

[UN urges all efforts be made to lower tensions in Venezuela](#)

20 April 2017 – The United Nations today expressed concern about the latest developments in Venezuela, calling on the Government and the opposition to address the country’s challenges for the benefit of the people.

“We call on the Government of Venezuela and the opposition to [engage sincerely](#) to reactivate dialogue efforts,” according to a statement attributable to UN spokesman Stéphane Dujarric.

Specifically, he noted dialogue around critical issues that are already agreed to be placed on the agenda, namely the balance of power among branches of the State, the electoral calendar, human rights, truth and justice and the socioeconomic situation.

Mr. Dujarric called for “concrete gestures” to reduce polarisation and to create the necessary conditions to address the country’s challenges.

[UN global assessment on higher education reveals disturbing disparities](#)

20 April 2017 – Noting the lack of sufficient institutions to cater to the growing demand for higher education as well as increasing disparities in its access, the United Nations educational and scientific agency has presented a series of steps to make such education more equitable and affordable.

In its new paper, [Six ways to ensure higher education leaves no one behind](#), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) also urged policy makers to set up national agencies to ensure equal opportunities in education as well as to devise measures that keep student loan repayments to less than 15 per cent of their annual income.

“Demand for higher education is going to continue rising. Governments must respond by introducing a range of new policies that will ensure expansion doesn’t leave the marginalised behind, and that access is based on merit, not privilege,” Irina Bokova, the Director-General of UNESCO, said in a [news release](#) announcing the findings.

“By creating and transmitting vital knowledge, skills and core values, higher education is a cornerstone for achieving the Sustainable Development

Goals ([SDGs](#)), she highlighted.

According to the assessment, the number of university level students doubled to 207 million between 2000 and 2014, but global trends showed that only 1 per cent of the poorest students spent more than four years in higher education, compared to 20 per cent of the richest.

The figures also revealed that only 8 per cent of young adults were enrolled, on average, in the poorest countries, compared to 74 per cent in the richest countries. The low-income countries also suffered the greatest gender disparity, with women making up only 30 per cent of bachelor-level students (in 2014).

The assessment has been prepared by UNESCO, together with the International Institute for Educational Planning ([IIHP](#)) a specialized UNESCO institute that works to strengthen national education capacity and policies and the Global Education Monitoring ([GEM](#)) Report, which monitors progress towards global education targets.

Though 'controversial', affirmative action could help

According to IIHP, quota or bonus systems could potentially be some means that can help address issues identified in the assessment.

In certain countries with deeply rooted social inequities, affirmative action through quota or bonus systems may be necessary to expand access to underrepresented groups, even if these mechanisms are controversial, noted Suzanne Grant Lewis, the Director of IIEP.

At the same time, the report also noted that while private colleges and universities have expanded to cater to the growing pool of students, enrolling some 30 per cent of all students worldwide, Governments aren't keeping pace financially with this expansion and families are left having to bear the expenses.

The last thing we want is for higher education to be the ball and chain around students' ankles
Aaron Benavot, Director of GEM

Across 26 countries in Europe, households paid for 15 per cent of the cost of higher education in 2011. In other high-income countries, these expenditures were even higher Chile (55 per cent), Japan (52 per cent), the United States (46 per cent) and Australia (40 per cent).

Efforts, particularly aimed at helping the disadvantaged, such as low tuition fees, need-based scholarships and loans repayments based on income, can help families manage the costs.

Coping with dramatic student expansion is not easy, but there are policy solutions Governments can put into place to stop the bill falling to households, noted Aaron Benavot, Director of the GEM Report.

“The last thing we want is for higher education to be the ball and chain around students’ ankles.”

[UN, African Union sign new partnership framework to better respond to evolving challenges](#)

19 April 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres and the Chairperson of the African Union, Moussa Faki Mahamat, today signed a new landmark framework to strengthen partnership between the two organizations on peace and security pillars and better respond to the changing dimensions and evolving challenges of peace operations.

“We no longer have the traditional peacekeeping operations, where peacekeepers separate two countries or two groups within the same country that have signed an agreement, and a makeshift peace essentially prevails,” Mr. Guterres [told the press](#) at a stakeout, alongside Mr. Mahamat, after signing the framework at UN Headquarters in New York.

“We are witnessing, in Africa, as around the world, changes [...] that force us to have a strategic review of the way peace operations take place,” he explained.

The Joint UN-AU Framework for Enhancing Partnership on Peace and Security is expected to boost the coordination between the two organizations at all levels. It is also anticipated to strengthen cooperation on issues ranging from human rights and good governance, to sustainable and inclusive development.

