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General Assembly approves creation of new UN Counter-Terrorism Office



Peter Thomson (left), President of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly. At his side is Moses Abelian, Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management. UN Photo/Kim Haughton

15 June – The General Assembly today approved the establishment of a new United Nations office to help Member States implement the Organization's global counter-terrorism strategy.

Adopting a consensus resolution, the 193-nation body also welcomed Secretary-General António Guterres' initiative to transfer relevant functions out of the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and into the new United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism.

As a result, the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force Office (CTITF) and the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT), currently in DPA, will be transferred to the new office, together with their existing staff and all associated regular and extra-budgetary resources. The new Office would be headed up by an Under-Secretary-General.

In his report on this issue to the Assembly, the Secretary-General proposed that the new Under-Secretary-General would Chair the Task Force and Executive Director of the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre.

According to the report, the Office would have five main functions:

1. provide leadership on the General Assembly counter-terrorism mandates entrusted to me from across the United Nations system;
2. enhance coordination and coherence across the 38 Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force entities to ensure

the balanced implementation of the four pillars of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy;

3. strengthen the delivery of United Nations counter-terrorism capacity-building assistance to Member States;
4. improve visibility, advocacy and resource mobilization for United Nations counter-terrorism efforts; and
5. ensure that due priority is given to counterterrorism across the United Nations system and that the important work on preventing violent extremism is firmly rooted in the Strategy.

“The Secretary-General considers counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism to be one of the highest priorities of the United Nations to address a growing threat to international peace and security,” said his Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric in a statement issued just after the Assembly’s action.

“He therefore hopes that this reform of the UN Counter-Terrorism architecture will contribute to the UN’s broader efforts to promote conflict prevention, sustainable peace and development,” the Spokesman said.

For his part, General Assembly President Peter Thomson said “this resolution will enhance the United Nations’ capability to assist Member States in implementing the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy across its four pillars by ensuring greater coordination and coherence across the UN system, and by improving visibility, advocacy and resource mobilization for United Nations’ counter-terrorism efforts.”

One in five children in rich countries lives in poverty, UNICEF 'wake-up call' report shows

15 June – One in five children in high-income countries lives in relative income poverty, and an average of one in eight faces food insecurity, according to a new report released today by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

The latest 'Report Card' issued by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre underscores that rich nations also face challenges meeting global commitments to children.

“Report Card 14 is a wake-up-call that even in high-income countries progress does not benefit all children,” said Sarah Cook, Director of UNICEF Innocenti.

Building the Future: Children and the Sustainable

Development Goals in Rich Countries is the first report to assess the status of children in 41 high-income countries in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) identified as most important for child well-being. It ranks countries based on their performance and details the challenges and opportunities that advanced economies face in achieving global commitments to children.

“Higher incomes do not automatically lead to improved outcomes for all children, and may indeed deepen inequalities. Governments in all countries need to take action to ensure the gaps are reduced and progress is made to reach the SDGs for children,” she emphasized.

While the report says that on average one in five children in high-income countries lives in relative income poverty, there is wide variation, from one in 10 in Denmark, Iceland and Norway to one in three in Israel and Romania.

On hunger, an average of one in eight children in high-income countries faces food insecurity, rising to one in five in the United Kingdom and the United States, and to one in three in Mexico and Turkey.

Turning to healthy lives, neonatal mortality has dramatically fallen in most countries; and rates of adolescent suicide, teenage births and drunkenness are declining. However, one in four adolescents reports two or more mental health issues more than once a week.



In Italy, a boy, stands in a poor suburb of the city of Turin, Piedmont Region. Photo: UNICEF/UNH73328/Pirozzi

Regarding quality education, even in the best-performing countries, including Japan and Finland, around one-fifth of 15-year-olds do not reach minimum proficiency levels in reading, mathematics and science.

Moreover, the Report Card reveals that an average of 14 per cent of adults surveyed in 17 rich countries believe that boys deserve preference for university education, and in the majority of these countries the belief is higher among males.

In ranking 41 countries, the league table reads well for those countries that frequently appear at the top of recent comparisons of human and child development – the Nordic countries, Germany and Switzerland – and less well for lower-income countries in the group, such as Romania, Bulgaria and Chile. However, a closer look reveals room for improvement across the board as all countries rank in the mid- or bottom-third on two or more goals.

