

Protect indigenous people's land rights and the whole world will benefit, UN forum declares

Protecting the land and resource rights of indigenous peoples will not only provide security for historically exploited groups but also help the global fight against climate change and biodiversity loss, said speakers on Monday at the annual [United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues](#).

In her opening remarks to the Forum in New York, the chairperson, Mariam Wallet Aboubakrine, a medical doctor from Timbuktu, Mali, called the land husbandry of Aboriginal peoples “part of our history and heritage.”

But few countries have acted to defend these peoples' collective rights, she added.

“Law enforcement is inadequate or non-existent, and other elements of Legislation goes against these rights,” she said. Measures necessary to give meaning to land rights, such as tenure delimitation and allocating title deeds, are often not implemented.

Moreover, she continued, those who defend indigenous rights continue to be targeted when they raise their voices – particularly when States or private actors seek their resources for aggressive development such as logging.

“As long as our rights over our lands, territories and resources are not recognized,” she added, indigenous people risk falling far short of the UN's [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

“In the same way,” she said, “the world risks losing the fight against climate change and the destruction of the environment.”



UN Photo/Evan Schneider

Participants of the seventeenth session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

UN for all peoples

General Assembly President Miroslav Lajčák reminded everyone “The United Nations is [here for people](#). And that includes indigenous people.”

“But we cannot yet say that this Organization has opened its doors wide enough,” he said. “And so, we need to be more ambitious.”

Mr. Lajčák, of Slovakia painted a grim picture of the situation facing indigenous people today, pointing out that while they make up only five per cent of the world’s population, they comprise 15 per cent of the world’s poorest people.

“That is shocking,” he said, adding that their human rights are being violated, they are being excluded and marginalized and face violence for asserting their basic rights.

Focusing on the theme of indigenous land, territories and resources, he said: “Indigenous people are being dispossessed. They are losing the lands their ancestors called home.”

But with global attention to indigenous rights on the rise, Mr. Lajčák saw reasons for hope, as well.

“The signs do look positive,” he said, noting that the UN teams on the ground are developing stronger partnerships, determined to make these communities stronger.

“We should be hopeful. But we cannot ignore the very real, and very serious, challenges. They cast a shadow over the future of many indigenous communities. And they demand our urgent attention,” he said.

When Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, spoke, he explained how for 500 years the indigenous people of America have waged a resistance campaign to defend their dignity and identity.

“We are all descendants of Mother Earth, so we are all brothers and sisters,” he underscored.

The annual Forum, the seventeenth, opened to a ceremonial cultural performance and a traditional welcome by Todadaho Sid Hill, Chief of the Onondaga Nation, located in New York.

Established in 2000, the forum provides expert advice and recommendations on indigenous issues to the UN’s Economic and Social Council as well as to specialized agencies that work on issues like development, agriculture, environmental protection and human rights.

[Global anxiety deepens over online data and privacy protection – UN agency](#)

Internet users worldwide are becoming more worried about their privacy online and many question the protections offered by Internet and social media companies, a new United Nations survey has found.

This waning of confidence could imperil the spread of online shopping even as newcomers to the Internet may be especially vulnerable to abuses because they are unaware of the risks.

[“Trust is essential for the successful expansion and use of e-commerce platforms](#) and mobile payment systems in developing nations,” said Fen Osler Hampson, Director of Global Security and Politics at Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), a think tank that helped conduct the study.

The [survey](#) was carried out by CIGI and Ipsos, in collaboration with the UN Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Internet Society.

Users in large emerging economies expressed the most “trust” in Internet firms with nine in ten expressing such faith in China, India and Indonesia and more than eight in ten doing so in Pakistan and Mexico.

To the contrary, fewer than 60 percent of consumers in Japan and Tunisia expressed such “trust.”

Privacy concerns

The evidence of mounting privacy concerns coincides with sharper public scrutiny of the protection policies of major Internet firms – over concerns fuelled by the revelation that a political data firm gained access to millions of Facebook users’ personal data without their consent.

