

Nicaragua: UN rights office calls for investigation as protest-related violence claims over 100 lives

The United Nations human rights arm has called on Nicaragua to conduct a prompt, transparent and independent investigation into allegations of serious rights violations carried out during anti-Governments protests, which have claimed more than 100 lives since mid-April, and injured over 1,000.

According to Liz Throssell, a spokesperson for the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR), violence spiked alarmingly this week with reports that at least 16 people were killed – many allegedly shot by police and armed pro-Government groups.

The latest killings took place on Thursday, at a march attended by hundreds of thousands, according to news reports, to mark Nicaragua's Mother's Day. The event was reportedly held to honour the mothers of students killed at previous rallies.

"We urge the Nicaraguan authorities to carry out effective, prompt, independent, impartial and transparent [investigations into all allegations of serious human rights violations](#) that have occurred in the last few weeks," Ms. Throssell said at a regular news briefing in Geneva on Friday.

"It is essential that those responsible for such serious human rights violations are held to account, and that victims and their relatives are accorded effective remedy, including equal and effective access to justice."

There are also reports that, in the early hours of 30 May, the Nicaraguan army arrested and detained six human rights defenders near the country's border with Costa Rica. Furthermore, journalists, students, and members of the Catholic Church and other groups have reportedly been subjected to death threats, violence and intimidation.

Calling for the prompt release of the rights defenders, Ms. Throssell urged the Government to "publicly express" its support and respect for the work they do, and to give clear instructions to the relevant authorities to prevent further aggression and intimidation.

She also underscored the need for the authorities to guarantee all legal safeguards, including access to lawyers, as well as to respect the absolute prohibition on torture and ill-treatment.

The spokesperson also reiterated OHCHR's request to the to the Nicaraguan authorities to grant it immediate access to the country so that it can, in line with its mandate, gather first-hand information about what happened during the protests and promote concrete actions to prevent further human rights violations.

End the 'harmful narrative'; migration is a net-gain for Africa, finds UN report

The large-scale migration of people within Africa tends to boost growth and lifts the continent's whole economy, a new United Nations report has said, urging the world to dispel misconceptions and "harmful narratives" targeting migration.

Cross-border movement offers "[a chance for a better life](#), with the social and economic benefits extending to both source and destination countries, as well as future generations," said Mukhisa Kituyi, the Secretary-General of the [UN Conference on Trade and Development](#) (UNCTAD), launching the agency's [Economic Development in Africa](#) report on Thursday.

"Our analysis shows this to be true for millions of African migrants and their families," he said, adding that public perception, "particularly as it relates to international African migration, is rife with misconceptions that have become part of a divisive, misleading and harmful narrative."

According to the report, remittances travelling back home from migrant workers both outside and inside Africa rose – on average – from \$38.4 billion between 2005-2007, to \$64.9 billion, during the two-year period up to the end of 2016. By that point, remittances accounted for over half of the capital flows within the continent. Likewise, migrants contributed nearly 20 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Côte d'Ivoire according to figures from 2008, and 13 per cent in Rwanda (2012 figures).

Overall, some 19 million international migrants moved within Africa, and 17 million Africans left the continent during last year. The continent was also the destination for about 5.5 million people from outside, the report found.

Close relation between trade and migration

The report also provides evidence of the "intimate correlation" between migration and trade – two sides of the same coin – said Junior Roy Davis, the lead author of the report.

"Africa is on the cusp of tremendous change," he said, noting the recently agreed African Continental Free Trade Area and the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons.

"In this context the report contributes to a better understanding of the implications of intra-African migration for the continent's socio-economic transformation," added Mr. Davis.

Continent hosting majority of the world's refugees and displaced persons

However, alongside the numbers of migrants moving and working within Africa, the continent also has some of the [highest number of people forced from their homes](#) due to conflict or natural disasters.

On top of the development gains lost at home, there is a significant economic and social burden faced by host countries, leaving many migrants dependent on international humanitarian aid.