Based on Report Card results, UNICEF is calling for high-income countries to take action by putting children at the heart of equitable and sustainable progress, saying that: “Improving the well-being of all children today is essential for achieving both equity and sustainability.”

UNICEF is also appealing for improved collection of comparable data; tailored policy responses to national contexts; honouring global sustainable development commitments; and that no child be left behind.

Independent UN probe reveals 'cruel and brutal nature' of human rights violations in Burundi



Thousands of people fleeing fear of violence in Burundi have arrived in Mahama Refugee Camp, Rwanda. Photo: UNHCR/Kate Holt (file)

15 June – A United Nations-appointed panel of experts investigating human rights violations in Burundi today released the latest findings of their probe, noting that their initial fears concerning the scope and gravity of these abuses since April 2015 have been confirmed.

“We were struck in our investigations by the feeling of deep and widespread fear running through the testimonies we gathered,” Fatsah Ouguergouz, Reine Alapini Gansou and Françoise Hampson, members of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi, during the presentation of their second oral briefing to the UN Human Rights Council.

The Inquiry experts said that these violations include extrajudicial executions, acts of torture and other inhuman and degrading treatment, sexual and gender-based violence, arbitrary arrests and detention and enforced disappearances, often accompanied by demands for large ransoms from families in exchange for promises to release detainees or to find those who have disappeared.

Many of these violations have been committed by members of the National Intelligence Service and the police, sometimes assisted by members of the youth league of the ruling party, the *Imbonerakure*, they added.

Despite the lack of access to the country and the Burundian Government's lack of cooperation, the Commission interviewed many Burundians in exile and visited Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Kenya, among other countries.

Since the beginning of its investigation, it has collected more than 470 testimonies of human rights violations allegedly committed in Burundi since April 2015.

“We were struck by the particularly cruel and brutal nature of the violations described to us,” the Commission members stated, citing testimonies alleging the use, during torture sessions, of clubs, rifle butts, bayonets, iron bars, metal chains and electric cables.

Testimonies also cited needles stuck into victims' bodies or unidentified products injected into them; nails ripped out with pliers; burns; and many abuses inflicted on male detainees' genital organs.

“In several cases, acts of torture and ill-treatment were accompanied by violent insults and death threats, including of an ethnic nature,” they said.

The Commission has also documented cases of sexual violence, particularly against female relatives of government opponents, especially by people believed to be *Imbonerakure*.

The Commission will present its final report at the thirty-sixth session of the Human Rights Council in September 2017.

'All of us can and must be prepared to speak out' to halt abuse of older persons – UN rights expert

15 June – Many older persons are at risk of being abused by their own relatives, a United Nations human rights expert has warned, urging greater vigilance and more reporting of suspected cases, especially since many fear on the part of older persons may not speak up for fear of reprisals – or to protect family members from criminal prosecution.

“Older people are afraid to say they are being abused,” said Rosa Kornfeld-Matte, the UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, speaking to *UN News* ahead of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, which is marked annually on 15 June.

“They are afraid because they feel lonely. They believe that if they denounce the person next to them, they will find themselves alone,” she said, echoing a statement issued by the UN Office for the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) in which she said she is particularly appalled that older persons are often at risk from members of their own family.

“We must not close our eyes to the fate of older persons, even though it is difficult to accept that our families are not always a safe haven. On this World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, I urge everyone who suspects any form of elder abuse, including financial abuse, to report their concerns,” stated Ms. Kornfeld-Matte.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), around one in six older persons experience some form of abuse, a figure higher than previously estimated and predicted to rise as populations age worldwide. By 2050 the number of people aged 60 and over will double to reach two billion globally, with the vast majority of older people living in low- and middle-income countries.

The agency warned that if the proportion of elder abuse victims remains constant, the number of people affected will increase rapidly due to population ageing, growing to 320 million victims by 2050.

Along these lines, a recent study published in the *Lancet Global Health* found that nearly 16 per cent of those subject to abuse aged 60 years and older, were subjected to either psychological abuse, financial abuse, neglect, physical abuse or sexual abuse.

