

It's time to 'eliminate the scourge of conflict-related sexual violence', urges UN chief

The effects of conflict-related sexual violence echo across generations, in the form of trauma, stigma, and unwanted pregnancy, said the UN chief on Tuesday, describing the scourge as “a threat to our collective security” and “a stain on our common humanity.”

That was the central message from [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) to mark the [International Day](#) for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict.

“Children conceived through wartime rape often [struggle](#) with issues of identity and belonging for decades after the guns have fallen silent,” explained Mr. Guterres.

“They may be left in a legal limbo, or at risk of becoming stateless,” he continued. “They are vulnerable to recruitment, trafficking and exploitation, with broad implications for peace and security, as well as human rights.”

These women and children are sometimes seen as affiliates of armed and violent extremist groups, rather than as victims and survivors
– *UN Chief António Guterres*

Many of those children scarred by violence in war are rarely accepted by society, have been labelled “bad blood” or “children of the enemy,” and are alienated from their mothers’ social groups, according to the UN.

Meanwhile, unsafe abortion, following violent rape, remains a leading cause of maternal mortality in conflict-affected settings.

“Their mothers may be marginalized and shunned by their own families and communities. These women and children are sometimes seen as affiliates of armed and violent extremist groups, rather than as victims and survivors,” Mr. Guterres maintained.

Moreover, the issue of children born of war has been missing from both the international human rights framework and from peace and security discourse, rendering them a voiceless category of victims.

Under this year’s theme, “The Plight and Rights of Children Born of War,” the Day encourages solidarity with the survivors who have endured multiple ordeals, in the wake of sexual violence.

“On the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, we amplify the voices of these forgotten victims of war, who suffer stigma,

shame and exclusion in societies polarized by armed conflict,” spelled out Mr. Guterres.

He underscored that the UN stands ready to work with governments, civil society, traditional and religious leaders, and all partners “to support children born of rape in wartime and their mothers, and those working on the frontlines to support them.”

“Let us reaffirm our global commitment to eliminate the scourge of conflict-related sexual violence and to provide justice, services and support to all those affected,” concluded the Secretary-General.

Rise in violent conflict shows prevention ‘more necessary than ever’: UN chief

With the number of people killed in armed conflict rising tenfold since 2005, preventive action is “more necessary than ever,” United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said on Tuesday.

The UN chief was speaking to journalists in Norway, where he is attending an annual retreat for international conflict mediators and other high-level decision makers.

Mr. Guterres gave compelling reasons why the international community must do everything to prevent and solve conflict.

“The number of countries with violent conflicts is the highest in the last 30 years. If we compare with 2007 and consider the number of violent situations that can be qualified as war according to the number of casualties, they have tripled,” he said.

Prevention is more necessary than ever, and the more difficult conflict resolution is, the more important prevention becomes – UN Chief António Guterres

“At the same time, taking as a reference 2005, when we had the lowest number of people being killed in battle, we have now tenfold that level, which means that the situation is indeed deteriorating in the world. That means that prevention is more necessary than ever, and the more difficult conflict resolution is, the more important prevention becomes.”

For Mr. Guterres, mediation is “an absolutely fundamental instrument” in this

regard.

This includes formal interventions but also what he called “backdoor mediation”, as well as initiatives that involve affected communities.

The Secretary-General is among more than 100 participants taking part in the two-day Oslo Forum, which wraps up in the Norwegian capital on Wednesday.

Attendance is by invitation only, and the informal discussions will cover peacemaking issues and challenges, including the situations in Syria, Libya, Yemen and Mali.

Mr. Guterres has made conflict prevention a cornerstone of his tenure and has consistently pushed for “a surge in diplomacy for peace,” even before taking office in January 2017.

His establishment of a High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation later that year underlines this priority.

The Board’s 18 members—nine women and nine men—include former global leaders, renowned experts and internationally recognized personalities will support the UN in working more effectively with regional organizations, non-governmental groups and others involved in mediation around the world.

Mediation meeting in Finland

The Secretary-General joined members at their second meeting, held in Finland’s capital, Helsinki, on Monday.

