

Spirit of compromise needed to combat workplace 'brutalism' – UN labour agency

The head of the United Nations labour agency has called for a new spirit of cooperation and consensus between workers, employers and Governments, to end what he called the “new brutalism” of sexual harassment and violence in the workplace.

Addressing the International Labour Conference on Monday, Guy Ryder, the Director-General of the UN International Labour Organization (ILO) underscored that the “[the spirit of tripartism, compromise, and consensus](#)” is the “precondition of success for the Conference and of the ILO.”

Informally dubbed the “world parliament of labour”, the [Conference](#) is the primary policy making body of the ILO. It is convened annually in the Swiss city, Geneva, and brings together more than 5,000 Government officials, worker representatives and employer delegates from the ILO’s 187 member States.

In his remarks, Mr. Ryder also warned against growing challenges in labour markets across the world, and to multilateralism in general, underlining that the ILO “must be a bulwark against such contagion.”

He also highlighted the need to secure workplaces from any forms of violence or harassment.

Action against sexual harassment must make the difference – ILO head

In particular, action that would really make a difference is needed, to end sexual harassment, said Mr. Ryder – brought into sharp focus by the “Me Too” campaign.

“Our answer to the ever more vocal call for action must be ‘Us Too’,” he stressed.

The ILO chief unveiled his new report entitled “The Women at Work Initiative: The push for Equality”, which calls for innovative action to close the persistent gender gap.

He also unveiled new data on workers in the occupied Arab territories, reporting that they faced a grim situation overall.

In particular, women continue to be severely disadvantaged in the Palestinian labour market; finding it hard to access decent jobs, as well as facing gender-based discrimination. It also found that the population of the Gaza

Strip continues to live through a “humanitarian and human-made” crisis with its economy depleted and the labour market crippled.

The opening day also saw Samir Murad, Minister of Labour of Jordan, elected President of the Conference over its duration from 28 May to 8 June. Jean-Jacques Elmiger (Governments) from Switzerland, Khalifa Khamis Mattar (Employers) from the United Arab Emirates and Akiko Gono (Workers) from Japan, were elected Vice-Presidents.

[UN chief in Mali to mark determination, dedication, service and sacrifice of peacekeepers](#)

UN staff reporting on the visit, took the opportunity to go out with the team ahead of the arrival of United Nations [Secretary-General António Guterres](#). The UN chief will be in Mali to mark the 70th anniversary of UN peacekeeping, alongside the dedicated men and women who serve in the Organization’s most deadly mission known as MINUSMA, a French acronym that stands for the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.

“Patrols are conducted to reassure the population, to help them overcome the feeling of insecurity. At the beginning of the crisis, people did not dare to go out because they were scared of armed groups and of attacks”, explains Masserigne Faye, Coordinator for the police component that’s integral to the mission.

Overall, the capital appeared calm and peaceful on Sunday night, with drivers happy to allow the joint patrol to look inside their vehicles, as part of routine inspections.

“It’s very good, it allows us to work freely”, said one taxi driver, Mamoutou Kané, after opening the trunk of his cab.

“We think it’s reassuring for the population. We want it to last”, said another bystander, Boubacar Traoré, sitting outside a small grocery store in the Medina Coura neighborhood.

But it’s not the capital in the south of Mali, which is causing the greatest security concerns at present, but rather the northern and central areas of the land-locked northwest African nation, that stretches deep into the Sahara Desert.

The first UN peacekeepers were deployed in Mali in 2013 following a violent insurrection by separatist rebels attempting to take control of the north of the country and a subsequent military-led coup. MINUSMA is there to help

maintain a fragile peace agreement in support of the national authorities and provide protection for civilians caught up in conflict.

But with many peacekeepers now being targeted by armed groups, fighting Malian government forces, the mission faces huge dangers. UN Secretary-General will show his solidarity with them on Tuesday, but also be expressing his solidarity with Muslims fasting for the Ramadan. He himself will be observing the fast during his visit.

“Each peacekeeper in Mali, in performing their service, is facing sacrifice on a daily basis”, said the Special Representative for the Secretary-General, Mahamat Saleh Annadif, who is also head of MINUSMA, in an interview with *UN News* on Monday.

In March, during a key Security Council debate on improving UN peacekeeping operations, Mr Guterres told Member States that “UN peacekeepers are often under-equipped, under-prepared and unready” adding that “our peacekeepers are vulnerable, and they are targeted for attack”.

He said three areas needed a fresh focus: more realistic expectations about what missions can achieve; making them stronger and safer; and mobilizing greater political support with well-structured, well-equipped, and better-trained forces.

