

# UN rights chief denounces Burundi for 'belligerent and defamatory' attack on inquiry team

The top United Nations human rights official has called on Burundi to "immediately retract" its threat to try and prosecute members of a UN Commission of Inquiry into rights abuses in the central African nation.

High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, said on Thursday that comments made by Burundi's UN ambassador the previous day, were "deeply regrettable in both tone and substance".

"Burundi's belligerent and defamatory response to the findings of the Commission of Inquiry, and its repeated and wholly unsupported assertions that the commission was the puppet of mysterious external forces [...] are reprehensible," said Ms. Bachelet, in a [statement](#).

She also raised concern over the Burundian Government's "complete failure" to address the very serious findings of the [Commission of Inquiry](#).

On Wednesday, the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Burundi to the UN, Albert Shingiro, attacked the independent international inquiry team, threatening to prosecute its members and compared Commission Chair, Doudou Diène, to a participant in the slave trade.

In the statement, Ms. Bachelet also called on Burundi, as a UN Member State, to "show respect" to its institutions and the various bodies, laws and mechanisms it has established. Burundi is also a current member of the Geneva-based Human Rights Council.

"I urge the Government of Burundi to issue an immediate retraction of this inflammatory statement and to offer a full apology to Mr. Diène and the other Commissioners, as well as to the Human Rights Council, which created the Commission, and its President who selected and appointed the three Commissioners," she said.

Established by the Human Rights Council in 2016, the Commission has been tasked with a thorough investigation into human rights violations and abuses in Burundi since April 2015 and identify perpetrators with a view to ensuring full accountability.

The Commission was also asked to engage with the Burundian authorities and all other stakeholders, including national, regional and global rights bodies, to provide the support and expertise for the immediate improvement of the situation of human rights and the fight against impunity.

[Burundi](#) has been embroiled in crisis since April 2015 when widespread protests erupted after the country's President announced he would seek a

third term in office, in defiance of constitutional law at the time. The protests were followed by an attempted coup, disputed elections, and alleged crackdown on political opponents.

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## **‘Crippling to our credibility’ that number of women peacekeepers is so low: UN chief**

Despite greater participation of women in building and sustaining peace and the recognition from all quarters of the value they bring, the realities on the ground show that much more remains to be done, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres told Security Council members on Thursday.

“Every year, we make laudable commitments,” Mr. Guterres [said](#) at the Council’s annual high-level debate on women and peace and security.

“But they are not backed with the requisite financial and political support,” he continued, noting lack of inclusion in mediation efforts and limited space for women to participate as peacebuilders.

He said it was “crippling to our credibility and protection capacity that women represent only 4 percent of our military peacekeepers and 10 percent of police.” He added that the UN “fully supports the innovative efforts launched by Member States this year to incentivize greater representation.”

Furthermore, women’s organizations overall are not provided with adequate funding while resources for empowerment programmes are constrained, added the UN chief.

In his briefing, Mr. Guterres outlined key action points, which he will prioritize over the coming months, beginning with a commitment to ensure gender parity as well as stamping out all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse within the Organization.

He went onto note he will continue to push for greater and more meaningful participation of women in mediation efforts, as well as for a gendered approach to peace and security.

He said this meant “supporting peacebuilding at the local level, even during conflict ... We must consistently support the local women’s groups that negotiate humanitarian access and support community resilience; learn from them; and build peace from the ground up.”

Ensuring full financing for these and other measures is vital, added the

Secretary-General, noting also that he has setup a task-force to review the UN's funding for gender equality, including in the peace and security pillar.

"Finally, from now on, I will include gender analysis in my reports to this Council whenever it is relevant to inform your decisions," he said.



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director UN Women, briefs the Security Council meeting on women and peace and security

### **'Continued tolerance' of limited space for women 'is shameful'**

Also speaking at the Security Council debate, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the head of UN Women, the Organization's main gender equality and women's empowerment agency, briefed on the Secretary-General's report on women and peace and security.

Stating that the report is a "loud alarm bell" on systemic failures which have prevented women's full involvement in peace-making, she called on UN Member States to ensure "genuine" efforts to include more women. "Our continued tolerance for the limited recognition of women's expertise and lived experience is shameful."

The 20th anniversary of the landmark Security Council resolution 1325, in 2020 will be an opportunity to shape the agenda for the next decade with new commitments and priorities, she continued, calling on everyone to participate sincerely in the process and contribute to lasting change.

Adopted in 2000, [resolution 1325](#) reaffirmed the critical role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, including peacebuilding, peacekeeping and in humanitarian responses. It also stressed the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

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## Oslo leads the way in 'Breathe Life' campaign for cleaner cities in climate change era

Norway's capital Oslo is paving a fossil-free, electrified, path in its push toward improving air quality, the United Nations Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) has announced.

