

UN anti-drug conference offers 'opportunity to chart a better and balanced path' forward – UN chief

Inclusive partnerships are essential to addressing drug challenges and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), according to the top United Nations panel dealing with all aspects of narcotic drugs.

“With the UN General Assembly special session consensus as our blueprint, we can promote efforts to stop organized crime while protecting human rights, enabling development and [ensuring rights-based treatment](#) and support,” [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) said Monday in a video message at the opening session of the [61st Commission on Narcotic Drugs](#).

“I have called on the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [[UNODC](#)] to develop a comprehensive strategy that works across the three pillars with other UN entities to advance our efforts,” he stressed, referring to the three main pillars of the UN’s work – peace and security, human rights, and development.

UNODC Executive Director Yury Fedotov [said](#) that throughout the coming year, the agency is looking forward to continuing its lead role in the UN’s strategic work on drug issues.

“The Commission on Narcotic Drugs has proven time and again its value in bringing the world together – Member States, UN agencies, regional organizations, civil society, young people and scientists,” he said.

“The political commitment, expertise and experience gathered here represent a vital resource as we seek to find balanced, integrated solutions, drawing on the mutually supportive and reinforcing international drug control conventions and human rights obligations, and working towards the Sustainable Development Goals,” Mr. Fedotov underscored.

The opening session was also addressed by the President of the International Narcotics Control Board, Dr. Viroj Sumyai, and featured a video message from WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

“At this session, UNODC and [WHO](#) [the [World Health Organization](#)] will present a new report on treatment and care for people with drug use disorders in contact with the criminal justice system, and addressing alternatives to conviction or incarceration,” explained Mr. Fedotov.

Over the next week, the session, chaired by Ambassador Alicia Buenrostro Massieu of Mexico, will also consider a variety of resolutions, such as on combating the synthetic opioid crisis, strengthening drug prevention in schools and measures to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission.

“UNODC remains committed to supporting you in all your efforts to improve balanced, evidence-based responses to the challenges to health, security, safety and development posed by drugs,” he concluded.

Along with the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs serves as the central policymaking body within the UN system on drugs. It is one of UNODC’s governing bodies, and its resolutions and decisions provide guidance to Member States, UNODC and the international community.

[As rainy season nears, UN faces ‘time pressure’ to deliver aid in South Sudan](#)

With the rainy season approaching in South Sudan, where one in three people have been displaced by more than four years of conflict, a senior United Nations humanitarian official has called for urgent financial support to distribute and preposition life-saving aid supplies.

“Due to [seasonal time pressure](#), we need early funding now to reach millions of people with multi-sectoral assistance during the dry season, through road transport and prepositioning of life-saving aid supplies,” said Alain Noudehou, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in the African country, in a statement issued over the weekend.

He said that rain would make the condition of roads difficult for transporting aid supplies and that airlifts would cost many times more than ground transport.

A recent report analyzing [food security](#) – access to adequate food – projected that more than seven million people, or almost two-thirds of South Sudan’s population, could become severely food insecure between May and July without sustained humanitarian assistance and access.

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Mr. Noudehou’s statement came after a high-level delegation of donors, heads of humanitarian agencies and partners visited Leer in the Unity region of South Sudan to see firsthand the plight of the 90,000 people living there.

The delegation met with the Governor of Leer, community leaders and aid agencies who are currently assisting tens of thousands of people across the

region.

Leer was one of two counties affected by famine in 2017. Although the famine was stopped due to intensive humanitarian intervention, the situation remains fragile with about 85 per cent of the population predicted to reach crisis and emergency food insecurity conditions by the end of April.

South Sudan attained independence from Sudan in 2011, but a political face-off between two rival factions plunged the world's newest country into full blown conflict in December 2013.

With the conflict now in its fifth year, nearly 4.3 million people, or one in three, have been displaced, including more than 1.8 million who are internally displaced and about 2.5 million who are in neighbouring countries.

"Once again, I strongly urge all parties to the conflict to stop the fighting and to ensure that humanitarian agencies are given free, safe and unhindered access to all areas of South Sudan, and for all bureaucratic impediments to be removed," said Mr. Noudehou.

