

UN rights office issues business standards on treatment of LGBTI employees; major companies on board

27 September 2017 – Drawing on good practice from around the world, the top United Nation human rights official today launched an unprecedented set of global standards to support the business community in tackling discrimination against lesbian, gay, bi, trans and intersex people (LGBTI).

“Social change requires the active involvement of all parts of society – including, critically, the business community,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, speaking to business leaders, activists and journalists at Microsoft’s New York City headquarters.

Mr. Zeid called on the private sector to play its part in promoting LGBTI inclusion in the workplace and beyond.

“The decisions that companies take – whether in respect of human resources, investment, supply chains, even marketing – can have a real and, in some cases, [profound impact on human rights](#),” he told the audience.

The new standards set out actions for companies to protect the rights of LGBTI employees, such as eliminating workplace discrimination; making sure business operations do not contribute to discrimination against customers, suppliers or members of the public; and working with business partners to address discriminatory practices up and down the supply chain.

They also encourage companies to stand up for the rights of LGBTI people in the countries where they operate – including through advocacy and support for local organizations.

“There is growing evidence that, besides being the right thing to do, standing up for equal rights for LGBTI people is also in the private sector’s commercial interest,” the High Commissioner noted, adding: “Excluding any group slows us all down. Eliminating discrimination is the key to unlocking talent and maximizing productivity.”

The product of a year-long process of consultations facilitated by the UN Human Rights Office and the Institute for Human Rights and Business, including regional meetings with leading business representatives in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas, Accenture, Baker McKenzie, BNP Paribas, The Coca-Cola Company, Deutsche Bank, EDF, EY, Gap Inc., Godrej, IKEA Group, Microsoft, Oath, Orange, SAP, and Spotify are among the supporting companies.

In the coming months, the standards will be presented at launch events globally, including in Mumbai on 12 October, London on 30 October, Hong Kong on 14 November, Geneva on 29 November and Melbourne in 5 December.

UNICEF expands relief efforts in Latin America and Caribbean after month of 'relentless' natural disasters

27 September 2017 – To help children and families affected by the series of natural disasters that have devastated countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) today said it has scaled up its humanitarian response the region.

"Children in Latin America and the Caribbean have faced several [natural disasters of epic proportions](#) in September," said Grant Leaity, UNICEF Deputy Director of Emergency Programmes.

"With four successive hurricanes – including Hurricane Irma, the largest ever recorded over the Atlantic – and two major earthquakes in Mexico, the past few weeks have been relentless," he added.

In the past month, four major hurricanes – Category 3 or higher – have churned through the Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean. Hurricanes Irma, Jose, Katia and Maria caused major damage to island nations in the Caribbean, as well as continental North and Central America, devastating the lives of millions of people and leaving hundreds of thousands homeless and displaced.

Since two earthquakes – 12 days apart – caused widespread damage and destruction in central Mexico, the region has experienced over 4,000 aftershocks, including a 6.1 magnitude quake as recently as 23 September. Up to seven million children live in the affected areas and thousands have been left homeless, with no access to basic services.

It's absolutely vital that children who have lived through these traumatic events get the psychosocial support they need UNICEF Mexico Ambassador Thalia

Across the region, UNICEF has urgently scaled up its emergency response to reach vulnerable children with protection services, water, sanitation and hygiene, health and education initiatives.

"It's absolutely vital that children who have lived through these traumatic events get the psychosocial support they need," said UNICEF Mexico Ambassador Thalia, who visited UNICEF operations centre this week to learn more about UNICEF's response.

In Mexico, UNICEF is working with its partners in earthquake-affected areas to establish temporary schools, promote school safety guidelines, train teachers in psychosocial support, and distribute education supplies and early

childhood development kits to teachers and caregivers.

“Through child-friendly spaces UNICEF is able to provide children with a safe place, to play, learn and begin to heal their psychological wounds,” Ambassador Thalia underscored.

For children and families affected by the hurricanes, UNICEF is working with partners and local governments to provide immediate relief including access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene supplies, provision of psycho social support for children and working to ensure children and able to get back into education as soon as possible.

To support its humanitarian response in Mexico, Cuba, the Eastern Caribbean and Haiti, UNICEF is appealing for \$18.1 million.

[‘Time to stamp out human trafficking,’ says Guterres; UN pledges action to eradicate ‘heinous crime’](#)

27 September 2017 – With tens of millions of human trafficking victims worldwide, “now is the time to stand together and stamp out this abominable practice,” [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today told a high-level meeting at which Member States adopted a political Declaration reaffirming their commitment to implement a United Nations action plan to end the scourge.

