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## **'Time to stamp out human trafficking,' says Guterres; UN pledges action to eradicate 'heinous crime'**

**27 September** – With tens of millions of human trafficking victims worldwide, “now is the time to stand together and stamp out this abominable practice,” Secretary-General António Guterres today told a high-level meeting at which Member States adopted a political Declaration reaffirming their commitment to implement a United Nations action plan to end the scourge.

“Human trafficking is all around us, in all regions of the world,” said Mr. Guterres, referring to such practices as forced labour, sexual servitude, recruitment of child soldiers and other forms of exploitation and abuse.

The Assembly's high-level meeting, convened to examine progress achieved and challenges remaining in the implementation of the seven-year-old Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, opened today and closes tomorrow.

In the Declaration, adopted without a vote, UN Member States demonstrated their strong political will to take decisive concerted action to end the heinous crime.



Trafficked sex worker in Cambodia. Photo: UNODC/Mattia Insolera

In recent years, rising conflict, insecurity and economic uncertainty have brought new tests.

“As millions of children, women and men spill out of their countries towards safety, they find themselves at the mercy of merciless people,” Mr. Guterres said.

These criminal networks are global, well-organized, technologically savvy, and highly proficient in taking advantage of gaps in governance and weaknesses in institutions, he added.

Fighting human trafficking requires greater use of relevant instruments, including the UN conventions against transnational organized crime and against corruption, and next year’s expected adoption by the General Assembly of a global compact on safe, orderly and regular migration is a further potential milestone, he said.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by Member States in 2015, also addresses some of the root causes that make people vulnerable to trafficking. Often, trafficking is abetted by poverty and inequality.

“Fighting trafficking and advancing sustainable, inclusive development go hand in hand,” Mr. Guterres said.

Also addressing the meeting, Yuri Fedotov, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), said “this appraisal and the adoption of the political Declaration can help us take this commitment forward and sharpen responses to an odious crime that continues to exploit and victimize the most vulnerable, in all parts of the world.”

To build a robust evidence base, UNODC is currently working with the academic community to develop innovative methodologies to measure the size and scope of the trafficking problem, he added.

General Assembly President Miroslav Lajcak also addressed the meeting, as did Ms. Mira Sorvino, UNODC Goodwill Ambassador for the global fight against human trafficking and Grizelda Grootboom, a civil society representative and victim of human trafficking.

## Syrian parties should join next round of Geneva talks ‘without preconditions’ – UN envoy



Staffan de Mistura, special envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria speaks at the Security Council Meeting on the situation in the Middle East. UN Photo/Ariana Lindquist

**27 September** – The United Nations is set to convene the next round of the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva by the end of October or in early November, the UN mediator told the Security Council today.

“The time has come for the focus to return to Geneva, and the intra-Syrian talks under the auspices of the United Nations,” said UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura, urging the Government and the opposition to assess the situation with realism and responsibility to the Syrian people and prepare to participate in the talks without preconditions.

Mr. de Mistura said the Government should show a genuine interest in having negotiations about credible, inclusive local and central governance, a schedule and process for a new constitution, and UN-supervised elections.

For its part, the opposition should show its unity and readiness to speak in one voice, he said, urging opposition groups to seize the opportunity presented by Saudi Arabia to convene a conference for them to overcome differences.

“Let me caution both sides and their backers against illusions of victory or dreams of shortcuts,” he said. “There is no

substitute for an internationally supported process based on a comprehensive and inclusive approach that also helps Syrians to re-discover a modicum of trust and social cohesion after the bitterest of conflict.”

Following the 10-15 July round of the UN-facilitated talks, the envoy said the conference ended with incremental progress but no breakthrough.

Intra-Syrian talks focus on the “four baskets”: a credible non-sectarian transitional government; a future constitution; early and free parliamentary elections within 18 months; and a united war against terrorism within Syria.

Also briefing the Council on the humanitarian situation there, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock said “Syria continues to face deep and difficult challenges, and the Syrian people remain trapped in a cycle of violence that must be broken.”