[New UN health agency regulation guideline aim to help countries end 'reign' of tobacco industry](#)

The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) on Friday launched new guidelines on the role that tobacco product regulations can play in saving lives by reducing the demand for tobacco and tobacco products – estimated to kill over seven million people annually.

The new guide together with an accompanying publication will help governments "do much more" to implement regulations and address the exploitation of tobacco product regulations, highlighted the UN health agency.

"The [tobacco industry has enjoyed years of little or no regulation](#), mainly due to the complexity of tobacco product regulation and lack of appropriate guidance in this area," said Douglas Bettcher, the Director of the WHO Department for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases.

"Tobacco product regulation is an under-utilized tool which has a critical role to play in reducing tobacco use [and] these new tools provide a useful resource to countries to either introduce or improve existing tobacco product regulation provisions and end the tobacco industry 'reign'," he added.

The guide, titled [Tobacco product regulation: Building laboratory testing](#)

[capacity](#), provides practical and stepwise approaches to implementing tobacco testing relevant to a wide range of countries, especially those with inadequate resources to establish testing facilities.

It also provides regulators and policymakers with comprehensible information on how to test tobacco products, what products to test, and how to use testing data in a meaningful manner to support regulation.

The guidelines will also assist in the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control – a global treaty combatting the tobacco epidemic – through strengthening tobacco product regulation capacity in WHO member States.

We [need more countries to introduce and increase](#) tobacco taxes to drive down smoking rates and generate revenues to fund health systems – *Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General*

According to Vinayak Prasad, the head of the Tobacco Free Initiative at WHO, most countries “hesitate” to implement policies, due in part to the highly technical nature of such policy interventions and the difficulties in translating science into regulation.

“Failure to regulate is a missed opportunity as tobacco product regulation – in the context of comprehensive control – is a valuable tool that complements other tried and tested tobacco control interventions, such as raising taxes, and ensuring smoke-free environments,” he explained.

The accompanying publication, [Case studies for regulatory approaches to tobacco products – Menthol in tobacco products](#), includes practical steps as well as policy options countries can employ to make regulations more effective, such as the regulators’ enforcement of a total ban on the use of flavours in tobacco products such as menthol.

The guidance document and the accompanying publication were launched at the 2018 World Conference on Tobacco or Health in Cape Town, South Africa.

[**Nigerian women artists unite at UN to change perceptions of women and Africa**](#)

Three Nigerian women will spotlight themes such as human trafficking, suicide bombing, and sexism and sexual harassment at the United Nations, showing the strength of women as agents of change in African societies often dominated by men.

“We have to see ourselves as part of the solution, not just as women reserved for sex or for the kitchen,” author and Queen Blessing Itua told *UN News* ahead of a special event planned for this Sunday in the UN General Assembly Hall.

“Unity in Diversity: An Evening of Art and Hope with Nigerian Women” will feature excerpts from Ms. Itua’s book “We Are the Blessings of Africa,” as well as monologues from Ifeoma Fafunwa’s HEAR WORD! and Nadine Ibrahim’s films “Tolu” and “Through Her Eyes.”

The event is organized by UN WOMEN, UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Nigerian Mission to the UN, with other partners.

“Africa is a diverse continent, rich with different countries and different cultures, and natural resources. Africa has the talent – men and women,” said Ms. Itua. “When men in Africa look at women, women are reserved just in the kitchen or at home. So there’s a need to shift thinking that women can be powerful agents of development, then they’re able to support and empower women.

“If women understand that they have a critical role to play, they do not see themselves as just wives or women at home, they also raise up into mental engagement with the men and hopefully strategize about developing our Mother Land,” Ms. Itua continued.

Born in Nigeria and living in the United States, Ms. Itua said she wants to create awareness and give voice to women who do not have a platform to speak out about social ills, particularly rural women.

Her latest film, *Mrs. Adams*, – which will premiere during the Commission on the Status of Women next week – follows human trafficking routes in Nigeria and Europe. It is meant to be a statement not just about brutalization of women and sexual violence, but also highlight the economic reasons that people choose to migrate in the first place – to change some of the misinterpretations about exploitative work practices, forced labour and smuggling.

