

# UN human rights chief urges repeal of repressive NGO law in Egypt

1 June 2017 – The United Nations human rights chief today urged Egyptian officials to repeal a new law on non-governmental organizations, saying that it “further tightens the noose” around NGOs trying to hold the Government to account for human rights obligations.

Law 70 of 2017, which was enacted on 24 May, requires all NGOs to work in line with the Government’s development and social welfare plans or face jail time.

“The crucial function of these NGOs – to hold the State accountable for its human rights obligations – has been severely hampered already through asset freezes, travel bans, smear campaigns and prosecutions,” [said](#) UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said. “This new law further tightens the noose.”

The law also requires civil society groups to report all information on their funding, activities and programmes to authorities, and to seek permission for conducting surveys and any other activities.

The latest law replaces Law 84 of 2002, which Mr. Zeid said was “already repressive.” In recent years, hundreds of civil society groups were dissolved or had their assets frozen under this legislation.

More than 37 Egyptian NGO workers and leaders have been accused of “illegal receipt of foreign funding” and “working without legal permission,” according to the Office of the High Commissioner ([OHCHR](#)). None of them have been officially charged.

The revised law “places such tight restrictions on civil society that it effectively hands administration of NGOs to the Government,” Mr. Zeid said.

He added that while national security is a consideration in Egypt, “muzzling” civil society is not the solution.

“Civil society and media oversight of the Government are essential elements of a strong and stable society, where grievances can be openly aired. Muzzling dissent can only lead to further instability,” he warned.

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# UNICEF urges Governments to close data gaps on vulnerable children in residential care

1 June 2017 – At least 2.7 million children live in residential care worldwide and face increased risk of violence, abuse and long-term damage to their cognitive, social and emotional development, a United Nations study says, warning that “this is just tip of the iceberg.”

According to the study *Child Abuse & Neglect*, published by the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), official records in many countries only capture a small fraction of the actual number of children living in residential care and children in privately owned centres are often not counted.

“It is critical that governments [keep more accurate and comprehensive listings](#) of all existing residential care facilities, as well as regularly undertake thorough counts of children living in these facilities in order to help strengthen official records,” said Claudia Cappa, Statistics Specialist at UNICEF and co-author of the study. “That way we will be able to measure the breadth of the problem and work with governments to respond effectively.”

In residential care, such as institutions or orphanages, children who are already vulnerable due to family separation are at increased risk of violence, abuse and long-term damage to their cognitive, social and emotional development, said Cornelius Williams, Associate Director of Child Protection at UNICEF.

Research shows some of the key risk factors that result in children being placed in residential care include family breakdown, health issues, poor or unequal provision of social services, disability and poverty.

Governments are urged to reduce the number of children living in residential care by preventing family separation where possible, and by seeking homes for children in family-based care such as foster homes. Stronger investment in community-based family support programmes is also needed, UNICEF said.

UNICEF’s new estimate is based on data from 140 countries. Central and Eastern Europe was found to have the highest rate worldwide, with 666 children per 100,000 living in residential care, over 5 times the global average of 120 children.

Industrialized countries have the second-highest rate with 192 children, followed by East Asia and the Pacific region at 153.

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# Slovak Foreign Minister elected as President of 72nd session of the General Assembly

31 May 2017 – The United Nations General Assembly today elected by acclamation Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák of Slovakia as President of its upcoming 72nd session.

Following his election at UN Headquarters in New York, Mr. Lajčák outlined as the six priorities for his tenure: people; peace and prevention; migration; the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) and climate action; and human rights, which would guide his work as an overarching principle.

"I do believe we can do more to bring the UN closer to the world's citizen and make a real difference in their lives," he began. With a focus on quality, he pledged "not to launch any initiative that would result in additional burden, particularly for smaller States. I would rather create a streamlined agenda organized in clusters."

"Indeed, it is a common goal to create a stronger United Nations able to meet the multitude of expectations placed upon it," he underscored. "To that end, I will facilitate a constructive, informed and open interaction among Member States and with the Secretary-General."

Mr. Lajčák called for greater trust between the UN and its Members, stressing that he would do "his utmost to support progress on the United Nations reform agenda, which is vital to improve the efficiency and role of the General Assembly, as well as reform the Security Council into a twenty-first-century body."

Immediately after leaving the General Assembly Hall, Mr. Lajčák spoke to the press.

"I've always believed strongly in multilateralism, with the United Nations at the very centre of it, and I want to use my mandate, when I take over from the current president, to strengthen the role of the United Nations. We live in difficult times, and therefore I believe we need the UN more than ever, and we need a strong and efficient United Nations," he said.

Turning to peace and prevention, Mr. Lajčák explained: "As a professional diplomat, I really believe that we should invest more in preventing conflict, and thus saving human lives and also saving money. There is one important event that is already mandated for April next year, which we want to use to strengthen the importance of sustaining peace and preventing conflict."

