

[UN chief calls for \\$1 billion in donor contributions to emergency response fund](#)

8 December 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Friday called for \$1 billion in donor contributions to the Organization's Central Emergency Response Fund ([CERF](#)) – a pool of funding that supports critical relief operations in crises around the world – as humanitarian needs have increased from \$5.2 billion in 2005 to over \$24 billion today.

“Over the past twelve years, CERF has been at the forefront of humanitarian response,” UN Secretary-General said at a pledging conference in New York, thanking the 126 Member States and Observers, and the other donors who have generously contributed to the fund since its creation in 2005.

“CERF is without question one of our most important tools to reach people quickly and save lives,” he added.

This year, CERF, managed by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), has funded life-saving work, allocating nearly \$130 million to help prevent famine in Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen.

The fund also supported relief responses in other places, including for Palestine refugees in Gaza, for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, and those affected by hurricanes Irma and Maria in the Caribbean.

Mr. Guterres then announced a CERF allocation of \$100 million to meet critical needs in nine underfunded emergencies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Tanzania, Cameroon, Mali, Philippines, Eritrea, Haiti and Pakistan.

Protracted conflict and the impact of natural disasters, compounded by structural fragility and chronic vulnerability, mean that more people than ever before survive on the brink of disaster.

In 2018, protracted crises are likely to continue, while the impact of climate change is likely to grow and intensify.

“There is no sign of a let-up in humanitarian needs,” the UN chief said, noting that this is why the General Assembly adopted a resolution a year ago that calls for an expansion of CERF's annual funding target from \$450 million to \$1 billion.

Noting that the global humanitarian funding gap stands at \$11 billion as of 30 November and humanitarian response plans are funded at an average of just 60 per cent, the Secretary-General stressed that a \$1 billion CERF will help to bolster contingency financing.

“\$1 billion is an ambitious but achievable goal,” he said. “A strong United Nations needs a strong CERF.”

[UN official releases funds to enable live-saving aid programmes in Gaza Strip](#)

8 December 2017 – A senior United Nations aid and development official in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) today released \$2.2 million to support health, food and livelihood programmes in the Gaza Strip.

According to a [news release](#) by the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), the allocation authorized Friday, by Robert Piper, the UN Coordinator for Humanitarian Aid and Development Activities, will also enable essential and life-saving child and maternal health interventions, including the provision of incubators and phototherapy equipment to neonatal intensive care units and intensive care units in Gaza hospitals.

“With each day that passes without improvement, hopes diminish and frustrations rise. We must summon the resources and political will to bring change to Gaza,” said Mr. Piper in the news release.

“In spite of political movement towards Palestinian reconciliation in recent months, most of the measures adopted by the Palestinian Authority since March 2017, which triggered the latest deterioration in the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, are yet to be reversed,” he added.

The resources from the oPt Humanitarian Fund, will enable the most vulnerable families in the Gaza Strip to immediately access fresh and nutritious local food through the provision of six-month fresh food vouchers for families falling below the deep poverty line, with insufficient or no access to means of assistance and with limited capacity to meet their households’ basic food needs.

It will also support livelihoods and improved food security of farmers to overcome the electricity crisis in the Gaza Strip, through provision of solar power systems and agricultural supplies.

The allocation comes in the context of an overall deterioration in conditions in the Gaza Strip this year following the worsening of an electricity crisis that has left Gaza’s nearly two million – already suffering from 10 years of Israeli blockade and internal Palestinian divisions – with an average of only four to six hours of electricity per day, severely disrupting daily life and the provision of basic services, the news release added.

The oPt Humanitarian Fund is an emergency pooled fund that supports the delivery of strategic humanitarian assistance to address priority needs, while retaining the flexibility to respond unforeseen emergencies or events. It is a pooled funding mechanism, operated from donations from the Governments of Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey.

[UN chief condemns attack that leaves dozens of peacekeepers dead in volatile eastern DR Congo](#)

8 December 2017 – Dozens of United Nations ‘blue helmets’ in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have been killed and many more injured, in what the [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres described as the “worst attack” on UN peacekeepers in recent history.

