

With rising number of girls at risk, world in 'race against time' to end female genital mutilation – UN

6 February 2018 – Female genital mutilation is a violent act that, among other things, causes infection, disease, childbirth complications and death, said the Executive Directors of the United Nations Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)) and UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) in a joint statement for the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Describing FGM as ["a cruel practice"](#) that inflicts emotional harm and preys on girls between infancy and age 15, the most vulnerable members of society, the UN agency chiefs called it a ["violation of human rights"](#) that perpetuates the low status of girls and women; and a drag on the well-being of communities and economies.

["Yet, it is also something that can be stopped,"](#) UNFPA's Dr. Natalia Kanem, and UNICEF's Henrietta H. Fore said in Tuesday's statement.

["Around the world, momentum to eliminate female genital mutilation is building. Political will, community engagement and targeted investment are changing practices and changing lives,"](#) they added.

In countries where both agencies work jointly to end FGM, girls are one-third less likely today to undergo the harmful practice than in 1997.

Since 2008, more than 25 million people in some 18,000 communities across 15 countries publicly disavowed the practice, and globally its prevalence has declined by nearly a quarter since 2000.

["This is good for girls and young women themselves; it is also good for their families and communities,"](#) the agency heads stressed.

Girls who are not subjected to the practice tend to grow up to be healthier and have healthier children, they elaborated, pointing out that they are often ["better educated, earn higher incomes and are more empowered to make decisions about their own lives."](#)

The UN agencies also noted that the countries committed to changing the harmful practice reap commensurate benefits.

["This is the good news,"](#) they continued. ["Yet, population trends in some of the world's poorest countries where female genital mutilation persists threaten to roll back our progress."](#)

By 2030, more than one-third of births globally will be in the 30 FGM countries ["requiring accelerated progress to protect millions at risk."](#)

["It is unconscionable that these girls should be added to the 200](#)

million women and girls in the world today who have already endured female genital mutilation. Who already bear the scars, or suffer related complications, or relive harsh memories of pain and betrayal, they stressed.

Nobody — not the girls, their families or communities — benefits economically or socially in unequal societies where such violence against girls is accepted, argued the UNICEF and UNFPA chiefs.

They maintained that FGM rates can drop rapidly when the issue is taken on by governments, communities and families; when social norms are confronted, village by village; when medical professionals jointly refuse to perform it; when laws make it a crime — and authorities enforce them; when access to health, education and legal services ensure sustainable change; and where girls and women are protected and empowered to make their voices heard.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognize that female genital mutilation undermines progress towards a more equal, just and prosperous world, and target by 2030 its elimination.

Given the rising number of girls at risk, both agencies call it a race against time.

With increased investment, redoubled political commitment, greater community engagement and more empowered women and girls, the agency heads upheld, it is a race that can be won. And because it can, it must.

It is high time to eliminate female genital mutilation from the face of the earth forever. It is a task for all of us, and for our common future, the statement concluded.

For his part, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres called FGM a gross violation of the human rights of women and girls.

Without concerted, accelerated action, a further 68 million girls could be subjected to this harmful practice by 2030, he warned in his message marking the Day.

The UN chief pointed out that while several countries with strong political engagement have seen success, the progress is not enough to keep up with population growth, and without immediate action, the number of cases will continue to rise.

Sustainable development cannot be achieved without full respect for the human rights of women and girls, he upheld, reiterating SDG 5's target for FGM elimination.

He said that together with the European Union, the UN has launched the Spotlight Initiative, a global, multi-year undertaking that aims to create strong partnerships and align efforts to end all forms of violence against women and girls, including female genital mutilation.

With the dignity, health and well-being of millions of girls at stake,

there is no time to waste,” underscored the Secretary-General.
“Together, we can and must end this harmful practice.”

Amid ‘difficult reality’ in Middle East, two-state solution more important than ever – UN chief

5 February 2018 – International consensus on a two-State solution to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could be eroding “at a time when it is more important than ever,” [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres said on Tuesday, calling the ‘question of Palestine’ one of the longest unresolved issues on the agenda of the United Nations.

“We must face today’s difficult reality,” Secretary-General António Guterres told the opening of the 2018 session of the [Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People](#), which was created by the UN General Assembly in 1975 to seek and end to the Israeli occupation and ensure the achievement of a two-state solution in the Middle East conflict.

“Negative trends on the ground have the potential to create an [irreversible one-state reality](#) that is incompatible with realizing the legitimate national, historic and democratic aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians,” he added.

After decades, “convergence and global consensus could be eroding, making effective concerted action more difficult to achieve,” he stressed, noting “illegal” settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank as “a major obstacle to peace.” “It must be halted and reversed,” he maintained. Moreover, the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza remains dire, with predictions by the UN Country Team in the Occupied Palestine Territory that unless concrete action is taken to improve basic services and infrastructure, it will become unliveable by 2020.

“Yet,” the UN chief continued “Gaza remains squeezed by crippling closures and a state of constant humanitarian emergency” as two million Palestinians struggle daily with an electricity crisis, chronic unemployment and a paralyzed economy – amid an unfolding environmental disaster.

The latest funding shortfall in the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East ([UNRWA](#)) will further impair critical services and threaten the human security, rights and dignity of five million Palestine refugees across the Middle East. “I appeal to the generosity of the international community not to let that happen,” implored Mr. Guterres, adding “Reconciliation is a key step in reaching the larger objective of a Palestinian State and lasting peace.” He reiterated his commitment to

supporting the parties' efforts to a two-State solution.

