

Employers must address all aspects of gender-based violence in workplace – UN Women chief

16 March 2017 – Tolerating violence against women in the workplace will have a huge cost to employers, including lost productivity, legal expenses, high turnover, sick leaves and harm to corporate reputation, panellists today told a United Nations-hosted discussion, urging Governments and institutions alike to take responsibility for putting in place adequate standards and measures to prevent such practices.

“Violence against women has long-term consequences,” UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka said, explaining that children who watched their mothers and sisters beaten up at home could become perpetrators themselves or unhappy persons when they grow up.

She also said that women could die from violence and experience various forms of suffering, including physical and emotional damage, trauma, stigma, and limited access to the labour market. Employers will also have to pay the heavy price in the form of lost productivity, legal cost, high turnover, sick leaves and damaged reputation.

To prevent violence against women, institutions must take responsibility for addressing the issue at the macro-level by setting standards and putting in place preventive measures, she stressed.

The panel discussion, titled ‘Ending Violence against Women: Prevention and response in the world of work,’ was sponsored by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UN Women, formally known as the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

VIDEO: During the 61st Commission on the Status of Women, ILO expert Manuela Tomei, at a panel discussion on violence against women at work, highlights the importance of prevention, protection, and assistance to the victims, adding that the issue requires interventions and commitment from employers and workers.

The event was held on the sidelines of the 61st Commission on the Status of Women, known as the largest inter-governmental forum on women’s rights and gender equality. The theme this year is on women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work.

Manuela Tomei, Director of ILO’s Working Conditions and Equality Department, said that violence against women is a violation of human rights, a threat to women’s security and health, and a threat to women’s empowerment.

She said that a survey conducted by ILO and Gallop found that one of the top

three challenges women find in workplace is “abuse and harassment.”

The world of work goes beyond the physical workplace to include commutes, social events and home, she said, stressing the importance of addressing the issue through an integrated approach that includes prevention, protection and assistance to victims.

She said ILO is leading efforts to set a new global standard by 2019 or 2020 against violence and harassment in workplace.

[Relief operations in western Mosul reaching ‘breaking point’ as civilians flee hunger, fighting – UN](#)

16 March 2017 – The United Nations and its humanitarian partners in Iraq are scrambling to get emergency sites ready amidst a mass exodus from West Mosul, with nearly 700,000 civilians still living in the city where Iraqi forces are fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh), according to the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in the country.

“The number of people is higher than expected,” Lise Grande told journalist in New York via videoconference from Iraq. “If the pace accelerates further, it’s going to stretch us to the breaking point.”

She added that if 50,000 civilians flee in a single day, the current system would not work properly. The UN and its partners have already started to set up large warehouse size structures which will house the families as they await “the dignified support they deserve,” said Ms. Grande.

According to the latest figures she disclosed, there are still an estimated 650,000 to 680,000 civilians in Mosul’s Old City.

“We fear the civilians there might be trapped in an extremely difficult situation. Families that chose to stay are at risk, families that leave are also at risk,” said Ms. Grande, noting that ISIL is targeting people who try to flee what is expected to be a prolonged siege.

Meanwhile, people who stay are without food and water. No steady supplies have been able to reach the city since mid-November, Ms. Grande said.



Iraqi women and children displaced from the Mosul corridor line up to receive food in Debaga Displacement Camp in Erbil Governorate. Photo: UNICEF/Anmar

Families with resources are trying to trade what they can to eat even one meal a day, according to stories from people who were able to flee, while some people go for days without meals.

“Whether you stay or whether you go there are significant risks to the civilians,” Ms. Grande noted. “The greatest problem is water.”

When the military operation to oust terrorists from the area began on 17 October 2016, some 1.5 million civilians were living in Mosul. In the eastern part of the city, some 345,000 were displaced – of whom about 70,000 returned home because “conditions are ready and safe to do so,” journalists were told today.

The western part of Mosul is more densely populated, however. There is hope that civilian casualties will be limited because the Iraqi forces adopted a so-called “humanitarian concept of operations” which prohibits artillery strikes, requires civilians to remain in their homes, and provides humanitarian exit corridors wherever necessary.

Those who do flee are screened at the Hammam al Alil site, with the men separated from the women and children. Once interrogated and cleared, the families are reunited.

