

[Viet Nam: UN experts urge Government to release blogger 'Mother Mushroom'](#)

8 March 2017 – A group of UN human rights experts has urged the Government of Viet Nam to immediately release a popular blogger, known as Mother Mushroom, who has been detained since October last year.

Ms. Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh, a 37-year-old environmental human rights defender, is accused of spreading propaganda against the Government. The charges are linked to her online activities that were critical of the Government.

“We are deeply concerned that Ms. Quynh is being detained because of the exercise of her right to freedom of opinion and expression on a matter of public interest,” the experts emphasized in a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

“We fear for her physical and psychological integrity, and denounce the violations of her fundamental right to due process, in particular her being detained incommunicado, the denial of her right to legal counsel and the banning of visits from her family,” they added.

Among the issues she tackled was an incident involving the dumping of toxic chemicals in April 2016, which polluted local waters and killed a large number of fish.

“As an environmental human rights defender, Mother Mushroom should be honoured for her courage and perseverance in defending the environment and human rights for years without fear,” the experts stressed.

The experts are Special Rapporteurs: John H. Knox, on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment; Maina Kiai, on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; David Kaye, on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Michel Forst, on the situation of human rights defenders, and Baskut Tuncak, on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes.

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.

In Nairobi, UN chief Guterres marks International Women's Day, hails Kenya's role in multilateralism

8 March 2017 – The richness, welfare and prosperity of countries depend on the full integration of women in the development process, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said today, commemorating International Women's Day at a ceremony in Nairobi as part of his visit to Kenya.

Speaking at an event alongside the First Lady of Kenya, Mr. Guterres told the hundreds of assembled women leaders at the Government's official celebration of the International Day, that every effort had to be made to finally defeat male-dominated culture if we are to be able to achieve gender equality.

"The truth is that north and south, east and west [...] everywhere, we still have a male-dominated culture," he said, recalling that he had pushed hard for women's empowerment when he was the Prime Minister of Portugal and, as the former UN High Commissioner for Refugees, he had met women who suffered the worst possible abuse.

Against this background, and the enduring male-dominated culture and violation of women's human rights, "we need to have [...] policies of gender equality [and] policies of protection of women in vulnerable situations, but the key [...] is our strong commitment to women and girls' empowerment in our societies," he stated.

Noting the three pillars of the UN – human rights, peace and security and development – he also underlined that "it is better to prevent conflict when we have women fully empowered in societies and it's better to solve conflicts when fully participate in conflict resolution."

Mr. Guterres also had the opportunity to visit a number of field projects in the Mathare slums, including a women's empowerment program run by UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) as part of its slum upgrading initiative and a UN WOMEN project designed to encourage the political participation of women. He was able to listen to a group of women who had decided to run for office, often against great odds.

VIDEO: Wrapping up his three day-visit to the Horn of Africa, Secretary-General António Guterres attends the commemoration of International Women's Day in Nairobi, Kenya in the company of First Lady of Kenya, Margaret Kenyatta.

Earlier in the day, the Secretary-General met with Kenya President Uhuru Kenyatta at State House.

Speaking to the press following the meeting, Mr. Guterres expressed his

belief that the “narrative of the UN about Africa has not always been the right one,” being sometimes “too much concentrated on crisis.”

And while it is true that there are crises in Africa – as there are crises in Europe, Asia and elsewhere – Africa must be seen more and more as a land of achievements and opportunity. “And [...] Kenya is the symbol of that achievement and that opportunity,” he said, going on to express solidarity with the Kenyan Government and people regarding the drought that is affecting the country.

“I hope that the international community will be able to match the generosity that Kenyans have always shown, namely in relation to refugees, and support the country now that the drought has been prolonged in such a way that, of course, the resources of the country are themselves in difficulty to face this enormous challenge,” he underscored.

Turning next to his visit yesterday to neighbouring Somalia, he reiterated his concern for ongoing drought there, saying: “People are dying. This must stop.” The “international community must act now and mobilize to support the Somali people in this very difficult situation.”

Mr. Guterres visited a settlement for people displaced by the drought. For over an hour, he walked through the camp, asked questions and listened to the stories of men, women and children who had come to Baidoa to seek food and water. Some had recently resettled from the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya only to be forced to move again because of the drought.



Secretary-General António Guterres and First Lady Margaret Kenyatta of Kenya commemorating International Women’s Day at a ceremony in the capital Nairobi. Photo: UNIC Nairobi

International Women’s Day around the UN system

Meanwhile in New York, the official UN commemoration of International Women’s Day took place at Headquarters and featured statements from Peter Thomson, the President, 71st Session of the UN General Assembly; Bjarni Benediktsson, the Prime Minister of Iceland; Amina Mohammad, UN Deputy Secretary-General; Antonio de Aguiar Patriota, Chair of the upcoming 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women ; Lana Nusseibeh, President, UN Women Executive Board; Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director, UN Women; Casar Jacobson, Disability Activist and Youth Champion; and Anne Hathaway, UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador.

“As we meet today to celebrate the positive developments that have taken place over the years in the promotion and protection of women and girls’ human rights, let us pause to recognize that this progress has often been slow, fragile and uneven,” said Mr. Thomson.

He called on the event to recall that “if we are to achieve a future in which all women and men enjoy equal rights, empowerment, and opportunity, then we

must commit to decisive action to overcome the entrenched obstacles still preventing progress.”

Noting the theme of this year’s International Day – ‘Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030’ – brings focused attention to a critical driver of gender equality, he said that if governments and other stakeholders are serious about achieving a ‘Planet 50-50 by 2030,’ specific action must be taken now to accelerate the realization of gender equality.

Also today, the Organization’s Rome-based agencies – the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) – reminded the world that women and girls play a crucial role in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular, the goal of eradicating hunger and extreme poverty.

Leaders from the three agencies reinforced their commitments to step up efforts to invest in the capacities of rural women as key agents of change in building a world without hunger.

Latest ballistic launches by DPR Korea raise risk of regional arms race, UN Security Council warns

8 March 2017 – Expressing strong condemnation of the most recent ballistic missile launches carried out by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), the United Nations Security Council reiterated that the country should refrain from any actions, including nuclear tests, in violation of the relevant Council resolutions, and comply fully with its obligations under those resolutions.

“Such [ballistic missile] activities contribute to the DPR Korea’s development of nuclear weapons delivery systems and increase tension in the region and beyond as well as the risk of a regional arms race,” stressed the 15-member Security Council in a statement issued late yesterday.

“[We regret] that the [country] is diverting resources to the pursuit of ballistic missiles while [its] citizens have great unmet needs,” the members added.

Three of the ballistic missiles launched on 5 March landed in Japan’s Exclusive Economic Zone.

These latest ballistic missile firing follows at least 14 launches between April last year and February this year, as well as a nuclear test in

September 2016. These actions are also in violation of a number of Security Council resolutions, including one adopted in March last year that had imposed fresh sanctions on the country.

Further in the statement, Security Council members underscored the importance of maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in north-east Asian region at large and expressed their commitment to a peaceful, diplomatic and political solution to the situation.

They also welcomed efforts by Council members, as well as other States, to facilitate a peaceful and comprehensive solution through dialogue, emphasised the importance of DPR Korea showing “sincere commitment” to denuclearisation, and stressed the importance of working to reduce tensions in the Korean Peninsula and beyond.

Earlier this week, UN Secretary-General António Guterres had also condemned the missile launches and reiterated his call for the DPR Korean leadership to refrain from further provocations and return to full compliance with its international obligations.

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.

SEE ALSO: UN News focus page on Mali

“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.