

Tackling corruption 'from the top down' essential, declares UN chief, marking key global treaty

Corruption and complicity know no geographical boundaries, and it is society's most vulnerable who get hurt the most, senior United Nations officials said on Wednesday, calling on Government leaders to fight the scourge, "from the top down".

"It all begins with setting an example. [By tackling corruption, Governments can show they mean business](#)," said [Secretary-General António Guterres](#), speaking at a high-level event marking the 15th anniversary of the [UN Convention Against Corruption](#).

"Society cannot function equitably and efficiently when public officials – from doctors to police, judges and politicians – enrich themselves rather than perform their duties with integrity," he added.

Adopted in 2003, the [Convention Against Corruption](#) is the only legally-binding universal instrument, drawn up to fight corruption in all its forms.

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In his remarks, Mr. Guterres also underlined that in addition to robbing vital resources from public services such as schools and hospitals, corruption also fuels human trafficking and the black market in natural resources, weapons, drugs and cultural artifacts.

"It fuels conflict, and when a hard-won peace is achieved, corruption undermines recovery. Corruption and impunity are corrosive, breeding frustration and fostering further corruption when people see no other way of achieving their goals," said the UN chief, calling for greater political and popular support for the fight against corruption.

He described the Convention Against Corruption as one of the most effective tools the world has to achieve the common goals of good governance, stability and prosperity.

"The UN will continue to support Member States every step of the way, from helping to engage and empower citizens in this fight, to helping build and enhance institutions that can deliver on their promise," said Mr. Guterres.

Corruption ‘destroys everything in its path’

Speaking alongside the Secretary-General, Miroslav Lajčák, the President of the UN General Assembly also reiterated that corruption hurts all sections of the society and that it “destroys everything in its path.”

Ultimately, corruption causes suffering to ordinary people going about their daily lives, he stressed, citing common examples: “When they are stopped at checkpoints, for bribes. When a bus does not come – or a clinic does not open – because budgets were mismanaged. Or when they lose all of their savings, from extortion,” said Mr. Lajčák.

He also highlighted the link between the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and good governance.

“If we want to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we need to take concrete steps. This will mean allocating budgets. It will mean raising more funds. It will mean new policies and new legislation”, he said, adding that more innovative ways needed to be found of “working together”.

Yury Fedotov, the Executive-Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) also [underscored the importance of the Convention](#) for sustainable development.

Noting that while [Sustainable Development Goal 16](#) (SDG16) explicitly urges action against corruption, tackling the problem is a prerequisite for overall economic growth.

“Anti-corruption responses are also crucial to ensuring access to healthcare, water, education and other vital services; protecting forests, oceans and wildlife; and reducing inequalities,” he added.

Ebola outbreak puts Democratic Republic of the Congo on an ‘epidemiological knife-edge’

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[Health Organization](#) (WHO) said on Wednesday.

Speaking in Geneva at the [World Health Assembly](#), Dr Peter Salama, WHO Deputy Director-General, who heads up emergency preparedness and response, said that there were several reasons why the current outbreak – which has claimed 27 lives since it was declared on 8 May – has yet to be contained.

“It’s hard to recall a situation of an outbreak where a Government has responded more quickly and more decisively than in this outbreak,” he said, adding that it was “a multi-partner effort and it’s not over yet. We’re really just at the beginning.

“I used the phrase yesterday that we’re on the epidemiological knife-edge of this response, the next few weeks will really tell if this outbreak will spread to urban areas or if we’re going to be able to keep it under control.”

Unlike previous Ebola events in DRC – this is the country’s ninth since 1976 – the 2018 outbreak has been complicated by the fact that it involves rural and urban areas.

This has raised the chances that it might spread both nationally and internationally, Dr. Salama said, particularly since the city of Mbandaka – where the disease was identified after first surfacing in the relatively remote Bikoro – is close to the Congo river, which acts as the main transport link to DRC’s capital, Kinshasa.

With 58 confirmed, probable or suspected cases of the disease in the country as of Wednesday, effective tracing of anyone who has come into contact with the disease will “make or break” the response to Ebola, Dr. Salama said.

He described the task ahead as “the detective work of epidemiology”, adding that medical personnel at a hospital in Wangata, Mbandaka, were tracing some 600 contacts from three separate chains of transmission.

One of these chains was associated with a funeral in a neighbouring town of Bikoro; another was linked to a health-care facility in the small village of Iboko; and the third related to a church ceremony. “Each one has the potential to expand if not controlled,” Dr. Salama said.

The WHO official confirmed that a selective, or “ring vaccination” programme had just begun and that efforts are ongoing to ensure that the Ebola drug can be stored in “ultracold” conditions at between -60 and -80°C.

WHO has repeatedly stressed that vaccination is only one measure among many in any outbreak response.

That message was repeated in Geneva by Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO [Director-General](#), who praised the commitment and sacrifice of the communities and health workers on the front line, as “the most important element in fighting this outbreak”.