The senior UN official said the Organization and its humanitarian partners are working “around the clock” in support of the Iraqi Government to quickly get sites ready for the displaced civilians. Aid workers receive the site, set up tents and mattresses, clear and construct sanitation areas, and then transfer the areas to Iraqi military, who move in civilians on civilian buses.

Ms. Grande said that there are concerns about water and sanitation at the screening sites, and that the Government has asked for additional support to help it correct those conditions.

The UN and its partners are supplying food, water and other services to the sites, with more than 1.4 million people reached.

Coordination between the UN, its partners and the Government is good, but “complicated,” Ms. Grande acknowledged, noting that the UN is part of 19 daily coordination forums, which include a range from local to national officials.

[At Security Council, UN officials urge governments to implement rules on](#)

prosecuting traffickers

15 March 2017 – Human trafficking thrives in countries where the rule of law is weak or non-existent, top United Nations officials today told the Security Council, calling on Governments to make better use of the tools created under the UN flag to stop the victimization of men, women and children.

“At a time of divisions in so many areas, this should be an issue that can unite us,” Secretary-General António Guterres told the 15-member Council, stressing that “slavery is not a thing of the past.”

“Let us come together around the key issues of prosecution, protection and prevention, and thereby build a future without human trafficking,” he added.

The Secretary-General outlined a number of UN tools that exist which can be used to punish human trafficking, and to prevent it in the first place. Among them is the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol, which includes the first internationally agreed definition of the crime of trafficking in persons and provides a framework to effectively prevent and combat it.

He noted also the International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions and the complementary Global Plan of Action on Human Trafficking. Approved in 2010, the Plan aims to better coordinate national responses to this scourge, and includes a UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

In his speech, Mr. Guterres called on Member States to strengthen intelligence-sharing and other law enforcement, while also addressing the underlying vulnerabilities of victims, such as educating girls, respecting the rights of minorities, and creating safe paths for migration.

He also called for engagement with the private sector, and cautioned that any support needs to incorporate the voices and views of the people effected.

RELATED: Treaties against human trafficking key to combating the scourge, supporting victims – UN anti-crime official

According to UNODC’s 2016 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, issued in late-December, victims of trafficking are found in 106 of 193 countries. Many of these are in conflict areas, where the crimes are not prosecuted.

“For organized crime networks, human trafficking is a low-risk, high-reward criminal business, a perception reinforced by the inexcusably low conviction rates still reported around the world,” told the Council Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of UNODC via videoconference from Vienna.

In addition to an estimated 21 million people around the world who are victims of forced labour and extreme exploitation, Mr. Fedotov discussed the threats facing refugees and displaced persons.

“As conflict displaces countless people, as the rule of law breaks down, as cooperation between countries falter, criminals see a clear business opportunity,” he noted.

The best way to counter trafficking and protect the most vulnerable is to fully implement and make sure of the frameworks already in place, Mr. Fedotov underscored.

He noted that the Global Plan of Action will be reviewed this October, and will focus on trafficking in conflict situations.

“I hope you will take advantage of this opportunity,” Mr. Fedotov told the Council.

Among the numerous speakers addressing the UN body today is Ashraf El Nour, Director, International Organization for Migration (IOM).

[UN aid chief urges global action as starvation, famine loom for 20 million across four countries](#)

10 March 2017 – Just back from Kenya, Yemen, South Sudan and Somalia – countries that are facing or are at risk of famine – the top United Nations humanitarian official today urged the international community for comprehensive action to save people from simply “starving to death.”

“We stand at a critical point in history. Already at the beginning of the year we are facing the largest humanitarian crisis since the creation of the UN,” UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien told the Security Council today.

Without collective and coordinated global efforts, he warned, people risk starving to death and succumbing to disease, stunted children and lost futures, and mass displacements and reversed development gains.

“The appeal for action by the Secretary-General can thus not be understated. It was right to sound the alarm early, not wait for the pictures of emaciated dying children [...] to mobilize a reaction and the funds,” Mr. O’Brien underscored, calling for accelerated global efforts to support UN humanitarian action on the ground.

Turning to the countries he visited, the senior UN official said that, about two-thirds of the population (more than 18 million people) in Yemen needed assistance, including more than seven million severely food insecure, and the fighting continued to worsen the crisis.

"I continue to reiterate the same message to all: only a political solution will ultimately end human suffering and bring stability to the region," he said, noting that with access and funding, humanitarians will do more, but cautioned that relief-workers were "not the long-term solution to the growing crisis."

