

Recent initiatives important milestones towards greater peace in Mali, say UN, regional partners

8 March 2017 – Commending recent progress, including the launch of interim authorities in Kidal, northern Mali, the United Nations together with regional blocs urged the parties to the peace agreement in the African nation to overcome the difficulties which are impeding the establishment of such authorities in the Taoudéni and Timbuktu regions.

The UN, the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the European Union (EU) – in their capacity as members of the Mediation Team supporting the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali resulting from the Algiers Process – also welcomed the successful conduct by the parties of the first mixed patrol in Gao on 23 February, within the framework of the Operational Coordination Mechanism, and called on them to extend the patrols in Kidal and Timbuktu without delay.

“[These] initiatives represent important milestones towards the successful implementation of the Agreement and towards greater peace and stability and the return of state services,” read a joint declaration issued by the four organizations.

Noting the important steps still to be taken, the organizations further invited parties to the Agreement to continue to honour the commitments made, in particular at the high-level meeting of the Agreement Monitoring Committee held in the capital, Bamako, last month, as well as to implement all the provisions of the Agreement for the interim period so as to support in a consensual manner the ongoing State reform and the new political and security architecture.

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“In that regard, [we] call on the parties to establish without delay the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reinsertion, the Integration Commission, and the National Council for Security Sector Reform which are key to advancing the peace process,” added the joint declaration.



Rwandan Peacekeepers from the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) patrol the streets of Gao, in northern Mali. UN Photo/Marco Dormino

Also in the declaration, the organizations also welcomed the establishment of a consultative framework involving all parties as well as the international Mediation Team, as well as commended progress towards preparing for a national conference, the *Conférence d'entente nationale* and called for broad

and inclusive participation for its preparation and organization.

The organizations, however, noted concern at the recent increase in attacks and clashes, particularly in north and central regions of Mali, such as those in Boulkessi, in Timbuktu as well as terrorist attacks in border areas in Burkina Faso and Niger, and underlined the need to bring the perpetrators to justice.

They also called on the parties to the Agreement to work closely together to improve intercommunal relations, share information about security threats, and take concrete steps to prevent and counter violent extremism and terrorism and spill-over into the region.

“In this regard, [we] welcome the initiative of the G5 Sahel Member States to more effectively fight violent extremism in support of the Malian parties,” said the parties.

They also reiterated their commitment to support, in coordination with the lead and the other members of the Mediation Team, the implementation of the Agreement as well as their determination “to counter those who take actions to obstruct or threaten the implementation of the Agreement.”

[On International Day, UN calls for women's full participation in labour force](#)

8 March 2017 – As the rights of women and girls around the world are being reduced and restricted, the United Nations today marked International Women's Day with calls for empowering and educating women and girls to reach gender equality in the work place.

In messages for the Day and events around the world, senior UN officials reflected on the significant impact of women's participation and contribution to the global economy, and international goal of reaching 50-50 equality in employment around the world by 2030.

Secretary-General António Guterres noted that leadership positions are predominantly held by men, and “outdated attitudes and entrenched male chauvinism” are widening the economic gender gap.

“Around the world, tradition, cultural values and religion are being misused to curtail women's rights, to entrench sexism and defend misogynistic practices,” the Secretary-General said.

He underscored that denying women and girls their rights “is not only

wrong in itself; it has serious social and economic impacts that hold us all back.”

Closing the gender gap, for example, would add \$12 trillion to global gross domestic production (GDP) by 2025.

In her message, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Women Executive Director, decried the lack of opportunities for women and girls, saying “too many women and girls spend too many hours on household responsibilities.”

She called for construing a different world of work for women: “As they grow up, girls must be exposed to a broad range of careers, and encouraged to make choices that lead beyond the traditional service and care options to jobs in industry, art, public service, modern agriculture and science,”

This change needs to start at home and in the first days of school, and include adjustments in parenting, curricula, educational settings and cultural stereotypes propagated in entertainment and advertising.

Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka said women and girls must be ready to be part of a digital revolution and study science, technology and math if they are to compete successfully for high-paying new jobs.

In her message, the head of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said equality lies in destroying stereotypes. It “lies in ridding the media and collective imagination of prejudice by highlighting the women scientists, artists and politicians who are moving humanity forward in all fields,” Irina Bokova said.

She called on governments to invest in education and training, and allowing women to exercise their own choices when it comes to their bodies and their lives – just as men do.

“Everywhere, women and men are determined to change things, to denounce discrimination and demand genuine equality, and we must support and accompany them,” said Ms. Bokova.

[UN human rights experts call for global treaty to regulate dangerous pesticides](#)

7 March 2017 – Two United Nations human rights experts are calling for a comprehensive new global treaty to regulate and phase out the use of dangerous pesticides in farming, and move towards sustainable agricultural practices.