“The survey underlines the importance of adopting and adapting policies to cope with the evolving digital economy” said Shamika Sirimanne, the Director of Technology and Logistics Division at the UN agency, which deals with the economics of globalization.

“The challenge for policymakers is to deal holistically with a number of areas – from connectivity and payment solutions to skills and regulations,” she explained.

Is technology worth the cost? *Yes and No*

As e-commerce soars, there is also a general increase in the number of people using mobile payments and non-traditional means of paying for services, such as tapping one's smart phone to board trains or scanning it to pay for a cup of coffee.

The use of smart phones to make cashless purchases is in fact far higher in many developing countries than it is in the United States and much of Europe, the study noted.

In addition, many people, especially in the developing world, expressed the view that new technology is "worth what it costs."

At the same time, some users in developed countries expressed views to the contrary. Their main worry, the survey found, is that technology will result in the loss of employment.

The launch of the survey coincides with UNCTAD's [E-Commerce Week](#) – the leading forum for Governments, private sector, development banks, academia and the civil society to discuss development opportunities and challenges before the evolving digital economy.

UN officials urge action to prevent sexual violence in conflict; Rohingya lawyer says 'Security Council failed us'

The United Nations Security Council has failed to prevent the Rohingya refugee crisis, and the 15-member body must refer sexual violence and other crimes against the ethnic group to the world's top criminal court, a Rohingya lawyer said on Monday.

"Where I come from, women and girls have been gang-raped, tortured and killed by the Myanmar Army, for no other reason than for being Rohingya," Razia Sultana said on behalf of non-governmental organizations during a Security Council open debate on [preventing sexual violence in conflict](#).

The debate, addressed by Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, was held as the Council prepares for a visit later this month to Myanmar and its neighbor Bangladesh, which hosts hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees.

Ms. Sultana urged the Council members to meet with women and girl survivors during the trip.

Since August last year, more than 670,000 Rohingya have fled Myanmar. "This is the fastest refugee movement since the Rwanda genocide," Ms. Sultana said.

"However, the international community, especially the Security Council, has failed us. This latest crisis should have been prevented if the warning signs since 2012 had not been ignored," she added.

Ms. Sultana said that her own research and interviews provide evidence that Government troops raped well over 300 women and girls in 17 villages in Rakhine state. With over 350 villages attacked and burned since August 2017, this number is likely only a fraction of the actual total.

"Girls as young as six were gang-raped," she said.

This year's UN Secretary-General's [report on sexual violence in conflict](#) lists the Myanmar military for the first time.

She said the Council must refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court without delay.



UN Photo/Mark Garten

Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed addresses the Security Council's open debate on women, peace and security.

Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed told the Council that: "This year, in Myanmar and many other conflict situations, the widespread threat and use of sexual violence has, once again, been used as a tactic to advance military, economic and ideological objectives."

"And, once again, it has been a [driver of massive forced displacement](#)," she added. "Let us intensify our efforts to end the horrific litany of sexual

violence in conflict so that women, girls, men and boys have one less burden to bear as they work to rebuild shattered lives.”

A decade ago, the Council adopted the groundbreaking resolution 1820, which elevated the issue of conflict-related sexual violence onto its agenda, as a threat to security and impediment to peace.

It seeks to “debunk the myths that fuel sexual violence,” and rejects the notion of rape as an “inevitable byproduct of war” or mere “collateral damage.” Since then, the issue has been systematically included peacekeeping missions.



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, addresses the Security Council’s open debate on women, peace and security.

But “it is clear that words on paper are not yet matched by facts on the ground. We have not yet moved from resolutions to lasting solutions,” said Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Stigma and victim-blame give the weapon of rape its uniquely destructive power, including the power to shred the social fabric, and turn victims into outcasts. It is also the reason that sexual violence remains one of the least-reported of all crimes.

“It is a travesty and an outrage that not a single member of ISIL or Boko Haram has yet been convicted for sexual violence as an international crime,” she said.

As recommendations, she called on the international community to establish a reparations fund for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, while stressing the need a more operational response to stigma alleviation, as well

as the need to marshal sustained funding for the gender-based response.

