

FEATURE: 'Overwhelming majority' of women experience some form of harassment, sexual violence in their daily journeys

3 May 2017 – From rude comments and unwanted touching and groping to rape and murder, sexual violence and harassment has reached pandemic proportions, according to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women ([UN Women](#)), which recently launched a campaign in Mexico City to tackle the issue on public transport.

Studies show that a large majority of women worldwide have been victims of sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence in public spaces; in Mexico City, a recent national survey found that nearly 90 per cent of women feel unsafe on buses and on the subway.

These behaviours have been so normalized and naturalized within societies that women themselves don't often consider it important enough to report

For Ana Güzmes, UN Women's representative in Mexico, the figures point to nothing less than an epidemic. "From a very young age women experience sexual violence and harassment in public spaces, in transport, walking on the streets, and it consists of anything from rude words, unwanted touching, obscene glares, to rapes, murders and feminicide."

The alarming data prompted UN Women, in partnership with the local government, to launch the campaign *#NoEsDeHombres*, which translates to "this is not what being a man is about." The campaign promotes what the agency says is a more respectful form of masculinity.

Yeliz Osman, Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Programme Coordinator at UN Women in Mexico, notes that the capital is no different to other cities around the world. "The overwhelming majority of women who participated in focus groups said that they experience some form of sexual harassment in their daily journeys."

"These behaviours have been so normalized and naturalized within societies that women themselves don't often consider it important enough to report and men don't even realize in many cases that this is actually a form of violence and the impact that it has on women and girls."

VIDEO: Responding to sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces

According to a survey on the issue carried out by the National Institute for Statistics and Geography, the forms of violence that were most frequently reported were offensive or sexualized comments (74 per cent), unwanted touching and groping (58 per cent) and fear of being assaulted or abused (14 per cent).

Example of the campaign. Click for large. Photo: UN Women

The fear women and girls feel ends up changing the way they live, Ms. Osman continued. "Women's perceptions of their safety in Mexico City, as in many cities in the world, has an impact on decisions to go out at night or to take part in leisure activities; also women have to change the way they dress, they need to go out accompanied by other people, and that's simply not acceptable.

"Women should be free to move around, to go to work, to go to school, free from constant harassment and violence," she stressed.

The campaign targets men between the ages of 20 and 50 that use public transport on a daily basis, and was divided into two stages.

During the first stage, the Mexico City Metro was strategically used to undertake social experiments that were filmed and made into two videos which challenge the normalization of sexual violence by placing men in situations that give them an idea of what women experience in their daily lives.

The videos were then released with the goal of generating empathy and creating change in male attitudes and behaviours. To date, the videos have been viewed more than 10 million times on social network platforms, reaching more than 108 million users on Twitter with the hashtag #NoEsDeHombres.

The second stage consists of posters that aim to raise awareness of the sexual violence experienced by women and girls on public transport every day and seek to deter men from committing these acts by informing them of the possible sanctions for sexual violence. At the same time, women were encouraged to report incidents. The posters were placed in different public spaces including the metro, buses and under bridges.

This is the first time that UN Women and Mexico City have implemented such an innovative campaign that targets men, the objective of which is to create relationships between men and women that are more equal and free of violence.

VIDEO: Encouraging innovative, locally owned and sustainable approaches to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women in public spaces.

"Sexual harassment is almost considered a natural part of male behaviour and we need to transform the notion that it's natural," stated Ms. Osman. "It's not natural and not all men harass women, not all men are violent. We don't

want to perpetuate stereotypes about what is to be a man or a woman.

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"However, what we are trying to say is that there are forms of masculinity that are less harmful, more positive, more respectful towards women, and more equal. That's what we are trying to promote: a masculinity that is based on women's rights and equality."

While the campaign #NoEsDeHombres was created specifically for Mexico, UN Women's global flagship initiative "Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces," which was launched in 2010 with the goal of preventing and responding to sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces, has a growing list of champion cities.

These include Cairo, New Delhi, Kigali, Port Moresby, Quito, Cape Town, Rabat, Marrakech, Quezon City, Guatemala City, Medellin, Dushanbe, Maputo, Tegucigalpa, Dublin, Winnipeg, Reykjavik, Sakai, New York, and Brussels.

According to UN Women, studies showed that 43 per cent of young women in London experienced some form of street harassment in 2011; over 90 per cent of women and girls in Port Moresby have experienced some form of sexual violence when accessing public transportation; and 55 per cent of women in Kigali reported that they were concerned about going to educational institutions after dark.

