

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.

[UN agencies supporting Kenyans in drought-hit areas](#)

3 March 2017 – Some 2.7 million people in parts of Kenya are in urgent need of water and sanitation following the onset of a severe drought, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) today announced, noting the UN’s support for what the Government is calling a national disaster.

UNICEF is working in Kenya to support the Government’s efforts, alongside the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Food Programme (WFP), and other partners, according to a press release.

“Our efforts should not only alleviate the current suffering brought about by this emergency, but should also aim to build the resilience of families and the capacity of local governments to deal with future droughts and other calamities,” the Representative of UNICEF in Kenya, Werner Schultink said.

In addition to the need for water and sanitation, some 1.1 million children are food insecure, the UN agency said.

UN efforts of support include dispatching 12,000 cartons of ready to use therapeutic foods for the severely-malnourished children, for example.

The President of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, recently declared the drought a national disaster and has called for international support.

[On visit to Iraq, UN’s focal point for conflict-related sexual violent visits abused women](#)

3 March 2017 – The United Nations focal point for ending conflict-related sexual violence is in Iraq where she today met with survivors of rape and other abuse by the Islamic State (ISIL).

Zainab Hawa Bangura, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on

Sexual Violence in Conflict, visited the Girls and Women Support and Treatment Centre in Dohuk Governorate, northern Iraq. Accompanied by Gyorgy Busztin, the Deputy Secretary-General of the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), she met with women and girls who had escaped from Mosul, where Iraqi forces launched an offensive two weeks ago to dislodge ISIL.

According to a press release, the Centre is a collaboration with the Dohuk Directorate General and in support from the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) is at the forefront of addressing the needs of the Yazidi sexual violence survivors, including medical and psychosocial support.

ISIL has systematically targeted the Yazidi community with rape and other sexual violence, including sexual slavery and forced marriage, according to the Office of Ms. Bangura whose legal and investigative teams have been working to aid survivors from the community.

Ms. Bangura has repeatedly called for a multipronged approach from the global to the local levels, to aid the survivors and their families and help them reclaim a role in their community.

As part of her visit to Iraq, Ms. Bangura has discussed the need for such support with Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Nechervan Barzani. In addition, she held discussions with Jassim Mohammed Al-Jaf of the Ministry of Migration and Displaced and with Faed Zaidan, the head of the High Judicial Council of Iraq.

She also met with Sunni religious leaders to discuss reintegration of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, and to ensure that children born of rape are not ostracized by the community.

[On Wildlife Day, UN says young people play special role as today's change-makers, tomorrow's custodians](#)

3 March 2017 – With the fate of the world's wildlife soon to be in the hands of the next generation, the United Nations is observing this year's World Wildlife Day with a call to harness the power of young people's voices in conservation efforts.

Poaching and illegal trafficking pose a significant threat to wildlife, especially some of the world's most iconic and endangered species, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said in his message for the Day, which this year is on the theme *Listen to the Young Voices*.

Strict enforcement of laws is important, but so too is awareness,

Mr. Guterres added, appealing to young people to protect their inheritance by becoming informed and acting to protect wild animals and plants from the threat of extinction.

In her message, Irina Bokova, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), stressed that young people have a special role to play as change-makers and future custodians.

“We must listen to them and nurture their engagement, to craft new forms of action to conserve and protect wildlife on the basis of solidarity,” she said.

On 20 December 2013, the UN General Assembly decided to proclaim 3 March as World Wildlife Day – the day of the adoption of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 1973, which plays an important role in ensuring that international trade does not threaten the species’ survival.



UN World Wildlife Day 3 March

“Given the current rate of poaching and smuggling, will future generations one day speak of elephants, rhinoceros and many other endangered species as we speak of mammoths...? We must not and will not allow this to happen,” said CITES Secretary-General, John E. Scanlon.

“Our generation has not yet succeeded in securing the future of many wild animals and plants. Meeting this challenge will now be shared with the next generation,” he added.

Habitat loss, climate change and industrial-scale poaching are impacting species great and small, from elusive pangolins to migratory sea turtles, to apex predators like the tiger. World Wildlife Day is a very special occasion on the UN calendar as it helps to galvanize national and international action.

To succeed, it is vital to fully harness the innovation and energy of youth, and combine it with the wisdom that comes with experience, he said.

Last year, the UN launched the Wild for Life campaign, which asked people to make wildlife crime personal. Since its launch, it has engaged 35 celebrity champions, reached over 1 billion people, generated 4.5 million social media engagement and 12,000 pledges of action.

And some are taking monumental steps to combat the destruction of species. In December 2016, the future of elephants was given a huge boost by China’s declaration to ban all commercial ivory trade by the end of 2017.

“China has set a great example to the world with its ivory ban. Young people should take heart from this and push for further progress globally to ensure that wildlife and their habitats are sustainably managed in the

future, #8221 said UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Executive Director Erik Solheim.