The WHO chief also underlined that the coordination among international health partners was essential, too, before highlighting that even he had

problems in accessing rural Bikoro to see the problem first-hand, during his visit to the area shortly after the beginning of the outbreak.

[South Korea leads developed nations in household debt, UN expert warns](#)

Despite being the world's 11th largest economy, a significant number of South Koreans are living in "substandard" housing, faced with rising rents they can no longer afford, a United Nations rights expert said on Wednesday, noting that the country now leads developed nations in levels of household debt.

"I met with residents who are living in completely [substandard housing](#) and yet paying exorbitant rents," said Leilani Farha, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, at the end of a 10-day visit to the Republic of Korea.

In a statement on Wednesday, she said that some were "forced to live in tiny spaces no more than 5 square metres, on short term leases and at the mercy of landlords' arbitrary decisions to raise the rent".

While acknowledging the Government's "massive effort" to improve housing conditions for the bulk of its population, she said she is "deeply concerned" by the continuation of "massive reconstruction projects" resulting in the destruction of neighbourhoods and displacement of individuals and families.

She also expressed alarm at how urban areas have become unaffordable for young people and low-income households; although that is an observation which has been made frequently about expanding cities in other developed countries such as London, Tokyo and New York.

Ms. Farha pointed out that the country's current legal framework for urban redevelopment and reconstruction does not comply with internationally recognised human rights standards and continues to result in forced evictions.

She said that South Korea, formally known as the Republic of Korea, now leads the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) list, in terms of household debt and "security of tenure is a real issue," she added.

"The shift from housing being treated as a commodity to housing being understood as a human right, is not yet complete", she said, adding that "The Government should adopt a comprehensive human rights-based national action plan on housing".

UN pays tribute to the Organization's founding mothers

Women have played a pivotal role in the United Nations since its inception in 1945, including in the first international agreement proclaiming gender equality as a fundamental human right: the [UN Charter](#).

According to recent studies from scholarly research, women delegates from developing countries, or the Global South, played a significant role in ensuring that the Charter made specific mention of gender rights. And yet, out of the 850 delegates who signed the historic document, only four were women.

Speaking on Tuesday at an event headlined, *Women and the Origins of the United Nations – a Southern Legacy*, Maria Luiza Viotti, UN [Chef de Cabinet](#), said that even as the world body works for equality today, “we must also remember our history.”

“That means paying tribute to the pioneers from the early years of the struggle,” she added.

The event honouring the women of developing countries who defended their rights more than seven decades ago, provided not only long-overdue recognition today, but also served to correct an incomplete historical narrative, which failed to reflect the role of women from countries like Brazil, the Dominican Republic, India, Mexico, Pakistan, Uruguay and Venezuela.

Ms. Viotti recalled their push to defend women's rights, and inspire a global shift in recognition, when many of the countries at the 1945 [San Francisco Conference](#), did not even allow women to vote.

“Since then, the UN has elaborated an extensive body of laws, standards and norms articulating women's rights – from the opportunities to which they are entitled to the protections they must be assured,” she continued, noting that today, it presses for gender parity not just across the world but across the world body itself.

“The struggle continues. Laws and goals on paper are essential. But what is needed even more is tangible steps to bring these rules and rights to life,” concluded Ms. Viotti.

Poverty compounding health challenges for Palestine refugees – UN agency

Non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cancer and smoking-related ailments, account for the majority of the chronic health problems confronting Palestine refugees across the Middle East, a new report by the United Nations agency which supports them, has found.

According to the Director of Health at the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), Akihiro Seita, these diseases account for as much as 80 per cent of fatalities.

The reason for the high number, he said, is “simply because they do not have access to healthy lives or in other words; poverty.”

UNRWA’s [2017 Annual Report](#) on health looks at the overall picture across the agency’s five areas of operation – Jordan; Lebanon; the West Bank, including East Jerusalem; Gaza; and Syria.

Last year, around three million registered refugees received health services, amounting to 9.2 million consultations – all free of charge – at 143 UNRWA primary health care centres.

“Protecting and promoting the health of registered Palestine refugees, is at the heart of our mandate, enabling them to achieve the highest attainable level of health until a just and lasting resolution of the Palestine refugee issue is achieved,” said Dr. Seita.

The report also coincides with the 70th anniversary of the 1948 War that resulted in the mass displacement and dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes.

This year, the report also comes amid escalating tensions in the region and violent clashes in Gaza over the past two months, between Palestinian demonstrators and Israeli Security Forces along the border fence.

Quoting figures from the UN [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), Dr. Seita said that over 12,000 people have been injured in the weekly protests since late March.

“Out of 12,000, according to WHO, about 7,000 went to hospitals,” he said, of whom around 3,500 had gunshot wounds, he said.

The impact of the “extraordinary” number of injuries overwhelmed the limited health and medical services in the enclave, added the UNRWA official, noting that many people with gunshot wounds ended up at primary-care health centres, which are not equipped for major surgery or trauma services.