

Olympic message of peace is universal, UN chief says ahead Pyeongchang Games

9 February 2018 – As the world comes together for the Winter Olympics, which kicked off Friday in Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres called on everyone to recognize and promote the Games' universal message of peace and tolerance.

“The Olympic spirit allows people to be together, from all over the world, to respect each other, to assert the values of tolerance, of mutual understanding that are the basic elements for peace to be possible,” Mr. Guterres [told](#) journalists in Pyeongchang.

Obviously, in the present context, he said, there is a lot of attention for this message of peace in relation to the Korean Peninsula, but the Olympic message of peace is not local.

“It is universal. It's for the world. It is valued in Korea as it is valued everywhere where we struggle to try to address the many complex conflicts that we are facing,” he said.

The UN chief also extended his appreciation and pride to be at the Winter Olympics and highlighted the cooperation between UN and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), as well as the values for which the IOC and its sister organization, the International Paralympic Committee, stand.

The Winter Olympics opened earlier today (local time) with cultural and artistic performances as well as the customary parade of athletes, which was the delegations from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea under one flag, carried together by a sportsperson from each team.

Olympic torch 'a symbol of hope' – UN General Assembly President

Also today, the opening ceremony saw the conclusion of the long journey of the Olympic Torch that started in November 2017.

In the last leg of its journey, the flame was carried, among others, by Miroslav Lajčák, the President of the UN General Assembly and Thomas Bach, the President of the IOC.

Outlining the commonalities between sport and diplomacy – both about peace and bringing people together – Mr. Lajčák highlighted that the Olympic torch is “probably the best symbol in our times in our world.”

“[It] is a symbol of peace, a symbol of youth, a symbol of sport, communication, a symbol of tradition, a symbol of hope.” he said.

British commander at UN Mission in South Sudan serves as role model for young women

9 February 2018 – Lieutenant Colonel Katie Hislop of the United Kingdom said she was happy to serve as a role model for young women considering a career with the armed forces. The mother of two was the only woman to head a military contingent at the United Nations Mission in South Sudan ([UNMISS](#)).

“I recognize that women are still a minority in most of the armed forces across the world, so in some ways it’s a privileged position,” she said in an interview.

“Fortunately, for me in the UK, it’s a fairly normal position I find myself in. So, if there’s anything that I could do to be a role model for young women who perhaps don’t think that a military career is possible, then I would be happy to do that.”

Lt Col Hislop commanded the UK Engineering Task Force at UNMISS, made up of peacekeepers who are electricians, builders, bricklayers, concreters and plumbers who worked across a wide range of construction projects.

As contingent commander, Lt Col Hislop supervised several projects, including the building of a hospital in the town of Bentiu, located in the north.

Its construction helped to ease the case load at a hospital run by MSF, the humanitarian organization which provides medical aid to people affected by conflict and natural disasters. The new hospital has a surgical facility as well as an emergency department which can treat catastrophic injuries and serious diseases.

“Prior to the hospital being there, there simply wasn’t a facility to treat UN staff,” she said. “If someone is particularly seriously injured, it may well be that they are then transferred to a bigger facility, maybe in Nairobi for instance.”

Other tasks performed by her contingent included building additional landing sites for helicopters and digging drainage channels, particularly during the rainy season.

The UK is among 125 countries providing military and police officers to serve at 15 UN peacekeeping operations worldwide. Over 600 British personnel were deployed with the UN as of December 2017; more than half in South Sudan alone.



Since 1948, thousands of troops from the United Kingdom have taken part in UN peacekeeping operations. More than 100 have paid the ultimate price while defending civilians and supporting operations approved by the UN Security Council. Pictured, UK engineers in South Sudan marking Remembrance Day in honour of colleagues lost in the line of duty. *Photo: UNMISS*



Some 600 UK personnel are currently deployed in UN peacekeeping operations, the majority in South Sudan and Cyprus. Their largest presence is currently in South Sudan, where 400 troops, including 41 women, are deployed with the UN mission in the country in support of the Government and the South Sudanese people. Engineers and medical specialists from the UK have helped to construct a temporary field hospital providing medical care to more than 1,800 people. Pictured, Combat medic from The Black Watch, 3rd Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Scotland. *Photo: British Army/Crown Copyrights*



