

UN urges Sri Lanka not to miss opportunity to advance justice and reconciliation

3 March 2017 – The slow pace of transitional justice in Sri Lanka and the lack of a comprehensive strategy to address accountability for past crimes risk derailing the momentum towards lasting peace, reconciliation and stability, a United Nations report said today.

Seventeen months ago, when we published a detailed report on the grave human rights violations committed during the conflict in Sri Lanka, I urged the Government and all the people of Sri Lanka to ensure that this historic opportunity for truly fundamental change should not be squandered, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said in a news release on the report.

He noted that in many ways, Sri Lanka appears to be turning a corner on the promotion and protection of human rights, but he stressed that hard-won gains could prove illusory if they are not tethered to a comprehensive, robust strategy.

This critical opportunity in Sri Lankan history cannot be missed, he said, urging the Government and people of Sri Lanka once again to prioritize justice alongside reconciliation to ensure that the horrors of the past are firmly dealt with, never to recur.

The report, issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), assesses progress made in tackling the legacy of grave violations in Sri Lanka between 2002 and 2011 and acknowledges that there have been positive advances on human rights and constitutional reform.

However, the report notes that the structures set up and measures taken until now have been inadequate, lacked coordination and a sense of urgency.

Party politics, including the balancing of power between the different constituencies of the coalition in the run-up to constitutional reforms, have contributed to a reluctance to address difficult issues regarding accountability or to clearly articulate a unified position by all parts of Government, the report states.

The report makes a number of concrete recommendations, including calling on the Government to embrace the report of the Consultation Task Force, to formulate a communications campaign to inform the public about details of the reconciliation agenda, to invite the UN human rights office to establish a presence in Sri Lanka, to give the highest priority to the restitution of all private land that has been occupied by the military, and to adopt legislation establishing a hybrid court.

The report also highlights a number of serious human rights violations that are reportedly continuing to occur in Sri Lanka, including the harassment or surveillance of human rights defenders and victims of violations, police abuse and excessive use of force, and the use of torture.

The High Commissioner will present the report to the Human Rights Council on 22 March in Geneva.

[UN expert urges greater protection of people with albinism from witch doctors](#)

3 March 2017 – With hundreds of attacks in the last six years on people with albinism, a United Nations independent expert is calling for additional oversight of traditional healers who use body parts in witchcraft rituals and so-called medicines.

Presenting a report to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by people with albinism, Ikponwosa Ero, said the demand for the body parts of people with albinism for the purposes of witchcraft rituals, or in traditional medicine known as *muti* or *juju*, has led to the existence of a clandestine market for body parts operating at regional, national and international levels.

The issue is further complicated by the lack of effective oversight over the practice of traditional healers, the secrecy that often surrounds witchcraft rituals and the absence of clear national policies on the issue, Ms. Ero said.

She called for a twin-track approach that would urgently address the trafficking of body parts from people with albinism, while also demystifying the misbeliefs about albinism.

At least 600 attacks and violations of rights of people with albinism have been reported in 27 countries, the majority in the past six years, according to information from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Ms. Ero is the first Independent Expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council to monitor, report and advise on the situation of those worldwide who have albinism.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN 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.

[‘Communicating SDGs’ key to achieving global development targets, top UN information official](#)

2 March 2017 – Bringing together a diverse array of partners to communicate the Sustainable Development Goals was a key focus on day two Global Festival of Ideas for Sustainable Development, a ‘playable’ United Nations conference that aims to chart a new way of thinking on addressing some of the world’s most complex development challenges.

“We have to make the world aware of this [...] agenda that is definitely going to transform the planet and that is going to ensure that no one is left behind,” Cristina Gallach, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, told the Festival.

“The more we communicate about the SDGs and make people aware of the agenda, the more the governments we will be accountable and will ensure that it is implemented,” she added.

