

'United against hate': UN chief and religious leaders honour victims of Pittsburgh synagogue shooting

Calling for solidarity against anti-Semitism, [United Nations Secretary-General](#) António Guterres, addressed an inter-faith tribute held on Wednesday in New York's historic Park East Synagogue, to honour victims of Saturday's mass-shooting in Pittsburgh.

More than 200 people gathered at the historic synagogue on Manhattan's Upper East Side, including local leaders of different faiths and denominations, who joined diplomats and others to call on all communities to stand "united against hate".

The deadly mass-shooting by a lone gunman at the Tree of Life synagogue, in the US city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, during Sabbath celebrations, left 11 people dead and six wounded.

I have seen the best of Man and the worst of Man, and the best of Man will prevail – *Senior Rabbi, Arthur Schneier*

"Since I became Secretary-General I have been raising my voice against what I believe is the rise of anti-Semitism in many of our societies, and mainly in my part of the world in Europe, but also importantly in North America" said Mr. Guterres, as he denounced Saturday's "horrendous act."

Citing other forms of anti-religious hatred being witnessed today – including against Muslims and Christians worldwide – he noted that anti-Semitism is the "oldest and more permanent form of hatred" to have endured "in the history of humankind".

Calling for a "strong investment in the social cohesion of societies", he stressed the responsibility of leaders of international organizations, political parties, religions and civil-society organizations, to "address the root causes that are undermining" this cohesion and "creating conditions for these forms of hatred to become more and more frequent, and more negative in the way they are expressed."



UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

UN Secretary-General António Guterres addresses an interfaith gathering at Park East Synagogue in New York City (31 October 2018)

The remembrance, titled “United against hate,” opened with a rendition of the song “Ose Shalom” – which means “make peace” in Hebrew – by the Park East Day School children’s choir.

The synagogue’s Senior Rabbi, Arthur Schneier, a Holocaust survivor whose family was killed in the Auschwitz Nazi death camp, stated in his opening remarks: “I have been through the worst. I have seen the best of Man and the worst of Man, and the best of Man will prevail.”

Sheikh Musa Drammeh, Chairman of the Islamic Cultural Center of North America said that “it is time for this nation to rise to the occasion and to make this union a more perfect union and to prohibit hate.”

The UN Secretary-General, who previously headed the UN refugee agency, [UNHCR](#), noted he had worked closely with the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) during that time, and had tremendous respect for its work. The Tree of Life Congregation’s support for HIAS, was one of the factor’s which drove the anti-Semitic gunman to target the synagogue.

“They are a true expression of humanitarianism, but also of humanism and solidarity,” he said, regretting that the alleged perpetrator of the attack chose to target an organization that “is the symbol of everything [he considers] good in the world”.

Other faith leaders in attendance, expressing their common rejection of all forms of violence, intolerance and anti-Semitism, included Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York; Archbishop Demetrios, Primate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America; and Archbishop Auza, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations.

'No cure' for HIV in Zimbabwe says UN, following claims from local preacher

The United Nations in Zimbabwe is reaffirming that people living with HIV and AIDS need to continue with antiretroviral (ARV) therapy to manage their infections, after a local preacher reportedly claimed that he had received divine revelation of an herbal cure.

In a [statement](#) released on Wednesday by the [UN in Zimbabwe](#), Dr. Alex Gasaira, [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) representative in the country, explicitly stated that “there is no cure for HIV infection.”

According to media reports, the Zimbabwean minister notified his congregation in the capital Harare on Sunday of the “cure” for HIV and AIDS. He claimed that a healing plant had been revealed to him by God, sparking a media outcry.

The nation’s largest newspaper, the Harare Herald, reported that his claims were scientifically baseless, and that the Zimbabwean Government was actively discouraging the purchase of unapproved medicines.

Zimbabwe saw some 30,000 AIDS-related deaths in 2016, with well over one million people living with HIV accounted for in the same year, according to statistics from UNAIDS; the agency working towards ending the global pandemic as a public health threat, by 2030.

Those desperate for a cure should not abandon their ARV therapy, the UN advised. Any researchers working in the field, the statement said, are urged to subject their treatments to the Zimbabwe Ministry of Health for proper clinical trials and procedures.