Corporal Heather McQueen is a vehicle mechanic and maintains all UN engineering vehicles in Malakal, South Sudan. Pictured, Heather speaks with Angelo, a local colleague who assists in maintaining the vehicles. Heather teaches Angelo about how to repair vehicles; he provides her with vital advice on how weather and road conditions in this area of South Sudan affect vehicle maintenance. *Photo: UNMISS*



The UK contribution to UN peacekeeping in South Sudan includes a UK C-130, which flies the Entebbe-Juba-Malakal route, moving humanitarian-enabling supplies, UN material and vehicles, including to the hard-to-reach base in Malakal. *Photo: UNMISS*



Besides contributing troops to South Sudan and Cyprus, the United Kingdom is the sixth largest contributor of financial assistance to UN peacekeeping. Pictured, the Black Watch, 3rd Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Scotland wearing the distinctive blue UN berets ahead of their deployment to the UN peacekeeping mission in Cyprus ([UNFICYP](#)). *Photo: British Army/Crown Copyrights*

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Peacekeepers serving under the UN flag work in difficult and dangerous environments, risking their lives to protect some of the world's most vulnerable people. As of 31 January 2018, the UK has lost 104 personnel in the service of peace.

Overall, 14,528 uniformed personnel from around the globe are serving with UNMISS; 718 of them are women. The UN encourages its troop and police contributing countries to deploy more women in peacekeeping operations;

numerous studies have demonstrated the unique and positive role that women can play in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding.

South Sudan is the world's youngest country, having gained independence in July 2011. The UN mission was initially mandated to support the Government in consolidating peace, thus fostering longer-term state building and economic development, among other duties.

However, political violence that broke out in December 2013 has resulted in thousands killed, with more than four million forced to flee their homes, either to other parts of the country or across the border, for example to Uganda, which is hosting around one million South Sudanese refugees.

UNMISS troops are protecting more than 200,000 civilians in six Protection of Civilian sites throughout South Sudan.

For Lt Col Hilsop, who has completed her deployment to South Sudan, serving under the UN flag was "an absolute pleasure."

[Ahead of International Day of Women and Girls in Science, UN calls for smashing stereotypes](#)

9 February 2018 – It is time to support and invest in women and girls who want to pursue careers in scientific research, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres said in a message to mark the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, observed annually on 11 February.

Mr. Guterres said that although both girls and boys have the potential to pursue their ambitions in science and mathematics, in school and at work, [systematic discrimination](#) means that women occupy less than 30 per cent of research and development jobs worldwide.

"We need to encourage and support girls and women achieve their full potential as scientific researchers and innovators. Women and girls need this, and the world needs this, if we are to achieve our ambitions for sustainable development on a healthy planet," he stated.

The UN chief called for "concerted, concrete efforts" to overcome stereotypes and biases, such as media representations of scientists and innovators as being mainly men.

His concerns are being echoed by two other top UN officials.

In a [joint statement](#) on the Day, the Director-General of the UN Educational,

Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), Audrey Azoulay, and the Executive Director of [UN Women](#), Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, stressed that such imagery makes it difficult for girls to believe they can be scientists, explorers or inventors, for example.

They said the future will be marked by scientific and technological progress which “will be the greatest when it draws on the full talent, creativity and ideas of women and girls in science.”

They added that the rapidly growing science and technology sectors are “vital” to national economies.

However, UNESCO [data](#) shows only around 30 per cent of all female students in higher education select the so-called STEM subjects – science, technology, engineering or mathematics. One of the main tools for tackling gender inequality in the sciences is dismantling the barriers to girls and women, at home, in the classroom and in the workplace. This requires a change in attitudes and the challenging of stereotypes, they said.

“We need to tackle biased perceptions amongst teachers, employers, peers and parents of the suitability of girls and young women to learn science – or learn at all – to pursue scientific careers or to lead and manage in academic spheres,” the UN officials stressed.

They went on to stress that: “Tackling some of the greatest challenges of the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development – from improving health to combatting climate change – will rely on harnessing all talent.”

“That means we need to achieve a significant increase in the number of women entering and remaining in STEM careers.”

In December 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution that established the annual [International Day](#) to recognize the critical role women and girls play in science and technology communities.

