

Following El Salvador visit, UN right expert urges authorities to protect people from gangs

21 August 2017 – El Salvador is suffering a ‘hidden tragedy’ due to gang-related violence, an independent United Nations human rights expert today said, urging national authorities to intensify efforts to help and protect people affected by gangs.

“El Salvador is suffering a [hidden tragedy](#) of people who have had to leave their homes because of the high levels of gang-related violence,” said Special Rapporteur Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, who examines the human rights of internally displaced persons, after visiting violence-hit areas including Mejicanos in San Salvador.

“The problem is more significant and widespread than the Government is currently accepting,” she added. “The Government needs to acknowledge the full extent of internal displacement and act to tackle it and the gang violence which is driving it.”

The UN expert noted that gangs dominate people through threats, intimidation and “a culture of violence” that infects entire communities and every day interactions.

“Killings are commonplace and extortion is widespread. If people are under threat from gangs, they and their families leave their homes to seek safety elsewhere,” she said.

Young people, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to such violence, including also rape, as are members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex communities.

“Young people are particularly affected by violence,” said Ms. Jimenez-Damary who visited El Salvador at the invitation of the Government.

“One young woman told me: ‘It is a crime and dangerous to be a young person in El Salvador today’. This situation is due not only to the gang violence, but in some cases is the result of oppressive police and military operations.”

During her five-day visit, from 14 to 18 August, the expert met senior State and Government officials, United Nations and other humanitarian partners, representatives of civil society organizations, and people who had fled their homes.

Her full findings and recommendations will be included in a report to the Human Rights Council in June 2018.

UN Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-

based 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.