“Elder abuse is rarely discussed in policy circles, less prioritized for research and addressed by only a handful of organizations,” noted Dr. Etienne Krug, Director of the WHO Department for the Management of Noncommunicable Diseases, Disability, Violence and Injury Prevention.

“Governments must protect all people from violence. We must work to shed light on this important societal challenge,



Elderly Bhutanese men commune with each other on a park bench.
UN Photo/John Isaac

understand how best to prevent it, and help put in place the measures needed,” Dr. Kurg stressed.

If you see something, say something

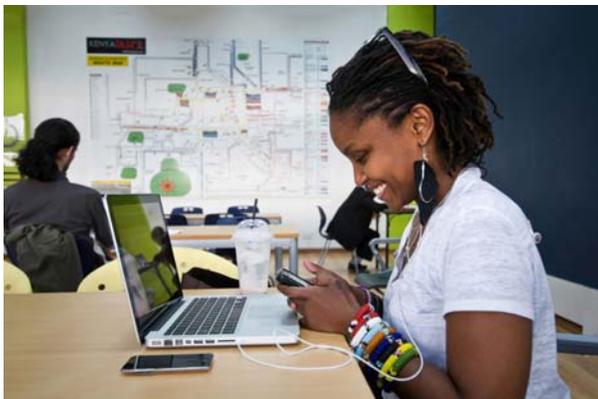
While most cases of abuse go undetected despite clear warning signs, Ms. Kornfeld-Matte urged everyone to step up if they are witness to such incidents.

“If a neighbour, a senior citizen or even a nursing home employee sees any abuse type of situation, they have to go to the police and report what they see,” she said, stressing: “We cannot assume the victims will report what is happening to them.”

She explained that despite facing abuse such as being physically restrained, left in soiled clothes, over-medicated or emotionally neglected, they may not speak up for fear of reprisals – or to protect family members from criminal prosecution. In some cases, the victims may not be fully aware that what is happening to them constitutes abuse.

“This all adds to the weight of our collective responsibility to act, and to speak up for older persons when they are unable or unwilling to speak for themselves. All of us can and must be prepared to be advocates for older people, if this abuse is ever to be halted,” she said.

Switzerland tops world innovation index; India and other emerging markets on the rise – UN agency



iHub, an innovation and business space for the technology community in Kenya. Photo: iHub/UNDP

15 June – Innovation is a key development tool that could boost economies and provide a way out of the growing squeeze on the world's food resources – one of the major challenges of the 21st century – according to a new United Nations report.

“Innovation is the engine of economic growth in an increasingly knowledge-based global economy, but more investment is needed to help boost human creativity and economic output,” said Francis Gurry, Director-General of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and co-author of the 10th edition of the *Global Innovation Index (GII): Innovation feeding the World*.

With an eye on how creativity in agriculture and the food sector is helping to feed the world – one of the major challenges of the 21st century – WIPO points out that innovation is key to sustaining the productivity growth required to meet the rising demand and to helping enhance the networks that integrate the sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management known as food systems.

According to the UN agency, rich countries continue to dominate global innovation in terms of most new products and services, with Switzerland at the top for the seventh year running and high-income economies taking 24 of the top 25 spots – China is the exception at 22, moving up three places in the last 12 months.

“Innovation can help transform the current economic upswing into longer-term growth,” noted Mr. Gurry.

A total of 17 economies comprise the 'innovation achievers' this year, with nine from the Sub-Saharan Africa region and three from Eastern Europe.

Key findings show the rise of India as an emerging innovation centre in Asia, high innovation performance in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Kenya and Rwanda and an opportunity to improve innovation capacity in Latin America and the Caribbean – with Chile, Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina showing particular strengths in institutions, infrastructure and business sophistication.

Next to innovation powerhouses such as China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, a group of Asian economies including

Indonesia, the Philippines and Viet Nam – dubbed by WIPO as the "new Asian tigers" – are actively working to improve their innovation ecosystems and rank high in a number of important indicators related to education, productivity growth and high-tech exports, among others.

