

UN rights office disappointed with Thai Government's refusal to criminalize enforced disappearance

28 February 2017 – The United Nations human rights office today urged the Government of Thailand to criminalize enforced or voluntary disappearance and torture.

The announcement follows news last week that National Legislative Assembly – the military-appointed parliament – decided not to enact a bill that would have done just that.

“The Assembly’s decision to reject the bill is very concerning given the continued allegations of torture and disappearances in Thailand, and it is deeply worrying that such actions may now continue without any legal redress,” Ravina Shamdasani told journalists in Geneva.

Ms. Shamdasani, the spokesperson for the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), characterized the decision to not enact the bill as “a devastating blow” to the families of those who have disappeared.

Since 1980, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Voluntary Disappearances recorded 82 cases of enforced disappearances in the country.

Those include the disappearances of respected lawyer Somchai Neelapaijit in 2004 and Karen human rights activist Pholachi “Billy” Rakchongcharoen in 2014.

Speaking to the press, Ms. Shamdasani also raised concern about the increasing number of criminal cases brought against human rights defenders in Thailand for reporting allegations of torture and ill-treatment.

Sustainable Development Goals critical for better future for all – deputy UN chief Amina Mohammed

28 February 2017 – Delivering her first address as the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, Amina Mohammed underlined that Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are essential for a safe and secure future that brings prosperity, opportunity and human rights for all.

“Around the world, success in achieving the SDGs will ease global anxieties, provide a better life for women and men and build a firm foundation for stability and peace in all societies, everywhere,” said Ms. Mohammed at the opening of the 2017 Economic and Social Council segment on Operational Activities for Development.

Ms. Mohammed, earlier today, was administered the oath of office by Secretary-General António Guterres at a ceremony at the UN Headquarters in New York.

“Success will require a bolder approach to financing and partnerships. Nothing will be achieved without engaging all actors,” she added, urging all countries to rethink systems, approaches, redefine traditional planning, delivery and monitoring.

She also said that the UN too needed to be “fit for purpose” to help its Member States implement 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

“We must innovate, and revamp our approach to partnership and financing, with a focus on the long haul. We must empower youth to participate in and shape the political and economic lives of their countries and communities; to be the agents of peace and development,” she noted.

Further in her remarks, the deputy UN chief also highlighted that despite much progress, Africa continued to remain vulnerable, and therefore needs to be a UN priority.



Opening of the 2017 Economic and Social Council segment on Operational Activities for Development. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Noting that efforts should be stepped to support the least developed, landlocked and small island developing states to reduce vulnerability and build resilience, she added that “It is critical that, across the world, we focus on those furthest behind first. Because in all regions, the rising tide of optimism and empowerment, has not yet reached everyone.”

She also underlined the need to address growing inequalities around the globe as well as combat gender discrimination which continues to limit the opportunities and potential of women and girls in all countries.

Looking ahead, Ms. Mohammed said that focus would be based on broadly three principles: strengthening impartial leadership of the UN development system for coherence and integration at all levels; addressing the trust deficit to entail accountability and transparency at all levels; and being responsive to national priorities.

“Solutions from the past will not, alone, meet the challenges of the future,” she underlined.

The UN Deputy Secretary-General also spoke of the Quadrennial Comprehensive

Policy Review (QCPR) process that established a sequenced approach to the review of the UN development system as well as on the empowerment of Resident Coordinators and implementation of standard operating procedures for UN Country Teams.

Noting that the world has a unique, once-in-a-generation opportunity to deliver a better future for all humanity, she stressed: “The task ahead is challenging, but nothing is impossible when we work together.”

Opening the segment, ECOSOC Vice-President Cristián Barros said the Council would contribute to the implementation of the QCPR in three ways: by laying the foundation for its work after the receipt of comprehensive proposals requested from the Secretary-General in the QCPR; by discussing concrete steps that the UN development system can initiate immediately to enhance system-wide coherence and efficiency; by reflecting on adjustments needed to improve impact of support provided to different groups of countries to deliver on the 2030 Agenda.

As a result of the deliberations in the general Assembly on the QCPR, Mr. Barros said there is now growing recognition among Member States that the UN development system is at a “critical juncture” where important decisions will need to be made for the Organization to effectively support delivery of the 2030 Agenda.

This is why the new QCPR resolution of the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare proposals for their consideration in the course of this year on the system’s functions and capacities.

“These options will enable Member States to make decisions on the changes required at different levels for the kind of transformation we need to bring the UN development system up to speed with the level of ambition of the 2030 Agenda,” he said.

Russia, China block Security Council action on use of chemical weapons in Syria

28 February 2017 – With ‘no’ votes from permanent members Russia and China, the United Nations Security Council today failed to adopt a resolution that would, according to press reports, have imposed sanctions against parties using chemical weapons in war-torn Syria.