Countries back 'ambitious and comprehensive' reform of UN development system

The United Nations General Assembly on Thursday gave the green light to a bold new plan to make sustainable development a reality, described by UN chief António Guterres as “the most ambitious and comprehensive transformation of the UN development system in decades.”

The UN Secretary-General said the reform package paved the way for a new era of “national ownership” of development, supported by the whole UN system, in a tailored fashion, allowing countries to pursue sustainable economic and social development.

“It sets the foundations to [reposition sustainable development](#) at the heart of the United Nations,” he said, after the 193-member intergovernmental body adopted the reform resolution by consensus.

“And it gives practical meaning to our collective promise to advance the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) for everyone, everywhere – with poverty eradication as its first goal, leaving no one behind,” he explained. “In the end, reform is about putting in place the mechanisms to make a real difference in the lives of people.”

It sets the foundations to reposition sustainable development at the heart of the United Nations –*UN chief Guterres*

The reform process will mean significant changes to the setup, leadership, accountability mechanisms and capacities of the whole UN development system; ensuring it meets national needs not only for implementing the SDGs, but also in meeting the climate change commitments made through the 2015 Paris

Agreement.

Otherwise known as the Global Goals, the SDGs are a universal call to action, to end poverty and hunger; to protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

More specifically, the reform gives Resident Coordinators – the most senior UN development officials at the country level – a dedicated, independent role in coordinating the activities of all the various UN entities working locally, which make up UN Country Teams.

Mr. Guterres noted that being a Resident Coordinator is “one of the most challenging jobs” at the UN, and the 129 Resident Coordinators covering 165 countries are working hard “in some cases against all odds.”

Currently, successful coordination depends too much on individual personalities and the goodwill of those involved, he said, highlighting that this reform will help resolve “a historic deficit in our coordination function” and accentuate strategies that work and are effective.

With the reform, the functions of the resident coordinator are now separated from those of the resident representative of the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

“You will be able to count on impartial and empowered Resident Coordinators – fully devoted to the needs that you require to fulfil the 2030 Agenda, drawing on experience, skills and knowledge across the system,” Mr. Guterres said.

“Our teams on the ground will now be better able to tailor their presence, capacities, skillsets and overall response to your priorities,” he added.

Speaking before the adoption of the landmark reform, General Assembly President Miroslav Lajčák, said that “this resolution, today, is not seen by everyone, as the perfect document.”

It is a legitimate outcome of a multilateral process. It shows what we are capable of –*Assembly President Lajčák*

“But it is a legitimate outcome of a [multilateral process](#). It shows what we are capable of,” he added.

The UN Secretariat said that the reform implementation will require some \$255 million annually.

In an [interview](#) with *UN News*, UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed said that the changes will allow “a much more independent and impartial leader” at the country level to pull a team together.

“What I would say is that, in previous times, we’ve sort of had a conductor that, through no fault of their own, is conducting a cacophony – the left

hand does not know what the right hand is doing,” she said, adding that “today, we have an opportunity to make a symphony for the SDGs. That’s really the difference on the ground.”

Ms. Mohammed stressed that the reform establishes clear accountability for the money spent, and highlighted the importance of partnerships among stakeholders, including Member States and the private sector.

“The assets of the United Nations are its people. We will invest in them. We will try to lead them, inspire them, incentivize them, and create the environments to make them go for gold,” she said.

[UN agencies join forces against environmental risks that cause 12.6 million deaths a year](#)

Two United Nations agencies are combining their expertise to counter the growing threat of extreme weather, climate change and air pollution, which cause more than 12.6 million deaths a year, it was announced on Thursday.

The legal agreement, signed by the World Meteorological Organization ([WMO](#)) and the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) in Geneva, commits the agencies to protect communities using “relevant and authoritative” data on the weather, climate and atmosphere.

WMO spokesperson Clare Nullis said that there was a “lot of political will” between the heads of the two organizations – WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas, and WHO Director-General Tedros Ghebreyesus – who shook on the deal on Wednesday after “decades of collaboration” between the agencies.

