

'Bleakest period yet' in Occupied Palestinian Territory: UN human rights expert

Reports of the indignities faced by people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory have "[painted the bleakest picture yet](#)" of the human rights situation there, a United Nations expert has said.

[Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk](#) was in Amman, Jordan, this week where he met with civil society and other representatives to gather information for his latest report, which will be presented to the General Assembly in October.

Mr. Lynk monitors the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory but has been prohibited by Israel from travelling there.

"This is my third mission to the region since I assumed the mandate in May 2016, and the reports I received this week have painted the bleakest picture yet of the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory," he said in a statement issued on Friday.

The rights expert listed concerns such as Israeli settlement expansion in the West Bank and the ongoing crisis in Gaza.

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"After years of creeping Israeli de facto annexation of large swathes of the West Bank through settlement expansion, the creation of closed military zones and other measures, Israel appears to be getting closer to enacting legislation that will formally annex parts of the West Bank. This would amount to a profound violation of international law, and the impact of ongoing settlement expansion on human rights must not be ignored," he said.

Mr. Lynk also reported that the situation continues to worsen in Gaza, which has been crippled by a blockade for more than a decade. Furthermore, an electricity crisis that began last June has yet to be resolved.

"Residents are deprived of their most basic rights, including the rights to health, to education, and most recently, in attempting to exercise their right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, they were deprived of the right to life," he said, referring to recent demonstrations along the border fence, in which more than 100 Palestinians were killed and thousands wounded.

The UN expert was also worried about how funding cuts will affect the work of

[UNRWA](#), the UN agency that assists Palestinian refugees.

Nearly one million people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory depend on it for health care, education and social services

[FROM THE FIELD: Weaving profits in Azerbaijan](#)

Artisans in Azerbaijan who practice the traditional art of carpet making are being provided with new business opportunities thanks to a project supported by the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)).

Weaving carpets is a skill that has been passed down through the generations and in the central Asian country is largely the work of women.

Although Azerbaijan is located on the ancient trading route known as the Silk Road, many artisans, especially those living in mountainous areas, are finding it increasingly difficult to get their carpets to market.



ABAD/Elkhan Ganiyev

Small and Medium sized enterprises, like the carpet weavers of Azerbaijan, account for 60-70 per cent of global employment, according to the UN.

As the International Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Day is marked across the world on June 27, the Azerbaijani authorities, with the support of UNDP, are boosting efforts to help artisans sell their goods.

For more on this ancient artistry:

<https://undp.shorthandstories.com/ancient-artistry/>

<http://www.un.org/en/events/smallbusinessday/>

Veteran public official from Portugal elected to lead UN migration agency

A lawyer and politician from Portugal, with an extensive career in public service, has been elected to head the United Nations migration agency.

António Manuel de Carvalho Ferreira Vitorino of Portugal was elected today by the member States of the [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#) to serve as the agency's Director General, beginning on 1 October 2018. Mr. Vitorino succeeds William Lacy Swing of the United States, who will have served two five-year terms as IOM chief.

Established in 1951, IOM had been an observer to the UN since 1992. Mr. Vitorino is the first Director General elected since the agency joined the UN system as a related organization in September 2016, part of the outcome from the [UN Summit](#) for Refugees and Migrants, which took place at UN Headquarters in New York.

With degrees in law and political science from the University of Lisbon, Mr. Vitorino has served in the Portuguese Government starting with his election to Parliament in 1980. His career in national politics included a term as judge on the Constitutional Court, in addition to appointments as Defence Minister and Deputy Prime Minister under António Guterres, the current UN Secretary-General.

From 1999 to 2004, Mr. Vitorino served as the European Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs, during which he participated in conversations that led to the drawing up of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and the Convention on the Future of Europe.

Outlining his priorities for the agency, Mr. Vitorino told UN News that he envisioned a "very decentralized, flexible organization, very close to the ground", capable of answering the needs of its member States on migration. Adoption of the [Global Compact](#) on migration was an upcoming challenge, he said, adding also that it was "absolutely necessary" to achieve "concrete action" on the linkages between migration and the [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

IOM is the leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration with over 10,000 staff serving in over 400 offices across more than 150 countries. It provides services and advice to Governments and migrants, such as humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced people.

The agency works with its partners in the international community to help ensure orderly and humane migration management and to promote international

cooperation and understanding on migration issues.

[Africa's Sahel must be a top priority for UN peacebuilding efforts, says commission](#)

The vast Sahel region of Africa, which is facing multiple threats and challenges – including destructive climate change, drought, terrorism and organized crime – must continue to be a top priority for United Nations peacebuilding efforts, the [Security Council](#) heard on Friday.

The mutually-supportive relationship with the UN [Peacebuilding Commission](#) was highlighted by Cho Tae-yul, its former chair, speaking first, saying that “the Council emphasized the importance” of its “convening role” with the Commission, to mobilize support in collaboration with UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). He said it was vital to continue advancing the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, known as UNISS.

