

Employers must address all aspects of gender-based violence in workplace – UN Women chief

16 March 2017 – Tolerating violence against women in the workplace will have a huge cost to employers, including lost productivity, legal expenses, high turnover, sick leaves and harm to corporate reputation, panellists today told a United Nations-hosted discussion, urging Governments and institutions alike to take responsibility for putting in place adequate standards and measures to prevent such practices.

“Violence against women has long-term consequences,” UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka said, explaining that children who watched their mothers and sisters beaten up at home could become perpetrators themselves or unhappy persons when they grow up.

She also said that women could die from violence and experience various forms of suffering, including physical and emotional damage, trauma, stigma, and limited access to the labour market. Employers will also have to pay the heavy price in the form of lost productivity, legal cost, high turnover, sick leaves and damaged reputation.

To prevent violence against women, institutions must take responsibility for addressing the issue at the macro-level by setting standards and putting in place preventive measures, she stressed.

The panel discussion, titled ‘Ending Violence against Women: Prevention and response in the world of work,’ was sponsored by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UN Women, formally known as the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

VIDEO: During the 61st Commission on the Status of Women, ILO expert Manuela Tomei, at a panel discussion on violence against women at work, highlights the importance of prevention, protection, and assistance to the victims, adding that the issue requires interventions and commitment from employers and workers.

The event was held on the sidelines of the 61st Commission on the Status of Women, known as the largest inter-governmental forum on women’s rights and gender equality. The theme this year is on women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work.

Manuela Tomei, Director of ILO’s Working Conditions and Equality Department, said that violence against women is a violation of human rights, a threat to women’s security and health, and a threat to women’s empowerment.

She said that a survey conducted by ILO and Gallop found that one of the top

three challenges women find in workplace is “abuse and harassment.”

The world of work goes beyond the physical workplace to include commutes, social events and home, she said, stressing the importance of addressing the issue through an integrated approach that includes prevention, protection and assistance to victims.

She said ILO is leading efforts to set a new global standard by 2019 or 2020 against violence and harassment in workplace.

Relief operations in western Mosul reaching ‘breaking point’ as civilians flee hunger, fighting – UN

16 March 2017 – The United Nations and its humanitarian partners in Iraq are scrambling to get emergency sites ready amidst a mass exodus from West Mosul, with nearly 700,000 civilians still living in the city where Iraqi forces are fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh), according to the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in the country.

“The number of people is higher than expected,” Lise Grande told journalist in New York via videoconference from Iraq. “If the pace accelerates further, it’s going to stretch us to the breaking point.”

She added that if 50,000 civilians flee in a single day, the current system would not work properly. The UN and its partners have already started to set up large warehouse size structures which will house the families as they await “the dignified support they deserve,” said Ms. Grande.

According to the latest figures she disclosed, there are still an estimated 650,000 to 680,000 civilians in Mosul’s Old City.

“We fear the civilians there might be trapped in an extremely difficult situation. Families that chose to stay are at risk, families that leave are also at risk,” said Ms. Grande, noting that ISIL is targeting people who try to flee what is expected to be a prolonged siege.

Meanwhile, people who stay are without food and water. No steady supplies have been able to reach the city since mid-November, Ms. Grande said.



Iraqi women and children displaced from the Mosul corridor line up to receive food in Debaga Displacement Camp in Erbil Governorate. Photo: UNICEF/Anmar

Families with resources are trying to trade what they can to eat even one meal a day, according to stories from people who were able to flee, while some people go for days without meals.

“Whether you stay or whether you go there are significant risks to the civilians,” Ms. Grande noted. “The greatest problem is water.”

When the military operation to oust terrorists from the area began on 17 October 2016, some 1.5 million civilians were living in Mosul. In the eastern part of the city, some 345,000 were displaced – of whom about 70,000 returned home because “conditions are ready and safe to do so,” journalists were told today.

The western part of Mosul is more densely populated, however. There is hope that civilian casualties will be limited because the Iraqi forces adopted a so-called “humanitarian concept of operations” which prohibits artillery strikes, requires civilians to remain in their homes, and provides humanitarian exit corridors wherever necessary.

Those who do flee are screened at the Hammam al Alil site, with the men separated from the women and children. Once interrogated and cleared, the families are reunited.

The senior UN official said the Organization and its humanitarian partners are working “around the clock” in support of the Iraqi Government to quickly get sites ready for the displaced civilians. Aid workers receive the site, set up tents and mattresses, clear and construct sanitation areas, and then transfer the areas to Iraqi military, who move in civilians on civilian buses.

Ms. Grande said that there are concerns about water and sanitation at the screening sites, and that the Government has asked for additional support to help it correct those conditions.

The UN and its partners are supplying food, water and other services to the sites, with more than 1.4 million people reached.

