

Wrapping up visit to Yemen, UN aid chief stresses need for all parties to facilitate humanitarian work

28 October 2017 – At the end of a five-day mission to conflict-torn Yemen, the United Nations humanitarian chief on Saturday stressed the need for more funding and better humanitarian access to help the population in need.

“It has been shocking to see the terrible impact of this man-made conflict,” UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock said in a press release issued by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

“In Aden and Sana’a, and during my visits to Lahj, Hudaydah, Hajjah, and Amran governorates, I have met hundreds of Yemenis, and listened to their stories of atrocious suffering,” he added.

Plunged into civil war between Houthi rebels and supporters of Yemen’s internationally recognized Government in 2015, Yemen has faced one of the world’s largest humanitarian crisis, including the fastest growing cholera epidemic ever recorded, the world’s largest food emergency and widespread population displacement.

Mr. Lowcock, who is also Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, said that the UN and partners have the capacity to further scale up their work but more generous and timely donor financing is needed and all parties must help facilitate and never hinder humanitarians’ work.

During this visit, his first to the country since his appointment on 1 September 2017, Mr. Lowcock held frank discussions with the Government in Aden and those in positions of authority in Sana’a on ways to alleviate the suffering of the population and address the challenging operating environment.

In Aden, he asked Prime Minister Ahmed Obeid bin Dagher, among other things, to ensure progress on paying salaries to health workers, teachers and other civil servants, to get Sana’a’s airport reopened for commercial and humanitarian flights and to improve the operation of the ports, especially Al-Hudaydah.

In Sana’a, he raised serious concerns about the operating environment facing the UN and other humanitarian agencies.

“I am concerned about the increasing levels of interference in the work of the humanitarian agencies, including delays in granting and denial of visas, delays of essential equipment and supplies at the ports, bureaucratic impediments affecting NGOs and preventing essential assessments of needs so that we can target our assistance most effectively,” he said.

Mr. Lowcock stressed that the end to the horrendous suffering in Yemen requires an end to the conflict, for which a political resolution is needed.

In the absence of substantial progress on all these points, the already dire situation will continue to deteriorate. The human suffering, already extreme, will grow and grow," he said.

Despite challenging conditions and lack of funding, UN and humanitarian parties are providing direct assistance to more than 7 million people each month.

[Citing Uruguay's commitment to human rights, Un rights chief urges more efforts to tackle violations](#)

27 October 2017 – While Uruguay's commitment to human rights at home and abroad is clear, a series of challenges must be addressed, including "inhumane" prison conditions and widespread violence against women, the UN human rights chief said Friday.

"The Uruguayan authorities have made [significant efforts to integrate human rights](#) into public policy, and there is clear political will to make progress in this area," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein after a two-day visit to the country.

Noting that Uruguay's efforts to improve its overall situation are recognised domestically and internationally, Mr. Zeid also highlighted that the country had adopted laws to tackle discrimination, reduce poverty and enhance the rights of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons.

"Uruguay is a country with tremendous potential, which has dared to make a difference in many areas," he continued. "However, the progress made to date is not enough: the country can do more to tackle the serious human rights violations that continue to occur."

According to Mr. Zeid, Uruguay must address its challenges with human rights-based strategies, in which "the Government, Congress and, very importantly, the judiciary, uphold and implement the country's obligations under international human rights law."

During his meetings with Uruguayan authorities and civil society representatives, the High Commissioner expressed concern about serious human rights issues in the country, such as the reportedly "appalling and inhumane" conditions of many detention centres.

Mr. Zeid also voiced alarm at the situation of adolescents in conflict with the law, particularly the excessive duration of pre-trial detention and called on Uruguay to ensure their protection from violence and discrimination.

“In a country aging as rapidly as Uruguay, the whole of society needs to realise that youth is their hope for the future,” he said.

Mr. Zeid also called on the Government to make every effort to ensure that all allegations of torture or ill-treatment are investigated properly, emphasizing “Uruguay needs to use imprisonment as a last resort, implement more non-custodial sentences and introduce more rehabilitation programmes.”

Mr. Zeid called “troubling,” the persistently high rates of gender-based killings of women, along with the difficulty many women victims of violence face in accessing justice. He also urged the Government to remove any restrictions and barriers to reproductive health services, including safe abortion procedures, which were decriminalised in 2012, and post-abortion care.

While acknowledging the Government’s attempts to address impunity during the military dictatorship of 1973 to 1985, Mr. Zeid said “it is 32 years since the dictatorship ended, but Uruguay has yet to deal adequately with a brutal period in its recent history. This is essential for society to look to the future without fear and for this, international human rights law is key.”

“I am convinced that the country is capable of overcoming its most pressing human rights challenges for the benefit of its people,” he stressed, adding that his Office stands ready to continue providing support in this endeavour.

[Don't let security crisis overshadow human rights situation in DPR Korea – UN expert](#)

27 October 2017 – The international security crisis over the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) must not overshadow the human rights situation of millions of ordinary citizens in the country, a United Nations human rights expert has said.

“While the current tensions divert our attention to the authorities, we should not forget that behind the Government there are [ordinary citizens](#) whose human rights need protection, more so than ever,” Tomás Ojea Quintana, Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Asian country, told reporters in New York today.

Earlier this week, the Special Rapporteur appealed to the UN General Assembly's main body dealing with human rights and social and humanitarian issues ([Third Committee](#)) to ensure that human rights were not overlooked amid the unprecedented tensions over the country's nuclear and ballistic missile programme.

He said the wider sanctions on coal, iron and seafood imposed by the UN Security Council in September may have a negative impact on the population, citing reports that sanctions may have prevented cancer patients from access to chemotherapy and blocked the import of disability equipment.

