

[Australian Jane Connors appointed first UN rights advocate for victims of sexual exploitation](#)

23 August 2017 – [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has appointed Jane Connors, Australian law professional and long-time human rights advocate, as the first United Nations advocate for the rights of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

The [appointment](#) is in line with the Secretary-General's pledge made in his report on '[Special measures](#) for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse: a new approach' that the UN will put the rights and dignity of victims at the forefront of its prevention and response efforts.

Ms. Connors, currently International Advocacy Director, Law and Policy, for Amnesty International in Geneva, brings to the position a long and multi-faceted career in human rights advocacy, as well as human rights and humanitarian assistance in the academic, UN and civil society spheres.

As Victims' Rights Advocate, Ms. Connors will support an integrated, strategic response to victim assistance in coordination with relevant UN system actors.

She will work with government institutions, civil society, and national and legal and human rights organizations to build networks of support and to help ensure that the full effect of local laws, including remedies for victims, are brought to bear.

Before joining Amnesty International, she was Director of the Research and Right to Development Division at the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)). She also worked in OHCHR's Human Rights Treaties Division and as Chief of the Special Procedures Branch.

From 1996 and 2002, she was the Chief of the Women's Rights Section in the Division for the Advancement of Women in the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs in New York.

[On Day of Remembrance, UN says history of slave trade can help combat social](#)

injustice

23 August 2017 – Remembering the universal demand for freedom that led to the 1791 insurrection by slaves in what is now Haiti, the head of the United Nations cultural and educational agency today marked the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition by underscoring the importance of teaching this history to young people.

“We are counting on the teaching of this history to place tomorrow’s citizens on the path to peace and dignity,” said Irina Bokova, in a [message](#) to mark the Day, which is observed annually on 23 August.

Ms. Bokova is the Director-General of UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), which has played a leading role within the UN system in fostering understanding and recognition of the slave trade.

“Everyone must know the scale of the crime of the slave trade, the millions of lives broken and the impact on the fate of continents up to this very day. Everyone must be fully informed of the struggle that led to its abolition, so that together we can build societies that are fairer, and thus freer,” the senior UN official said.

She pointed to modern slavery and human trafficking, as well as ongoing social injustices, racism and racial discrimination, and said the legacy of the 1791 insurrection offer hope to eradicating those scourges.

Ignorance is our enemy: it is used as an alibi by the indifferent who state that ‘we cannot change anything’ UNESCO chief Irina Bokova

“Freedom of rights, hardwon by force, must be translated into real freedom through public policies that guarantee to people of African descent the full exercise of economic, social and political equality, and full and equal participation in society,” Ms. Bokova said.

“The 1791 uprising, like so many others across the world, shows us the way, but the path ahead is still long, she said, adding: “Ignorance is our enemy: it is used as an alibi by the indifferent who state that ‘we cannot change anything,’ and sanctions the lies of those who claim that ‘they did not know.’”

Everyone, continued the UNESCO chief, must know the scale of the crime of the slave trade, the millions of lives broken and the impact on the fate of continents up to this very day. “Everyone must be fully informed of the struggle that led to its abolition, so that together we can build societies that are fairer, and thus freer.”

To honour the history of the slave trade and its abolition, UNESCO earlier this year added to its World Heritage List the Mbanza Kongo, Vestiges of the Capital of the former Kingdom of Kongo (Angola) and the Valongo Wharf

Archaeological Site (Brazil), as an acknowledgement of their outstanding universal value.

In 2015, the Valongo Wharf Archaeological Site was recognized as a site of memory associated with the UNESCO Slave Route Project: Resistance, Liberty, Heritage. Recognition of this heritage is decisive in raising the awareness of the general public, educating young people and in the processes of conciliation and social cohesion.

The [Slave Route](#) project, established in 1994, consists of creating opportunities to promote mutual understanding and international reconciliation and stability through consultation and discussion. It also raises awareness, promotes debate and helps build consensus on approaches to be taken on addressing the issue of the slave trade and slavery.

This year, the [International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition](#) is also part of the [International Decade for People of African Descent](#), which began in 2015, and seeks to help boost political commitments in favour of people of African descent.

[Syria: UN relief officials condemn targeting of civilians, infrastructure as airstrikes hit Raqqa](#)

22 August 2017 – Senior United Nations humanitarian officials for Syria today expressed deep concern over many civilians reportedly killed in airstrikes and other attacks in the last few days in Raqqa city, where coalition forces are fighting Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorists.

The UN condemns attacks directed against civilians and civilian infrastructure. The humanitarian community reminds all parties to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law to protect civilians and to [spare no effort to prevent civilian casualties](#), said a joint statement issued by Ali Al-Za'tari, the Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria, and Ramesh Rajasingham, the acting Regional Humanitarian Coordinator.