“Excessive use of pesticides are very dangerous to human health, to the environment and it is misleading to claim they are vital to ensuring food security,” the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Hilal Elver, and the Special Rapporteur on Toxics, Baskut Tuncak, said in a joint statement to the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

The Special Rapporteurs pointed to research showing that pesticides were responsible for an estimated 200,000 acute poisoning deaths each year. Some 99 per cent of fatalities occurred in developing countries where health, safety and environmental regulations were weaker.

Chronic exposure to pesticides has been linked to cancer, Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s diseases, hormone disruption, developmental disorders and sterility. Farmers and agricultural workers, communities living near plantations, indigenous communities and pregnant women and children are particularly vulnerable to pesticide exposure and require special protections.

The experts particularly emphasized the obligation of States to protect the rights of children from hazardous pesticides, also warning that certain pesticides can persist in the environment for decades and pose a threat to the entire ecological system on which food production depends.

While acknowledging that certain international treaties currently offer protection from the use of a few pesticides, they stressed that a global treaty to regulate the vast majority of them throughout their life cycle does not yet exist, leaving a critical gap in the human rights protection framework.

“Without harmonized, stringent regulations on the production, sale and acceptable levels of pesticide use, the burden of the negative effects of pesticides is felt by poor and vulnerable communities in countries that have less stringent enforcement mechanisms,” they emphasized.

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.

UN envoy urges protection of children as key to peace-making and conflict prevention

7 March 2017 – The rights of children must also be a cornerstone of conflict prevention, peace-making and peace building efforts, the United Nations focal

point on children in armed conflict today told the UN Human Rights Council, expressing deep concern at the scale and severity of grave violations committed against children in the past year.

“In Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen thousands of children were killed and maimed as result of intense conflict,” said the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Leila Zerrougui, said presenting her latest report to the Geneva-based rights body.

Recruitment and use continued at “high levels” in those countries, as well as in the conflicts in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Nigeria, Ms. Zerrougui said.

She also warned of the impact that attacks on schools and hospitals have on children’s education and health, as well as the denial of humanitarian aid for children and even besiegement.

In her address, Ms. Zerrougui called on the Human Rights Council and the UN Member States to take all available measures to prevent violations from reoccurring.

In addition, the senior UN official also urged Member States to protect the rights of children associated with armed groups and to treat them as victims instead of perpetrators, saying Member States “cannot lock up a child for his or her entire life and that prolonged detention will only create and feed grievances.”

She urged Governments to follow Niger’s lead to adopt protocols for the handover of children encountered in military and security operations to child protection officers.

Of particular concern is the safety of girls who are targeted for sexual violence and trafficking, and who are often stigmatized and rejected by their communities when they return after being kidnapped by armed groups.

“Priority should be given to preparing and sensitizing communities to their plight,” Ms. Zerrougui said.

She also detailed a number of successes during the past year – as the mandate of the Office of the Special Representative marked its 20th anniversary – including through the campaign Children, Not Soldiers and the peace process in Colombia.

Today’s presentation to the Human Rights Council was the last for Ms. Zerrougui, who steps down this year as the Special Representative.

Hungarian law that could detain all asylum-seekers violates country's legal obligations – UN agency

7 March 2017 – The United Nations refugee agency voiced deep concern at a new law voted today by the Hungarian Parliament that could lead to mandatory detention of all asylum-seekers, including many children – for the entire length of the asylum procedure – and warned that it would have a terrible impact on people who have already suffered greatly.

“In practice, it means that every asylum-seeker, including children, would be detained in shipping containers surrounded by high razor wire fence at the border for extended periods of time,” Cécile Pouilly, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told the media today at a news briefing at the UN Office at Geneva (UNOG).

“The new law violates Hungary’s obligations under international and European Union (EU) laws, and will have a terrible physical and psychological impact on women, children and men who had already greatly suffered,” she added.

According to the UN agency, under international and EU laws, the detention of refugees and asylum-seekers could only be justified on a limited number of grounds, and only where it was necessary, reasonable and proportionate.

That requires authorities to consider whether there were less coercive or intrusive measures to achieve those goals, based on an assessment of the individual’s particular circumstances, explained Ms. Pouilly, adding that alternatives to detention should always be considered first.

“Failure to do so could render detention arbitrary,” she said.

Until now, asylum-seekers had been allowed to stay in open reception centres across the country. However, with the new law the people who had entered the country, having passed through the transit zones, would be moved back to those zones and confined to the containers.

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“This is extremely worrying, especially thinking about children being detained,” noted Ms. Pouilly, adding: “Children should never be detained under any conditions as detention was never in a child’s best interest.”

She also said that the Government had also already erected a razor wire barrier along the entire border with Serbia and, now, only 50 asylum seekers were allowed to enter the country per week, at two crossing points.

Lack of legal pathways to access Europe and because of the closed borders, many people are resorting to smugglers, which make them, and especially children, even more vulnerable and harder to track.

The UNHCR spokesperson further told the media that the physical barriers already erected, together with legislative and policy obstacles, make it nearly impossible for asylum-seekers to enter the country, apply for asylum and receive international protection.