The city is a global front runner when it comes to sustainability, having implemented methods of recycling waste into heat and electricity, and allowing cyclists precedence over private cars.

The Executive Director of UN Environment Erick Solheim, said the capital city's pollution reduction sets the example for "turning climate action into an opportunity."

A major contributor to dwindling emissions has been the city's transition toward renewable fuel solutions. Oslo has the highest number of electric vehicles in the world per capita, which alone has decreased CO2 emissions by 35 per cent since 2012, [UN Environment reports](#).

Benefits for drivers include reduced taxes, access to bus and taxi lanes, free travel on toll roads and public ferries, together with free municipal parking. All public transport in Oslo, and neighbouring Akershus, is to be powered completely by renewable energy by 2020.

Oslo is one among 42 cities taking part in Breathe Life, a campaign led by the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), UNEP, and the [Climate & Clean Air Coalition](#) aimed at exploring clean air options and reducing pollutants to safe levels by 2030.

The network of participating cities are spread across the world, each tailoring their approach to clean air issues locally.

In Colombia's Santiago de Cali, the city has focused on the reduction of agricultural burning along with transport emissions. While in the capital of Ghana, Accra, where long hours are spent near wood and charcoal cookstoves, the city has outlined strategies to improve household and ambient air pollution.

Highlighting that such changes will improve the everyday lives of citizens, Mr. Solheim said, "I hope that other cities around the world will be inspired by what Oslo is doing."

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## [‘Essential step’ towards universal health care made at pivotal UN conference](#)

United Nations Member States have unanimously vowed to strengthen primary health care, as an “essential step” towards achieving universal health coverage for all.

The commitment came at the [Global Conference on Primary Health Care](#), being held in the capital of Kazakhstan this week. Known as the [Declaration of Astana](#), it reaffirms the historic 1978 [Declaration of Alma-Ata](#), which was the first accord reached by world leaders on primary health care.

Thursday’s declaration is also intended to help the world achieve [Sustainable Development Goal 3](#): “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.”

Today, instead of health for all, we have health for some – *Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General*

The 1978 declaration laid the foundation for universal primary health care, but progress over the past four decades has been uneven: today, half the world’s population lacks access to essential health services – including care for non-communicable and communicable diseases, maternal and child health, mental health, and sexual and reproductive health.

The new Declaration has been made as a global movement grows for greater investment in primary health care to achieve universal health coverage: so far, health resources have been overwhelmingly focused on single disease interventions rather than strong, comprehensive health systems – a gap highlighted by several health emergencies in recent years.

“Today, instead of health for all, we have health for some,” said Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#). “We all have a solemn responsibility to ensure that today’s declaration on primary health care enables every person, everywhere to exercise their fundamental right to health.”

The signatories to the Declaration made pledges in four key areas: for bold political choices for health to be made across all sectors; to build sustainable primary health care; to empower individuals and communities; and to align stakeholder support to national policies, strategies and plans.

The World Health Organization (WHO), UN Childrens’ Fund ([UNICEF](#)) and the

Government of Kazakhstan are co-hosting the Global Conference on Primary Health Care, described as “pivotal” by the WHO, with participants including government ministers from around the world, health workers, activists and leaders from civil society and the private sector.

In a joint statement, UNICEF and WHO promised to help governments and civil society to act on the Declaration of Astana and support the implementation of the pledges made in the Declaration.

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## **FROM THE FIELD: Enslaved Guatemalan indigenous women wait for reparations**

Fifteen Guatemalan women from the Q’eqchi indigenous group, who were enslaved and raped by the military during the Central American country’s 36-year-long civil conflict, are still waiting for hard-won reparations to materialize.

✘ With the help of local women’s rights organizations, including UN Women and other UN partners, the women from Sepur Zarco in the east of Guatemala succeeded in securing the conviction of two former military officers on charges of crimes against humanity, back in 2016.

The women of Sepur Zarco in Guatemala fought and won a groundbreaking case against two former military officers accused of crimes against humanity. (April 2018)

UN Women/Ryan Brown

It was a groundbreaking legal decision; the first time anywhere in the world that a national court had prosecuted sexual slavery during conflict using national legislation and international criminal law.

The women were granted a total of 18 reparation measures, including education for the children of their community, access to land, a health-care clinic and other interventions which would help to confront what UN Women has described as “the abject poverty their community has endured across generations.”

But UN Women say that many of the reparations have not been paid.

[Read more here](#), about the women known respectfully as the abuelas (grandmothers) of Sepur Zarco.