Following a comprehensive UN review, Deir ez-Zor and the 93,500 people in the city are being removed from the list of those besieged, he said, explaining that after three years of siege by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), Syrian Government forces in early September gained road access, marking the end of costly airdrops.

Now an estimated 419,920 people remain besieged in 10 locations across Syria. Of these, 95 per cent are besieged by the Government, two per cent by non-State armed groups, and three per cent by both non-State armed groups and the Government of Syria. “These sieges must be lifted,” said Mr. Lowcock, who is also UN Emergency Relief Coordinator.

So far in September, 9,000 people in the three besieged towns of Foah, Kefraya and Yarmouk have been reached, and 25,000 people were reached in East Harasta, Misraba and Modira. In total, under the August and September access plan, the UN has reached 280,500 of the 1.23 million people it requested to provide assistance to, he added.

## At Security Council, UN official urges greater cooperation for more effective aviation security



Aircraft on runway. Photo: World Bank/Arne Hoel (file)

**27 September** – Highlighting multifaceted threats to aviation security in the context of international peace and security, the head of the United Nations civil aviation body urged greater cooperation among Member States, at all levels, to make global aviation security more effective.

“We must find a way to identify and judiciously share essential elements of information necessary to implement appropriate measures at the proper level,” Fang Liu, the Secretary-General of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), told the Security Council today at its meeting on threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts.

In her briefing, Ms. Liu informed the 15-member Security Council on the new ICAO Global Aviation Security Plan, which focuses extensively on the threat of terrorism to civil aviation and aims to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of global provisions, and the sustainable implementation of preventative measures.

The Global Plan, which she referred to as a major milestone for civil aviation security contributing to the UN global counter terrorism strategy, has five priority areas: enhancing risk awareness and response; establishing a better-defined security culture; improving technological resources and fostering innovation; improving oversight and quality assurance; and increasing cooperation and support.

“It will only be by virtue of sustained political will, especially at the highest levels of governments and industry, that the [Global Plan] will succeed,” the ICAO chief added.

Also in her briefing, Ms. Liu spoke of threats from cyber space; Man-Portable Air Defence Systems (MANPADS), especially in conflict areas; and improvised explosive devices in portable electronic devices.

Concluding her remarks, the head of ICAO also urged the Security Council to allocate a portion of the counter terrorism funds as well as to encourage UN Member States to increase their contributions to aviation security projects, in particular for capacity building and training to enhance the effective implementation of ICAO Standards.

## UNICEF expands relief efforts in Latin America and Caribbean after month of 'relentless' natural disasters



In Oaxaca, Mexico, UNICEF staff make a rapid assessment of the damage in San Pedro Huilotepec caused by the earthquake. Photo: UNICEF/Solis

**27 September** – To help children and families affected by the series of natural disasters that have devastated countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) today said it has scaled up its humanitarian response the region.

“Children in Latin America and the Caribbean have faced several natural disasters of epic proportions in September,” said Grant Leaty, UNICEF Deputy Director of Emergency Programmes.

“With four successive hurricanes – including Hurricane Irma, the largest ever recorded over the Atlantic – and two major earthquakes in Mexico, the past few weeks have been relentless,” he added.

In the past month, four major hurricanes – Category 3 or higher – have churned through the Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean. Hurricanes Irma, Jose, Katia and Maria caused major damage to island nations in the Caribbean, as well as continental North and Central America,

devastating the lives of millions of people and leaving hundreds of thousands homeless and displaced.

Since two earthquakes – 12 days apart – caused widespread damage and destruction in central Mexico, the region has experienced over 4,000 aftershocks, including a 6.1 magnitude quake as recently as 23 September. Up to seven million children live in the affected areas and thousands have been left homeless, with no access to basic services.

Across the region, UNICEF has urgently scaled up its emergency response to reach vulnerable children with protection services, water, sanitation and hygiene, health and education initiatives.

“It’s absolutely vital that children who have lived through these traumatic events get the psychosocial support they need,” said UNICEF Mexico Ambassador Thalia, who visited UNICEF operations centre this week to learn more about UNICEF’s response.

In Mexico, UNICEF is working with its partners in earthquake-affected areas to establish temporary schools, promote school safety guidelines, train teachers in psychosocial support, and distribute education supplies and early childhood development kits to teachers and caregivers.