As part of the "Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces" initiative, cities commit to identify gender-responsive, locally relevant and owned interventions; to develop and implement laws and policies to prevent and respond to the issue of sexual violence in public spaces; to invest in the safety and economic viability of public spaces and to change attitudes and behaviours to promote women's and girls' rights to enjoy public spaces free from violence.

AUDIO: What is life like for women and girls in Mexico's most populous city? Yeliz Osman, Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Programme Coordinator at UN Women in Mexico, speaks with *UN News*.

Perpetrators, not victims, should be shamed for conflict-related sexual

violence – UN report

3 May 2017 – Survivors of sexual violence in war zones need to be recognized as legitimate victims of conflict and terrorism, and not blamed, stigmatized or shamed, the United Nations has said in an annual report to be presented to the Security Council.

“[Shame and stigma](#) are integral to the logic of sexual violence being employed as a tactic of war or terrorism: aggressors understand that this type of crime can turn victims into outcasts, thus unravelling the family and kinship ties that hold communities together,” according to the latest report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence, which is prepared by the Office of the UN Special Representative on the issue.

The report calls on traditional, religious and community leaders to address harmful social norms and help to redirect the stigma of rape from the victims to the perpetrators. If not, the victims may face lethal retaliation, “honour” crimes, suicide, untreated diseases, unsafe abortion, economic exclusion and indigence.

Of particular concern in the report are children born of rape, which “may themselves face a lifetime of marginalization, owing to stigma and uncertain legal status.”

“Unless those who have suffered sexual violence and the children born of rape are reintegrated into their societies and economies, they will remain susceptible to exploitation and recruitment,” the report cautions.

The report calls for national legal and policy frameworks to ensure that survivors of conflict-related sexual violence can benefit from reparations and redress, and have access to urgent support and services, such as sexual and reproductive health care “including measures for the safe termination of unwanted pregnancies.”

Protection from sexual violence and access to sexual and reproductive health care was also pledged at the 2016 [World Humanitarian Summit](#) last May.

The annual report reviews 13 conflict settings, four post-conflict countries and two additional situations of concern. It also lists government and non-government actors who are credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of rape or other forms of sexual violence.

This year, for the first time since the Security Council created the position of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, there has been a delisting. The Ivorian armed forces (FACI) have been removed after the Government adopted measures in accordance with resolution 1960 (2010) and 2106 (2013). These measures include issuing orders through chains of command and adopting codes of conduct prohibiting sexual violence, or investigating alleged incidents.

“The measures taken by the Government of Côte d’Ivoire have resulted in the

first delisting pursuant to this mandate, namely that of the Forces armées de Côte d'Ivoire. Continued monitoring and technical assistance will be required to consolidate these gains," the report noted.

The report is due to be presented to the Security Council on 15 May.

[Syria: Reported airstrikes should not derail chance for 'good news' at Astana talks, says UN envoy](#)

3 May 2017 – A senior United Nations mediator today urged the continuation of talks on a Syrian ceasefire being held in the Kazak capital of Astana.

The current round of what has become known as the 'Astana talks' –between the Syrian conflict parties and led by Russia, Turkey and Iran, kicked off today, but, according to media reports, the Syrian opposition side walked out of the meeting, citing a new barrage of airstrikes in the area they hold.

"The United Nations is very concerned at the reports of escalation in Syria, including, allegedly, reports of air strikes, particularly in this delicate moment in the Astana discussions where actually proposals to de-escalate the conflict are under very serious discussion," the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, [told](#) reporters, following the suspension of the meeting.

"We are calling, therefore, for the immediate investigation and for immediate institution of measures to ensure that now no strikes are taking place and are halted," Mr. de Mistura said, urging all participants in Astana to "press ahead tomorrow with de-escalation discussions and confidence-building measures."

Asked if he is confident that the opposition will come back tomorrow, he said that there have been "some incidents produced by one side or the other," but the important thing is "to make sure that those incidents stop but also do not kill the opportunity for good news related to that."

Positive outcomes from the Astana talks – which aim to bolster the ceasefire regime brokered by Russia, Turkey and Iran in late December 2016 – would help Mr. de Mistura with his role of facilitating the [intra-Syrian talks](#) in Geneva, the latest round of which wrapped up in late March. The discussions are guided by UN Security Council [resolution 2254 \(2015\)](#), focusing on matters of governance, a schedule and process to draft a new constitution and the holding of elections as the basis for a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned process to end the conflict.

