

On International Day, UN agency urges 'hope, healing, dignity' for fistula sufferers

23 May 2017 – Obstetric fistula has largely been eliminated in developed countries, but more than two million women and girls still live with the condition, the head of the United Nations women's health agency today said, calling for investment and support to eliminate the debilitating and stigmatizing condition.

“With strong political leadership, investment and action, [we can end this scourge](#) in our lifetime,” the Executive Director of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), Babatunde Osotimehin, said in his message for the [Day](#).

Join us in standing with the world's poorest, most marginalized women and girls.

Obstetric fistula is a hole in the birth canal caused by obstructed labour. Women who experience obstetric fistula suffer constant incontinence, shame, social segregation and health problems.

The condition, which affects between 50,000 and 100,000 new women and girls each year, is believed to be largely avoided by delaying the first age of pregnancy, avoiding harmful traditional practices, and receiving medical attention in time.

That, unfortunately, was not the case for Nachilango Bisolomo in Malawi. She married early and was pregnant by the age of 18, before her pelvis fully developed. After a long and difficult labour, her baby died, and Ms. Bisolomo was left with a fistula.

She changed her name from Nasiwelo to Nachilango, meaning “one who has been punished.”

Like many survivors, she felt embarrassed and alienated: “My life has been hell.”

After 46 years, Ms. Bisolomo had her fistula repaired at a clinic supported by UNFPA.

“I don't intend to change my name when I go back, despite being healed,” she told UNFPA from her hospital bed, “because I want to still be an example to many that [this condition can be cured](#).”

In his message for the Day, Mr. Osotimehin noted women like Ms. Bisolomo, as well as two women whom he has known personally who underwent the procedure at the ages of 83 and 77.

I have no words to describe the sense of hope, healing and restored dignity for that this treatment provided, he said, foremost to these two women, but also to their loved ones.

In recognition of women who have endured this condition for decades, this year's theme is 'Hope, healing and dignity for all' with a special focus on those most left behind, excluded and shunned by society.

Security Council strongly condemns ballistic missile test by DPR Korea

22 May 2017 – Strongly condemning yesterday's ballistic missile launch conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the United Nations Security Council vowed to "fully and comprehensively implement all measures" imposed on the country and strongly urged all other UN Member States to do the same.

In a press statement, Council members expressed their utmost concern over the DPRK's "highly destabilising behaviour and flagrant and provocative defiance" of the Council by conducting this ballistic missile launch in violation of its international obligations under the body's relevant resolutions, dating from 2006.

"The members of the Security Council agreed that the Security Council would continue to closely monitor the situation and take further significant measures including sanctions, in line with the Council's previously expressed determination," said the statement.

The body dealing with the Council's sanctions regime against DPRK, known as the '[1718 Committee](#)' after the Council resolution that established it, was urged to redouble its efforts to improve global implementation of all measures, including by implementing the relevant feasible recommendations of the Panel of Experts as soon as possible.

Stressing that the DPRK's illegal ballistic missile activities are significantly contributing to its development of nuclear weapons delivery systems and are greatly increasing tension in the region and beyond, the Council further regretted that the country is diverting resources to the pursuit of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons while its own citizens "have great unmet needs."

Further to the statement, the Council emphasized the vital importance of the DPRK's immediately showing sincere commitment to denuclearization through concrete action and stressed the importance of working to reduce tensions in the Korean Peninsula and beyond. To that end, the Security Council demanded the DPRK conduct no further nuclear and ballistic missile tests.

Reiterating the importance of maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in North-East Asia at large, the Council members expressed their commitment to “a peaceful, diplomatic and political solution to the situation,” and welcomed efforts by Council members, as well as other States, to facilitate a peaceful and comprehensive solution through dialogue.

[In final address, UN health chief urges world body to ‘remember the people’ behind the facts and figures](#)

22 May 2017 – The outgoing chief of the United Nations health agency today highlighted the relevance of the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), and offered its decision-making body parting advice that included protecting scientific evidence, pushing for innovation and thinking of people in every decision that is taken.

“[Remember the people](#),” WHO Director-General Margaret Chan told the 70th World Health Assembly in Geneva. “Behind every number is a person who defines our common humanity and deserves our compassion, especially when suffering or premature death can be prevented.”