"A two-State solution is the only way to achieve the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and secure a sustainable solution to the conflict," concluded the Secretary-General.

Meetings Coverage Press Release can be found [here](#)

[Female genital mutilation 'not acceptable' in the 21st century – UN envoy on youth](#)

5 February 2018 – Speaking a day ahead of the International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation, the United Nations youth envoy people underscored that the ghastly practice is an aversion to the human rights of millions and keeps them from achieving their full potential.

"This is not acceptable and this is done in the name of tradition, culture, religion or in the name of ensuring that women are to take on subservient roles to the men they will eventually marry," said Jayathma Wickramanayake, the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, speaking at an international forum in the Gambia on strategies to combat the practice.

"This is not acceptable in the 21st century."

Globally, over 200 million women and girls are estimated to have undergone some form of genital mutilation and girls aged 14 and younger account for about 44 million of those who have been "cut."

[According](#) to the UN Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)), although the practice is declining in many countries where it is prevalent, many of these countries also experiencing a high rate of population growth – meaning that the number of girls who undergo genital mutilation will continue to grow if efforts are not significantly scaled up.

The in one of its Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development – agreed to by all UN Member States – has called for eliminating female genital mutilation as well as other harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage ([target 5.3](#)).

Countries too have also stepped up their efforts.

For instance, in November 2015, Gambia [banned](#) and subsequently criminalized female genital mutilation. Many other African countries also now have legislation that that forbids the practice.

In addition to implementing the law, the Envoy on Youth also called on all countries and stakeholders to address any existing gaps in their legal frameworks and reiterated the support from the UN in overcoming the harmful practice.

“History has taught us that human societies can come up with reprehensible social practices – that are justified under false guises – to strengthen the power structures or maintain the status quo for certain groups in society,” she said.

“Luckily we also know that social practice is not static and that it can change as our understanding evolves.”

Marked annually on 6 February, the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation aims to strengthen momentum towards ending the practice which is globally recognized as a violation of the human rights of girls and women as well as perpetuates deep-rooted inequality between the sexes.

[UN chief congratulates US, Russia on nuclear arsenal cuts, urges further disarmament](#)

5 February 2018 – United Nations Secretary-General on Monday congratulated the United States and Russia on successfully reducing their strategic nuclear forces to the level required by a new bilateral treaty signed in 2010, calling on both sides to engage in the necessary dialogue that will lead to further arsenal reductions.

“The Secretary-General stresses that at a time when global anxieties about nuclear weapons are higher than at any time since the Cold War, [efforts in nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control](#) are more vital than ever,” said a statement issued by his Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric.

“These endeavors can play significant roles in building trust and confidence, and preventing, mitigating and resolving conflicts,” the statement added.

Known as “New START,” the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms reduces deployed nuclear weapons to 700 delivery vehicles and 1,550 warheads.

It is a part of a series of bilateral nuclear arms control agreements between the two nations that “have significantly reduced the dangers posed by nuclear weapons and are steps towards the common aspiration of a world free of nuclear weapons,” the statement noted.

Mr. Guterres called on them “to engage in the necessary dialogue that will lead to further arsenal reductions” and “to continue to display the historic leadership across the multilateral disarmament agenda that has proven so valuable to our collective security,” the statement said.

The new Treaty was signed in Prague on 8 April, 2010 and came into force on 5 February, 2011.

[Proof of chemical weapons use in Syria should be met with ‘meaningful response,’ UN disarmament chief](#)

5 February 2018 – Evidence of the use, or likely use, of banned chemical weapons in Syria should be met with a “meaningful response” within the Security Council, the United Nations disarmament affairs chief said on Monday.

UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu was [briefing](#) the Council on the work being undertaken by the UN and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact Finding Mission (FFM) to look into all allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

“New reports by the FFM are pending. Should they conclude that there has been the use, or likely use, of chemical weapons in any of these alleged incidents, our obligation to enact a meaningful response will be further intensified.”

She said that the complete destruction of the Government’s 27 above-ground facilities should be completed within two months, and added that the FFM was due to submit a report “very soon.”

The majority of allegations involve the use of chlorine gas.

Meanwhile, allegations of chemical weapon use were continuing, she said, “including only this past weekend in the town of Saraqeb.”

According to news reports, nine people have been treated with breathing problems, after a bomb believed to be filled with the toxic gas was dropped on the opposition-held town, in Idlib Governorate.

High Representative Nakamitsu said that the situation made it “abundantly clear our continuing and collective responsibility to ensure that those responsible are held to account.” She said that another FFM team has been looking into allegations of the use of chemical weapons by other warring parties, brought to their attention by the Syrian government. She said its

report was pending.

Ms. Nakamitsu said that should any of the reports conclude that there had been “the use, or likely use, of chemical weapons in any of these alleged incidents, our obligation to enact a meaningful response will be further intensified.”

“It is my hope, and the hope of the Secretary-General, that such a response will favour unity, not impunity,” she added.

In November last year, the Security Council failed to adopt a resolution to renew the mandate of an international panel investigating the use of chemical weapons in Syria, due to the use of the veto by permanent member, Russia.

Ms. Nakamitsu, also the head of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), told the Security Council that work still remains to be done to fully implement Council resolution 2118 as well as for the international community to have “shared confidence” that the Syria’s chemical weapons programme has been fully eliminated.