

[Africa is 'on the rise', says UN chief Guterres, urging collaboration for better future](#)

Africa is “on the move and on the rise” with communities coming together to resolve their problems and offer mutual support, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres highlighted on Wednesday.

He urged everyone with a stake in Africa’s success to seize the new opportunities and work together with people on the continent for the common good.

However, alongside the progress and resilience, on the back of stability and improved governance, parts of Africa remain fragile with challenges to overcome, [said](#) Mr. Guterres, addressing the inaugural [Africa Dialogue Series](#) at the UN Headquarters, in New York.

The two-day series focuses on the nexus between peace, security, human rights, humanitarian and development in the continent. It replaces Africa Week, which was launched in 2010.

“The volatility of financial markets, the looming trade conflicts, and high levels of debt in some countries are causing concern over economies that may be vulnerable to shocks. The widening impacts of climate change will create additional strains in the years ahead,” he said.

“Inclusive, sustainable development in Africa is a goal unto itself. It is also a leading tool to prevent conflict and crises,” added the UN chief.

On sustainable development, the Secretary-General noted the synergies between the UN [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and the AU’s Agenda 2063, and said that the policies and approaches two organizations “are more closely aligned [today] than ever before”.

Turning to the UN-AU partnership on peace and security, Mr. Guterres cited examples from the Central African Republic and South Sudan where UN is working closely with African-led initiatives.

“I will continue to advocate strongly for predictable, sustained and flexible financing for AU-led peace support operations authorized by the Security Council. These operations are contributing to global security and deserve multilateral support,” he said.



UNMIL/Shpend Berbatovci

A voter in Liberia casting his ballot for a president in the second round of vote on 26 December 2017.

Making a 'prosperous and peaceful Africa' a reality – UN Special Adviser

Briefing on the theme of the dialogue and expected outcomes, Bience Gawanas, the UN Special Adviser on Africa, said that the Dialogue “bears testimony of the desire to engage with the UN to realize a prosperous and peaceful Africa.”

“Africa is changing [...] and it is seeking to achieve peace, prosperity and socio-economic transformation,” she said, urging all actors to continue to work together in a coherent and coordinated response to the challenges.

Meanwhile, María Fernanda Espinosa, the President of the 73rd session of the General Assembly highlighted the central role of Africa in the multilateral system, highlighting the importance of stronger and more collaborative efforts between the AU and the UN.

Such efforts will strengthen multilateralism, she said.

Stronger and more collaborative efforts between the United Nations and the African Union is essential to our efforts to strengthen multilateralism – *Assembly President*

Ms. Espinosa also noted the revitalization processes at the two institutions and expressed hope that the end result will allow them to “work together on behalf of all people.”

“Our focus remains the same as yours: to ensure that the UN is reflective of,

and relevant to the needs of all people,” she said.

Africa can share lessons vital for sustainable development – ECOSOC President

Speaking alongside Ms. Espinosa, Inga Rhonda King, the President of the Economic and Social Council underlined the importance of synergies between UN’s 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 of the AU.

“The Economic and Social Council has an important role to play in sustaining peace and promoting sustainable development in Africa,” she said, noting the body’s collaboration with other entities of the UN system and beyond, to develop solutions to development and humanitarian challenges in the continent.

Noting the focus of next year’s High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) on Sustainable Development Goals on jobs, inequality, justice, climate change, education and partnerships, Ms. King called African countries, to share relevant lessons learned and ideas on progressing the 2030 Agenda forward.



UNMISS Photo

A UN integrated patrol at a protection of civilians site in Bentiu, South Sudan. After widespread violence across the country in July 2016, such patrols helped local communities feel more secure.

Partnerships vital to overcome peace and security challenges – Security Council President

Also speaking at the Dialogue, Sacha Sergio Llorenty, the Permanent Representative of Bolivia and the President of the Security Council for the month of October, spoke of the link between peace, security and development.

He highlighted the importance of women and young people in peace and development efforts in Africa and called for political support at the highest level to ensure their meaningful participation.

He also said that partnerships are critical to overcome challenges in the continent, as illustrated by the G5 Sahel Joint Task Force and the UN-AU Mission in Darfur (UNAMID).