“Through child-friendly spaces UNICEF is able to provide children with a safe place, to play, learn and begin to heal their psychological wounds,” Ambassador Thalia underscored.

For children and families affected by the hurricanes, UNICEF is working with partners and local governments to provide immediate relief including access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene supplies, provision of psycho social support for children and working to ensure children and able to get back into education as soon as possible.

To support its humanitarian response in Mexico, Cuba, the Eastern Caribbean and Haiti,



UNICEF is appealing for \$18.1 million.

## UN chief welcomes Saudi Arabia's decision to lift ban on women drivers



**27 September** – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has welcomed the decision by Saudi Arabia to allow women to drive cars in the country.

In a tweet, the UN chief noted that ending the restrictions represents an “important step in the right direction.”

According to reports, under the new law, women can legally obtain a driving licence without asking a male guardian for permission.

Also welcoming the announcement, the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) “expressed hope that the move would “start the journey” to substantive equality for women and girls in the country, with more access to public spaces and life, increased participation in the job market and a life free of violence in all spheres.



Graphic from the Saudi Communication and Media Center on 26 September 2017 explaining that women are allowed to drive. Photo: Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs

“Women being able to apply for a driver’s licence in Saudi Arabia, and subsequently drive, is a long-awaited milestone in the [country], that puts them at par with their male counterparts in this one area of public life and gives them a right to a life-saving skill that they should never have been denied,” said Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the Executive Director UN Women, in a statement today.

“The ability to move independently within their country is a vital step to the other freedoms that are their right as economic, political and social actors, and that bring benefits to all of society,” she added.

## Colombia: New UN Mission begins operation; focus on reintegrating ex-fighters



An observer from the UN Verification Mission in Colombia, which began its work on 26 September 2017. Photo: UN Mission in Colombia

**27 September** – The second post-conflict United Nations mission in Colombia has started its operations, succeeding the UN entity which was mandated to verify the implementation agreement between the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army (FARC-EP) concerning the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities, and laying down of arms.

“We are pleased that the laying down of weapons has been successfully concluded,” said Jean Arnault, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Colombia and the head of the UN Verification Mission in the country, in a news release yesterday.

Noting that the transition has offered an opportunity to redouble efforts to bring peace to all corners of the country, he added: “Through our follow-up and verification activities, [we] will continue to support Colombia in its process of building a firm and lasting

peace.”

Established by the UN Security Council in July, the purpose of the Mission is to accompany the parties and verify their commitments regarding points 3.2 and 3.4 of the Final Peace Agreement on the reintegration of former FARC-EP members,



and the implementation of measures of protection and security for communities in territories most affected by the conflict.

Across the country, the Mission will have ten regional offices and will continue to maintain presence at the twenty-six Territorial Area for Training and Reincorporation. In addition, it will also establish seven sub-offices in different parts of the country.

The Verification Mission starts its activities immediately upon the conclusion of the mandate of the first UN Mission in Colombia, which was established by the Security Council in January last year 2016. That Mission was mandated with the verification of the Agreement between the Government and FARC-EP on the Bilateral and Definitive Ceasefire and Cessation of Hostilities and Laying down of Arms (Ceasefire Agreement).

## North Africa set to adopt 5-year plan to boost youth employment – UN labour agency

**27 September** – With a youth unemployment rate at 28.8 per cent – twice the global average – countries in North Africa need to adopt a broader, more concerted response to tackle the crisis, the United Nations labour agency warned today.

“Arguably the single biggest global development challenge in the decades to come will be the need to integrate hundreds of millions of young people into the labour market,” International Labour Organization (ILO) Director-General Guy Ryder told a two-day international conference in Geneva, which is expected to adopt a new five-year action plan to enhance youth employability in the sub-region.

An ILO press release issued today said that in North Africa, only 16.6 per cent of young women and 46.8 per cent of young men are economically active, meaning that they are employed or seeking work.

Among those active, 29.3 per cent – 24.1 per cent for young men and 44.4 per cent for young women – are unemployed; and around 25 per cent of working youth are estimated to be living in poverty.

