

In special address, Chile's President spotlights efficacy of UN Human Rights Council

29 March 2017 – Addressing a special meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Chilean President today stressed the importance of multilateralism and the work of the 47-member body.

"I raise my voice in support of the efficacy of the United Nations and the Human Rights Council," said Michelle Bachelet, stressing the need for the UN to increase a regular budget allocation to the human rights agenda from the current three per cent.

"In my opinion, it is important to preserve the essence of the Council and to prevent it from being used for alternative purposes by any one State. We are all responsible for ensuring that the international system works as it is supposed to," she said.

"One fundamental element is the principle of adherence to international law, which includes respect for treaties and preventing the misuse of mechanisms or institutions designed to resolve differences," she added.

Chile has resisted dictatorship and has taken charge of the burdensome legacy of brutal human rights violations, she said.

Among other things, Chile has made a commitment to head an initiative against torture to prevent this crime from occurring and promote ratification of international instruments related to the issue, said Ms. Bachelet.

After having received numerous recommendations, Chile in November 2016 modified the Penal Code that defined the crime of torture according to three categories: physical, psychological and sexual violence.

The Government is also working on efforts to present a bill that would create a national preventative mechanism against torture within the national human rights institution.

In his video message, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, said that Chile has long been a strong human rights advocate at the international stage.

Chile has made great strides since the end of the dictatorship, but too many families still do not know the truth about what happened to their loved ones.

The right to truth for victims of gross human rights violations is inalienable. Any potential measure of pardon or early release for perpetrators must be carefully considered in light of human rights law, he said.

UN chief confirms the remains found in DRC those of the two missing experts

29 March 2017 – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has confirmed the deaths of Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalan, two members of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo who had been missing since 12 March, and vowed that the Organization would do everything possible to ensure that justice is done.

In a statement late yesterday, the UN chief expressed his deepest condolences to the families, loved ones and colleagues of Mr. Sharp (United States) and Ms. Catalan (Sweden) and said that the Organization will honour their memory by continuing to support the work of the Group of Experts and the whole UN family in the DRC.

“Michael and Zaida lost their lives seeking to understand the causes of conflict and insecurity in the DRC in order to help bring peace to the country and its people,” said Mr. Guterres.

He also called on the national authorities to continue to search for the four Congolese nationals who were accompanying the experts and said that the UN would cooperate with them in the continuing search.

Also in the statement, the Secretary General underscored that the UN will conduct an inquiry into the deaths.

“In case of criminal acts, the UN will do everything possible to ensure that justice is done,” he stressed.

Mr. Guterres also expressed hope that the cause of their deaths will be determined following a thorough examination and that the Congolese authorities will conduct a full investigation into the incident.

On Monday, peacekeepers from the UN Mission in the country (MONUSCO) discovered the two experts’ remains outside the city of Kananga in the DRC’s Kasai-Central province.

The Group of Experts on the DRC has been supporting the work of a Committee established by the Security Council to oversee sanctions measures, including arms embargo, travel ban and assets freeze imposed upon armed groups in the country.

DR Congo: UN and regional partners express concern about Kasai unrest

28 March 2017 – The United Nations and regional partner organizations today expressed deep concern about the situation in the central Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) where at least two United Nations experts disappeared two weeks ago and dozens of police officers were reportedly found dead.

The UN, the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU) and the International Organization of La Francophonie (IOF) today released a joint statement warning that the level of violence and reported human rights violations necessitate “an urgent response from the country’s political leaders.”

The statement calls on defence and security forces to exercise restraint in the efforts to restore order, and encourages the recently-initiated dialogue between the Government and the Kamuina Nsapu militia.

The UN, AU, EU and IOF also reiterated their call for a credible investigation into the human rights violation and assurances that the perpetrators are held to account.

In the joint statement, the organizations underscored their support for the 31 December 2016 political agreement.

The agreement – facilitated by Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo (CENCO) mediators, and reached in DRC’s capital, Kinshasa, on 31 December 2016 – represents a significant step towards a peacefully managed transition consistent with the democratic principles enshrined in the country’s Constitution.

Belarus: UN expert decries Government’s return to mass violence against peaceful protestors

28 March 2017 – A United Nations-appointed independent expert on the human rights situation in Belarus has expressed dismay over the Government’s return to the policy of violent mass repression against peaceful demonstrators, non-governmental organizations, journalists and political opponents, and is calling on the authorities there to stop harassment and violence.

“The events of the last weekend prove the pre-meditated character of the

repressive measures, and show an open return by the Government to its old policy of mass repression against citizens who exercise or dispense defense for human rights provided by the constitution and international treaties,” said the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Belarus, Miklós Haraszti, in a news release from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

He was referring to the crackdown on March 25 and 26 against dozens of human rights defenders, both local and international, that came after hundreds of peaceful demonstrators against the Government’s social policies had been violently attacked, arbitrarily arrested and deprived of their liberty, and then summarily fined or sentenced to prison from one to two weeks.

Since early February, demonstrators have been protesting against a decree under which a fine can be levied against anyone who does not work more than 183 days and is not declared officially unemployed.

Mr. Haraszti said he was “particularly shocked” by the raid against non-governmental organizations, such as Viasna, in their own offices, accompanied by physical violence, and by the disappearance for three days of political opponent Mikalai Statkevich, who was eventually released from the facility of the intelligence service.

“Two weeks ago, I, together with other human rights experts, had warned that further violations could be committed by the Government of President Lukashenko, known for its history of violent oppression of any form of dissenting views,” the expert said, expressing regret that his fears materialized.

“I will continue to be vigilant and call on the international community to press for opening to dialogue with human rights defenders and those who promote peaceful and democratic change in Belarus,” Mr. Haraszti said.

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.

Protecting human rights essential in promoting sustainable supply chains – UN experts

28 March 2017 – The only way to achieve socially sustainable supply chains is if human rights are protected and respected, a group of UN experts said today in an open letter addressed to G20 leaders currently meeting in Geneva.

Despite contributing positively to social and economic development worldwide, links between global supply chains and negative human rights impacts persist, the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights said.

Michael Addo, the current head of the Working Group said: "All too often, global supply chains are associated with human rights violations and abuses such as unsafe working conditions, child and forced labour, livelihoods destroyed by toxic industrial wastes, land seizures without compensation, and persecution of those who speak up against such abuse."

Millions of lives are affected by the actions of companies in global supply chains and as such, governments and companies have enormous potential to promote sustainable development and uphold human rights, as long as they work together to do so, the working group noted.

The letter calls on governments to "lead by example," in their roles as economic actors in ensuring that state-owned or controlled business respect human rights.

G20 members are meeting to prepare a ministerial declaration for more inclusive global economic growth.

"The G20 represents 85 percent of global economic output, 75 percent of world trade, and two-thirds of the world's population, and includes both major 'developed' and 'emerging' economies," Mr. Addo noted.

"G20 leaders are therefore uniquely placed to address the human rights risks and impacts associated with global supply chains. They also have a unique responsibility to demonstrate leadership on this critical issue for our time," he said.

The UN Working Group also said that any commitments to promoting sustainable supply chains must be founded on the globally-agreed UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

The Working Group on human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises was established by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2011. Along with current Chair Mr. Addo, its members are: Surya Deva, Dante Pesce, Anita Ramasastry and Pavel Sulyandziga.

The Working Group reports to the UN Human Rights Council and to the General Assembly. Its experts Special Procedures are independent and are not UN staff. They are also independent from any government or organization. They serve in their individual capacity and do not receive a salary for their work.