Coordination between the UN, its partners and the Government is good, but “complicated,” Ms. Grande acknowledged, noting that the UN is part of 19 daily coordination forums, which include a range from local to national officials.

Amid rise of ‘fake news,’ authorities should ensure truthful info reaches

public – UN, regional experts

10 March 2017 – Noting growing prevalence of “fake news” and propaganda in both legacy and social media, United Nations and key regional human rights experts have called on State actors to ensure that they disseminate reliable and trustworthy information, including about matters of public interest, such as the economy, public health, security and the environment.

“State actors should not make, sponsor, encourage or further disseminate statements which they know or reasonably should know to be false (disinformation) or which demonstrate a reckless disregard for verifiable information (propaganda),” read a Joint Declaration issued last week by the experts.

The Declaration was made by the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye, along with his counterparts from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Organization of American States (OAS), and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR).

“‘Fake news’ has emerged as a global topic of concern and there is a risk that efforts to counter it could lead to censorship, the suppression of critical thinking and other approaches contrary to human rights law. In this Joint Declaration, we identify general principles that should apply to any efforts to deal with these issues,” explained Mr. Kaye in a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The Declaration also identifies applicable human rights standards, encourages promotion of diversity and plurality in the media and emphasizes the particular roles played by digital intermediaries, as well as journalists and media outlets, and notes that they should consider including critical coverage of disinformation and propaganda as part of their news services in line with their watchdog role in society, particularly during elections and regarding debates on matters of public interest.

It also notes that States have a “positive obligation” to promote a free, independent and diverse communications environment, including media diversity, which is a key means of addressing disinformation and propaganda.

Further, the Declaration notes that all stakeholders – including intermediaries, media outlets, civil society and academia – should be supported in developing participatory and transparent initiatives for creating a better understanding of the impact of disinformation and propaganda on democracy, freedom of expression, journalism and civic space, as well as appropriate responses to these phenomena.

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.

Vigilance against Zika virus should 'remain high,' UN health agency says in new guidance

10 March 2017 – Although a decline in cases of Zika virus infection has been reported in some countries, there is still a need for heightened vigilance, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported today, issuing fresh guidance on the virus that has been linked to birth defects and neurological complications.

The new WHO data also lists countries where the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito is present, but where there is no sign of the Zika virus.

The insect is considered to be the main transmitter of the disease, which has been identified in more than 80 countries to date.

As such, WHO says that overall, the global risk assessment has not changed and “the [Zika virus] continues to spread geographically to areas where competent vectors are present.

The current data adds some 70 countries to the list of those considered to be ‘at-risk.’ These are countries where there’s no sign of the virus, but where the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito is present; it is considered to be the main carrier of the virus.

Speaking to *UN News* in Geneva, WHO technical Officer Monika Gehner said: “[The new guidance] helps us because now we can assess risks more precisely. Now, even if you do not have Zika virus transmission, but if you have the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, you are at risk of Zika virus transmission.”

She went on to stress that amid surging global travel, “a traveller who is infected with Zika virus may go to an area in a country and in fact mosquitos that are established there, and a mosquito can then transmit to other people and so on, so you have a cycle of transmission.”

The aim of this new WHO guidance is not to spread alarm. Instead, it’s a call to governments to do more to prevent the spread of Zika.

This requires greater surveillance of mosquito populations and research into suspected Zika infections, as well as better diagnostic techniques and updated health advice to at-risk communities and travellers.

Yemen: UNICEF vaccination campaign reaches 5 million children

9 March 2017 – Amid escalating violence, the United Nations humanitarian agency for children and its partners have completed the first round of a nationwide door-to-door vaccination campaign reaching 5 million children under the age of five with oral polio vaccine and vitamin A supplementation.

“In the last two years, more children have died from preventable diseases than those killed in the violence,” said Meritxell Relaño, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Representative in Yemen, in a press release. “This is why vaccination campaigns are so crucial to save the lives of Yemen’s children and to secure their future.”

In the first campaign of its kind this year, 40,000 vaccinators spread across Yemen to provide children with polio vaccine and vitamin A supplements. Mobile health teams have reached children wherever they are, including in places where access to health services has been cut off by the fighting. Health workers have shown heroic resolve in crossing frontlines, mountains and valleys to vaccinate children.

UNICEF says that the campaign comes at a critical time. Children in Yemen are living on the brink of famine and widespread malnutrition has drastically increased their risk of disease. More than half of Yemen’s medical facilities are no longer functional and the health system is on the verge of collapse.

UNICEF is scaling up its humanitarian response, including support for the treatment of 323,000 children against severe acute malnutrition, and the provision of basic healthcare services to one million children and over half a million pregnant and breastfeeding mothers.

“Children are dying because the conflict is preventing them from getting the health care and nutrition they urgently need. Their immune systems are weak from months of hunger,” said Dr. Relaño, calling on all parties to the conflict to find a political solution to this crisis.