Innovation Feeding the World

The theme of the GII 2017, 'Innovation Feeding the World,' spotlights innovation carried out in agriculture and food systems. Over the next decades, these sectors will face an enormous rise in global demand and increased competition for limited natural resources, in addition to adapting to climate change.

The report underscores that innovation is key to sustaining the necessary productivity growth to help enhance networks that integrate the sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management known as food systems.

Each year, the GII surveys some 130 economies using dozens of metrics, from patent filings to education spending providing decision makers a high-level look at the innovative activity that increasingly drives economic and social growth. For the last ten years, it has observed an innovative capacity gap between developed and developing nations and lacklustre growth rates for research and development activities at both the government and corporate levels.

UN cooperation with African Union must be institutionalized, less 'ad hoc,' Security Council told

15 June – The United Nations must move towards a more institutionalized approach for the joint planning, mandating, financing and supporting of African Union (AU) peace-support operations, the Secretary-General's Chef de Cabinet told the Security Council today.

“We must move away from ad hoc arrangements,” said Chef de Cabinet Maria Luiza Viotti during the presentation of the Secretary-General's report on options for authorization and support for AU peace support operations.

The report presents proposals for institutionalized approaches to joint planning and mandating, financing and supporting AU peace support operations, she added, explaining that different situations will require different planning, financing and support arrangements, but these can be underpinned by jointly-agreed principles and decision-making processes.

The report also builds on an earlier review of over a decade of UN-AU cooperation.

“Our aim is not to replicate earlier arrangements but to develop new approaches that reflect lessons-learned as well as developing capacities of the African Union and the roles of other partners,” she said, adding that predictable approaches are required, as the UN-AU partnership “is, has been and will be the preferred modality of pursuing peace and security in Africa.”

The report also highlights the importance of compliance and oversight, particularly in the areas of human rights and conduct and discipline. The UN will continue to provide any technical assistance in the AU's implementation of relevant compliance frameworks, Ms. Luiza Viotti said.

As Secretary-General António Guterres has often said, the world can greatly benefit from African wisdom, African ideas and African solutions, she noted, adding that: “Together, we can create more efficient and effective responses to better respond to the needs of the African people and advance international peace and security.”



Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti (centre), Chef de Cabinet to the Secretary-General, addresses the Security Council meeting on options for authorization and support for African Union peace support operations UN Photo/Evan Schneider

For his part, Smaïl Chergui, Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union, speaking via video teleconference from Addis Ababa, said the organization was conducting peace-support operations in the world's most challenging situations, yet financing remained ad hoc and highly unpredictable. He noted that 30 per cent of AU member States contributed to its recently established Peace Fund which, he emphasized, the Commission of the African Union would manage with transparency and good governance.

Donald Kaberuka, African Union High Representative for the Peace Fund, said a well-funded African peace and security architecture is not simply an African priority – it is also for the global public good. While AU member States are primarily responsible for financing the Fund, partnerships would continue to play a vital role, he said, adding that forging an effective alliance between the UN and the AU held the greatest strategic importance to collective security.

“There should be no illusion as to the political complexity of this matter,” he said, emphasizing that a shared solution on predictable and sustainable financing for peace operations mandated by the AU and authorized by the Council was a strategic imperative for both the AU and the UN.

UN expert urges 'bold action' to address raft of human rights abuses in Eritrea



Two young Eritreans wait to board a commercial ferry at Samos Island, Greece. Growing numbers of Eritreans are seeking asylum in Europe. Photo: UNHCR/A. D'Amato

15 June – Actions against severe human rights abuses meted out to Eritrean citizens must not be delayed, a United Nations rights expert has warned in a new report to the Human Rights Council.

“I regret to report that, as of now, the Government has made no effort to end ongoing human rights violations, which the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea described as amounting to crimes against humanity,” said Sheila B. Keetharuth, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea.

She stressed that citizens continue to suffer arbitrary arrest, incommunicado detention, enforced disappearances, and a national service system that amounts to enslavement.

“The time for Eritrea to take bold action for human rights protection is long overdue, and the Government has not delivered on any of its promises,” underscored the expert while urging the authorities “to rise above the rhetoric it has used over the last five years when addressing the [Council].”