While nine of the Council’s members voting in favour, Bolivia joined Russia and China in rejecting the text, as Egypt, Ethiopia and Kazakhstan abstained. A negative vote – or veto – from one of the Council’s five permanent members

means a resolution cannot be adopted.

Media reports suggest that the draft resolution would have established a sanctions regime, a committee and an expert panel to hold accountable those using and producing chemical weapons in Syria. The text would also have imposed sanctions on a number of individuals and entities linked to the use of chemical weapons in cases where responsibility was established by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM).

The Council came together on 19 December to unanimously adopt a resolution demanding that all parties to the Syrian conflict ensure immediate and unhindered access for the monitoring of evacuations from eastern Aleppo.

But today's decision comes after the Council's two most recent failed attempts to take action on Syria: on 8 October, Russia vetoed a resolution that would have called for an end to military flights over Aleppo; and on 5 December, a measure calling for a seven-day ceasefire in the beleaguered city failed to pass after negative votes by both China and Russia. In the past five years, Russia has vetoed seven Council texts on the Syrian conflict, while China has vetoed six of those seven.

[People fleeing war more likely to find shelter in poorer countries, says UN refugee agency](#)

28 February 2017 – Most of the 3.2 million people driven forcibly from their homes in early 2016 found shelter in low- and middle-income countries, according to a new study by the United Nations refugee agency.

“The biggest contributors providing a safe haven to the world's uprooted people are poorer communities,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi in a news release yesterday.

More than half the new refugees in the first half of 2016 fled Syria's conflict, with most staying in the immediate region – Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt, according to the UN Refugee Agency's (UNHCR) Mid-Year Trends 2016 report.

Other sizable groups fled Iraq, Burundi, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan, the UN agency reported.

For example, relative to the sizes of their populations, Lebanon and Jordan host the largest number of refugees, while in terms of economic performance

the biggest burdens are carried by South Sudan and Chad.

“Today we face not so much a crisis of numbers but of cooperation and solidarity,” Mr. Grandi said.

RELATED: Refugees fleeing danger are ‘not dangerous themselves’ – UN refugee agency chief

Of all countries, Turkey sheltered the greatest number of refugees, hosting 2.8 million by mid-2016. It was followed by Pakistan (1.6 million), Lebanon (one million), Iran (978,000), Ethiopia (742,700), Jordan (691,800), Kenya (523,500), Uganda (512,600), Germany (478,600) and Chad (386,100).

Speaking earlier this month, he criticized the politicizing of refugees in Europe, the United States, and other industrialized countries and regional blocks.

“These are people that flee from danger, they’re not dangerous themselves,” he had said.

[With virtual and augmented reality, UN ‘ideas forum’ to explore collaboration on Global Goals](#)

28 February 2017 – Policy makers, activists and private sector representatives from over 80 countries will join gaming experts and simulators tomorrow in Bonn, Germany, at the start of the first “playable” sustainable development conference organized by the United Nations and partners.

According to Mitchell Toomey, the Global Director at the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Action Campaign, the Global Festival of Ideas for Sustainable Development is designed to bring together diverse communities and come up with ideas on sustainability to let the “crowd” decide what happens next.

“The whole concept is taken from the great experience that the UN was able to participate in with the designing of the SDGs [...] ‘let’s ask everybody what should be in the next agenda’,” Mr. Toomey told *UN News*.

“By opening a lot of different channels, including the My World Survey and The World We Want [...] over 10 million people eventually became involved in that process,” he added.

Organized in Bonn, Germany, from 1-3 March, the Festival will see

participants transform into “active players” to come up with new ideas on addressing global challenges.

Using the gaming app 2030 Hive Mind – a real-time policy simulation application – participants will explore collaboration to achieve the SDGs by 2030. They will also have to make tough choices and trade-offs along the way.

The idea to use the gaming app came from the need to “stay serious” in tackling development challenges and the importance of engaging and being approachable, explained Mr. Toomey.



Mitchell Toomey, the Global Director at the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Action Campaign. Photo: UN News/Cristina Silveiro

“[The app is] very interesting as it relies on people coming together, sharing what they know, trading policies and advice, collaborating, bringing good ideas to crescendo by getting enough people to think about them and support them at the same time,” he added.

“The goal is to provide a way to develop policies, but also to campaign around that, by walking around the event and making sure others are supporting the policies that you are, and those who do that the best will get the best scores.”

The introduction of the app also aims to engage with everyone on the topic of sustainable development and SDGs so that the goals don’t remain in the policy domain alone and to encourage everyone to take part in the issue.

The festival also features a virtual reality zone (VRZone) to showcase, in 360-degrees, content produced across the UN system and to tell stories that inspire and generate empathy, action and positive social change. The series provides a deeper understanding for those living in the most complex development challenges, catalysing urgency for those most in danger of being left behind if the SDGs are not met.

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.