"Migration is another priority," he continued. "We have to

deliver on the migration compact, so this will be one of the most urgent issues during the 72nd Session. The next one is to stay focused and keep the speed and attention when it comes to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals and also climate change.&#8221

The Assembly President-elect then added that the &#8220next priority is human rights &#8211 respect for basic rights and dignity of every human being. And this is an overarching principle that must be reflected in everything we do.&#8221

### ***Congratulations abound***

In his remarks to the General Assembly, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres offered his warm congratulations, [saying](#): &#8220Foreign Minister Lajèák has always demonstrated an impressive command of all aspects of UN action and a strong commitment to the principles that govern our work.&#8221

The UN chief highlighted Mr. Lajèák's strong commitment to the implementation of Agenda 2030 and the [Paris Agreement](#) on Climate change, adding that his &#8220enthusiastic leadership in relation to the Oceans Conference represent a legacy that will never be forgotten in the United Nations.&#8221

Mr. Guterres also lauded current President, Peter Thomson, saying: &#8220You have guided this Assembly outstandingly well during the transition from one Secretary-General to the next &#8211 and you have fully supported my efforts to sharpen our focus on prevention, achieve reform, and better serve the peoples of the world.&#8221

For his part, General Assembly President Thomson [offered](#) congratulations, highlighting that his successor brings &#8220a dedicated work ethic, an unwavering commitment to multilateralism, and a wealth of experience to the role,&#8221 skills, he added &#8220that will serve him, and the United Nations, well over the coming session.&#8221

Mr. Thomson commented that he had been struck by Mr. Lajèák's &#8220commitment to forging a United Nations fit for the 21st Century, an Organization that serves the people, one that is based on ethics and transparency, and one that promotes human rights and the rule of law.&#8221

Finally, he expressed his confidence &#8220that under Minister Lajèák's leadership, the United Nations will be strongly positioned to advance our global efforts to sustain peace; promote human rights; and stay the course on implementation of the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.&#8221

Having served as a three-term Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovakia, along with the UN and European Union in a number of senior conflict prevention, resolution, and mediation role, Mr. Lajèák will assume the Presidency on 12 September.

Made up of all the 193 Member States of the UN, the General Assembly provides a forum for multilateral discussion of the full spectrum of international issues covered by the UN Charter. It meets in regular session intensively

from September to December each year, and thereafter as required.

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## **'Warning signs are flashing' in crisis-torn Central African Republic, warns senior UN official**

31 May 2017 – Despite “vast improvement” in security in parts of the Central African Republic (CAR), there are still deep tensions and some fear of a sudden relapse, a top United Nations human rights official said while visiting the strife-torn country.

Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Andrew Gilmour said he was struck by the improvements in the capital, Bangui, such as “bustling markets and signs of growing economic life” and a “police, justice and corrections institutions beginning to take form.”

In Bambari, within the Ouaka prefecture, where clashes between armed groups killed numbers of civilians and displaced a significant population, Mr. Gilmour saw a fledgling gendarmerie, police, judiciary and civil authorities.

Calling it a “town without armed groups,” Mr. Gilmour said Bambari “represents a model of hope of the possible way forward,” due to the collaboration between Government forces, UN peacekeepers from the UN Integrated Stabilization Mission, known as MINUSCA, international partners and non-governmental organizations.

The senior UN official warned, however, that armed groups are coalescing and continuing with “atrocious attacks” against women and children, even as disarmament has stalled, attacks on peacekeepers continue, and deployed forces battle without sufficient resources.

“This is a time for leadership, strengthened partnerships, and a coordinated approach that puts Central Africans’ ‘Human Rights Up Front’,” Mr. Gilmour said referring to the UN initiative to prevent and respond early to large-scale human rights or humanitarian violations.

“Warning signs are flashing and must not be ignored,” stressed Mr. Gilmour.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, plunged the country of 4.5 million people into civil conflict in 2013. According to the UN, more than half the population is in dire need of assistance. Despite significant progress and successful elections, CAR has remained in the grip of instability and sporadic unrest.

Fresh violence surfaced earlier this year. As of May 2017, there were more than 500,000 internally displaced persons nationwide, a figure that had not been reached since August 2014.

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## [Act before time runs out, urges UNICEF, as Yemen grapples with 'unprecedented' cholera outbreak](#)

31 May 2017 – Amid an “unprecedented” increase in suspected cholera cases in war-torn Yemen – where medical facilities are teetering on the edge of collapse – the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has stepped up its response but warned that time may be “running out.”

“More and more children die every day in Yemen from preventable causes like malnutrition and cholera,” said Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, in a [statement](#) yesterday.

“Anyone with a heart for children cannot let the situation continue. Stop the conflict [now],” he urged.

According to the UN agency, [more than 65,000 suspected cases of the deadly disease have been reported](#) in the country, of which about 10,000 were reported in the past 72 hours alone.

Some 532 people, including 109 children have succumbed to the disease over the past month. The numbers are feared to rise as more cases are verified.

Responding to the outbreak, UNICEF has sent in three aircrafts carrying over 40 metric tonnes of lifesaving supplies including medicines, oral rehydration salts (ORS), diarrhoea disease kits and intravenous fluids to treat more than 50,000 patients.

It is also helping provide chlorinated drinking water, disinfect wells and set up water filling stations and storage.

But needs continue to increase, with medicines and other vital medical equipment in short supply, said UNICEF.

This latest crisis comes as the country has been reeling under the effects of a conflict, now into its third year, that has rendered water treatment plants barely functional and water sources severely contaminated by sewage and uncollected garbage.

Half of the country’s health facilities aren’t working, and medical staff haven’t been paid for over eight months.

“The situation in Yemen is teetering on the verge of disaster [...] over 27 million Yemenis are staring at an unforgiving humanitarian catastrophe. The biggest victims of this man-made tragedy are Yemen’s most vulnerable population – its children,” underscored Meritxell Relaño UNICEF Representative in Yemen.

“The international community needs to support long-term investments in social services like water and sanitation. Otherwise, deadly disease outbreaks will strike again and kill many more.”