Late Thursday, a MONUSCO (the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC) Company Operating Base at Force at Semuliki in Beni territory, North Kivu, was attacked by suspected Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) elements, resulting in a protracted fighting between the suspected armed group elements and MONUSCO and Armed Forces of the DRC, known by the French acronym, FARDC.

“These deliberate attacks against UN peacekeepers are unacceptable and constitute a war crime” said Secretary-General António Guterres, adding: “I condemn this attack unequivocally.”

Further, calling on the DRC authorities to investigate the incident and swiftly bring the perpetrators to justice, the UN chief stressed: “There must be no impunity for such assaults, here or anywhere else.”

In his remarks, he also said that the attack is another indication of the challenges faced by UN peacekeepers around the world and acknowledged the sacrifices made by troop contributing countries in the service of global peace.

“These brave women and men are putting their lives on the line every day across the world to serve peace and to protect civilians,” he noted, offering condolences to the families and loved ones of those killed and a speedy recovery to those injured.

He also informed that military reinforcements, including the Force Commander from MONUSCO, have arrived on the scene and medical evacuation of casualties is ongoing.

The volatile North Kivu region, located in eastern DRC, has witnessed a

number of attacks on UN peacekeeping forces. In October, two UN 'blue helmets' were killed and another 18 were injured their base was attacked by the ADF armed group.

[Podcast: Peacekeeping and protection in South Sudan](#)

7 December 2017 – Defending the vulnerable from attack is one of the important duties of a UN peacekeeper, but what do you do when you come across a secret safe that may contain weapons, hidden away in a camp designed to protect civilians?

That's one of the real-life dilemmas facing a UN police patrol in this [latest edition](#) of our podcast series from *UN News*, 'The Lid Is On.'

We'll be taking you inside one of the Protection of Civilian sites, where thousands of South Sudanese civilians have been sheltering during years of conflict, under the watchful eye of UN 'blue helmets,' as peacekeepers are widely known, from countries across the world.

Daniel Dickinson has been working as the Spokesperson for the UN Mission in the country, known as [UNMISS](#), since early this year, and we asked him to report on the behind-the-scenes work that its troops and police get involved in every day, to try and ease the suffering of the world's youngest nation.

AUDIO: Peacekeeping and protection in South Sudan.

[FEATURE: Seizing on global trend, Afghan women reporters empower voices against violence](#)

7 December 2017 – In a year when the [#metoo](#) hashtag has inspired women across the globe to tell their personal tales of harassment and unwanted sexual advances in the workplace, a team of female television reporters in northern Afghanistan is promising to "leave no sister behind" by telling the often harrowing stories of Afghan women and girls trapped by abuse and gender-based violence.

In Afghanistan, the challenge of helping women tell these stories is fraught with peril. It requires the use of confidentiality and anonymity to protect women and girls who choose to speak out. Those who report abuse – from simple harassment to severe beatings and rape – risk retribution and often more violence, sometimes including murder, for speaking out.

“Our first step is to gain the trust of survivors,” says Raihana Rasoly, an anchor and reporter at Ariana Television in the city of Mazar-i-Sharif. “When we report on abuse, we are careful to follow up and stay in contact with those who want to tell their story through the media.”

She went on to say that the media outlet also works to help get the women to safety, including, if necessary, to the local women’s shelter.

“I would also say that when it comes to sexual harassment, female journalists know a lot about this problem,” adds Ms. Rasoly, who heads up the regional bureau of the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee. “In Afghanistan, if a woman or girl tells her story, she can be saddled with a stigma for life.”

Though women in developed countries are also subject to ostracism and further abuse for speaking out, in Afghanistan that can also be accompanied by societal perceptions that the violations of a woman or girl have tainted her for life. She, in turn, can be abandoned by her own family.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)) has taken a special interest in providing support for media organizations keen to help Afghan women, men and marginalized groups tell their stories.