World 'deserves to know the truth' behind Kashoggi disappearance: UN human rights chief

United Nations human rights chief [Michele Bachelet](#) said on Wednesday that she was open to an independent, UN-led investigation into the fate of Saudi journalist Jamal Kashoggi, if joint efforts by Turkey and Saudi Arabia, fail to uncover the facts.

The High Commissioner who heads [OHCHR](#), reiterated her call earlier in the week, for diplomatic immunity to be waived to ensure the joint investigation is effective, impartial and transparent.

Mr. Khashoggi, an influential Saudi journalist and critic, who has been living in exile in the United States in recent months and writing a column for the Washington Post newspaper, had gone to the Saudi Consulate in the Turkish city of Istanbul, on 2 October, to obtain marriage papers. He was never seen leaving, and the Saudi authorities have denied all knowledge of his whereabouts.

If it doesn't work we might need another kind of investigation...His family and the world, deserves to know the truth – *UN human rights chief, Michelle Bachelet*

In an exclusive interview on Wednesday with the UN News Spanish service at UN Headquarters in New York, Ms. Bachelet said that Mr. Khashoggi's "family and the world, deserves to know the truth" of what happened to him.

The rights chief said the UN had firstly urged both countries – Turkey and Saudi Arabia – to conduct a joint investigation, which is on-going, "but we have mentioned that this investigation should be thorough, should be transparent, should be a very serious investigation" she said, to determine whether, and how he may have died or genuinely disappeared.

She said it was essential that the perpetrators be brought to justice. Urging

the full lifting of diplomatic immunity for the truth to be established, she said that the joint investigation, had to succeed in uncovering the facts.

“If it doesn’t work we might need another kind of investigation, but for now, we hope that it’s already been done, some of this, even though it’s 12 days later. His family and the world, deserves the know the truth,” said the High Commissioner.

[‘Virginity testing’: a human rights violation, with no scientific basis – UN](#)

A group of United Nations agencies has issued a [joint statement](#) calling for a ban on tests meant to assess the virginity of a girl or a woman, which is a common practice in at least 20 countries.

The statement, which was issued during the World Congress of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) in Rio de Janeiro, stresses that such tests are both unscientific, and a violation of human rights.

So-called “virginity testing” – also often referred to as hymen, “two-finger” or per vaginal examination – is a gynecological inspection of female genitalia carried out in the false belief that it can reliably determine whether a woman or girl has had vaginal intercourse.

In a global call to eliminate violence against women and girls everywhere, the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR), UN Women and the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), said that “this medically unnecessary, and often times painful, humiliating and traumatic practice must end”.

The practice is a long-standing tradition documented in at least 20 countries, spanning all regions of the world. Women and girls are often forced to undergo virginity testing for various reasons, including requests from parents or potential partners to establish marriage eligibility or even from potential employers.

It is mostly performed by doctors, police officers, or community leaders on women and girls, in order to assess their virtue, honour or social value.

In their statement, the UN agencies explained that the practice has “no scientific or clinical basis” and that “there is no examination that can prove a girl or woman has had sex”, as the “appearance of girl’s or woman’s hymen cannot prove whether they have had sexual intercourse or are sexually active or not”.

In addition, the UN agencies denounce virginity testing as a violation of the rights of girls and women, which can be detrimental to their physical, psychological and social well-being. The examination can be “painful, humiliating and traumatic” and reinforces stereotyped notions of female sexuality and gender inequality.

In some regions, it is common for health professionals to perform virginity testing on victims of rape, supposedly to ascertain whether or not rape occurred. Given the lack of clinical basis, the procedure is deemed “unnecessary” and “can cause pain and mimic the original act of sexual violence, exacerbating survivors’ sense of disempowerment and cause re-victimisation,” said the agencies.

“The result of this unscientific test can impact upon judicial proceedings, often to the detriment of victims and in favour of perpetrators, sometimes resulting in perpetrators being acquitted,” the statement added.

“Given that these procedures are unnecessary and potentially harmful, it is unethical for doctors or other health providers to undertake them. Such procedures must never be carried out,” the joint statement read, calling for a collaborative response across societies, supported by the public health community and all health professionals.

“Health professionals can be great agents for change,” said Dr. Princess Nothema Simelela, WHO’s Assistant Director-General for Family, Women’s, Children’s and Adolescents’ Health.