To enhance the effectiveness and security of peacekeeping operations, the UN is conducting comprehensive reform of the whole peace and security pillar, including improving security for peacekeepers in the field and the “Action for Peacekeeping” initiative, with Mali a top priority.

MINUSMA has already taken measures on the ground to reduce casualties: “By increasing training, by increasing patrols, by taking precautions to inspect roads before trucks drive through them, by taking advantage of the arrival of combat convoy contingents, we have really made significant progress towards diminishing casualties”, said Mr. Annadif.

His Chief of Staff, Lizbeth Cullity, said that a recent attack on mission forces in May showed the impact of steps already taken to improve the preparation and safety of peacekeepers: “It was due to that kind of preparation, the rehearsal, the drills of going through that, just before the attack, that we believe that we were able to save lives”, she told *UN News*.

During his two-day visit, the UN chief is meeting troops and other MINUSMA personnel. He will also meet Mali’s President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and other government officials in Bamako.

On Wednesday, Mr. Guterres is set to leave the capital and travel to the regions, where he will meet with local authorities and UN staff, as well as women, youth and religious representatives.

Central African Republic crisis 'breaks my heart' says senior UN aid official

The already serious humanitarian situation in Central African Republic (CAR) has worsened amid a spike in violence which threatens to overtake almost every area of the country, a top UN aid official said on Monday.

One in four people has been displaced, according to Najat Rochdi, UN Humanitarian Coordinator for CAR, who said that this included areas that were formerly peaceful, such as the north and central zones.

Speaking at a press conference in Geneva, Ms. Rochdi warned that severe acute malnutrition in six administrative regions is higher than 15 per cent – the emergency threshold – and infant mortality is at 18 per cent.

And amid severe funding shortages which have meant aid cut-backs, she told journalists in French: "It breaks my heart every time a child comes to me and says I'm hungry."

Speaking later in English, she said: "Where you have kids, those little girls and little boys coming to you and looking at you and telling, 'I'm hungry, I'm starving,' it's horrible, really horrible. Unfortunately the situation has worsened because we had in one year's time an increase of 70 per cent of the internally displaced people. Meaning more children, more little girls and more little boys, meaning also that it's a whole generation that is sacrificed because they are not going to school."

She said it was very important to keep providing them with humanitarian assistance, which meant going beyond food distribution, beyond the access to water, beyond the access to health. "It's just access to hope."

Of the more than \$515 million aid requirement needed in CAR for 1.9 million people, less than 20 per cent has been provided so far this year.

Fighting between the mostly Christian anti-Balaka militia and the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition has plunged the CAR into civil conflict since 2012. A peace agreement was reached in January 2013, but rebels seized the capital, Bangui, in March of that year, forcing President François Bozizé to flee.

Concerned with the security, humanitarian, human rights and political crisis in the CAR and its regional implications, the Security Council authorized the deployment of a UN stabilization mission, known by its French acronym, MINUSCA, in 2014 with the protection of civilians as its utmost priority.



OCHA/Yaye N. Sene.

The humanitarian community distributed high-energy biscuits to 1,500 children and debilitated adults who suffered from starvation and thirst for more than 72 hours during an outbreak of violence in Mbomou Prefecture, Central African Republic in May 2017.

The country's huge natural wealth – in the form of diamonds, gold and uranium – continues to fuel the fighting, Ms. Rochdi explained, adding that there was “absolutely no problem” in areas “where you don't have that much to steal.”

The violence reached the capital, Bangui, at the beginning of the month after almost a year of relative stability.

In that incident, 70 people were killed in clashes between security forces and armed militia, and thousands were displaced.

Ms. Rochdi said that UN troops had to intervene after Muslims were denied healthcare access.

The town of Bambari has also seen armed groups return, despite becoming a “safe haven for all communities” since last year, the UN official added.

The militia aimed to put pressure on the government to grant them an amnesty but this would be a “disaster” for the country, Ms. Rochdi insisted, before adding that efforts to prevent impunity had been stepped up and had resulted in a Special Criminal Court, which is due to start work in CAR next week.

Some of its “first clients” would be “high-profile leaders of armed groups,” Ms. Rochdi said, adding that CAR was one of the most dangerous places on earth for humanitarians, with six people killed this year and attacks on aid workers and looting happening on a “regular” basis.

Yet despite the instability and fact that funding levels in 2017 were only 40 per cent of what was requested, she maintained that it still made a

substantial difference on the ground and had helped to prepare communities to withstand future shocks too.

