

# Interview: Health care is a human right, senior UN official says; urges protection for medical workers

24 October 2017 – Health is a human right and health care workers are human rights defenders, the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights has said, reminding Governments to provide healthcare for their citizens and to protect professionals who deliver these services.

“We see health not only as the absence of disease and not only a question of access to services, but in face the right to be human is a manner that you have your physical and mental integrity upheld,” Kate Gilmore said in an interview with *UN News*.

Similarly, health care workers are part of the “machinery of human rights defence,” yet are increasingly being targeted for doing their jobs.

“In conflict settings, there has been a marked spike in the targeting of hospitals, of doctors, of ambulances and of nurses. And this is not only quite unconscionable,” the Deputy High Commissioner said, noting these attacks are also against international humanitarian law and the basic rules of war to which each Government has signed up by virtue of being a member of the United Nations.

“But in other settings, too,” she continued. “In non-conflict settings, health workers who work with communities that are subjected to terrible bigotry, those working with those suffering leprosy, historically health workers providing services to those living with HIV and AIDS, workers whose priority is sexual and reproductive health.”

Ms. Gilmore noted “a pattern across the globe of health workers being targeted for providing compassionate, humane care rooted in medical science.”

She denounced such attacks calling them “wrong, unfair and unjust.”

Ms. Gilmore, along with Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Andrew Gilmour, will participate at a dialogue today at the UN Headquarters in New York on how human rights, including the right to health, are reflected in the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development.

Hear more from her in this interview with UN News.

**AUDIO:** UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Kate Gilmore.

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## Widespread militia activities, political unrest drive millions from their homes in DR Congo, UN warns

24 October 2017 – Some 3.9 million people across several regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have been displaced from their homes, and amid growing violence and unrest, the United Nations refugee agency warned on Tuesday that the number could rise even further.

According to a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), over the last three months alone, more than 428,000 people have been displaced.

“With widespread militia activities, and unrest and violence fuelled by ethnic and political conflict affecting many areas, the risk of further displacement is high,” UNHCR spokesperson Adrian Edwards told journalists at a regular briefing in Geneva today.

“The challenges of getting aid to people in need are growing fast,” he added.

In particular, the regions of Tanganyika, North and South Kivu, and Kasai are the worst affected due to intercommunal clashes, fighting between armed groups and increasing number of armed militia.

Complicating the matters is the onset of the rainy season, that has necessitated the need to beef up public health, sanitation and water supplies to prevent the outbreak of disease. Psychosocial support as well as care for people with specific needs is also urgently required.

In light of the worsening conditions, the UN agency and humanitarian partners have declared the situation in DRC to ‘level 3’ – the highest level of emergency.

### **Level 3 emergency**

In the context of Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), a [Level 3 emergency](#) would typically be a sudden onset complex emergency requiring the activation of a UN system-wide response, with agreed mechanisms, tools and procedures.

*Glossary, UNHCR Global Report 2014*

In addition to the people displaced within DRC, over 620,000 Congolese refugees are sheltering in more than 11 African nations – about 100,000 of them within the past one year.

And at the same time, the number of refugees from neighbouring countries seeking refuge inside the DRC has grown by a third since early 2016 and now stands at 526,000 people.

“We continue to see new arrivals from Burundi, the Central African Republic and South Sudan,” said Mr. Edwards, noting that funding is urgently needed for the response.

Bettina Luescher, for the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)), said the agency is scaling up capacities in the provinces of Kasai (proper) and Kasai Central – the hardest-hit of Greater Kasai’s five provinces, with a threefold increase in the number of severely hungry people over the past 18 months. Two thirds of the severely hungry are in Kasai province alone, she added.

Of the \$236.2 million required for the needs of refugees, IDPs and other people of concern in the DRC, only \$49.7 million has been received so far – a fifth of the amount required.

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## [Ending child marriage in West and Central Africa on pace to take 100 years – UNICEF](#)

24 October 2017 – Unless progress is accelerated, ending child marriage in West and Central Africa will take more than 100 years, with far-reaching, life-altering consequences for millions of child brides and crippling impact on the region’s prosperity, the United Nations children’s agency has said.

A new report released Monday from the UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)), *Achieving a future without child marriage: Focus on West and Central Africa*, reveals that, due to rapid population growth and high prevalence of child marriage, even if the current decline rate was doubled, it would not suffice to reduce the annual number of girls married.

“We cannot continue to let so many of our girls miss out on their health, education, and childhood,” said Fatoumata Ndiaye, UNICEF’s Deputy Executive Director, in a press release, adding that “at current rates, our report shows, it will [take over 100 years](#) to eliminate child marriage in the region – how is this acceptable?”