Ms. Keetharuth emphasized that the Government of Eritrea must “put its obligations under human rights treaties into effect,” said.

The Special Rapporteur continued that while Eritrea has increased its interaction with some human rights bodies, nothing has substantially changed on the ground. In her report, she has suggested a list of areas with the intention to assist the Human Rights Council in developing specific and time-bound benchmarks to assess substantive change.

“Such specific, time-bound targets would help Member States assess Eritrea's progress. I hope that, as of next year, we will be able to celebrate the first steps of tangible improvements that will make a change in people's life in Eritrea,” she said.

The Special Rapporteur noted that Eritrea has no constitution and lacks fundamental institutions that underpin a society based on the rule of law. It does not have an independent judiciary, democratically elected parliament or legislative assembly, opposition parties, an independent media or civil society organizations, other than government-affiliated organizations.

Government shows 'no willingness' to tackle impunity

“The Eritrean authorities have refused to engage with me for yet another year, but various groups and notably Eritreans have seized the opportunity offered by the mandate. They have used the space to voice their opinions, express their ideas, and highlight their concerns on human rights – a space that the Government continues to deny them at home,” Ms. Keetharuth said.

“It is incumbent on the Eritrean authorities to dialogue with the Eritrean people while respecting and protecting their rights,” she added.

The Special Rapporteur also pointed out that the Government had shown no willingness to tackle impunity, despite calls by the Commission of Inquiry to ensure accountability for past human rights violations and crimes against humanity.

She urged other States to take action against Eritreans implicated in the commission of crimes against humanity, if the alleged offenders were on their territory.

Ms. Keetharuth said human rights in Eritrea would continue to be watched closely despite a lack of access.

“The Government refuses to open its doors for international experts to undertake a comprehensive review of the human rights situation,” she said.

“Remote monitoring is the only way to shed light on a country that continues to shield itself from scrutiny. Increased engagement with the international community is a welcome development, but it cannot be a substitute for human rights progress and scrutiny,” concluded the UN envoy.

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.

Myanmar: UN expert urges Government to do more to protect rights of all children

15 June – A United Nations human rights expert today urged the Government of Myanmar to do more to protect children in the country, citing cases of detention and alleged incidents of child labour and marriage.

“I stand ready to assist in any way I can to achieve a Myanmar where the rights and fundamental freedoms of all are respected and fully realized,” said the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, in her remarks to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

She reminded the Government that this obligation extended to all children within its jurisdiction, including all those from the Rohingya minority living in Rakhine state.

She expressed concern that at least 13 children were being held by police in Rakhine, stressing that detention should be strictly “a last resort.”

She also called for an immediate Government investigation into the death in custody of one of the 13, to fully probe the circumstances including why the death was not reported for four months.



Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar Yanghee Lee. UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

Ms. Lee also expressed concern about the situation of Rohingya children who have fled Myanmar, especially the reported recent rise in the number of child brides among women and girls now living in neighbouring countries.

She also expressed shock at the recent case of a girl working as a domestic servant and who had been abused by her employers.

On a more positive note, Ms. Lee congratulated Myanmar on becoming a mid-ranked country in the human development index.

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UN envoy strongly condemns attack on popular restaurant in Somali capital



A street scene in Mogadishu, the Somali capital. Photo: AU-UN IST/Stuart Price

15 June – The United Nations envoy for Somalia today strongly condemned last night's attack on a pizza restaurant and an adjacent hotel in Mogadishu that reportedly killed at least 19 people.

“Last night's attack was clearly aimed at civilians who were breaking the fast,” said the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Somalia, Michael Keating, in a statement to the press.

“There can be no justification for such acts of wanton bloodshed. The holy month of Ramadan is a time of peace and compassion; the attackers have shown cynical contempt for this, and set back the prospect for a peaceful solution to Somalia's problems,” he added.

Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack, which was triggered by a suicide car bomber and targeted customers who frequent the Pizza House restaurant and adjacent Posh Hotel. Five militants who seized control of the restaurant were subsequently killed by Somali security forces.

On behalf of the United Nations and the broader international community, he extended heartfelt condolences to the families and victims of the deceased and wished a full and speedy recovery to those who sustained injuries.