“In order to fill the youth employment gap in the North African region, we call on social partners, governments, workers and employers’ organizations together with development partners, to renew their commitment and action on youth employment,” ILO Deputy Director-General for Policy Deborah Greenfield said at the event, calling for a strong policy response to reverse these trends.

Young workers are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. What’s more, North Africa has one of the largest gender imbalances in labour market participation.

At the conference, which ends today, representatives from Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia, as well as development partners and major stakeholders are expected to adopt “Roadmap for Youth Employment in North Africa.”



Youth of ages 15–29 make up around 30 percent of the population in the Arab region. Photo: UNDP

## UN rights office issues business standards on treatment of LGBTI employees; major companies on board



Photo: UNAIDS

**27 September** – Drawing on good practice from around the world, the top United Nation human rights official today launched an unprecedented set of global standards to support the business community in tackling discrimination against lesbian, gay, bi, trans and intersex people (LGBTI).

“Social change requires the active involvement of all parts of society – including, critically, the business community,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, speaking to business leaders, activists and journalists at Microsoft’s New York City headquarters.

Mr. Zeid called on the private sector to play its part in promoting LGBTI inclusion in the workplace and beyond.

“The decisions that companies take – whether in respect of human resources, investment, supply chains, even marketing – can have a real and, in some cases, profound impact on human rights,” he told the audience.

The new standards set out actions for companies to protect the rights of LGBTI employees, such as eliminating workplace discrimination; making sure business operations do not contribute to discrimination against customers, suppliers or members of the public; and working with business partners to address discriminatory practices up and down the supply chain.

They also encourage companies to stand up for the rights of LGBTI people in the countries where they operate – including through advocacy and support for local organizations.

“There is growing evidence that, besides being the right thing to do, standing up for equal rights for LGBTI people is also in the private sector’s commercial interest,” the High Commissioner noted, adding: “Excluding any group slows us all down. Eliminating discrimination is the key to unlocking talent and maximizing productivity.”

The product of a year-long process of consultations facilitated by the UN Human Rights Office and the Institute for Human Rights and Business, including regional meetings with leading business representatives in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas, Accenture, Baker McKenzie, BNP Paribas, The Coca-Cola Company, Deutsche Bank, EDF, EY, Gap Inc., Godrej, IKEA Group, Microsoft, Oath, Orange, SAP, and Spotify are among the supporting companies.

In the coming months, the standards will be presented at launch events globally, including in Mumbai on 12 October, London on 30 October, Hong Kong on 14 November, Geneva on 29 November and Melbourne in 5 December.

## Sustainable tourism can advance global development, UN agency highlights on World Day

**27 September** – On World Tourism Day, the United Nations underscored the potential of sustainable tourism to advance economic, social, environmental and cultural sustainable development.

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“This year’s celebration comes at a very special time,” said Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General of the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) at the official UN celebration of the Day in Doha, Qatar, pointing out that 2017 is the UN International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development.

“[It is] a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to come together and promote travel and tourism, as one of the most effective transformative human forces of the 21st century,” he added.

Noting the connection between air transport and tourism, he stated: “Both are a force for development and have major responsibilities in building a better and more sustainable world. Both are interlinked, as over half of the people travelling the world today arrive to their destination by air, thus the economic impacts of tourism and aviation are linked.”

Acknowledging global challenges, such as climate change, migration and security, the UNWTO chief said, that 2016, 1,235 million travellers crossed international borders in one year. That was almost one-sixth of the people of the world making an international trip every year, “and while doing so, tourism is bringing tremendous benefits to communities, economies and societies.”

Generating \$3.2 billion of spending worldwide every day, tourism creates one-tenth of jobs globally, represents 10 per cent of world’s gross domestic product (GDP) and is 30 per cent of world trade in services. As the third largest export industry, travel and tourism fuel UNWTO’s long-term forecasts showing that by 2030, the number of travellers will reach 1.8 billion.

“But beyond the numbers and the economic benefits, travel and tourism is today a major contributor to a transformation that slowly and gradually is bringing us together, as humans, like never before, in a fast, globalized world,” he stressed.

