

Stoking fear among followers is not clever politics but a recipe for self-destruction, warns UN rights chief

In a scathing address to the Human Rights Council, the top United Nations rights official on Wednesday warned political leaders who stoke fear and intolerance among their followers for the sake of their own ambitions are merely copying the behaviour of previous generations of once strong, but ultimately catastrophic, leaders and politicians.

“Yours will in the end become a mouse-like global reputation, never the fine example of the leader you think you are,” said Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussen, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

He underscored the universality and fundamental nature – common to everyone – that ultimately they are all human beings, able to feel, love, think and hope; and that the characteristics like colour, race, ethnicity or gender are acquired by virtue of being humans and are secondary in nature.

“The present-day hatred, and its corresponding rising uncertainties, seem to come from humans who view the relationship between the core and the bolted – on characteristics in reverse,” added Mr. Zeid.

“In their view, the differences decide everything. But this approach, if each of us were to adopt it, and act upon it, would be an open invitation to human self-annihilation.”

Recalling the life of Nelson Mandela, the values of diversity and tolerance he worked for and the respect he earned, High Commissioner Zied urged political leaders to follow Mr. Mandela’s example.

“To deserve global respect, you must begin to follow his example – committing to the spirit and letter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” he said.

The UN human rights chief also painted a bleak picture of situations in more than 50 countries, ranging from an “apocalypse” in Syria to “ethnic cleansing” in Myanmar and anti-migration policies in many European countries and in the United States.

Mr. Zeid also praised the “real courage” of all those who stand up for and defend women’s rights, including sexual and reproductive rights, as well as the civil society movements fighting for respect of decency and rights despite overwhelming challenges.

In particular, he noted the MeToo movement, which takes on the abuse and sexual exploitation of women, an expression of solidarity and a force for dignity that is much needed, including in the wealthiest societies.

“Wherever I have travelled I have been privileged to meet women who defy restrictions on their freedom. These resilient and powerful women teach us – have, indeed, taught me – that every individual can help to reshape society, and the world,” he said.

Latin America and Caribbean must ‘radically transform’ food habits to combat obesity – UN agency

A “radical transformation” of food systems and food habits is critical to combat the growing scourge of overweight and obesity in Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Nations food security agency said on Wednesday.

“[Eradicating hunger must not be our only concern](#) [...] in a region where 7 percent of children under the age of five are overweight and 20 percent of adults in 24 countries are obese,” Jose Graziano da Silva, the Director-General of the UN [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO), highlighted at the opening of a [regional conference](#) being held in Montego Bay, Jamaica, where he called on governments to keep the fight against malnutrition at the top of their policy agendas.

Globally, almost 1.9 billion adults are overweight and some 650 million obese. The situation is most worrying in Latin America, where about 96 million adults are obese.

In addition to the growing threat of obesity and the ailments it often accompanies, the region has also seen the number of people suffering from undernutrition rising to 42.5 million, up 2.5 million, from the previous figure of 40 million.

To address these challenges, creation of “really sustainable food systems” in which production, trade, transport and consumption combine to guarantee a really nutritional food intake is vital, the head of FAO said.

“Eating fresh locally-grown produce in place of highly-processed foods is fundamental,” he stressed.

Doing so will also help advance the implementation of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), including the global development goals related to ending hunger, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture.

At the same time, introduction of social protection measures to strengthen family farming can also play an important part in combatting various forms of malnutrition, as well as reduce rural poverty, noted Mr. Graziano da Silva,

urging also Governments to promote adaptation of agriculture to the changing climate, and to do so in a way that protects poor rural communities.

[‘It’s her turn,’ says UN agency, issuing global call to close critical gap in refugee girls’ education](#)

By secondary-level education, refugee girls are only half as likely as their male peers to enrol in school – even though they make up half of the school-age refugee population, according to a new study released Wednesday by the United Nations refugee agency.

“It is time for the international community to recognize the injustice of denying refugee girls and women an education,” said Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)).