“Human trafficking is [all around us](#), in all regions of the world,” said Mr. Guterres, referring to such practices as forced labour, sexual servitude, recruitment of child soldiers and other forms of exploitation and abuse.

The Assembly’s [high-level meeting](#), convened to examine progress achieved and challenges remaining in the implementation of the seven-year-old [Global Plan of Action](#) to Combat Trafficking in Persons, opened today and closes tomorrow.

In the [Declaration](#), adopted without a vote, UN Member States demonstrated their strong political will to take decisive concerted action to end the heinous crime.

As millions of children, women and men spill out of their countries towards safety, they find themselves at the mercy of merciless people

In recent years, rising conflict, insecurity and economic uncertainty have brought new tests.

“As millions of children, women and men spill out of their countries towards safety, they find themselves at the mercy of merciless people,” Mr. Guterres said.

These criminal networks are global, well-organized, technologically savvy, and highly proficient in taking advantage of gaps in governance and weaknesses in institutions, he added.

Fighting human trafficking requires greater use of relevant instruments, including the UN conventions against transnational organized crime and against corruption, and next year’s expected adoption by the General Assembly of a global compact on safe, orderly and regular migration is a further potential milestone, he said.

The [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development, adopted by Member States in 2015, also addresses some of the root causes that make people vulnerable to trafficking. Often, trafficking is abetted by poverty and inequality.

“Fighting trafficking and advancing sustainable, inclusive development go hand in hand,” Mr. Guterres said.

Also addressing the meeting, Yuri Fedotov, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)), said “this appraisal and the adoption of the political Declaration can help us take this commitment forward and sharpen responses to an odious crime that continues to exploit and victimize the most vulnerable, in all parts of the world.”

To build a robust evidence base, UNODC is currently working with the academic community to develop innovative methodologies to measure the size and scope of the trafficking problem, he added.

General Assembly President Miroslav Lajčák also addressed the meeting, as did Ms. Mira Sorvino, UNODC Goodwill Ambassador for the global fight against human trafficking and Grizelda Grootboom, a civil society representative and victim of human trafficking.

[UN chief welcomes Saudi Arabia’s decision to lift ban on women drivers](#)

27 September 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has welcomed the decision by Saudi Arabia to allow women to drive cars in the country.

In a tweet, the UN chief noted that ending the restrictions represents an “[important step](#) in the right direction.”

According to reports, under the new law, women can legally obtain a driving licence without asking a male guardian for permission.

Also welcoming the announcement, the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women ([UN Women](#)) said the event was a milestone for women's rights in the country.

"We have received this with a lot of gladness [...] it is a very symbolic [step] by Saudi Arabia towards [strengthening] the rights of women [in the country]," Mohammad Naciri, Regional Director for Arab States at UN Women, told *UN News*.

He added that the UN agency would continue to explore avenues to build on the important event to advance the cause of women's rights both within Saudi Arabia, as well as the wider region.

[Colombia: New UN Mission begins operation; focus on reintegrating ex-fighters](#)

27 September 2017 – The second post-conflict United Nations mission in Colombia has started its operations, succeeding the UN entity which was mandated to verify the implementation agreement between the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) concerning the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities, and laying down of arms.

"We are pleased that the laying down of weapons has been successfully concluded," said Jean Arnault, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Colombia and the head of the UN Verification Mission in the country, in a [news release](#) yesterday.

Noting that the transition has offered an opportunity to redouble efforts to bring peace to all corners of the country, he added: "Through our follow-up and verification activities, [we] will continue to support Colombia in its process of building a firm and lasting peace."

Established by the UN Security Council in July, the purpose of the [Mission](#) is to accompany the parties and verify their commitments regarding points 3.2 and 3.4 of the [Final Peace Agreement](#) on the reintegration of former FARC-EP members, and the implementation of measures of protection and security for communities in territories most affected by the conflict.

Across the country, the Mission will have ten regional offices and will continue to maintain presence at the twenty-six Territorial Area for Training

and Reincorporation. In addition, it will also establish seven sub-offices in different parts of the country.

The Verification Mission starts its activities immediately upon the conclusion of the mandate of the first UN Mission in Colombia, which was established by the Security Council in January last year 2016. That Mission was mandated with the verification of the Agreement between the Government and FARC-EP on the Bilateral and Definitive Ceasefire and Cessation of Hostilities and Laying down of Arms (Ceasefire Agreement).