Among other advice, Dr. Chan, who steps down after two five-year terms, urged the body to work towards realizing the “tremendous potential of vaccines. She noted that the current measles outbreak in Europe and North America would have never occurred, had immunization coverage not dropped below the necessary 95 per cent threshold.

She also stressed the importance of listening to civil society, calling it “society’s conscience” and who can “give people who suffer the most a face and a voice.”

Refuting what she called “frequent criticism” that WHO has lost its relevance, Dr. Chan pointed to a recently issued report tracking how public health has evolved during her 10 year administration.

“It is a tribute to the power of partnerships and the capacity of public health to take solutions found for one problem and apply them to others,” the senior UN official said of the report.



Opening of the 70th World Health Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland. Photo: WHO

As an example, she noted that while it took nearly a decade to lower the prices of antiretroviral treatments for HIV, thanks to teamwork and

collaboration, the prices for new drugs to cure hepatitis C fell within two years.

'We falter sometimes, but we never give up'

"This is the culture of evidence-based learning that improves efficiency, gives health efforts their remarkable resilience, and keeps us irrepressibly optimistic," Dr. Chan said. "We falter sometimes, but we never give up."

WHO's relevance was "most dramatically demonstrated" during last month's global partnership meeting on neglected tropical diseases, she said. Participants celebrated a decade of "record-breaking progress" to eliminate the diseases.

"The fact that, in 2015, nearly one billion people received free treatments that protect them from diseases that blind, maim, deform, and debilitate has little impact on the world's geopolitical situation. The people being protected are among the poorest in the world," Dr. Chan said.

She added that this was "a success story that the world was hungry to hear."

Dr. Chan did admit fault, however, in WHO's handling of the 2014 [Ebola outbreak in West Africa](#); the virus has recently re-emerged near the border of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic.

The outgoing chief said that "WHO was too slow to recognize that the virus, during its first appearance in West Africa, would behave very differently than during past outbreaks in central Africa, where the virus was rare but familiar and containment measures were well-rehearsed."

While the organization made "quick course corrections" to bring three outbreaks under control and helped create the first Ebola vaccine, the outbreak happened on Dr. Chan's watch "and I am personally accountable."

Current health challenges, elections top Assembly's agenda

The year's World Health Assembly, which includes 194 countries, will discuss what has been learned from that outbreak, as well as from WHO's handling of Zika and other diseases.

Experts will also provide an update on how Angola responded to last year's Yellow Fever outbreak, which exhausted the global vaccine stockpile several times.

The current cholera epidemic in war-torn Yemen is also on the agenda; only days ago, WHO described it as "unprecedented."

Polio is still causing misery and paralysis in three countries where it is endemic: Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nigeria, so delegates will continue to push for the complete eradication of the wild poliovirus, for which there is no cure, only prevention.

In addition to tackling these health threats and many more, the World Health

Assembly has one more important task – choosing Dr. Chan’s successor. The three candidates hoping to step into her shoes after the vote tomorrow afternoon are Tedros Ghebreyesus from Ethiopia, David Nabarro from the UK, and Sania Nishtar from Pakistan.

[UN refugee agency ramps up response as Libya’s humanitarian crisis deepens](#)

22 May 2017 – Conflict, insecurity, political instability and a collapsing economy have contributed to the deteriorating humanitarian crisis in Libya, prompting the United Nations refugee agency to announce plans to step-up its presence and programmes there.

Amid the increasing complexity of refugee and migrant movements through and from Libya, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi visited Tripoli yesterday where he met [refugees and migrants](#) in some of Libya’s many detention centres.

“I was [shocked at the harsh conditions](#) in which refugees and migrants are held, generally due to lack of resources,” Mr. Grandi said. “Children, women and men who have suffered so much already should not have to endure such hardship.”

Some 300,000 Libyans have been displaced by ongoing conflict. In all, more than 1.3 million people – including internally displaced people (IDPs), as well as vulnerable Libyans, host communities, migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers – are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

According to Mr. Grandi’s Office ([UNHCR](#)), hundreds of thousands of people in the North African country have been affected by the collapse of law and order, absent or insufficient health care assistance, essential medicines, food, safe drinking water, shelter and education. In response, UNHCR is ramping up its existing humanitarian operations and is strengthening cooperation with the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) to leverage the respective strengths of both organizations.