The Sahel extends from Senegal in the east, to Sudan in the west, below the arid Sahara desert, including Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad.

Mr. Cho also noted other countries in Africa, where cooperation with the Council had proved effective, citing Burundi's socio-economic development, and the Commission's role helping to develop a peacebuilding plan for Liberia as the UN Mission there prepared to withdraw earlier this year.

He also noted that the Commission's convening role has also created space to engage with civil society organizations.

“Last year, in the discussions on Colombia, Solomon Islands and Sri Lanka, local civil society representatives contributed to the Commission's deliberations by sharing their views on what peacebuilding and sustaining peace, mean in practice,” he added.

Additionally, the former chair elaborated that the Commission has been increasingly taking a more regional view of its work, “as the challenges faced by certain countries are intertwined with that of other countries in the region, making it increasingly important to address the issues with a regional, cross-border approach.”

Taking the floor, the current chair, Ion Jinga, stressed that the Sahel remained a clear priority for the Commission moving forward, saying that it would be the exclusive focus of the Annual Session later in the year.

“The purpose of this important event will be to discuss ways of mobilizing deeper commitments and partnerships in support of efforts to build and sustain peace in the Sahel under the umbrella of the UN’s Sahel Strategy, he said.

He also underscored the importance of synchronizing its calendar with that of the Security Council, flagging that early preparation is “key” to provide strategic advice.

Established in 2005 as part of the UN reform, the Peacebuilding Commission advises both the [General Assembly](#) and the [Security Council](#). In 2016, twin resolutions were adopted on reviewing the peacebuilding architecture.

[EU migration deal welcomed by UN agencies](#)

UN humanitarian agencies on Friday broadly welcomed a freshly-inked deal on migration by European Union leaders which calls for more Member States to take responsibility within their borders for those in need of protection, amid a hardening stance by some since 2015.

In a joint statement, the UN Migration Agency ([IOM](#)) and the UN Refugee Agency ([UNCHR](#)) said that while the finer detail of the accord needs to be examined, they “stand ready to support a common approach”.

Echoing those sentiments, [UN Children’s Fund](#) ([UNICEF](#)) cautioned that more details were needed regarding the detention of minors and the processing of asylum claims for youngsters.

Speaking in Geneva, UNHCR spokesperson Charlie Yaxley noted that the development comes at a time when more than 1,000 people have died trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe for the fifth year in a row.

He noted the “disproportionate responsibility” that has been placed on “a small handful of States” by the long-running migration crisis – which peaked in 2015 – leading to search-and-rescue boats being denied the chance to disembark hundreds of individuals picked up at sea.

What was needed, the UNHCR spokesperson added, was “a unified approach that moves away from some of the more recent actions where we have seen States unilaterally seeking to harden or strengthen borders or restrict access to the asylum space”.

A crucial part of the EU deal reportedly involves the creation of additional “regional disembarkation points” and “disembarkation centres” for new

arrivals.

Children should not be detained based on their migration status, that is never in their best interest and deeply harmful – Sarah Crowe (UNICEF)

IOM's spokesperson Leonard Doyle said that "the majority" of these "should be in Europe", although these could be "potentially elsewhere", the agency said in a statement.

"We are not talking about external processing centres," Doyle added, noting a "specific agreement to share the responsibility and have it not just in the so-called frontline states: Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Greece, et cetera."

Currently, Libya is a major transit point for migrants and refugees heading to Europe, but the UN has repeatedly warned about rights violations linked to detention centres there – including slavery – and by human traffickers.

Responding to a question about Libya's role in the EU deal, the IOM spokesperson said that any centres operating outside the EU would be subject to "rigorous international standards and monitoring", adding that it was "quite a high bar".

UNHCR's Charlie Yaxley also noted said that the agency "wouldn't want to see an increase in the number of people being taken to Libya" amid a "general climate of lawlessness and insecurity" that still prevails there.

Asked about how youngsters would be treated under the terms of the deal, Sarah Crowe from the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) said that the "detention issue" needed clarifying.

"Children should not be detained based on their migration status, that is never in their best interest and deeply harmful", she said.

Ahead of the EU agreement, the UN agency maintained that a "well-managed and predictable European disembarkation mechanism could save children's lives", in addition to speeding up asylum procedures and improving access to legal aid.

Ms Crowe welcomed the potential for quicker asylum processing for children as a "good step". "Children really need to have a timely action, so that their claims and their future are swiftly decided," she added.

Approximately 40,000 refugees and migrants have arrived in Europe via maritime routes so far this year, according to IOM.

This is almost six times less than in 2016 over the same period, following a peak in arrivals in 2015, and approximately 30 per cent of those arriving on European shores needed international protection.