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[Despite progress, world's most marginalized still left behind – UN development report](#)

21 March 2017 – A flagship United Nations report launched today finds that although the average human development improved significantly since 1990, progress is uneven, with systemic discrimination against women, indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities.

The latest Human Development Report, released annually by the UN Development Programme (UNDP), found that while many people have greater access to education, health and sanitation, for example, more focus needs to be paid to who has been excluded and why.

“By eliminating deep, persistent, discriminatory social norms and laws, and addressing the unequal access to political participation, which have hindered progress for so many, poverty can be eradicated and a peaceful, just, and sustainable development can be achieved for all,” said UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, speaking at the report launch in Stockholm, alongside Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and the report’s lead author and Director of the Human Development Report Office, Selim Jahan.

Entitled *Human Development for Everyone*, the report noted that one in three people worldwide continue to live at a low level of human development, as measured by the Human Development Index – essentially a ranking of countries based on strides made with a peace-centric model of progress.

According to the report, women and girls are systematically excluded by economic, political, social and cultural barriers.

“Women tend to be poorer, earn less, and have fewer opportunities in most aspects of life than men,” according to the report.

Authors found that in 100 countries, women were legally excluded from some jobs because of their gender, and in 18 countries, women needed their husband’s approval to work.

The report also points to “dangerous practices,” such as female genital mutilation and forced marriage, which continue to hamper the development of women and their inclusion in society.

In addition to women and girls, the report points to “patterns of exclusion and lack of empowerment” of people in rural areas, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, migrants and refugees, and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community.

The report calls for far greater attention to empowering the most marginalized in society, and recognizes the importance of giving them greater voice in decision-making processes.

The report also warns that key development metrics can overstate progress when they focus on the quantity, rather than the quality, of development. For instance, girls’ enrolment in primary education has increased, but in half of 53 developing countries with data, the majority of adult women who completed four to six years of primary school are illiterate.

Unlike in previous years, this year’s report is also available in an app for iOS and Android.

[‘Stand up against intolerance and eliminate discrimination,’ says UN chief Guterres](#)

21 March 2017 – Against the backdrop of rising discrimination and violence against those perceived as different, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today urged the world to stand up against intolerance and build communities that recognize diversity not as a source of weakness, but a source of strength and richness.

“In a time of upheaval and change, it is easy to paint vulnerable communities as the cause of problems [...] people are being targeted because of their race, nationality, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation,” warned Mr. Guterres

at an event at the UN General Assembly commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Highlighting the particular plight of migrants as well as those, especially women and girls, from minority communities who are often targeted as “scapegoats” and experience racial profiling by authorities, the UN chief underscored the collective responsibility “to do better” and to protect human rights of all.

“We all have a role to play [...] after all, racial discrimination destabilizes societies, undermines democracies and erodes the legitimacy of governments,” he said. “By acting together to end discrimination, we can lift humanity as a whole.”

In his remarks, the Secretary-General also reminded that international law requires States to take effective actions to prevent and eliminate discrimination on all grounds and in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life.

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“They must be vigilant and respond immediately and appropriately, including by prohibiting incitement to racial, national and religious hatred and ending racial profiling,” he said, making a specific call on politicians and leaders to speak up and counter hateful speech.

“Let us stand up against intolerance and eliminate discrimination,” he noted, “Let us join forces in our global campaign – Together for Respect, Safety and Dignity for all.”

Marked on 21 March, the International Day commemorates the killing of 69 unarmed protestors in 1960 in Sharpeville, South Africa, who were staging a peaceful protest against the discriminatory pass laws of the racist apartheid regime.

Assembly honours memory of late Russian Ambassador Churkin

Also today at the General Assembly, UN chief Guterres paid a tribute to Ambassador Vitaly Churkin, the Permanent Representative of Russia to the United Nations who passed away last month, a day before his 65th birthday.

“Ambassador Churkin was truly one-of-a-kind – an outstanding diplomat, a man of many talents and interests, and a human being whose friendship touched many of us here in this hall today,” said Mr. Guterres in his message, offering his condolences to the late Ambassador’s wife, son and family as well as to the people and Government of Russia.

UN agency voices concern about forced return of Nigerian refugees from Cameroon

21 March 2017 – The United Nations refugee agency today expressed concern that forced returns of refugees from Cameroon's far north region to crisis-gripped north-eastern Nigeria are continuing despite the recent signing of a tripartite agreement aimed at ensuring the voluntary nature of returns.

So far this year, Cameroon has forcefully returned over 2,600 refugees back to Nigerian border villages against their will, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

"UNHCR is particularly concerned as these forced returns have continued unabated after the governments of Nigeria and Cameroon signed a tripartite agreement with UNHCR in Yaoundé on 2 March," UNHCR Spokesperson Babar Baloch told reporters at the UN's Geneva Office.

The forced return of asylum-seekers and refugees is known as *refoulement*, or forced return, and constitutes a serious violation of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 OAU Convention, both of which Cameroon has ratified.

While acknowledging the generosity of its Government and local communities that host over 85,000 Nigerian refugees, UNHCR calls on Cameroon to honour to its obligations under international and regional refugee protection instruments, as well as Cameroonian law.

Insecurity persists in parts of north-eastern Nigeria, and access to basic services remains limited. Most returning refugees find themselves in situations of internal displacement upon return and are unable to return to their places of origin.

Inside Nigeria, UNHCR teams have heard and documented accounts about Cameroonian troops returning refugees against their will – without allowing them time to collect their belongings.

Amid the chaos, some families were separated and some women were forced to leave their young children behind in Cameroon, including a child less than three years old.

While recognizing the legitimate national security concerns of the Cameroon Government, UNHCR reminds authorities that refugees are themselves fleeing violence and attacks from Boko Haram and that their access to asylum and protection must be ensured.