

'The world needs science and science needs women,' UN says on International Day

11 February 2017 – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today urged greater investments in teaching science, technology, engineering and math to all women and girls as well as equal access to these opportunities.

“For too long, discriminatory stereotypes have prevented women and girls from having equal access to education in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM),” said Mr. Guterres in his message for International Day of Women and Girls in Science, marked annually on 11 February.

“As a trained engineer and former teacher, I know that these stereotypes are flat wrong,” he said, explaining that they deny women and girls the chance to realize their potential and deprive the world of the ingenuity and innovation of half the population.

“On this International Day, I urge commitment to end bias, greater investments in STEM education for all women and girls as well as opportunities for their careers and longer-term professional advancement so that all can benefit from their ground-breaking future contributions,” he said.

Earlier this week, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization released its UNESCO Science Report: Towards 2030.

‘Female engineers and computer programmers wanted,’ is the main message of the report, which shows that women are increasingly graduating with life science degrees, but still rare in engineering and computer science, especially in developed economies.

“An analysis of computer science shows a steady decrease in female graduates since 2000 that is particularly marked in high-income countries,” it states.

The share of women graduates in computer science between 2000 and 2012 slipped in Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea and the United States, as well as in Latin America and the Caribbean.

“This should be a wake-up call,” UNESCO said. “Female participation is falling in a field that is expanding globally as its importance for national economies grows, penetrating every aspect of daily life.”

The share of women working as engineers is also higher in some developing countries, with increases observed in sub-Saharan and Arab countries. Women in the United Arab Emirates, for example, have benefited from national policies that promote training and employment of Emirati citizens, and in

particular women.

In her message on the Day, UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova called for empowering women and girls to learn and research.

“We must raise awareness about the work of women scientists by providing equal opportunities for their participation and leadership in a broad spectrum of high-level scientific bodies and events,” Ms. Bokova said, calling also for mentoring opportunities for women.

In 2016, UNESCO and the L’Oréal Foundation launched the manifesto For Women in Science, to engage governments and stakeholders in promoting the full participation of girls and women in science.

For its part, UN Women noted that science and technology offer unique opportunities for women and girls to overcome a number of the barriers they typically face. For example: mobile money has empowered and transformed the lives of millions of women previously thought to be “unbankable” by enabling them to directly access financial products and services.

Women with skills in science and technological fields can help improve vital infrastructure such as water and power supply, and in doing so ease the responsibilities that women and girls carry of providing unpaid care work for the household.

Similarly, Internet and mobile technology can help bridge barriers to education for the 32 million girls who are out of school at the primary level and the 29 million at the lower secondary level, explained the main UN entity on women’s empowerment and gender equality.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics estimates based on data from its database, July 2015

Encouraging women to do research

Women now account for 53 per cent of world’s bachelor’s and master’s graduates in science and 43 per cent of PhDs, according to the UNESCO report. Since 2000, there has been a steady increase in female graduates in agricultural sciences, likely driven by an emphasis on national food security and the food industry.

In sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, female graduates in agricultural science have been increasing steadily, with women comprising 40 per cent or more of graduates in Lesotho, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

Medicine is also a field increasingly popular with women, with six out of 10 researchers being women in both medical and agricultural sciences in Belarus and New Zealand, for instance.

In research, however, women still lag men at 28 per cent. The figure fluctuates geographically with women in Southeast Europe are on par with men, and at 44 per cent in Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

According to the report, the numbers are particularly low in the European Union, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

To encourage women and girls to study and work in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), the UN has organized a number of events around the world.

In New York, a high-level event is underway today tying gender, science and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The event was organized with support from the Government of Malta, as the president of the Council of the European Union.

AUDIO: American astronaut Peggy Whitson is making history as the first woman ever to command two missions aboard the International Space Station.

[South Sudan, Africa's largest refugee crisis, needs urgent response – UN agency](#)

10 February 2017 – With already more than 3.5 million displaced within and outside the borders of South Sudan and thousands more driven to neighbouring countries every day, the United Nations refugee agency has appealed for an urgent peaceful resolution to what has now become Africa's worst refugee crisis.

Recent new arrivals report suffering inside South Sudan with intense fighting, kidnappings, rape, fears of armed groups and threats to life, as well as acute food shortage, William Spindler, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) told the media at a regular briefing in Geneva.

More than 60 per cent of the refugees are children, many arriving with alarming levels of malnutrition enduring devastating impact of the brutalities of the ongoing conflict, he added.

However the crisis, third only to the displacements in Syria and Afghanistan and now in its fourth year, has received less attention and is plagued by chronic levels of underfunding.

UNHCR said that its response capacities are overstretched in the countries hosting the refugees and the lack of funds is affecting critical and life-saving efforts such as providing clean, drinking water, food, health and sanitation.

Last month, the agency revised upwards its funding requirements for 2017 to \$781.8 million (some \$297.9 million or 61 per cent higher than the earlier budget) in light of new needs of those who have been displaced due to renewed fighting, increased violence and resulting food insecurity since July last year.

The agency's last year funding appeal of \$649 million received only 33 per cent of the amount needed.

500,000 displaced in four months – more than 4,000 every day

The period between September and December 2016 saw almost half a million South Sudanese seeking refuge in neighbouring countries – an average of almost 4,100 people every day for four months.

According to Mr. Spindler, as the global displacement trends reflect, those fleeing South Sudan are being hosted by the poorest communities in the neighbouring countries, under immense pressure with scarce resources.

Noting that the welcome South Sudan refugees received in the neighbouring countries “is encouraging” he cautioned that the lack of resources to respond is also extremely worrying.