The issue is personal, Ms. Itua said. She hails from Edo state, which recently inaugurated a migration resource centre, and which has been cast in the spotlight after reports of Nigerians from that area being sold in modern slave markets in Libya.

“As an African woman, I believe that my goal is to work with other women in creating awareness. Together we are stronger. Working together to be stronger to change the narrative coming out of Africa,” Ms. Itua said.

She will be joined this Sunday by 24-year-old Nadine Ibrahim, whose film *Through Her Eyes* follows the internal struggle of a 12-year-old female suicide bomber in northern Nigeria.

Ms. Ibrahim, who is a Muslim, has said that she wants people to understand the rich and beautiful culture surrounding women, Islam and north-eastern Nigeria.

The film was filmed with security on location and after the original actress's mother pulled the daughter out of the film for fear of safety.

The Sunday night event will also feature Ifeoma Fafunwa, whose stage play "HEAR WORD! Naija Women Talk True" is a collection of monologues based on true-life stories of Nigerian women challenging social, cultural and political norms in the country.

A line from the play declares: "I have a vital contribution to my nation's transformation. I am a force, a tidal wave, and I won't hide. My destiny is not for you to decide."

[UN envoy on conflict-related sexual violence reports on visits to Iraq and Sudan](#)

A senior United Nations official has stressed the need to ensure survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Iraq are fully protected and that perpetrators are brought to justice.

[Pramila Patten, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict](#), this week concluded a visit to the country, where thousands of women and girls have suffered at the hands of the extremist group the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Da'esh).

She undertook an eight-day mission to [Iraq](#), which ended on Monday, prior to which she was in [Sudan](#) from 18 to 25 February.

In Iraq, Ms. Patten met with Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and other Government officials in the cities of Baghdad, Erbil and Mosul, as well as with civil society groups, religious leaders and other stakeholders.

"I heard first-hand the heart-wrenching accounts of survivors of Da'esh sexual violence," she told journalists at UN Headquarters in New York on Friday.

"Many of the women who remain displaced expressed serious safety concerns regarding their return to their homes due to activity from different militia groups and the reported presence of former Da'esh combatants within their community. Sunni women in particular shared their fear of reprisals on account of the wrong perception of affiliation with Da'esh."

Ms. Patten characterised the plight of survivors who have returned home with children fathered by the extremists as "extremely disturbing."

“While some religious leaders may show some empathy, the tribal leaders display a profound reluctance to accept children born of rape. And I was informed by the provincial authorities of Mosul of the setup of different orphanages with thousands of children,” she said.

Ms. Patten was invited to Iraq by the Government, which in 2016 signed an agreement with the UN aimed at preventing and addressing conflict-related violence.

It envisions support in areas such as evidence collection, strengthening of the legal framework and victim compensation.

In her talks with the authorities, Ms. Patten said she stressed the importance of ensuring that alleged Da’esh perpetrators are held accountable – not only for terrorism-related charges but also for sexual violence crimes.

Regarding Sudan, Ms. Patten said her visit marked the first time the UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict has been invited to the country.

She travelled to the capital, Khartoum, and two states in Darfur, where millions are still living in camps more than a decade after fighting broke out between armed rebel groups and Government forces and allied militias.

Despite an apparent improved security situation in the province, Ms. Patten said talks with displaced women and girls in two camps revealed how precarious things are there.

“I learned that the women and girls are especially at risk of sex violence when they step out of the camps, especially to pursue their livelihood activities,” she said.

“In El Genaina (capital of West Darfur state), I heard from women who are unable to return to their pre-war homes due to security concerns and fear of being raped. In addition, some women told me about sexual violence committed in the context of intercommunal conflicts over land and natural resources,” she said.

And in that regard, she said the initiative of the Government to collect illegal arms and ammunition “is quite positive and is a critical measure in the right direction to improve the security of women and girls.”

However, Ms. Patten noted there is what she described as “a deep-seated culture of denial of sexual violence” in Sudan, making it difficult to address the crime.

She hoped one outcome of her visit will be the country’s adoption of a cooperation framework with the UN to address conflict-related sexual violence.

Her proposal is that it will focus on five areas, including survivors’ access to medical, psycho-social and legal services; security sector training and engagement with religious leaders and civil society.