A [concept note](#) circulated in advance of this meeting asked delegates to share national experiences regarding specific measures taken to prevent conflict-related sexual violence, particularly long-term initiatives focused on women's empowerment, advancing gender equality, and ensuring that perpetrators of sexual violence are brought to justice.

The note also posed several other discussion questions, including one about how the Council – when establishing and renewing the mandates of UN peacekeeping and political missions, as well as relevant sanctions regimes – can more effectively promote gender equality, the empowerment of women in conflict and post-conflict situations, and accountability for sexual violence crimes.

[Restore ex-President's right to stand for election, UN expert committee directs Maldives](#)

Deciding upon complaints filed by Mohamed Nasheed, the ex-President of Maldives, a United Nations human rights expert committee has called on the Government to restore Mr. Nasheed's right to stand for public office, including the office of the President.

"Political rights can be suspended or restricted only in exceptional circumstances and under certain conditions," said Sarah Cleveland, member of the UN Human Rights Committee – an expert body that oversees implementation of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR) by its States parties.

"[Judicial proceedings that violate the right to fair trial](#) can render the resulting restriction of political rights arbitrary," she added.

In its [decision](#) of 4 April, which was made public Monday, the Committee stated that the judicial proceedings in which Mr. Nasheed was convicted were based on vague legislation, contained serious flaws and violated his right to a fair trial under the Covenant.

The Committee underscored Maldives' obligation to "avoid similar violations in the future, including reviewing its legislation to ensure that any restriction on the right to stand for office is reasonable and proportionate."

Mr. Nasheed, first brought to a Maldivian court in 2012, was ultimately

charged with terrorism and sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment in March 2015. As a result, he was disqualified from running in presidential elections for 16 years – the term of his sentence plus an additional three years.

He filed his submissions to the Human Rights Committee in July 2013 and October 2016.

The Committee's decision also directs Maldives to "quash [Mr. Nasheed's] conviction, review the charges against him taking into account the present Views, and, if appropriate, conduct a new trial ensuring all fair trial guarantees."

The Human Rights Committee also stressed Maldives' responsibility to provide effective remedy.

"As a party to the ICCPR, Maldives is obliged to make full reparation to individuals whose rights have been violated. We have asked Maldives to inform us within 180 days about the measures they have taken to implement our decision," added Yuval Shany, Vice-Chair of the Committee.

The Human Rights Committee is composed of 18 independent experts who are not UN staff and serve in their personal capacity. They are elected for a term of four years by States parties in accordance with articles 28 to 39 of the Covenant and may be re-elected if nominated.

[UN chief condemns deadly attack on peacekeepers in Mali](#)

The United Nations Secretary-General is calling on political leaders in Mali to ensure those responsible for [a deadly assault](#) on peacekeepers serving in the north are brought to justice.

One blue helmet from Burkina Faso was killed in the attack, which took place on Saturday at a base in the city of Timbuktu housing camps from the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and a French military operation known as Barkhane.

Seven peacekeepers, seven French soldiers and two Malian civilians were injured.

The attackers were disguised as UN peacekeepers, according to media reports.

MINUSMA supports political processes in Mali, in addition to carrying out a number of security-related tasks, and this was the largest attack against the Mission since its deployment five years ago, and the third this month.

UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) has conveyed his condolences to the Government of Burkina Faso and to the family of the fallen peacekeeper.

He also wished a speedy recovery to the injured.

“The Secretary-General calls on the Malian authorities as well as the signatory armed groups to the peace agreement to spare no effort in identifying the perpetrators of this attack, so that they can be brought to justice as swiftly as possible,” said a statement issued on Sunday by his spokesperson.

The UN chief stated that attacks targeting peacekeepers may constitute war crimes under international law.

He said these acts will not deter the UN Mission’s determination to support the Malian people in their quest for peace and stability.

Mr. Guterres also paid tribute to the courage of the men and women serving in MINUSMA, as well as the Malian and international forces, who are doing so “at great personal risk and sacrifice.”