In practical terms the arrangement will ensure a better flow of information between the agencies, Ms Nullis explained, adding that air pollution and UV forecasts from national weather centres, reach the health professionals on the ground “who are dealing on a daily basis, with the impact of environmental risks to health”.

In a statement released on Thursday, WMO said that the deal’s “overarching aim” was to promote policies and practices which are beneficial “both to public health and which cut greenhouse gases”.

One of the initiative’s main targets is to prevent people dying prematurely from illnesses related to air pollution including strokes, heart disease respiratory conditions and cancer.

Annually, an estimated seven million people die from air-pollution related diseases, WMO noted.

The agency also highlighted the threat from climate change, noting that Hurricane Maria claimed 64 lives in Puerto Rico last September, only for new research to reveal that it actually led to more than 4,600 deaths, “because of a breakdown in healthcare, electricity and infrastructure”.

WMO’s role in coordinating Member States’ seasonal rainfall and temperature forecasts will also help in the fight against many diseases such as malaria and dengue fever, which depend on these variables.

Similarly, scientific drought predictions could help protect farming communities during the dry season, while extreme heat warnings are increasingly used to reduce the health impact of heatwaves.

In its statement WMO noted that the plan is line with internationally agreed [Sustainable Development Goals](#), and their focus on helping populations to implement disaster risk reduction measures and adjust to climate change.

This involves placing “special emphasis” on reaching the most vulnerable populations in developing countries, Small Island Developing States and urban areas.

Gaza is ‘on the brink’ warns UN envoy, urging more international intervention

Rocket fire this week across the border between Gaza and Israel shows how close the region is “to the brink of war” a senior United Nations official warned on Wednesday, urging the international community to do more to help Israelis and Palestinians return to the negotiating table.

Briefing the Security Council, Nikolay Mladenov, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, said that the recent hostilities marked the most serious escalation since the 2014 conflict between Hamas and Israel.

Quoting reports from the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), Mr. Mladenov informed the Council that that between 28 and 30 May, 216 different projectiles, rockets and mortar shells, were fired from Gaza towards Israel. One projectile hit a school playground and another caused damage to a house.

In response, Israeli jets carried out strikes on 65 Hamas and Islamic Jihad targets in Gaza and destroyed a two-kilometre tunnel near the Kerem Shalom crossing, he added, noting that no casualties or serious injuries were reported as a result of either strikes, he said.

Since early morning on Wednesday, Mr. Mladenov added that the situation has “quieted down,” stressing that the calm must be “preserved at all costs.”

[“No one in Gaza can afford another war.”](#) No one has the right to play with the lives of two million people who have lived through hell in the last decade. No one should live in fear of an indiscriminate rocket attack,” he said.

“Everyone has a responsibility to do their part to de-escalate and step back from the brink in the interests of their own people and the future of their own children.”

Urgent steps needed to prevent situation from deteriorating – UN envoy

In his briefing, Mr. Mladenov also told the Palestinians in Gaza that their plight and suffering has been heard, and that work will be done to ensure that they have a “future beyond mere survival.”

“A future of freedom and development, a future focused on peace and prosperity where you are the masters of your own fate. A future for all Palestinians, under a single, democratic and legitimate Government, living in a State of Palestine side-by-side in peace and security with the State of Israel,” he said, adding that for it to happen, “we need to make sure that calm persists, that the militant build-up ends and that we deny those who want to disrupt peace any opportunity to do so.”

Concluding his remarks, the UN Special Coordinator called on the international community to intensify calls on Israel and Palestine to undertake concrete steps to advance the goal of a just and sustainable peace.

“Such actions must encompass the overarching political objectives: the unification of Gaza and the West Bank under a single, democratic and legitimate Palestinian Authority; an end to the occupation; and a resolution of the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of a two-state solution and in line with previous agreements and relevant UN resolutions,” he said.