The new projections, released during a UN-backed high-level meeting on ending child marriage in Dakar this week, aim to bring the spotlight on the region of the world where girls face the highest risk of marrying in childhood.

While the prevalence of child marriage in West and Central Africa has declined over the past two decades, progress has been uneven, and still four

in 10 women are married before the age of 18 and, of these, one in three before the age of 15.

West and Central Africa includes six of the 10 countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world: Niger; the Central African Republic; Chad; Mali; Burkina Faso and Guinea.

The report also highlights that progress is possible when the right mix of strategies is in place, such as empowering girls, mobilizing families and communities to change attitudes and behaviours, providing adequate services to girls at risk and to married girls and putting in place consistent laws and policies to protect and promote the rights of girls.

In five countries in the region – Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Togo, Ghana and Rwanda, declines ranged from 40 to 60 per cent over the past 25 years.

The longer a girl stays in school, the less likely she is to be married before the age of 18 and have children during her teenage years.

“Getting girls to schools should be our top priority,” said Ms. Ndiaye. “Not only because it equips girls for life, but it also helps to lift their families, their communities, their countries out of poverty.”

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## Don't just blame teachers when system is at fault, says UNESCO

24 October 2017 – Blaming just the teacher or the school for systemic educational problems can have serious negative side effects, warns a new report from the United Nations educational agency.

“Education is a shared responsibility between us all – governments, schools, teachers, parents and private actors,” said Irina Bokova, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), in a press release.

“Accountability for these responsibilities defines the way teachers teach, students learn, and governments act. It must be designed with care and with the principles of equity, inclusion and quality in mind,” she added.

The report, titled *Accountability in education: meeting our commitments*, looks at the different ways people and institutions can be held accountable for reaching the internationally agreed Sustainable Development Goal for Education (SDG4).

The report, the second in the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) series, shows

that blaming teachers for poor test scores and absenteeism is often both unjust and unconstructive.

Using student test scores to sanction teachers and schools makes it more likely they will adjust their behaviour to protect themselves, which may mean leaving the weakest learners behind,&#8221 explained Manos Antoninis, Director of the GEM Report.

Accountability must start with governments. If a government is too quick to apportion blame to others, it is deflecting attention away from its own responsibility for creating a strong, supportive education system,&#8221

For example, that nearly half of teacher absenteeism in Indonesia in 2013/14 was due to excused time for study for which replacements should have been provided.

In Senegal, only 12 of the 80 missed school days in 2014 were due to teachers avoiding their responsibilities.

In the European Union in 2009-2014, 38 per cent of education and training tenders only had one bidder, compared to 16 per cent of tenders in the construction sector, indicating that the risk of corruption is higher in education than in the building industry.

The report says that whereas transparency would help identify problems, only one in six governments publish annual education monitoring reports.

The report calls on governments to:

- design accountability mechanisms for schools and teachers that is supportive and avoid punitive mechanisms, especially those based on narrow performance measures;
- allow for democratic participation, respect media freedom to scrutinize education and set up independent institutions to handle complaints;
- develop credible and efficient regulations with associated sanctions for all education providers, public and private, that ensure non-discrimination and the quality of education;
- make the right to education justiciable, which is not the case in 45 per cent of countries.

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**We need the will to overcome global challenges, Secretary-General says on**

# UN Day

24 October 2017 – In his first United Nations Day message, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres called on people around the world to overcome their differences to address global challenges that go beyond national borders.

“Our world faces many grave challenges. Widening conflicts and inequality, extreme weather and deadly intolerance, [and] security threats including nuclear weapons,” said Mr. Guterres in a video message.

“We have the tools and wealth to overcome these challenges. [All we need is the will](#).”

In his message, the UN chief stated that the challenges faced by the world transcend borders and, therefore, everyone needs to transcend their differences to transform our future.

“When we achieve human rights and human dignity for all people they will build a peaceful, sustainable and just world,” he added, urging humanity noted in the [Charter of the United Nations](#) as ‘We the Peoples’ to make this vision a reality.

The 24th of October, the day in 1945 when the UN Charter entered into force, is celebrated annually as United Nations Day. In 1971, the General Assembly recommended that the day be observed by UN Member States as a public holiday.

Around the world, governments and UN offices mark the day through various programmes and events on the core pillars of the Organization.

This year, at the UN Headquarters, in New York, the Organization’s Department of Public Information will [organize](#) a concert featuring the Slovak National Folklore Ballet, Lúčnica.

The theme of the concert is “Potential in Diversity” and is sponsored by the Permanent Mission of the Slovak Republic to the UN.

Also, Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed, on behalf of the Secretary-General, will present the [2017 Secretary-General Awards](#) in categories, including innovation and creativity; implementing efficiencies; gender equality and parity; and champion of the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).