

[Strengthening UN peacekeeping tops agenda as chiefs of defence meet in New York](#)

7 July 2017 – In the ongoing effort to improve the overall performance of United Nations peacekeeping missions, the heads of the armed forces of around 100 countries met at UN Headquarters in New York today to discuss issues such as rapid deployment, training, increasing the number of female peacekeepers, and conduct and discipline.

“Our partnership has never been more important. Across the globe, armed conflict scars countless civilians and destabilizes entire regions,” [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres told participants at the Chiefs of Defence Conference, via a [video message](#).

Expressing gratitude to the men and women serving in peacekeeping, Mr. Guterres noted that UN “blue helmets” brave danger so others can enjoy safety.

He also welcomed the Conference’s focus on gender, with a view to increasing the number of female peacekeepers, and integrating a gender perspective into UN peace and security actions.

“When we have greater gender balance in our forces, we boost our protection outreach – and we reduce the chances of sexual exploitation and abuse,” he highlighted, urging all troop-contributing countries to deploy more women as well as to help integrate a gender-sensitive perspective in strengthening peace.

[With] greater gender balance in our forces, we boost our protection outreach – and we reduce the chances of sexual exploitation and abuse
Secretary-General Guterres

In the same vein, Jane Holl Lute, the Special Coordinator on improving UN response to sexual exploitation and abuse, also underscored the need to stand together against the individual misconduct of some troops, which she said “seriously injures the vulnerable and undermines the mission and name of the United Nations.”

“Only through the continued personal leadership of the chiefs of defence forces, and others, will we effectively prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse,” she said, adding: “We are in this endeavour together, and together, we can root out this scourge.”

Trust of those served must not be broken

In his opening remarks, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for

Peacekeeping Operations, highlighted that recent developments – whether geostrategic shifts, emergence of new threats or large budget cuts – call for greater urgency to strengthen the performance of peace operations.

“Now, more than ever before, peacekeepers need to be up to the challenge of the mandates they are given,” he said, calling for continued support for peacekeeping operations.

Success of our missions depends upon the confidence and trust placed on us by the populations we serve
Jean-Pierre Lacroix, UN peacekeeping chief

Stressing the need to eliminate sexual exploitation and abuse, he called for putting in place measures to ensure that only troops with impeccable backgrounds are deployed, and that rigorous and consistent measures are employed to make certain that those responsible are held accountable for their acts.

VIDEO: The 2017 Chiefs of Defence Conference will take place between 6 – 8 July. The UN peacekeeping chief, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, talks about the importance of the meeting amid new challenges facing peacekeeping.

“The success of our missions depends upon the confidence and trust placed on us by the populations we serve. When this trust is broken, our credibility is indelibly damaged,” he underscored.

More needs to be done to overcome the scale of challenges

Atul Khare, Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Field Support – which provides administrative, finance, logistical and technical support to peacekeeping and political missions around the world – spoke of efforts underway to improve service delivery and to produce better value for money.

In particular, he noted a new environmental strategy to guide UN efforts to deliver support in a responsible manner as well as steps to improve medical support to peacekeepers to prevent the avoidable loss of lives.

“But we need to do more together,” he added. “We simply cannot accept that 30 of the 287 military medical facilities in peacekeeping missions either have not deployed or are deployed with sub-standard equipment.”

In particular, Mr. Khare highlighted the need for more female participation in peacekeeping, urging the chiefs of defence to redouble their efforts to contribute female personnel to serve in missions.

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Atul Khare, Head of Field Support

He also called on them to ensure that uniformed contingents deploy rapidly and with the equipment and training required to carry out the tasks that they have been mandated.

Held under the theme *Meeting the Challenges*, the conference also included the participation of military representatives from the African Union, the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as well as the Force Commanders of the UN peacekeeping missions in Mali ([MINUSMA](#)), Central African Republic ([MINUSCA](#)), South Sudan ([UNMISS](#)) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo ([MONUSCO](#)).

DR Congo's economy loses over \$1 billion to child undernutrition, finds UN-backed study

7 July 2017 – The economy of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is losing as much as 4.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) to the effects of child undernutrition, according to a United Nations-backed study released today.

The social and economic costs of undernutrition are estimated at 1.637 billion Congolese francs, or more than \$1 billion a year.

“These results call on all of us to act now to avoid future losses caused by hunger,” [said](#) UN World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) Country Director Claude Jibidar in a news release.

“I’m convinced that with the understanding we now have of the terrible economic and social impact of malnutrition on children, we and our partners can work with the Government to make a real difference to this alarming situation.”

The Cost of Hunger in Africa study was undertaken by the Government of DRC in collaboration with WFP, the African Union Commission (AUC), the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), and the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean ([ECLAC](#)).

The study shows that the losses are incurred each year through increased healthcare costs, additional burdens to the education system and reduced workforce productivity.

According to the report, DRC could save up to around \$383 million by 2025 if the prevalence of underweight children is reduced from 11 to 5 per cent, and if stunting – low growth for age – is reduced from 43 to 10 per cent.

