)

The UN Secretary-General on Friday expressed his grave concern for thousands of civilians caught up in an escalation of fighting across southwestern Syria, close to the border with Jordan.

In [a statement](#) released by his Spokesman, António Guterres, said that an uptick in conflict involving both ground offensives and aerial bombardments, “had resulted in the displacement of thousands of civilians, the majority of whom are moving towards the Jordanian border.”

“The Secretary-General is also concerned at the significant risks these offensives pose to regional security”, the statement continued.

According to news reports, Syrian government forces went on the offensive against opposition held territory on Friday in the region, which is of major strategic concern, close to the border of both Jordan and Israel, where tensions over the Golan Heights provoked clashes between Israeli defence forces and Syrian troops just a few weeks ago.

The UN chief called for “an immediate end to the current military escalation” and urged all parties to the more than seven-year war, “to respect their obligations under international law and international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure.”

“Recalling the de-escalation and ceasefire arrangements that have provided relative calm in southwestern Syria over the past year, the Secretary-General urges all to exercise restraint and uphold these commitments as a matter of priority,” the statement concluded.

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## [Stigmatized, shunned and shamed, International Widows’ Day draws attention to their unique needs](#)

The loss of a spouse or partner is often devastating, but for many women it [is magnified](#) by a “long-term struggle” for basic needs, human rights and dignity, according to [UN Women](#), in a message to mark International Widows’ Day.

On its website dedicated to the Day, the United Nations calls the abuse of widows and their children “one of the most [serious violations](#) of human rights and obstacles to development today.”

“We must consider both the [vital role widows play](#) in our society, the ways in which gender inequality impacts their ability to thrive on their own, and the specific recognition and attention that they need from all of us,” underscored Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women in her message for the Day.

Across a wide range of countries, religions and ethnic groups, when a woman’s husband dies, she is left destitute – often illiterate or uneducated with no access to credit or other economic resources – rendering her unable to support herself or her family, according to the UN.

According to UN Women’s 2018 [Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), nearly one-in-ten of the estimated 258 million widows globally live in extreme poverty – with little or no input to policies impacting their survival.

“When widows with young children lose property, income and other assets—especially in the absence of support for unpaid care work—they may be forced to take their daughters out of school to work or help take care of siblings and housework,” continued Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka.

“This is how gender inequality perpetuates itself, continuing the cycle of disadvantage for girls and women for decades to come,” she added.

In 2010 the General Assembly set aside [23 June](#) each year to pay tribute to the millions of living spouses who endure extreme poverty, ostracism,

violence, homelessness and discrimination.

While violence against women is one of the most widespread violations of human rights, widows may be at particularly high risk.

In many countries widows find themselves the victims of physical and mental violence – including sexual abuse – related to inheritance, land and property disputes.

Moreover, they often endure poor nutrition, inadequate shelter and vulnerability to violence – combined with a lack of access to health care. Although they are frequently rape victims and, through economic insecurity, sometimes driven to sex work, their gynecological needs often go unaddressed.

Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka highlighted that to empower women, barriers to justice must be removed and social stigma norms tackled.

“On this International Widows’ Day, let us remember that widows are heroes, working hard to keep families, communities, and societies together following the loss of their spouses,” said the UN Women chief.

“As societies we owe it to the widows of the world to give them the respect, visibility and unique support they need,” she concluded.