The majority of the refugees are being hosted by Uganda (about 698,000), followed by Ethiopia (about 342,000), Sudan (305,000), Kenya (89,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (68,000) and the Central African Republic (4,900).

“We are working with authorities in South Sudan's neighbouring countries to provide life-saving support and look after the basic needs of those arriving in desperate conditions,” the UNHCR spokesperson said, renewing a call on donor countries to step up support to the humanitarian efforts for the South Sudan situation.

South Sudan has faced ongoing challenges since a political face-off between President Salva Kiir and his then former Vice-President Riek Machar erupted into full blown conflict between forces loyal to each in December 2013. The crisis has produced one of the world's worst displacement situations with immense suffering for civilians.

Despite the August 2015 peace agreement that formally ended the war, conflict and instability have also spread to previously unaffected areas.

'Year of Pulses' closes with call to

build on strong momentum among farmers, private sector – UN

10 February 2017 – Although the International Year of Pulses has helped raise awareness globally of the many benefits of pulses, such as beans, lentils and chickpeas, gains must be further strengthened to achieve the international community's new development goals, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said today.

It is essential to maintain the momentum, FAO's Deputy Director-General Maria-Helena Semedo told the Year's official closing ceremony today, which was hosted by Burkina Faso, according to a news release.

Realizing that pulses – defined as edible dried seeds of plants in the legume family – are small but powerful allies in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the UN General Assembly designated 2016 as the International Year and nominated FAO to lead implementation.

Since the Year's launch, connections have been fostered among key actors from farmers' organizations to the private sector to facilitate information exchange and policy dialogue on the production, trade and consumption of pulses.

Leaders in policy and research have tackled the top pulse issues at several international forums, and national committees have been established. A technical pulses database was created, a cookbook featuring recipes from international chefs was published, and the official multilingual website, with over half a million visits, promoted a rich array of information on pulses.

Though the Year has now officially closed, there has been a sound call to keep the momentum alive and continue activities beyond 2016.

Training programmes on the value of pulses should be supported, particularly for schoolchildren, farmers and extension workers. Policies and programmes should focus more on pulse producers, particularly small-holder farmers and young people, Ms. Semedo said, noting that FAO will carry on working with stakeholders from governments to family farmers to promote pulses.

Pulses are packed with minerals such as iron, zinc and folate and have been an important part of diets around the world for centuries.

Pulses are a valuable ingredient in achieving UN Sustainable Development Goal 2 which aims to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.

The plants contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation. They add large amounts of beneficial nitrogen to the soil and require little fertilizer. Growing pulses with other crops enhances soil fertility, improves

both crops' yields, and contributes to a more sustainable food system.

In addition, pulses have a very low water footprint compared to other protein sources, can be grown in very poor soils, and help reduce the risk of soil erosion and depletion. For poor farmers, growing pulses contributes to stable livelihoods, additional income and improved nutrition.

Burkina Faso's President, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, said: "To better cope with the triple problem of soil fertility management, reducing the adverse effects of climate change and the issue of food security, producing and consuming pulses is a great opportunity, especially for the most vulnerable people."

Overall, global pulse production has been slowly but steadily increasing. In 2014, global production reached 77 million tonnes, up 21 million metric tonnes since 2001.

[Senior UN officials call for close cooperation to address migrant, refugee flows in Libya](#)

10 February 2017 – The heads of the United Nations agencies for human rights, migrants, and refugees, and the UN envoy for Libya, today met in Geneva calling for international solidarity to address the flows of migrants and refugees in the North African country.

The senior UN officials stressed the need for a comprehensive approach to address the situation of migrants and refugees in Libya as well as to assist the hundreds of thousands of Libyans displaced and impacted by the crisis, according to a press release.

The meeting was between the Director-General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), William Lacy Swing; the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi; the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein; and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Libya, Martin Kobler.

They called for close cooperation at the regional and international levels, and highlighted the need to protect and rights of migrants and refugees.

"Along with many Libyans, migrants and refugees are heavily impacted by ongoing conflicts and the breakdown in law and order in Libya," the four senior UN officials said.

They noted that untold numbers of people particularly those smuggled

or trafficked, and those in detention outside of any legal process face grave human rights abuses and violations.

Migrants and refugees are also exposed to malnutrition, extortion, torture, sexual violence and other abuses, according to the joint press release.

[UN calls for 50 per cent increase in funding for mine action in 2017](#)

9 February 2017 – The United Nations has launched a \$511 million international appeal for humanitarian mine action in conflict and post-conflict settings for 2017, a 50 per cent increase from last year's \$347 million consolidated appeal.

Across the world, the conflicts tearing countries, communities and lives apart cause a tragic increase in the number of casualties due to landmines and other explosive hazards, said the Director of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), Agnès Marcaillou, in a press release issued earlier this week.

There is an absolute necessity for a humanitarian mine action response. The knowledge and willingness to help are there – it is adequate funding that is missing, added Ms. Marcaillou, who also chairs the UN Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action.

According to the Portfolio of Mine Action Projects 2017, an online resource for information on such projects, there is a sharp increase in the need for humanitarian mine action, including landmine clearance, risk education and victim assistance.

The Portfolio covers over 200 projects and presents a consolidated picture of the needs and strategies of 22 countries and territories contaminated with landmines and other explosive hazards such as unexploded cluster munitions, rockets and improvised explosive devices across Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and South America.

Needs are the greatest in active conflict zones, with Afghanistan requiring \$124 million; Iraq \$75 million; Syria \$52 million; and Yemen \$17 million. In addition, countries which have extensive residual contamination also need substantial support, with Cambodia requiring \$23 million and the Lao People's Democratic Republic \$26 million, according to UNMAS.