RELATED: As fresh violence in Yemen sends thousands their homes, UN agency urges international support

In South Sudan, where a famine was recently declared, more than 7.5 million people are in need of assistance, including some 3.4 million displaced. The figure rose by 1.4 million since last year.

"The famine in the country is man-made. Parties to the conflict are parties to the famine – as are those not intervening to make the violence stop," stressed Mr. O'Brien, calling on the South Sudanese authorities to translate their assurances of unconditional access into "action on the ground."



Women in Ganyiel, Unity state, South Sudan, collecting bags of food. The situation in Ganyiel is dire, with thousands of people having fled to the area from famine-stricken Leer and Mayendit counties. Photo: OCHA/Gemma Connell

Similarly, more than half the population of Somalia (6.2 million people) is need aid, 2.9 million of whom require immediate assistance. Extremely worrying is that more than one million children under the age of five are at the risk of acute malnourishment.

"The current indicators mirror the tragic picture of 2011, when Somalia last suffered a famine," recalled the UN official, but expressed hope that a famine can be averted with strong national leadership and immediate and concerted support by the international community.

RELATED: 'The world must act now to stop this,' UN chief Guterres says on visit to drought-hit Somalia

Concerning Kenya, he mentioned that more than 2.7 million people were food insecure, and that this number could reach four million by April.

"In collaboration with the Government [of Kenya], the UN will soon launch an appeal of \$200 million to provide timely life-saving assistance and protection," he informed.

Further in his briefing, Mr. O'Brien informed the Council of the outcomes of the Oslo Conference on the Lake Chad Basin where 14 donors pledged a total of \$672 million, of which \$458 million is for humanitarian action in 2017.

"This is very good news, and I commend those who made such generous pledges," he said but noted that more was needed to fully fund the \$1.5 billion required to provide the assistance needed across the region.

On the UN response in these locations, Mr. O'Brien highlighted that strategic, coordinated and prioritized plans are in place and dedicated teams on the ground are closely working with partners to ensure that immediate life-saving support reaches those in need.

"Now we need the international community and this Council to act," he highlighted, urging prompt action to tackle the factors causing famine; committing sufficient and timely financial support; and ensuring that fighting stops.

In particular, he underscored the need to ensure that humanitarians have safe, full and unimpeded access and that parties to the conflict in the affected countries respect humanitarian law and called on those with influence over the parties to the conflict to "exert that influence now."

"It is possible to avert this crisis, to avert these famines, to avert these looming human catastrophes," he concluded. "It is all preventable."

Amid rise of 'fake news,' authorities should ensure truthful info reaches public – UN, regional experts

10 March 2017 – Noting growing prevalence of "fake news" and propaganda in both legacy and social media, United Nations and key regional human rights experts have called on State actors to ensure that they disseminate reliable and trustworthy information, including about matters of public interest, such as the economy, public health, security and the environment.

"State actors should not make, sponsor, encourage or further disseminate statements which they know or reasonably should know to be false (disinformation) or which demonstrate a reckless disregard for verifiable information (propaganda)," read a Joint Declaration issued last week by the experts.

The Declaration was made by the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye, along with his counterparts from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Organization of American States (OAS), and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

"'Fake news' has emerged as a global topic of concern and there is a risk that efforts to counter it could lead to censorship, the suppression of critical thinking and other approaches contrary to human rights law. In this Joint Declaration, we identify general principles that should apply to any efforts to deal with these issues," explained Mr. Kaye in a news release

issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The Declaration also identifies applicable human rights standards, encourages promotion of diversity and plurality in the media and emphasizes the particular roles played by digital intermediaries, as well as journalists and media outlets, and notes that they should consider including critical coverage of disinformation and propaganda as part of their news services in line with their watchdog role in society, particularly during elections and regarding debates on matters of public interest.

It also notes that States have a “positive obligation” to promote a free, independent and diverse communications environment, including media diversity, which is a key means of addressing disinformation and propaganda.

Further, the Declaration notes that all stakeholders – including intermediaries, media outlets, civil society and academia – should be supported in developing participatory and transparent initiatives for creating a better understanding of the impact of disinformation and propaganda on democracy, freedom of expression, journalism and civic space, as well as appropriate responses to these phenomena.

UN Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.