“We should not underestimate the challenges of operating in an unstable and volatile environment, such as Libya today,” stressed Mr. Grandi.

In addition to new offices and community development centres for refugees and asylum-seekers, UNHCR is also scaling up its presence in places of disembarkation for people rescued or intercepted at sea, in close cooperation with IOM and other partners.

At the same time, access and humanitarian assistance to vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers in detention facilities run by the Libyan authorities will

be increased, focusing on lifesaving humanitarian activities and advocating for the release of detained refugees and asylum-seekers.

“Our ability to access and effectively deliver much needed protection and assistance is a constant challenge. The people we are trying to help and my staff live and work under enormous strain and risks,” said the High Commissioner.

In the last year and a half, UNHCR has been able to secure the release of more than 800 vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers. The agency is trying to find durable solutions for them.

UNHCR will also boost its programmes to assist Libyan IDPs and host communities who are in dire need of improved access to basic services, which have severely deteriorated as a result of the crisis. Among other activities, small-scale, community-based projects of immediate impact are envisaged for the benefit of host communities, displaced persons, refugees and asylum-seekers.

Libya continues to be the main departing point for refugees and migrants seeking to reach Europe. Mr. Grandi was accompanied to Tripoli by Vincent Cochetel, Special Envoy for the Central Mediterranean Situation, who will be coordinating UNHCR’s cross-regional response to the complexities of mixed migration movements across the Mediterranean, and by Amin Awad, UNHCR’s Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

[UN forum aims to ensure ‘promises made are promises kept’ on financing for development](#)

22 May 2017 – Promises made for financing the implementation of sustainable development goals must be promises kept, speakers said today at the opening of a United Nations forum.

“The eyes of the world are upon us,” said Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava, President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), as he opened the [2017 Forum](#) on financing for development follow-up.

The forum is an intergovernmental process mandated to review the [Addis Ababa Action Agenda](#) adopted by UN Member States in 2015 as well as other financing for development outcomes and the means of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

Building on last year’s inaugural session, which devoted particular attention to setting up the monitoring framework for the follow-up to the Addis Agenda,

the 2017 Forum is expected to provide impetus for achieving results.

UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, speaking via video message, recalled that the Addis Agenda, the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development and the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change have provided a roadmap for a better future for all.

The Forum will closely examine key elements of that roadmap, including the need for long-term, high-quality investment and urgent measures to improve the well-being of the poor and vulnerable, she said, encouraging participants to share their experiences with others and urged all countries to seek out and forge meaningful partnerships.

Developed countries need to deliver and developing countries have to further pursue South-South and triangular cooperation, she added.

[Other speakers](#) included Christine Lagarde, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF); Mahmoud Mohieldin, Senior Vice-President for the 2030 Development Agenda, United Nations Relations and Partnerships, World Bank Group; and Yonov Frederick Agah, Deputy Director-General of the World Trade Organization ([WTO](#)).

Meanwhile, a new UN report launched today [says](#) that continued slow global economic growth would likely leave about 6.5 per cent of the world population extremely poor in 2030 without national actions supported by international cooperation.

The 2017 *Financing for Development: Progress and Prospects* report states that a continuation of the status quo would severely hamper efforts to achieve the [SDGs](#) by 2030, with least developed countries (LDCs) likely to fall short by large margins.

The report, which is led by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, tracks progress on the Addis Agenda, and draws on the expertise, analysis and data from over 50 international institutions that make up the Inter-agency taskforce on financing for development, including the World Bank Group, the IMF and the WTO, UNCTAD and the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)).

The report finds that there is an urgent need to increase long-term investments in sustainable development and to address economic vulnerability. Such investment will stimulate global growth, leading to a virtuous cycle.

“Ramped-up investment in sustainable infrastructure will help stimulate sustainable and equitable global growth, and make available more resources for investment in achieving sustainable development,” said Wu Hongbo, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs.