

Southern Africa: UN agencies, Mozambique host first-ever forum to fight trafficking of people with albinism

19 May 2017 – United Nations agencies are joining forces with governments in Southern Africa in a push to strengthen protections for persons with albinism, who often fall victim to a raft of abuses, including maiming, trafficking and even murder, linked to the belief that their parts have magical powers in witchcraft potions.

A two-day regional forum on preventing and combating human trafficking and protecting people with albinism in Mozambique, Malawi and Tanzania is currently underway in Pemba, northern Mozambique. The first-of-its-kind workshop was organized by the UN International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) in partnership with the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)), the General Prosecutor of the Republic of Mozambique and the Prosecutor of Cabo Delgado province.

"UNICEF is supporting the Government to enhance civil registration by investing in the establishment and expansion of a digitalized system of birth registration to ensure the basic rights of every child to name, identity and nationality," [said](#) the UNICEF Representative in Mozambique, Marcoluigi Corsi.

Participants include representatives of Mozambique, Malawi and Tanzania's counter-trafficking coordination bodies, prosecutors, criminal investigation police, national human rights institutions, NGOs concerned with the protection of people with albinism and traditional healers.

"This will in turn prevent and address disappearance of children, abandonment or assist in investigations when children with albinism are affected. Following new instances of kidnapping and killing of children and people with albinism in Mozambique, UNICEF launched in August 2015 a social media campaign called #TodosIguais to create awareness on this issue. The ongoing campaign has so far reached over five million people," Mr. Corsi added.

Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania share common borders and are either countries of origin or destination for the trafficking of people with albinism and their body parts. The forum will result in a plan of action on cross-border cooperation for the prevention and prosecution of human trafficking-related crimes and the protection of the rights of people with albinism, eventually resulting in more effective investigation and prosecution, as well as victim protection.

"A regional approach like this that complements national efforts in Mozambique, Malawi and Tanzania is the only way we will improve cross-border coordination and investigation to protect people with albinism," said

Katharina Schnoering, IOM Chief of Mission in Mozambique. “This regional approach to investigation, research and cooperation was recommended in a recent report by the [UN independent expert](#) who visited Mozambique in 2016,” she added.

IOM is working in partnership with the Governments to assist trafficking victims and provide strengthened national counter-trafficking responses in the three African countries.

UNICEF backs the strengthening of child-friendly justice systems through capacity-building support to the police, judiciary and public prosecution to enhance accountability for violence and crimes against children.

The agency also endorses the strengthening of multi-sectoral case management systems to enable adequate channelling of cases of violence, harmful practices, including ritualistic killings or trafficking, child abandonment or any other risks that children face. UNICEF’s health and education programmes help increase access to health and education services, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalized children.

[UN agency micro-loan helps courageous Palestine refugee’s small business thrive amid rubble of Syrian war](#)

19 May 2017 – Hidden literally under the rubble of the Syrian war is the economic success story of a widow who, refusing to submit to despair, founded a thriving micro-enterprise venture with assistance from a United Nations agency loan.

Hanan Odah is a 30-year-old Palestine refugee who, living in the Jaramana refugee camp in the Syrian capital, Damascus, supports her displaced family of three with a stationery and perfume business that she first founded with a loan from the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East ([UNRWA](#)).

“Young, innovative and courageous, she is living proof that as large businesses have collapsed, small scale enterprises can survive and even thrive in the markets opening up at the grassroots,” said UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl in an [opinion piece](#) published today.

As senior leaders and key business figures gather this week at the World Economic Forum in Jordan, Mr. Krähenbühl hopes that they find Hanan’s story “revealing, instructive and perhaps even inspiring,” flagging UNRWA’s micro finance initiative as a rare but significant example of optimism in the country.

Calling her “an extraordinary young woman who in the face of untold adversity is bravely transforming her community from within, one business plan at a time,” he adds that that “is what the World Economic Forum, at its best, is striving to achieve.”

According to the Syrian Centre for Policy Research, de-industrialization has inflicted \$254.7 billion in economic damage on Syria. In 2015 alone GDP loss was \$ 163.3 billion. As a result of the economic collapse, more than 85 per cent of Syrians were living in poverty by the end of 2015, with more than 69 per cent of the population barely surviving in extreme poverty. Nearly three million jobs have been lost and unemployment is now over 50 per cent.

However, Mr. Krähenbühl pointed out: “With recent donor funding, in particular \$1 million from the European Union, we have expanded our micro finance outreach. Always searching for new openings, we have been actively mapping new locations of internally displaced people to reach the Palestine refugees we serve and to deliver loan products where market opportunities open up.”

In a country where nearly three million jobs have been lost and unemployment is over 50 per cent, the UN has expanded its [Microfinance programme in Palestine](#). Worth nearly \$2 million, UNRWA’s programme supports the resilience of Palestine refugees and Syrians alike.

For many beneficiaries these loans are vital to support their families and rebuild their homes but, most importantly, they provide a renewed sense of hope and dignity in a country devastated by six years of conflict.

“Across Syria, UNRWA’s Micro Finance Department disbursed a staggering 9,520 loans in 2016, worth nearly two million dollars. We can build on this track record and expand with the support of donors and partners,” stressed Mr. Krähenbühl.

“Our loans have also developed flexibly in response to the evolving conflict. There are currently five products that respond to the deepening emergency situations in Syria and help Palestine refugees re-build their houses and maintain stable incomes for themselves and extended families; no small achievement as war rages relentlessly in the country,” he concluded.

[South Sudan: UN report exposes human rights violations against civilians in Yei](#)

19 May 2017 – A United Nations report has documented human rights violations and abuses against civilians that may amount to war crimes or crimes against

humanity, in what used to be a peaceful multi-ethnic town in South Sudan.

“The conflict in Yei, in particular, highlights the [startling level of impunity](#) in South Sudan, which has fed successive cycles of violence across the country,” said the report, which contains the findings of an in-depth investigation into violations committed in and around the Central Equatoria town, 150 kilometres southwest of the capital, Juba, between July 2016 and January 2017.

The report by the Human Rights Division of the UN Mission in South Sudan ([UNMISS](#)) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) exposes violations and abuses by both sides of the conflict, based on ethnicity or their presumed association with the other side, including 114 killings by pro-Government forces.

The extent of the abuses by armed opposition groups remains unclear due to lack of access to areas where these groups are active. The report finds that these violations and abuses may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity and that they warrant further investigation.

Yei had been a largely peaceful town, with between 200,000 and 300,000 residents of many different ethnicities, until July 2016, when violence erupted between Government and opposition forces, which led to the departure of opposition leader Riek Machar into the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

As Government forces chased him, fighting simultaneously broke out along the route, particularly in Yei, fuelling strong divisions along ethnic lines and resulted in targeted killings, arrests, rapes and mass civilian displacement of more than half of the population of the town.

Satellite imagery shows that there was widespread burning of homes and businesses, resulting in the forcible displacement of tens of thousands of civilians.

[Yemen’s war pushing Somali refugees to return home – UN agency](#)

19 May 2017 – More than 30,000 Somali refugees have apparently returned to Somalia from Yemen, the United Nations refugee agency said, and an increasing number are seeking aid to return home.

Babar Baloch, spokesperson at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), today told reporters at the UN’s Geneva Office that Somali refugees are approaching the agency for assistance to return – citing safety and security concerns and limited access to services in Yemen.

The UN agency can assist up to 10,000 Somalis who voluntarily want to return to their home country. Their assistance would include documentation, travel and transportation aid, as well as financial support in Yemen to facilitate the journey.

Most refugees opt to return to Mogadishu, in the anticipation that assistance and services will be [more accessible and available](#), Mr. Baloch said.

Among the people who want to return is Barei Ibrahim and her 10 children. Ms. Ibrahim has been living in Yemen for 26 years, after war drove her from Somalia in the early nineties.

I don't have anything here, she told UNHCR from Yemen's only refugee camp, Kharaz, in the Lahj governorate. I don't have a job or a future and we are facing difficulties. We are begging to get by and are living in sorrow and grief.

Some 30,600 Somalis have reportedly already returned to Somalia from Yemen since the beginning of the current war, according to UN figures.

The conditions facing the almost 280,000 refugees in-country are worsening and their needs are growing by the day, UNHCR said. About 91 per cent of those refugees are Somalis, many who fled to Yemen years ago.

Yemen has traditionally accepted those in need of international protection, and is the only country in the Arabian Peninsula signatory to the Refugee Convention and the Protocol. However, the ongoing war has limited the capacities to provide adequate assistance and protection to refugees.

The UN agency is working to support those refugees living in Yemen, providing protection and services that include legal assistance, education and access to health and psycho-social services.

[UN chief congratulates on peaceful parliamentary elections in Algeria](#)

19 May 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has congratulated the people and Government of Algeria for the peaceful conduct of the 4 May parliamentary elections, for which he dispatched a group of electoral observers, his spokesperson said today.

The Secretary-General notes the announcement by the Algerian Constitutional Council of the results of the 4 May 2017 elections to the People's National Assembly, said a statement issued by his spokesperson.

“The Secretary-General would welcome any further steps the Government and all stakeholders can take to continue to strengthen the democratic process,” it added.

The Secretary-General deployed a panel of electoral experts to the country from 28 April to 7 May 2017, at the invitation of the Government.