Ariana TV reporters in Mazar, seizing on global trends, help expose abuse and violence. Left to Right: Anosha Ansari; Raihana Rasoly; Wahida Faizy. Photo: Philip Smucker

The UN has sponsored forums and athletic events to promote conversation and awareness of gender-based violence and harassment, and has worked with local media outlets to extend the messages coming out of these events to surrounding communities. The UN also has conducted traditional and social media campaigns to promote women’s rights, including through the participation of religious leaders, academics, elders and other public figures.

The best way to confront gender-based violence is to empower women, girls, and all others to speak up, according to Sayed Barez, a UNAMA public information officer. “When survivors are allowed to speak out – with the help of the media – it holds perpetrators accountable, turns lives around, and sensitizes society to all forms of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.”

In the end, he says, although obstacles remain, “the UN hopes to help in Afghanistan’s transformation by focusing efforts around enforcing laws that defend women and by insisting on the view that all and any violence against

women and girls is wrong.”

In Mazar, where efforts have been made to provide space and shelter for female survivors of violence and abuse, women who have sought protection have also been able to speak out through the media.

“Though it can be dangerous even for the shelters, depriving women of contact to the outside world and the media is illegal,” says Sayed Abdul Safwat, Director of Independent Cooperation for Change, an Afghan group instrumental in setting up women’s shelters across Afghanistan.

“Anything less than access to the media makes a shelter more akin to a prison,” he says. “Women should not be required to talk to the media, but they certainly should have the right to do so.”



Afghan woman in traditional cover, known as a burka, at the Blue Mosque in Mazar. Photo: Jawad Jalail

In social media across Afghanistan, one trending hashtag is #wheresmyname, which highlights the effort of women to be heard and recognized by men. “Women are often ignored in Afghan society, and their interests fall on deaf ears, so this hashtag is a kind of a cry for recognition,” said Anosha Ansari, also a reporter at Ariana TV in Mazar.

“Even when women are losing hope, they still want to be heard,” she added, pointing out that women and girls can often go unnamed even on their gravestones, which merely read, “Wife of someone” or “Daughter of another.”

Social media is a way not only for abused women and girls to learn more about their rights with regard to gender-based violence, but also to highlight the plight of survivors, particularly in distant locales across Afghanistan.

Even when women are losing hope, they still want to be heard Anosha Ansari

Yet Afghan women are usually reluctant to identify themselves with a real photo on Facebook, Twitter or elsewhere. “Of course, there is also self-censorship on social media,” said Ms. Ansari. “Women and girls usually want to avoid confrontation, so they often choose to keep stories of violence and abuse to themselves, but not always.”

Afghanistan’s media culture remains one of the most open and vibrant in the region, but breaking down conservative customs and taboos about discussing gender-based violence is a constant challenge. “There are still a lot of male leaders in society who say that this is not a subject that needs discussion,” said Ms. Rasoly. “That is a mindset that we are dealing with and trying to change.”

Each year, the international community marks 25 November as the International

Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Beginning on that date, and running through Human Rights Day on 10 December, are the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign.



Women demonstrating for rights. The banner reads: "Human rights are your rights! Human rights are my right! Human rights are our rights!" Photo: Farzana Wahidy

The theme for the 2017 campaign is "Leave No One Behind." Civil society activists across the world, including those in Afghanistan, are calling for all governments to use laws and policies as tools to confront and punish the perpetrators of violence against women, and better protect everyone. Led by UN Women, the agency leading the global effort for gender equality, which also works on the ground in Afghanistan, the UN focuses attention on vulnerable groups.

Relentless fighting in the hinterlands of Afghanistan prevents reporters, including the team of women at Ariana TV, from covering the issue from the countryside where vulnerable groups are at their greatest risk.

"When we hear stories about rape or torture in the villages and try to report them in the villages, we are often stopped by elders or militants from gaining access to the story," says Wahida Faizi, an Ariana TV reporter. "I would also add that women are sometimes more muted when they know they can be killed just for speaking out about violence and abuse against women in the countryside."

UNAMA has a mandate to support the Government of Afghanistan and its citizens in a shared goal of becoming a stable, open, and peaceful nation. This feature piece is meant to tell a human interest story related to how Afghanistan and the UN are working together to overcome the many challenges to achieving this goal.