[Women and children threatened by sexual violence at refugee reception centres in Greek islands – UN](#)

9 February 2018 – Asylum seekers are reporting sexual harassment and violence at some sub-standard reception centres on Greek islands – where even bathing during the daytime can be dangerous – despite Government measures to address the dire living conditions, the United Nations refugee agency warned on Friday.

“In 2017, UNHCR [the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees] received reports from 622 survivors of [sexual and gender-based violence](#) on the Greek Aegean islands, out of which at least 28 per cent experienced [such violence] after arriving in Greece,” UNHCR spokesperson Cécile Pouilly said Friday at the regular press briefing in Geneva.

Women reported inappropriate behaviour, sexual harassment and attempted sexual attacks as the most common forms of such violence.

“The situation is particularly worrying in the Reception and Identification Centres (RIC) of Moria (Lesvos) and Vathy (Samos), where thousands of refugees continue to stay in unsuitable shelter with inadequate security,” she added.

Some 5,500 people are in these centres, which is double their intended capacity. Reports of sexual harassment in Moria are particularly high.

“In these two centres,” Ms. Pouilly continued, “bathrooms and latrines are no-go zones after dark for women or children, unless they are accompanied. Even bathing during daytime can be dangerous. In Moria, one woman told our teams that she had not taken a shower in two months from fear.”

Identifying and helping survivors is hampered by a reluctance to report assaults out of discrimination concerns, stigma and retaliation, helplessness and insufficient trust to open up – including to UNHCR and medical and mental health experts from national services. Therefore, the actual number of incidents is likely to be higher than reported.

Over the past weeks, the authorities have accelerated transfers to the mainland, slightly reducing overcrowding, but crowded conditions continue to hinder outreach and prevention activities.

“Insecurity is another problem,” the spokesperson stressed. “Although there are police patrols, these remain insufficient, particularly at night, and don’t cover extended areas adjacent to the RICs, where people stay in tents without any security presence.”

Conditions are also building frustration among people, leading to a difficult and tense security environment, further raising the risk of sexual and gender-based violence.

While UNHCR welcomes Government measures to reduce the risk of sexual and gender-based violence, further steps must be taken to protect those in reception centres, including children, women and men.

Ms. Pouilly listed the steps, which involved gender separation – including separate shelters and secure and well-lit wash areas; improved conditions and services; greater police presence – with additional policewomen; more lighting in public areas; increased mainland transfers to ease overcrowding; additional staff dedicated to deal with the issue; and enhanced awareness-raising activities.

Exposure to sexual and gender-based violence worsens the already precarious

experience of those fleeing war-torn countries and crossing sometimes dangerous territory to reach a safe haven.

“UNHCR will continue to work with and remains ready to support the Government to strengthen its operational response and build capacity, to prevent sexual and gender-based violence and to identify and refer survivors of [such violence] to appropriate services and shelters,” Ms. Pouilly concluded.

[Syria: Life ‘living nightmare’ for children in East Ghouta, UNICEF chief warns](#)

9 February 2018 – Following reports that dozens of children have been killed in violence this week alone in Syria, a senior United Nations official on Friday stressed the need for unconditional evacuations of sick and wounded children from East Ghouta and other sieged areas.

“The violence shows no sign of abating,” said UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Executive Director Henrietta H. Fore in a statement. “For children who remain trapped under siege and under wanton, heavy violence across Syria, life is a [living nightmare](#). They are struggling just to stay alive.”

Violence is intensifying in several parts of Syria, and in East Ghouta alone, hundreds of children are in urgent need of medical evacuation, she said, noting that four years of siege have crumbled health and other basic services and over the past few months, malnutrition has increased five-fold.

Evacuation of sick children ‘not a bargaining chip’

“Children, wherever they are in Syria, must have access to healthcare. The evacuation of sick and wounded children from besieged areas should be a given, not part of bargaining efforts,” she warned.

“I am heartbroken by what the children of Syria continue to suffer because of actions taken by adults – actions that show total disregard for the protection, safety and wellbeing of children,” she added.

Protection of children must be paramount at all times, and schools, hospitals and playgrounds should be places of safety, never targets, she stressed, calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities in Syria.