“These findings are a [global wake-up call](#), and I urge all to join us in demanding: ‘It’s her turn,’” he added.

Access to education is a fundamental human right. Yet, for millions of women and girls among the world’s growing refugee population, it remains an aspiration – not a reality.

While all refugee children have more difficulty attending school than their non-refugee peers, refugee girls face even tougher challenges to find – and keep – a place in the classroom.

Moreover, as they get older, refugee girls face more marginalization and the gender gap in secondary schools grows wider.

UNHCR’s [report](#) reveals that social and cultural conventions often result in the prioritization of boys over girls to attend school. Poor facilities, such as a lack of appropriate toilets and menstrual supplies, can also block their access. Adding to the challenge, book costs, uniforms and distance can be prohibitive for refugee families.

“Finding solutions to the challenges refugee girls face as they strive to go to school requires action right across the board – from national education ministries to teacher training institutions, in communities and classrooms,” stressed Mr. Grandi.

“There are formidable barriers to overcome,” he continued. “We are calling for an international effort to turn the tide.”

UNHCR’s report highlights effective, deliverable actions and policies to help

more refugee girls get a quality education.

If refugee adults are able to work and support their families, they are more likely to let their children stay in school.

No girl should miss school because the journey there is too far or too dangerous – refugee girls need protection from harassment, sexual assault and kidnapping.

More female teachers from within host and refugee communities must be recruited to promote best practice.

The report notes that for refugee girls, a quality education reduces vulnerability to exploitation, sexual and gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy and child marriage.

Additionally, if all women received a primary level education, child deaths from diarrhoea, malaria and pneumonia would fall.

Moreover, the further girls progress in school, the more they develop leadership skills, entrepreneurship, self-reliance and resilience.

“If we continue to neglect refugee girls’ education, it is evident that the consequences will be felt for generations,” said Mr. Grandi.

“It is time to make refugee girls’ education a priority,” he concluded.

[UN chief urges completion of planned aid delivery to Douma in Syria’s east Ghouta](#)

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has called on all parties to the conflict in Syria to allow a humanitarian convoy to complete the delivery of supplies to Douma in eastern Ghouta planned for Thursday.

The latest convoy by the UN and its partners could not complete the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance to 27,500 people in Douma because of insecurity in the besieged enclave of eastern Ghouta, where the fighting reportedly killed more than 100 people on Monday alone.

“Nearly half of the food carried on the convoy could therefore not be delivered. Moreover, a part of the medical and health supplies to be included for delivery was removed by the Syrian authorities,” said UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric in a [statement](#) issued Tuesday, noting that the last time an inter-agency convoy reached eastern Ghouta this year was 14 February.

“The Secretary-General reminds all parties of their obligation under international humanitarian law and human rights law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure at all times and of the basic responsibility to ensure the necessary protection of all humanitarian organisations, personnel, facilities and other relief assets,” Mr. Dujarric added.

Eastern Ghouta, located near the capital, Damascus, has been under heavy bombardment, with more than 400,000 people experiencing shortages of food, fuel, medicines and drinking water.

[Security Council condemns attack on education workers in Central African Republic](#)

The United Nations Security Council on Tuesday denounced an attack against education workers that killed six, including one UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) consultant, who were traveling in the north-western prefecture of the Central African Republic (CAR).

In a [statement](#) issued to the press, the 15-member body “condemned in the strongest terms the heinous and cowardly attack” on 25 February by unknown assailants.

The other five victims were two officials of the country’s Ministry of Education, and three members of Bangui Sans Frontières, a UNICEF partner.

The statement said that Council members were “appalled” that the victims were targeted while traveling to provide training for community teachers who were to start teaching in temporary learning spaces set up by UNICEF and partners for 2,000 crisis-affected children in Markounda.

The Council reiterated the urgent and imperative need to hold accountable all perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses and international humanitarian law violations, irrespective of their status or political affiliation, and demanded that all armed groups lay down their arms and engage constructively in the peace process immediately and unconditionally.