[In Lebanon and Syria, UN emergency food chief appeals for humanitarian access](#)

3 May 2017 – The head of the United Nations emergency food relief agency today appealed for “regular, unimpeded and sustained” humanitarian access during meetings with senior government officials and partners in Lebanon and Syria – his first official visit since assuming office.

David Beasley, the Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) today wrapped up a three-day trip to the two countries to assess the growing needs. According to a press release, he spoke first-hand with Syrian refugee families in the Bekaa Valley and Beirut, and met with displaced women and children at a WFP distribution centre in Damascus.

“I am touched by the stories of the [struggle and resilience](#) of the many Syrians I met who are living away from home and loved ones,” Mr. Beasley said.

The UN agency provides monthly life-saving food assistance to more than four million vulnerable people each month inside Syria through regular deliveries as well as cross-border, cross-line and air deliveries to areas not reachable through regular means.

“In his meetings, Beasley appealed for regular, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access to deliver urgently needed food assistance to people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas across war-torn Syria,” WFP reported.

He also commended Lebanon for its generosity in hosting over one million Syrian refugees.

During the trip, Mr. Beasley also visited warehouses, food distribution centres and WFP-contracted supermarkets where some of the most vulnerable refugees redeem monthly electronic vouchers.

In Lebanon, almost 700,000 vulnerable Syrian refugees receive food assistance through an electronic voucher (e-card) system. The e-cards are replenished each month with \$27 per person, which can be used to buy food at one of 480 WFP-contracted shops across Lebanon.

In 'post truth' era, leaders must defend objective, independent media, UN says on Press Freedom Day

3 May 2017 – In a 'post-truth' world with 'fake news' on the rise, and media accountability and credibility falling under question, free, independent and professional journalism has never been more important, the United Nations today said.

'We need leaders to defend a free media. This is crucial to counter prevailing misinformation. And we need everyone to [stand for our right to truth](#), Secretary-General António Guterres today said, marking World Press Freedom Day.

This year's theme highlights media's role in advancing peaceful, just and inclusive societies and builds on the [theme](#) 'Critical Minds for Critical Times: Media's role in advancing peaceful, just and inclusive societies.'

The theme comes at a time when [free, independent and pluralistic media](#) has never been so important to empower individual women and men, strengthen good governance and the rule of law, and take forward the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural ([UNESCO](#)) said in a statement.

The agency is also tasked with defending press freedom and the safety of journalists, and is spearheading the [UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists](#) and the Issue of Impunity.

'Far too often, murder remains the most tragic form of censorship,' UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova said in her message on the Day, noting that 102 journalists were killed in 2016.

She noted that 'facing a crisis of audience identity, journalism stands before a horizon where old challenges are merging with new threats,' which include the Internet's blurring of the lines between advertising and editorial material, businesses pushing for profits and private censorship.

RELATED: [UNESCO award for Dawit Isaak 'sign of hope' to free imprisoned Eritrean journalist](#)

In her message, Ms. Bokova cited Guillermo Cano Isaza, a Colombian journalist assassinated in 1986, whose name was lent to the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize.

He wrote: 'Only the independence, the character, the objectivity and the good judgment of the journalist and the media can overcome the terrible storms of the new world that threaten freedom of information everywhere.'

Ms. Bokova noted those words, written two years prior to his death, continue to resonate today, 33 years later.

She called for original, critical and well-researched journalism, guided by high professional, ethical standards and a quality media education and for audiences who have the right media and information literacy skills.

Press Freedom is marked annually on 3 May. UNESCO's main celebration of this year's edition of the Day will take place in Jakarta, Indonesia, from 1 to 4 May.

The programme of the four-day conference has been designed to raise awareness of the importance of free and fact-based journalism in promoting peace and justice, and supporting the efficiency, accountability and inclusiveness of institutions, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs). The event is organized with the Government of Indonesia and the Indonesian Press Council.

During the event, Ms. Bokova will award the 2017 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize to Dawit Isaak, the imprisoned Eritrean-born journalist who will be represented by his daughter, Bethelem Isaak, during a ceremony hosted by Joko Widodo, the President of Indonesia.

A special event will be held at UN Headquarters in New York on Thursday.