

In Johannesburg, UN youth envoy spotlights need to boost support for reproductive health

In this century, child marriage cannot be allowed to happen, and similarly, children should not give birth to children, the United Nations youth envoy told an African forum on reproductive health and rights on Wednesday.

“There are high levels of adolescent pregnancy virtually everywhere in the continent. Africa has the highest levels of teenage pregnancy in the world. The larger part of them occur within marriage,” said Jayathma Wickramanayake, the UN Secretary General’s Special Envoy on Youth, at the opening ceremony of the eighth Africa Conference on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights held in Johannesburg, South Africa.

She said that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all UN Member States two-and-a-half years ago, acknowledges that increased attention to the health and well-being of the world’s adolescent girls, including their sexual and reproductive health, is a necessary condition for success.

“A cross-sectoral approach is critical to ensure the holistic development of young women, as well as young men, as we know that negative sexual and reproductive health outcomes impact on so many other issues in a young person’s life,” she stressed.

Ms. Wickramanayake noted that the millions of adolescent girls drop out of school due to child marriage and teenage pregnancy, and millions more still miss out on their education during their menstrual cycle because of the lack of sanitation facilities at their schools.

The lack of employment opportunities impacts those who become mothers while being children themselves, or those who are found to be HIV positive.

With the world today faced with the largest generation of youth in its history, these 1.8 billion people between the ages of 10 to 24 are the torchbearers of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Meaningful youth engagement and participation is critical to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

“Nowhere is this more critical than right here in the African continent, the only region that will continue to see its youth populations grow in the decades to come,” she said.

Africa continues to be faced with high levels of maternal mortality and morbidity. It is unacceptable that women continue to die while giving life. AIDS is still among the leading causes of death among adolescents in Sub-Saharan Africa.

All of this requires concerted efforts to ensure young people everywhere have access to quality, affordable and accessible sexual and reproductive health services.

She said during her multi-country visit across the continent, which took her to Senegal, the Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa, she witnessed the youthful energy that is driving creativity and new solutions to old problems, through technology and innovation.

It is young people who will drive the development of this region over the next several decades, and investing in young people is the recipe to the realization and achievement of the SDGs and other national and regional development frameworks, in particular the African Union 2063 Agenda.

“It is high time to recognize the power of the young people, and the value they can bring on to the decision-making table as full-fledged partners,” Ms. Wickramanayake said.

Focus on future, prioritize reconciliation for the region, UN envoy urges Western Balkans

Nearly a quarter of all Iraqi children are living in poverty, and in the wake of more than four years of violence, families are being pushed to “extreme measures” in order to survive, said the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) on Monday, as a major conference on rebuilding the country was set to open tomorrow in neighbouring Kuwait.

Maldives: UN rights experts denounce detention of judges as ‘direct attack’ on Supreme Court

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[Around four million Iraqi children in need says UNICEF, ahead of investment conference in Kuwait](#)

12 February 2018 – Nearly a quarter of all Iraqi children are living in poverty, and in the wake of more than four years of violence, families are being pushed to “extreme measures” in order to survive, said the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) on Monday, as a major conference on rebuilding the country was set to open tomorrow in neighbouring Kuwait.

“Children are Iraq’s future,” [said](#) Geert Cappaelaere, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, adding that “the Kuwait Conference for Iraq this week is an opportunity for world leaders to show that we are willing to invest in children – and through investing in children, that we are willing to invest in rebuilding a stable Iraq.”

The joint UNICEF and The UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) assessment entitled [Committing to Change – Securing the Future](#), which is being presented at the conference, concludes that without investment to restore infrastructure and services in war-ravaged cities such as Mosul, the “hard-won gains to end conflict in Iraq are in jeopardy.”

The Government-led battle to liberate swathes of Iraq last year occupied by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) terrorists since 2014, led to widespread destruction of homes, schools, hospitals and recreational spaces.

Since 2014, the UN verified 150 attacks on educational facilities, and around 50 attacks on health centres and their staff. Half of Iraq’s schools are in need of repair, and more than three million children have suffered disruption to their time in the classroom.

As displaced families try to return, the poorest often have little choice but to live in the ruins of their homes, in conditions that are hazardous to children. More than 21,400 homes have been destroyed or damaged in Mosul alone, according to UN figures.

The report indicates that some of the neediest families simply took their children out of school to work, and “many children were forced to fight.”

“Children are hardest hit in times of conflict and urban crisis recovery and reconstruction should be prioritized, adequately supported and quickly implemented,” said Zena Ali Ahmad, Arab Region Director for UN-Habitat.

The UN agencies are appealing at the conference – which runs 13 to 14 February – for commitments to restore basic infrastructure and services for

children, including psycho-social support.

A UN Spokesman announced Monday that [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres will attend the Conference and is expected to urge the international community to support the reconstruction of Iraq.

[More than 5,000 child soldiers released in 2017, but tens of thousands still being used in conflict – UN](#)

12 February 2018 – The global commitment to end the use of children in armed conflict led to the release and reintegration of more than 5,000 children in 2017, but tens of thousands of boys and girls are still being recruited, kidnapped, and forced to fight or work for military groups or armed forces at “alarming rates,” according to the United Nations.

“Children can only be freed from armed groups and forces through [a comprehensive reintegration process](#), including medical and psycho-social support, as well as educational programmes and trainings,” the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, said Monday, on the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers.

“Without a strong political and financial commitment to the reintegration process, re-recruitment is unfortunately likely to happen in many conflict situations,” Ms. Gamba added.

Despite progress, boys and girls continue to be recruited, kidnapped, forced to fight or work for military groups or armed forces. The recruitment and use of children happened in all 20 country situations covered by the mandate entrusted to Ms. Gambia and her office.

Sixty-one parties to conflict out of 63 are listed for this grave violation in the 2016 [Annual Report](#) of the Secretary-General on the issue, making it by far the most widely-spread violation.

“It is our responsibility to show these children that there is hope outside of conflicts, that they can live in peace and security and be allowed to live their dreams,” Ms. Gamba, reminded.

The International Day was initiated in 2002 when the [Optional Protocol](#) to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict entered into force on February 12, 2002. This protocol, which sets

the minimum age for recruitment into armed forces in conflict at 18, has been ratified by 167 States.

Is the international approach fit-for-purpose?

Meanwhile, the United Nations University (UNU) has been collaborating with the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)), the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Luxembourg and Switzerland, to examine whether the international community's approach to this scourge is effective, or requires adjustments.

The goal is to use [the empirical findings of the research](#) to inform programmatic guidance for actors in the field and to effectively disengage children from armed groups.

In their report, titled *Cradled by Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict*, researchers suggest that most children do not so much "opt" into conflict as "grow" into it.

According to the [report](#), conflict structures the information they see and the choices they make. It pulls and pushes them in many directions. Conflict erodes their relationships. It exacerbates their needs and exposes them to untold risks. Conflict shapes their identity and heightens their need to find meaning in their lives.

Ultimately, the forces of conflict narrow the paths available to children, and tragically, for many, lead to exploitation, violence, and trauma.

These findings undermine the conventional wisdom that "violent extremism" or ideology is predominantly responsible for driving children into armed groups.

The report proposes five principles for more effective international efforts to prevent and respond to child recruitment and use by armed groups: avoid programmes focused primarily on ideological factors; only incorporate ideological components where individually necessary and where they can be embedded into larger, holistic efforts to address the needs and risks of children; ensure all interventions are empirically based; rigorously assess interventions over the long term; and engage children not just as beneficiaries, but as partners.