Mr. Guterres also delivered an address at Kulturantaa, the summer residence of the country’s President, where he again highlighted his concerns about conflict, including its relation to global terrorism.

He also touched on the issue of nuclear non-proliferation and the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Turning to climate change, Mr. Guterres described it as “a main accelerator of many other problems around the world.”

He reported that the level of greenhouse gas emissions rose in 2017: the first time in recent years.

“It is clear that we are far from doing enough in relation to the risks that we face due to climate change,” he said.

[Space science ‘superpowers’ can light](#)

the way to success for girls in 'STEM' fields, hears UN forum

On its opening day, a major United Nations forum on the peaceful uses of outer space, was issued a clear challenge to break through the so-called "glass ceiling" that prevents women and girls from achieving their full potential; especially in the field of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

It was important to foster an understanding that "space for women" would be among the priorities moving forward, Markus Woltran, from the UN Office of Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) told *UN News*. He was the moderator of a panel discussion on space for women, taking place on Monday.

He explained that three steps could be taken to reach that goal, including getting more girls and women interested in STEM fields – science, technology, engineering and mathematics – secondly, using space as a motivating factor to create that interest; and third, keep their interest and involvement in STEM high, by removing the glass-ceiling that blocks their pathway to success.

Astrophysicist Ersilia Vaudo, the Chief Diversity Officer at the European Space Agency and a panel participant, also reiterated the importance of the "element of wonder and excitement" to light up career paths in space science.

"I used to say particularly for girls, but it holds true for everyone, that space and science gives superpowers," she told *UN News*, highlighting that STEM offers dimensions that people will not experience otherwise.

The field of space, in particular, is important for innovation, she added, noting rich and fulfilling career paths, ranging from climate action, to space exploration and now, living for long periods of time beyond earth's orbit.

We have been able to do things together that were not possible to do alone, like landing a robot on a comet, 500 million kilometers away from Earth – *Astrophysicist Ersilia Vaudo*

"These challenges will need the talents of all," said Ms. Vaudo, adding that workforces must be inclusive, in addition to being diverse, in order to realize everyone's full potential.

Citing the example of the European Space Agency, which has 22 member countries, speaking 18 different languages, she continued: "We have been able to do things together that were not possible to do alone, like landing a robot on a comet, 500 million kilometers away from Earth."

"This is because we have been able to put all these talents and competencies

together and make wonderful things happen.”

Space and Industries

Also on Monday, key actors from the space industry deliberated on how the industry can contribute to the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

Panel moderator, Jorge Del Rio Vera, Scientific Affairs Officer at UNOOSA, told UN News that the space industry is eager to engage with the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals, and recognizes the huge potential of being involved.

Partnership with a wide range of stakeholders, can also serve as an important driver for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as noted in Goal 17, “Partnership for the Goals.”

The challenge with the space industry, however, Mr. Del Rio Vera added, is that actors do not know “how” to go about forging such partnerships.

“This was a good opportunity for them to present their work, and what they can do for the 2030 Agenda and how to get involved,” he said, noting that UNOOSA has developed guidelines on how the space industry can collaborate with the UN on sustainable development.

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Nearly three million more displaced year-on-year, warns refugee agency chief, but solutions are within reach

The number of people forced to flee their homes last year rose by nearly three million to 68.5 million, the head of the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, said on Tuesday, warning that the world’s displacement hotspots “are becoming hotter”.

Citing ongoing, protracted violence around the globe and a lack of solutions to conflicts as reasons for the increase, [Filippo Grandi](#) said that “continuous pressure on civilians” caught up in fighting, had pushed them to leave their homes.

More than two thirds of all refugees worldwide originated from only a handful of countries, the High Commissioner told journalists in Geneva.

Top of the list is Syria, where seven years of brutal fighting have forced

more than 6 million people to seek shelter abroad, followed by Afghanistan (2.6 million) and South Sudan (2.4 million).