The new understanding will also help align the African Union’s Agenda 2063 with the global [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development to ensure that they are both a “success story” in the continent.

Prior to the stakeout, Mr. Guterres and Mr. Mahamat jointly led the first Joint UN-AU Annual Conference where they discussed the complementarity between the 2030 Agenda and the AU’s Agenda 2063, as well as the fight against terrorism and the financing of operations led by the AU.

They also discussed situations in several countries, including Libya, Mali, the Central African Republic, and Somalia, and discussed efforts to combat the activities of the Boko Haram terrorist group.

Momentum on political process must be renewed if Libya's many challenges are to be addressed – UN envoy

19 April 2017 – It is more important than ever to forge unity within Libya, the United Nations envoy for the country told the Security Council today, while calling on the Libyan stakeholders to regain the optimism generated by the 2015 Political Agreement, which has faded and is being replaced by “frustration and disappointment.”

In his briefing to the Council, Martin Kobler, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya, said that the majority of Libyans and the international community continued to [strongly support the political agreement](#) and its institutions and recognized the Presidency Council as the sole national executive authority.

“Both Libyans and the international community support the Agreement. Yes, it can be amended. But no, there is no alternative, there is no ‘plan B.’ And there is no need for one,” he said, underscoring: “If the parties do not uphold their responsibility in the [Libyan Political Agreement](#), there is no reason to think that they will have any greater commitment to an alternative agreement.”

Turning to the many other signs of positive developments in the country, including recent developments in the fight against terrorism and the improvement of the security situation in Tripoli, Mr. Kobler said that on the economic front, Libyan wages are on the rise and oil production has increased.

Despite progress, uncertainty contributing to ‘dangerous political power vacuum’

But the optimism generated by the signing of the Agreement has diminished, reported Mr. Kobler, emphasizing that instead of the “sharp horizon” established by the Agreement he now sees instead “frustration, disappointment, sometimes anger, and often it is justified.” He cited rising criminality, which remains widespread throughout the country, the division of institutions and the lack of guarantee of public services for the population.

The country’s gross domestic product (GDP), he added, has been steadily declining since 2012, not to mention the persistence of the parallel economy and illegal activities.

Mr. Kobler regretted that the current political vacuum is hampering efforts to create a united security force, to the point where some actors are considering a return to a military solution. “Competition for the control of national resources risks generating new violence,” he said, adding: The results of these divisions are setting Libya on a worrying path. Public services, including access to electricity, health, education, water, are

failing many.”

Against this backdrop, he said the time has come to return to the negotiating table and “regain the spirit of Skhirat,” referring to the seaside Moroccan town where the deal was reached. For this, he said, the country needs a strong international support, not only from an institutional point of view. He thus defended the creation of partnerships with Libyan society.

Seven steps to peace

With all this in mind, Mr. Kobler called on all political actors to agree on a fair and inclusive process to amend the political agreement. Secondly, he called for an immediate end to violence, including in the south of the country, as well as establishing unified security and confidence-building measures. In this regard, he said, the Committee responsible for supervising the ceasefire in Tripoli is an excellent starting point.

He went on to call for improving cooperation between the Presidency Council and all the economic players. The UN Mission in Libya ([UNMIL](#)), which he heads up, should help them to do so, he said.

Finally, the Special Representative called on the international community, including the UN, regional organizations and neighbouring States, not only to react after the fact but to anticipate the Libyan problems.

[General Assembly confirms appointment of Achim Steiner as new UN development chief](#)

19 April 2017 – The United Nations General Assembly today [confirmed](#) the appointment of Germany’s Achim Steiner as the head of the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)).

Mr. Steiner’s nomination for UNDP Administrator was forwarded to the General Assembly by [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres following consultations with UNDP’s Executive Board.

In an announcement of the four-year appointment, which begins on 20 April, Mr. Guterres noted that Mr. Steiner brings to his new position “[extensive senior leadership experience](#) both at the grassroots and at the highest levels of international policymaking addressing environmental sustainability, social equity, and economic development.”

Among his most recent experiences, Mr. Steiner was the head of the UN Environment Programme (UN Environment) and Director-General of the UN Office

in Nairobi.

In today's announcement, the Secretary-General thanked outgoing UNDP Administrator Helen Clark of New Zealand, who Mr. Guterres called "a highly effective communicator" and champion of development, among myriad key priorities.

Mr. Steiner takes the helm of UNDP, the largest of the independently funded UN agencies, which, under its special General Assembly mandate, leads the world body's work on eradicating extreme poverty and promoting good governance in the developing world.