These unconfirmed accounts come on the heels of an increasing number of reported civilian casualties due to intensified military operations, including airstrikes. In recent months, regular airstrikes and shelling in the city have reportedly resulted in scores of civilian casualties, including women and children, the statement said.

An estimated 75,000 people have been displaced from Raqqa city, but 18,000 to 25,000 civilians who remain trapped risk being killed by ISIL snipers or

mines if they try to flee, or being used as human shields or killed in indiscriminate airstrikes if they remain.

[UNICEF warns use of children as 'human bombs' is on the rise in north-east Nigeria](#)

22 August 2017 – The United Nations children agency today expressed extreme concern at the appalling increase in the cruel and calculated use of children, especially girls, as ‘human bombs’ in north-east Nigeria.

‘Since the beginning of January 2017, 83 children had been used as so-called [human bombs](#), 55 being girls, most of them often under 15 years old,’ UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) spokesperson Marixie Mercado told reporters at today’s regular press briefing in Geneva.

‘The 27 other children were boys and one was an infant strapped to a girl,’ she continued.

She pointed out that since 2014, children have been repeatedly used in this way, calling the number of children used so far this year alone was ‘already four times higher than what it was for all of 2016.’

‘Children used as human bombs are, above all, victims, not perpetrators,’ Ms. Mercado underscored.

She went on to say that the use of children in such attacks has a further impact of creating suspicion and fear of children released, rescued, or escaped from Boko Haram. ‘They face rejection when they tried to reintegrate their communities which compounds their suffering,’ she explained.

Ms. Mercado painted a dire picture, describing the situation as a massive displacement and malnutrition crisis ‘a deadly combination for children.’

She said that per cent of the persons displaced by the insurgencies in north-east Nigeria are children, and the vast majority of them in Borno state, where most of those attacks are taking place.

North-east Nigeria is one of the four countries or regions facing the spectre of famine, with up to 450,000 children at risk of severe acute malnutrition this year, according to UNICEF.

UNICEF is providing psychosocial support for children who had been held by

Boko Haram and the agency is also working with families and communities to foster the acceptance of returned children – including through social and economic reintegration support.

As of July, UNICEF has supported more than 3,000 children and 1,200 women. It also backed reconciliation activities in north-east Nigeria led by communities, religious leaders and influential women to help promote tolerance, acceptance, and reintegration.

Noting that a \$1 billion dollar appeal to minimally help sustain people in Nigeria is only 60 per cent funded, Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, told reporters at the briefing that the situation for civilians in the area was extremely grave.

Humanitarian Coordinator Edward Kallon stressed that women and children in Borno state face grave human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence. He noted that, since the start of the conflict in 2009, more than 20,000 people had been killed with thousands of women and girls abducted and abused.

In total, 8.5 million people in the worst-affected states of Borno, namely Adamawa and Yobe, need of humanitarian assistance. In its eighth year, this crisis shows no sign of abating, said Mr. Laerke. Food insecurity affects 5.2 million people, some of whom are on the brink of famine.

[UN human rights chief welcomes rape law reform in Lebanon, Tunisia, Jordan](#)

22 August 2017 – Today, the top United Nations human rights official welcomed the repeal of laws in Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan that allow rapists to avoid criminal prosecution by marrying their victims.

“To punish a rape victim by making her marry the perpetrator of a horrible crime against her – there is [no place in today's world for such hideous laws](#),” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein in press statement.

He warmly welcomed the stand that lawmakers in Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan have taken towards eliminating violence against women and ensuring that perpetrators of such violence are held to account.

According to the High Commissioner's Office ([OHCHR](#)), on 16 August, Lebanon voted to repeal article 522 of its penal code, a law that exempted from criminal prosecution a person accused of rape who agreed to marry the victim. Two weeks earlier, on 1 August, Jordanian lawmakers also voted to abolish a similar provision – article 308 of its penal code.

In Tunisia, on 26 July, the Parliament adopted a law on eliminating violence against women and eliminating impunity for perpetrators, recognizing that violence against women includes economic, sexual, political and psychological violence. The law will come into effect next year. Tunisia has also established two human rights institutions this year dealing with human trafficking and improving the enjoyment of individual liberties and equality.

These are hard-won victories, thanks to the tireless campaigns over the years by human rights defenders – in particular women human rights defenders – in Tunisia, Lebanon and Jordan, underscored High Commissioner Zeid.

He noted however that in Lebanon, article 505 of the Penal Code continues to allow those accused of having sex with a minor to go free if they marry their victims, while article 508 allows for marital rape, and called for the article to be repealed and for marital rape to be criminalized.

I call on the Governments and people of these countries and other countries in the region to build on this positive momentum, and to work towards the swift repeal of other legislation that condones sexual violence against women and girls and perpetuates discrimination against them in clear violation of international human rights law, concluded Mr. Zeid.