Until a cure is verified, effective ARV drugs can control HIV infections and help prevent transmission, “so that people with HIV, and those at substantial risk, can enjoy health, long and productive lives,” Dr. Gasasira added.

As of the end of last year, 87 percent of Zimbabweans living with HIV were aware of their status, and 74 percent of them were receiving treatment, the report states.

The United Nations is supporting Zimbabwe in its fight to stamp out HIV and AIDS as a public health threat by 2030, starting with informing citizens of their status and working to suppress infection through treatment.

Plastic-busting fungi may help tackle pollution, climate change: UN Environment

When it comes to helping green our world, organic mushrooms from the local market may be just the tip of the iceberg. A new United Nations-backed report reveals that fungi could help ween the world off its plastic addiction, by degrading polyurethane in just a matter of weeks.

According to the first-ever [State of the World's Fungi](#) report, Scientists at London's Kew Botanical Gardens reported that these organisms have the potential to break down waste plastic – an important advance in a world where momentum is building to [reverse the toxic tide](#) of plastic that is killing marine life and polluting the ocean.

Every year, at least eight million metric tonnes of plastic end up in the sea, sometimes decomposing into tiny microplastics that make their way into our food chain.

Senior Kew Gardens Scientist Ilia Leitch, said that other fungi and microorganisms are also being explored for their potential to degenerate different types of plastic, explaining that “by understanding how the fungi break down these bonds and what the optimal conditions are, you can then increase the speed at which they do it.”

In the meantime, the Kew Gardens report showcases the kind of pioneering thought that will be at the heart of the fourth UN [Environment Assembly](#) next March, on “innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production.”

Noting that there may be as many as 3.8 million fungal species, with only 144,000 named, the authors – a team of some 100 scientists from 18 countries – argue that further research into these organisms could provide answers to some of humanity's greatest challenges.

The report spells out that advances in their agricultural applications could translate into improved food security, environmental sustainability and increased production revenues.

In addition to recycling nutrients and helping crops to grow efficiently, fungi also provide compounds that produce antibiotics, immune-suppressants and statins that block cholesterol-producing liver enzyme action.

According to [UN Environment](#) (UNEP), there is [mounting evidence](#) that climate change is affecting the ranges of species and biodiversity in ways that are still not comprehensible. Fungi themselves are also under threat, particularly in high latitudes areas where average temperatures continue to rise, such as the Arctic. These changes are already affecting fungi

reproduction, geographic distributions and activity, with possible knock-on effects for our ecosystems.

“Species react differently to climate change, which disrupts the delicate interaction between them,” says Niklas Hagelberg, a UNEP climate change and ecosystems expert.

“This further complicates conservation; we need to quickly add climate change to our ecosystem management effort.”

Ahead of next year’s assembly, UNEP is urging people to “think beyond and live within,” a motto that is aimed at tackling environmental challenges and assuring a prosperous future – that may include a role for fungi, that was unthinkable just a few years ago.

Exercise ‘utmost restraint’ in eastern Ukraine to safeguard civilian life, top UN official urges fighters on the ground

After a lull in fighting in Ukraine over the summer, the last few weeks have seen a sharp rise in civilian deaths, more than half of which are due to landmines and explosive remnants of war, the United Nations top political official said on Tuesday.

“On the ground, continued and unpredictable escalations of hostilities aggravate the climate of insecurity,” UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Rosemary A. DiCarlo told the 15-member Security Council.

She said the recent so-called Harvest Ceasefire and Back to School Ceasefire – negotiated by representatives from Ukraine, Russia and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) – clearly showed that the impact of conflict on civilians could be drastically reduced with “sufficient political will and genuine commitment.”

“We continue to call upon the parties to ensure the full and immediate implementation of the ceasefire agreements and exercise utmost restraint to protect the civilian population,” she stated, urging an immediate withdrawal of heavy weapons from populated areas and protection of civilian infrastructure.

In her briefing, Ms. DiCarlo also drew attention to reports of increased tensions in the Sea of Azov and underscored the importance of the [Minsk](#)

[Agreements](#), endorsed by the Security Council, for a negotiated peace in eastern Ukraine.