In his full report to the General Assembly, the expert said DPRK citizens continued to suffer patterns of "grave violations" of their human rights, citing concerns over the situation of prisoners and abductees, access to food, corruption and freedom of information.

The expert reported on the testimonies of those who had told him of their fear of being sent to a political prison camp, as well as of those who were detained in inhumane conditions in holding centres near the border with China. He was also informed of the challenges people met to circumvent the country's system of surveillance.

The situation of family members who were forcibly separated during the Korean War, or as a result of abduction by the DPRK, was highlighted in the report as requiring urgent action to restore those family links.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

[Action needed to stop violations of LGBT people's rights worldwide, expert tells UN](#)

27 October 2017 – Immediate action is needed to stop the horrific violations of human rights of people around the world based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, a United Nations independent expert said Friday, delivering his first report to UN Member States in New York.

"It is unconscionable that people with an actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression different from a particular social norm, [are targeted](#) for violence and discrimination in many parts of the world," said Vitit Muntarbhorn, the UN's first independent

expert on the matter.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people suffer a crucible of egregious violations, including killings, rape, mutilation, torture, arbitrary detention, abduction, harassment, physical and mental assaults, he said, noting that they are subjected to lashings and forced surgical interventions, bullying from a young age, incitement to hatred and pressures leading to suicide.

“More than 70 countries around the world today still criminalize same-sex relations, and in some of them the death penalty may be applied,” he added, presenting his report to the UN General Assembly’s main body dealing with human rights and social and humanitarian issues ([Third Committee](#)).

Mr. Muntarhorn said all laws criminalizing same-sex relationships should be removed from the statute books.

“There is a need for effective anti-discrimination measures covering both the public and private spheres,” the expert said, stressing the need to build a community open to understanding and respecting sexual and gender diversity.

Human rights defenders are also increasingly targeted for their work in raising issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, the expert said, adding that this is another area of great concern.

“Non-governmental organizations, human rights defenders and activists, as well as independent national human rights institutions, play a crucial role in the advancement of an inclusive agenda for all without discrimination and distinction, including through the promotion of understanding of and respect for human rights and gender diversity,” Mr. Muntarhorn said. “They are agents of change which can activate significant reform processes.”

He said the establishment last year of his mandate to promote action against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity was a major step forward.

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[Security Council debate on ‘women, peace and security’ spotlights](#)

prevention and gender equality links

27 October 2017 – At the Security Council today, a senior United Nations official called on Member States, regional organizations and civil society for greater partnership to boost women’s participation at all levels and help ensure UN peace efforts are stronger and more sustainable.

“We will ensure our prevention initiatives and monitoring include a focus on women’s rights violations [and] we will tackle the structural and root causes of crisis, including gender inequality,” Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, the Chef de Cabinet, speaking on behalf of the Secretary-General, told a day-long [debate](#) in the Security Council, underlining the need for more action on the ‘women, peace and security agenda’ – with prevention as a core pillar.

Noting the importance of gender equality and security of women as reliable indicators for peace, she added: “We will [also] strengthen the collection and analysis of gender statistics and encourage Member States to monitor gender equality indicators as part of their work to implement the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).”

In her briefing, the Chef de Cabinet spoke of the need to ensure adequate representation of women in the security sector both to reduce their exposure to harm as well as to realize their potential in conflict prevention.

Noting, further, that only three per cent of peacekeepers are women, she informed the 15-member Council of the Secretary-General’s efforts with troop- and police-contributing countries to increase the number of female uniformed personnel.

Ms. Viotti also noted that 17 years after its adoption, Security Council resolution 1325 on women and peace and security was too often being implemented on in an ad hoc fashion, and called on UN Member States to share evidence and examples in order to examine gaps and successes.

‘Women, peace and security’ agenda central pillar of global affairs

Also briefing today, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the Executive Director of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women ([UN Women](#)) [said](#) said that while atrocities against women and girls in armed conflict are now the focus of attention and documentation, it is critical that perpetrators are brought to justice, and that survivors are accorded dignity and support.



Michaëlle Jean, Secretary-General of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (La Francophonie), addresses the Security Council’s open debate on women, peace and security. At left is Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). UN Photo/Kim Haughton

“This impunity cannot be allowed to continue,” she underlined.

Further, informing the Security Council of an overall decline in women’s participation in UN-led peace processes, inclusion of gender-sensitive provisions in peace agreements and consultation with women’s civil society organizations, in comparison with one year ago, Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka said that the political marginalization was not only limited to peace talks.

Only 17 countries have an elected woman Head of State or Government and the proportion of women parliamentarians in conflict and post-conflict countries has stagnated at 16 per cent in the last two years.

“The use of quotas and temporary special measures would help,” she said, noting examples from Somalia and Mali, and called on donors to continue supporting efforts targeted at women’s empowerment and highlighted the importance of ensuring gender-conscious funding for policies and programmes.

Concluding her remarks, the head of UN-Women stressed that women, peace and security agenda is now an essential pillar of global affairs.

“This is only the beginning. The chorus of voices that are appalled by the persistent political marginalization of women in decision-making is speaking louder [...] this agenda unites us because people from all over the world, every day, look up to the United Nations for peace, equality and inclusion,” she said.

Also speaking today were Charo Mina-Rojas of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, and Michaëlle Jean, Secretary-General of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, who underscored the need to effectively combat sexual and gender-based violence and end impunity.

“The silence around these crimes is as appalling as the crimes themselves,” stressed Ms. Mina-Rojas.

They also called for greater participation of women’s organizations and community leaders in the design and implementation of security and peacebuilding efforts.

“More than lip service should be paid to ensuring that women were invited to participate in national dialogues,” said Ms. Jean.