Breaking down stereotypes and enabling people to celebrate rich cultural diversity, is “tourism’s greatest contribution to a better world,” according to Mr. Rifai.



Bird watchers and tourists at the Cixi wetlands in China, which have become a national park that attracts thousands every year. Photo: You Ji/World Bank



## France must bring counter-terrorism law in line with international rights obligations – UN experts

**27 September** – Warning of possible “discriminatory repercussions,” especially for Muslims, two United Nations rights experts expressed concern over a new law that may perpetuate the emergency measures France introduced in 2015 – establishing a permanent state of emergency.

“The normalization of emergency powers has grave consequences for the integrity of rights protection in France, both within and beyond the context of counter-terrorism,” said the Special Rapporteur on the protection of human rights in the context of countering terrorism, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, today in a statement calling on France to honour its international human rights commitments and obligations while debating the new draft law.

The draft law “to Strengthen Internal Security and the Fight Against Terrorism” was approved by the Senate on 18 July and is currently being debated by the National Assembly.

On 22 September in a letter to the French Government, Ms. Ní Aoláin drew attention to several provisions of the draft that may adversely impact people’s rights to liberty and security as well as freedoms of movement, peaceful assembly, expression and religion.

Echoing these concerns, the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, Michel Forst, reiterated his fear that, if adopted, the law would impair rights to liberty, security, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion and others.

“As France is strengthening its fight against terrorism, the draft bill includes a number of security measures, which will incorporate into ordinary law several restrictions on civil liberties currently in place under France’s state of emergency,” Ms. Ní Aoláin pointed out.

She underscored that both regional and international human rights institutions affirm that the means open to the State to regulate terrorism by law are limited by its compliance with international human rights standards. The duration of the state of emergency must be time-bound, revised regularly, and meet the criteria of necessity and proportionality.

The two UN experts expressed concern about the vague wording in certain provisions of the draft bill – particularly the definitions of terrorism and threats to national security – that gives the authorities powers that may be used in an arbitrary manner and non-judicial officers – specifically prefects and police officers – broad discretion and a wider scope for control practices, which may have discriminatory repercussions for French residents, particularly Muslim.



View of Paris, France, from UNESCO headquarters. UN Photo/Mark Garten

## Hanging of 42 prisoners in Iraq raises concern over flawed due process – UN rights chief



High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein. UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

**27 September** – The mass hanging of 42 prisoners on Sunday in a prison in southern Iraq raises massive concerns over the country's use of the death penalty, the UN human rights chief said Wednesday.

“I am appalled to learn of the execution of 42 prisoners in a single day,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said in a press release from his Office (OHCHR), referring to the hanging at Al Hoot prison in the city of Nasiriyah.

“Under international law, the death penalty may only be imposed after a strict set of substantive and procedural requirements have been met,” he added.

Mr. Zeid said it was “extremely doubtful” that these strict due process and fair trial guarantees – including the men's rights to effective legal assistance and a full appeals process, and to seek pardon or commutation of their sentence – had been met in every one of these 42 individual cases.

Iraqi government officials have stated that the executed prisoners were Iraqis affiliated to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) or al-Qaeda, who had been charged under anti-terrorism laws with offences including kidnapping, killing members of the security forces, carrying out armed robberies, and detonating improvised explosive devices.

However, no information has been released about their names, places of residence, exact crimes, trials, date of sentencing, or the appeals processes which Iraqi officials say they have exhausted.

Iraqi officials have stated that around 1,200 of the estimated 6,000 prisoners held in Nasiriyah have been sentenced to death.

OHCHR has repeatedly warned that the Iraqi justice system as a whole is too flawed to allow for any executions, expressing concern over reports that Iraq may be planning to expedite the process of executing prisoners already sentenced to death while urging the Government to step back from its policy of accelerated or mass executions.

Mr. Zeid called on the Government to establish a special judicial oversight body to make recommendations on legal reforms that would ensure respect for due process and fair trial standards, as well as to monitor any future trials related to capital punishment.

He also urged the authorities to halt all imminent executions and to establish an immediate moratorium on the use of the death penalty.