“[We urge] all parties to avoid any unilateral steps that could deepen the divide or depart from of the spirit and letter of the Minsk Agreements,” she said, noting in particular the 11 November so-called “leadership” elections announced by separatists of the self-described “Donetsk people’s republic” and “Luhansk people’s republic”.

“Despite Ukraine’s objections, media report that preparations are still going ahead,” she added, recalling that the agreements address election-related matters “as part of a comprehensive package.”

“Any such measures, taken outside Ukraine’s constitutional and legal framework, would be incompatible with the Minsk Agreements,” she stressed, calling upon all parties to “recommit” to their full implementation and help usher in peace and stability to all of Ukraine.

Severe funding shortage affecting humanitarian response

Also briefing the Security Council, Ursula Mueller, the Deputy UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, said that over 3.5 million people across the region continue to rely on humanitarian assistance and protection.

Challenges, however, persist for relief actors, she continued, noting “unpredictable” access to areas in need as well as severe shortages of funds.

“I appeal to the donors to increase their support for consolidating these humanitarian gains, especially with Ukraine’s harsh winter fast approaching,” she said, stressing that UN agencies and humanitarian partners will continue to work to assist Ukraine’s displaced and conflict-affected people.

In late February 2014, the situation in Ukraine went from political crisis, to violent confrontation and, later became a full-scale conflict in the east, which has claimed the lives of over 3,000 civilians so far.

In April, the Russian Federation annexed and occupied the Crimean Peninsula, and according to the [UN human rights office, OHCHR](#), “continues to apply its laws in violation of international humanitarian law.”

The crisis has also engulfed the highest proportion of elderly people in the world of any conflict-zone, more than 30 per cent.

[Nigeria: Awareness-raising radio show](#)

on perils and opportunities of migration, launched by UN agency

A radio series was launched on Tuesday in Nigeria by the UN migration agency ([IOM](#)) to sensitize vulnerable people seeking to pursue economic opportunities abroad on the perils of irregular migration – migration done outside the regulated frameworks – and provide information on pathways to migrate legally and safely.

Every year, thousands of people from Nigeria and other Sub-Saharan African countries leave their families and homes in the hopes of finding work opportunities elsewhere. Many do it outside of the protected and safe international legal frameworks, which puts them at risk of trafficking, exploitation, detention without trial, sexual abuse, and other dangers such as dying at sea or in the desert.

Nigeria is the most common nationality of migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea into Italy. Some 37,550 Nigerians arrived on Italian shores in 2016. Many more went missing or died.

“The idea is to create awareness through the candid testimonies of returnees who have gone through the harrowing journey both at sea and through the Sahara,” said Abraham Tamrat, who manages IOM’s migrant protection and reintegration projects in Nigeria.

“The programme will also promote social cohesion and deal with the issue of stigmatization of returned migrants,” he explained. Many returning migrants face discrimination and shame for having failed to reach their destinations and goals of a better future.

Titled “Abroad Mata”, the awareness-raising 13-episode radio series will include a radio drama titled “Waka Well” – which means “travel well” in Pidgin English – as well as testimonies from returning migrants, expert analysis, and live phone-in questions from listeners.

Through commentary from IOM staff and government officials, the show will cover key migration issues in Nigeria such as the social factors behind migration, the role of traditional and religious leaders and the role of migration information centres set up by IOM.

“The best way to take migration to the public is through radio due to its wide coverage and following,” said Charles Anaelo, who works for the Nigerian commission tasked with protecting displaced persons, including migrants, the NCFRMI.

The programme will air in Edo, Delta, Oyo, Ogun, Imo and Lagos states in Pidgin English and in Yoruba, one of Nigeria’s most spoken languages. Edo and Delta states alone account for two thirds of the returns of irregular migrants enabled by a [joint initiative by the European Union and IOM](#).

“We need to raise these issues of irregular migration and human trafficking on the radio... And we need strong narratives to drive the message,” said Arinze Orakwue, from the Nigerian agency mandated with preventing human trafficking, NAPTIP.

The radio series is a joint effort between IOM, NCFRMI, NAPTIP, and several local radio stations. It is one of the UN’s many initiatives to engage communities through mass media and other communications methods to promote social and behavioural change.

Other initiatives by the UN to support migrants and prevent related suffering include assistance for migrants to reintegrate their communities, vocational trainings and the provision of information on how to migrate safely.