“With support from health systems and governments, they can recognise that ‘virginity testing’ has no medical or clinical bases, refuse to carry out the harmful practice, and educate the public about this,” she noted, adding that that, in doing so, they would be “upholding the Hippocratic oath of ‘do no harm’ and safeguarding the human rights of girls and women in their care”.

West Bank: ‘imminent’ demolition of Palestinian village could be ‘war crime’ – ICC Prosecutor

The Prosecutor mandated to oversee the Occupied Palestinian Territory for the [International Criminal Court](#) (ICC) [stated](#) on Wednesday that her office is keeping “a close eye” on the planned demolition of a Palestinian village in the West Bank by Israeli authorities, warning that, according to international law, it could constitute a “war crime”.

“I have been following with concern the planned eviction of the Bedouin

community of Khan al-Ahmar, in the West Bank,” said Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda, noting that “evacuation by force now appears imminent” and could result in “further escalation and violence”.

Approximately 190 herders, half of whom are children, live in Khan al-Ahmar, a village located in the outskirts of East Jerusalem. According to the [UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#), the village is one of dozens affected by an Israeli settlement reorganization plan that would create a continuous built-up area from East Jerusalem to Jericho.

“The problem if it happens in all of these [villages], is that then the contiguity and the possibility of a two-State solution will be challenged because the West Bank will be cut in half,” [Jamie McGoldrick](#), the UN Humanitarian Coordinator explained to UN News in an interview on Tuesday.

“It bears recalling, as a general matter,” said the ICC Prosecutor, “that extensive destruction of property without military necessity and population transfers in an occupied territory constitute war crimes under the Rome Statute.”

According to OCHA’s latest [Protection of Civilians report](#), over 300 Palestinian-owned structures have been demolished in 2018 alone.

Ms. Bensouda reminded all parties that the situation remains under preliminary examination by her Office, mandated with conducting independent and impartial preliminary examinations, investigations and prosecutions of the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and aggression.

“I continue to keep a close eye on the developments on the ground and will not hesitate to take any appropriate action, within the confines of the independent and impartial exercise of my mandate under the Rome Statute, with full respect for the principle of complementarity,” she stated.

The complementarity principle on which the ICC is based entails that the ICC can only investigate and prosecute core international crimes when national jurisdictions are unable or unwilling to do so genuinely.

[Veteran UN Syria Envoy to step down, pledges to work ‘until the last hour’ for peace](#)

The United Nations [Special Envoy for Syria](#), told the Security Council on Wednesday that he is stepping down at the end of next month, after four years and four months on the job

Staffan de Mistura, said that he had been “discussing with the Secretary-General my desire for purely personal reasons to move on. I have deeply appreciated his constant support and wise counsel on this matter.”

But briefing the 15-member Council on an invitation from the Government of Syria to visit Damascus next week, he said he would continue in his post up to the end of November, in an effort to get UN-backed peace talks on track, and help lay the groundwork for a new constitution.

We still have a very intense and hopefully fruitful month ahead. I am not laying down the charge until the last hour of the last day of my mandate – *Staffan de Mistura, Syria Envoy*

“I plan to engage them on the work that has been done on the Constitutional Committee”, in the Syrian capital, he told the Council, adding that “without steps on a safe, calm and neutral environment, the work of a constitutional committee will not end up being very meaningful.”

Mr. de Mistura said he hoped progress would be made not only on a fresh constitutional settlement for a post-war Syria, but also “the Working Group on the release of detainees and abductees, the handover of bodies and the identification of missing people”, which had met again last week in Tehran, he said, adding that “we keep urging for the first tangible results. Many, many people in Syria are waiting for that.”

He said objections from Damascus were holding up the committee’s launch, saying the Government objected to the 50-member delegation put together by the UN, representing Syria experts, civil society, tribal leaders and women, among others.

Turning to conditions on the ground for the millions of Syrians displaced and in need of humanitarian assistance after more than seven years of brutal fighting, he said “a catastrophe has so far been averted in Idlib, and the Russian-Turkish memorandum of understanding appears to be being implemented. Major strides have been taken in defeating terrorism and this should continue to be a priority.”

The Envoy told the Council that “we still have a very intense and hopefully fruitful month ahead. I am not laying down the charge until the last hour of the last day of my mandate.”