The UN Department headed by Ms. Gallach, Department of Public Information, is the organization’s entity tasked with informing the wider world on the SDGs and ensuring that the 17 goals are known and understood.

To that end, 17 ‘icons’ – each with a designated bright colour, short name phrase and single image – have been created to illustrate each Global Goal.

The icons have also been translated in over 50 languages, from Czech to Bahasa Indonesia, and the number is growing.

‘Going local’

This ‘localization’ is important to allow people around the globe take ownership of their development agenda, said the senior UN official.

“There are a lot of communications that need to be done locally in the different languages people speak locally on a daily basis” she explained.

Going local also helps people on the ground feel that that work is being done, “so local governments have to implement and local media have to monitor what goes on,” added Ms. Gallach.

Youths are the best allies

The UN has also placed a particular focus on youth with regards to the SDGs

and considers a key partner in the achievement of the Goals.

“[The youth] are aware the planet is not going well and they might inherit something really bad so they want to be part of the transformation”, said Ms. Gallach, adding: “They know the goals will be achieved when they are adults, when they will be at the peak of their lives.”

The senior UN official also underscored the importance of forging partnerships in the achievement of the SDGs, as well as in communicating them. In addition to the SDG icons – designed in partnership with Jakob Trollbäck, working with Project Everyone – other examples include the branding of the Mexico city metro and a rap song about the Goals in collaboration with Flocabulary, which uses educational hip-hop music to engage with students.

“The more we communicate the more we will harvest for partnerships [and] this agenda cannot be implemented without very strong partnerships” stressed Ms. Gallach.

The Global Festival of Ideas, the first in a series of annual forums, is hosted by the UN SDG Action Campaign in partnership with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) with the support of the German Government.

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Hunger persists in chronic conflict

zones despite strong global harvests – UN

2 March 2017 – Despite robust food supply conditions, droughts are worsening food security across swathes of East Africa, and access to food has been dramatically reduced in areas suffering civil conflicts, a new United Nations report has found.

“This is an unprecedented situation. Never before have we been faced with four threats of famine in multiple countries simultaneously,” Kostas Stamoulis, the Assistant Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), said in a news release issued today, noting that famine has been formally declared in South Sudan, and the food security situation is of grave concern in northern Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen.

According to the new edition of FAO’s Crop Prospects and Food Situation report, some 37 countries require external assistance for food, 28 of them in Africa as a result of lingering effects of last year’s El Niño-triggered droughts on harvests in 2016.

In South Sudan, 100,000 people were facing famine in Leer and Mayendit Counties, part of former Unity state. Overall, about 4.9 million people across the country were classified as facing crisis, emergency or famine.

In Yemen, 17 million people, or two-thirds of the population, are estimated to be food insecure. The report notes that “the risk of famine declaration in the country is very high.”

In northern Nigeria, 8.1 million people are facing acute food insecurity conditions, and in Somalia, an estimated 2.9 million people have been severely food insecure from six months ago.

Conflicts and civil unrest in Afghanistan, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Myanmar and Syria are also exacerbating food insecurity conditions for millions of people as well as affecting nearby countries hosting refugees.

Global food supply conditions robust

The report says, however, global food supply conditions are robust.



Various types of rice at a market in Hissar, Tajikistan. Photo: FAO/Nozim Kalandarov

Cereal production made quite strong gains in the world overall in 2016, with a record recovery in Central America, and larger cereal crops in Asia, Europe and North America.

Prospects are favourable for the 2017 maize crop in Brazil and Argentina and the outlook is generally positive for coarse grains throughout the Southern Hemisphere. Prospects for rice are mixed, but it is still too early to make firm predictions for many of the world's major crops.

Maize harvests in Southern Africa, slashed by El Niño, are forecast to recover this year, with South Africa's output expected to increase by more than 50 per cent from 2016.

Although FAO's first global wheat production forecast for 2017 points to a 1.8 per cent decline from last year's record level, that is due mostly to a projected 20 per cent output drop in the United States.