It meant that more than one million people had access to water, that 7,000 tonnes of humanitarian assistance were delivered and more than 60,000 children were given an education.

In addition, the aid ensured that more than 70,000 farming families received a vital seed allocation, helping them to become more self-sufficient.

More than 17,000 children from six to 59 months suffering from severe acute malnutrition were also given support.

The most important thing was that the people of CAR had some sense that they had a future, Mrs Rochdi said, adding that humanitarian assistance “is making the difference between life and death”.

Aid is also “the best way for all of us to sustain peace in CAR”, she added, since the funding gave communities hope.

[UN chief notes ‘with concern’ report holding Russia liable for downing airliner](#)

Following the conclusion of an investigation that holds Russia responsible for the downing of a Malaysia Airlines passenger plane in 2014, the United Nations chief said on Friday that he “has taken note with concern of the latest report”.

On Thursday, according to media reports, the Dutch-led international investigation team announced that it was Russian military personnel who had deployed the Buk surface-to-air missile, that shot down the plane. Russia has denied any involvement in the plane’s destruction.

Speaking to journalists on Friday at UN Headquarters in New York, UN Deputy Spokesperson Farhan Haq said that [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) underlined a prior Security Council resolution demanding that “all states cooperate fully with efforts to establish accountability”.

“In such instances, establishing the truth about this event is an important part of achieving justice for the victims and their families,” Mr. Haq added.

All 298 people on board MH17, which was en route from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, died when it crashed on 17 July 2014, in Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine.

It claimed the lives of 193 Dutch nationals, 43 from Malaysia, and 27 from Australia. Other victims came from a variety of countries including Indonesia, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany and the Philippines.

One year after the incident, Malaysia introduced a draft resolution in the UN Security Council on a measure that would have established an international tribunal to prosecute persons responsible for the downing of MH17.

The 15-member body, however, failed to adopt the resolution following a Russian veto.

If one of the Council's five permanent members casts a negative vote on a resolution, the text cannot be adopted.

On the first anniversary of that tragedy, Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General at that time, issued a statement in which he said "the victims must be honoured by a collective effort to ascertain the truth about the incident and ensure that any persons determined responsible will be held to account."

[France: New terrorism laws may undercut human rights and freedoms, says UN expert](#)

While commending efforts by the French government to combat terrorism, a United Nations rights expert has raised concerns about the effect recent counter-terrorism laws are having on fundamental human rights there, including freedom of movement, religion and association.

Fionnuala Ni Aolain, the UN Special Rapporteur on the protection of human rights said she was particularly concerned that tough new security laws passed last November, may disproportionately stigmatize and further marginalize Muslim citizens.

She said it was clear that Muslims in France "have been the community primarily [subject to exceptional measures](#) both during the state of emergency and the new law, in tandem with other counter-terrorism measures," Ms. Ni Aolain said, highlighting the example of mosque closures as an encroachment on religious freedom.

"There is no doubt that the State may lawfully engage in restrictions to protect public order, but a clear tipping point to exceptionality arises when counter-terrorism measures engage profound, sustained and potentially disproportionate effects on the enjoyment of fundamental human rights and civil liberties," she added.

At the Government's invitation, Ms. Ni Aolain visited France from 14 to 23 May where she took account of the serious security challenges faced by French authorities. But she said the on-going threat of terror attacks and pressure on security services, did not excuse how laws were being implemented.

"It is deeply concerning that the Muslim minority community is being constructed as a per se 'suspect community' through the sustained and broad application of a counter-terrorism law," she said at the end of the visit.

The new counter-terror measures came into force last November, formally ending a nearly two-year state of emergency after the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris.

"France must continue to work in genuine partnership with all its citizens"

Fionnuala Ni Aolain

Ms. Ni Aolain expressed concerns during the emergency period, that there were insufficient checks and balances to protect against administrative measures, including freedoms of movement, privacy, religious belief and practice.

According to the Special Rapporteur's assessment, the continuing effect of these measures constitutes a *de facto* state of qualified emergency in ordinary French law.

She was particularly mindful of the effects these laws had on the of rights by French Muslim citizens and recommended that the Government create an independent body to oversee counter-terrorism and exceptional national security powers.

"France must continue to work in genuine partnership with all its citizens and take specific steps to prevent this conflation, which includes best practice on independent oversight, community consultation, prevention, and remedy when violations of human rights are established through legal and administrative action," underscored the UN expert.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council, on an honorary basis, to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or country situation.