Responding to a question about ongoing concerns over 1.5 million Syrian refugees in neighbouring host countries, including Lebanon, the High Commissioner stressed that “it’s not a question of ‘if’, but ‘when’” they will return to Syria – once conditions allow.

New disputes in 2017 were also significant contributors to global displacement.

These include the exodus of more than 700,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh last year, the UNHCR chief said, adding that it is still not safe for them to return, as well as 1.5 million Venezuelans who had sought shelter in neighbouring countries in Latin America.

The High Commissioner also expressed concern for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where violence has spread to formerly peaceful areas of the vast country and caused displacement figures to double in 2017, to 4.4 million.

The report also found that 85 per cent of the 68.5 million displaced last year came from poor or middle-income countries.

This, Mr. Grandi added, “should be an element dispelling the notion” that the so-called crisis is only in the rich world, “which it is not”.

He added: “It continues to be a crisis mostly of the poor world – so, people from poor countries moving to poor countries, or staying within their country, as displaced.”

In addition, 70 per cent of the world’s displaced are nationals of just 10 countries, according to the UNHCR report.

This is also significant, Mr. Grandi said, because “it means, frankly, that if there were solutions to conflicts to these countries – or some of them at least – this number could start to come down. But we haven’t seen any significant progress in peacemaking or peacebuilding in any of these 10 countries.”

Despite the rise in displacement driven by persecution and violence and the lack of conflict resolution, the High Commissioner struck a positive note, saying that UNHCR is helping to find solutions to the pressures caused by mass displacement.

To date, 14 countries, including in Latin America and Africa, have implemented positive measures to cope with an influx of refugees, the UNHCR chief said, noting that his agency continues to coordinate international efforts to create a fairer protection system for people forced to flee their countries.

The upcoming [Global Compact](#) on Refugees follows the 2016 [New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants](#), in which all 193 UN Member States agreed that the responsibility for helping all those in need of international protection must

be borne more equitably and predictably.

UNHCR has been engaged in consultations with Governments and other stakeholders to develop a draft compact which Mr. Grandi will present to the General Assembly later this year.

Hundreds of thousands of lives still lost each year to small arms, UN conference hears

Government representatives are meeting at United Nations Headquarters to review global action to address the illegal flow of revolvers, pistols, assault rifles, machine guns and other similar weapons.

These small arms and light weapons, which end up on battlefields or urban streets and elsewhere, are a big problem for the world, according to the UN body that has organized the [two-week conference](#), which opened in New York on Monday.

Small arms fire kills over half a million people each year, UN Chef de Cabinet Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti told the gathering.

She said while those pulling the trigger range from soldiers and police officers, to civilians – sometimes acting in self-defence – most are members of armed groups, terrorist organizations, criminal gangs, or national security forces who are abusing their power.

“Regulating small arms is a unique challenge,” Ms. Viotti stated, delivering a message on behalf of the UN Secretary-General.

“It is not simply a question of addressing government stockpiles. Out of some 900 million small arms in the world, three-quarters are in civilian hands – the majority unlicensed.”

The senior UN official said controlling and regulating the flow of small arms and light weapons requires action that goes beyond national security institutions.

This includes initiatives such as providing alternative livelihoods to former combatants, or working with grass-roots organizations and community violence reduction programmes.

Ms. Viotti added that small arms control is also a prerequisite for stability and conflict prevention, which are critical to maintaining peace and achieving sustainable development.

She pointed out that small arms and light weapons are also a factor in large-scale human rights abuses and the forced displacement of civilians.

“Only through sustainable development will we be able to build just, peaceful and inclusive societies and achieve lasting peace,” she said.

However, she said that addressing the root causes of violence and conflict was integral to reaching these goals.

The conference underway at the UN follows on from a 2001 Programme of Action by which countries committed to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

Nations have been meeting every six years to review progress on its implementation, with this year’s conference marking the third such gathering.

The organizers behind RevCon3, as the conference is known, point to new concerns such as the increased links between transnational organized crime, illicit small arms trafficking and terrorism; and the use of emerging technologies such as 3-D printing in the underground trafficking business.