“Africa has the potential to reap a demographic dividend from a young, educated and skilled workforce,” said Kefilwe Moalosi, speaking on behalf of AUC and NEPAD. “But this potential can only be harnessed if we continue to invest in the health and nutrition of its people, particularly its women and children, and secure the necessary economic growth.”

The Cost of Hunger in Africa study has been conducted in 11 African countries. Their economies suffer an estimated annual loss associated with child undernutrition that is equivalent to between 1.9 per cent and 16.5 per cent of GDP. Results are due to be released soon in Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The study is being planned for Mali and Mauritania.

[Concerned about Liu Xiaobo, UN rights office urges access to jailed rights defender](#)

7 July 2017 – The United Nations human rights office today expressed great concern about the health of Liu Xiaobo and urged access to the jailed Nobel laureate and his wife, Liu Xia.

“We are very concerned at reports that Liu Xiaobo’s health has [seriously deteriorated](#) over the past 24 hours,” a spokesperson for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), Liz Throssell, told reporters in Geneva.

She said OHCHR has been engaging with Chinese authorities about the situation of Mr. Liu and his wife, but has not received further information from the Government for more than 24 hours.

“The welcome request for medical support for Liu Xiaobo should be responded to urgently, and amid these latest reports of the deterioration of his health, we believe the UN should be granted access to both Liu Xiaobo and Liu Xia,” Ms. Throssell said.

She added that given the urgency and seriousness of the situation, High Commissioner Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein will continue to closely follow developments in the situation.

Mr. Liu was jailed in 2009 after calling for political reforms in China. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010 for “his long and non-violent struggle for fundamental human rights in China.”

He is reportedly in grave medical condition and has been diagnosed with liver cancer.

[Rights defenders ‘must not be silenced,’ says UN office, urging Turkey to release activists](#)

7 July 2017 – The United Nations today voiced grave concern about the arbitrary detention and arrests of human rights defenders in Turkey and called on the Government to ensure that activists can carry out their work in a safe and enabling environment without fear.

“Human rights defenders must not be silenced,” Liz Throssell, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), told a [press briefing](#) in Geneva.

OHCHR has received reports that eight Turkish human rights defenders and two international experts were detained on the Büyükada Island near Istanbul on Wednesday, 5 July, while taking part in a training workshop on digital security and protection for human rights defenders.

Their detention period has now been extended to seven days and they are reportedly being interrogated over allegations of “membership of an armed terrorist organisation,” noted Ms. Throssell.

“We fear they are now at significant risk of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment,” she added.

The detainees include Idil Eser Ilknur, the Director of Amnesty International Turkey; Ilknur Üstün of the Women’s Coalition; Veli Acu and Günel Kursun of the Human Rights Agenda Association; Nalan Erkem, Seyhmuş Özbekli and Özlem Dalkiran of Helsinki Citizens Assembly; and Nejat Tastan of the Equal Rights Watch Association. One Swedish and one German national, who facilitated the training, were also detained along with the owner of the hotel where the workshop was taking place.

This new wave of detentions is “deeply worrying,” according to OHCHR, as it comes a month after the Chairperson of Amnesty International Turkey, Taner Kiliç, was arrested, along with 22 other lawyers. Mr. Kiliç and six others remain in custody.

The Office is also extremely concerned about two other human rights defenders – Nuriye Gülmen, a university lecturer, and Semih Özakça, a school teacher – who went on hunger strike in March in protest against their arbitrary dismissal in the context of last year’s sweeping purges.

“We call upon the Turkish Government to release and reinstate them in their jobs without delay, and to ensure adequate compensation for their unlawful arrest and dismissal,” said Ms. Throssell.

OHCHR said that in the context of the state of emergency, the Government seems to have criminalized the legitimate exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and freedom of opinion and expression, using emergency decrees that fail to meet international human rights standards.

[UN chief 'deeply sorry' as Cyprus talks conclude without agreement](#)

7 July 2017 – [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres says that he is “deeply sorry” that, despite very strong commitments and the engagement of all delegations, the United Nations-facilitated Conference on Cyprus concluded without reaching an agreement.

“Unfortunately [...] an agreement was not possible and the conference was closed without the possibility to bring a solution to this dramatically long-lasting problem,” Mr. Guterres [told the press](#) in the early hours of Friday in the Swiss town of Crans-Montana, where the talks took place.

However, he noted that, in spite of the closure of the Conference, initiatives can still be pursued and developed in order to address the issues that were being discussed.

“The UN role is the role of a facilitator and we will always be at the disposal of the parties willing to come to an agreement, if that would be the case,” he added.

The Conference [had begun](#) on 28 June in the hopes of reaching a comprehensive settlement to the conflict that has divided the Mediterranean island for more than four decades.

In his remarks, Mr. Guterres also expressed his appreciation to the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders as well as to the representatives of the guarantors – Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom – and the European Union, which served as an observer.

He also thanked the UN team, led by Espen Barth Eide, the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus, for doing everything possible to bring closer together the positions of the different delegations.