

# UN urges Sri Lanka not to miss opportunity to advance justice and reconciliation

3 March 2017 – The slow pace of transitional justice in Sri Lanka and the lack of a comprehensive strategy to address accountability for past crimes risk derailing the momentum towards lasting peace, reconciliation and stability, a United Nations report said today.

Seventeen months ago, when we published a detailed report on the grave human rights violations committed during the conflict in Sri Lanka, I urged the Government and all the people of Sri Lanka to ensure that this historic opportunity for truly fundamental change should not be squandered, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said in a news release on the report.

He noted that in many ways, Sri Lanka appears to be turning a corner on the promotion and protection of human rights, but he stressed that hard-won gains could prove illusory if they are not tethered to a comprehensive, robust strategy.

This critical opportunity in Sri Lankan history cannot be missed, he said, urging the Government and people of Sri Lanka once again to prioritize justice alongside reconciliation to ensure that the horrors of the past are firmly dealt with, never to recur.

The report, issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), assesses progress made in tackling the legacy of grave violations in Sri Lanka between 2002 and 2011 and acknowledges that there have been positive advances on human rights and constitutional reform.

However, the report notes that the structures set up and measures taken until now have been inadequate, lacked coordination and a sense of urgency.

Party politics, including the balancing of power between the different constituencies of the coalition in the run-up to constitutional reforms, have contributed to a reluctance to address difficult issues regarding accountability or to clearly articulate a unified position by all parts of Government, the report states.

The report makes a number of concrete recommendations, including calling on the Government to embrace the report of the Consultation Task Force, to formulate a communications campaign to inform the public about details of the reconciliation agenda, to invite the UN human rights office to establish a presence in Sri Lanka, to give the highest priority to the restitution of all private land that has been occupied by the military, and to adopt legislation establishing a hybrid court.

The report also highlights a number of serious human rights violations that are reportedly continuing to occur in Sri Lanka, including the harassment or surveillance of human rights defenders and victims of violations, police abuse and excessive use of force, and the use of torture.

The High Commissioner will present the report to the Human Rights Council on 22 March in Geneva.

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## [UN expert urges greater protection of people with albinism from witch doctors](#)

3 March 2017 – With hundreds of attacks in the last six years on people with albinism, a United Nations independent expert is calling for additional oversight of traditional healers who use body parts in witchcraft rituals and so-called medicines.

Presenting a report to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by people with albinism, Ikponwosa Ero, said the demand for the body parts of people with albinism for the purposes of witchcraft rituals, or in traditional medicine known as *muti* or *juju*, has led to the existence of a clandestine market for body parts operating at regional, national and international levels.

The issue is further complicated by the lack of effective oversight over the practice of traditional healers, the secrecy that often surrounds witchcraft rituals and the absence of clear national policies on the issue, Ms. Ero said.

She called for a twin-track approach that would urgently address the trafficking of body parts from people with albinism, while also demystifying the misbeliefs about albinism.

At least 600 attacks and violations of rights of people with albinism have been reported in 27 countries, the majority in the past six years, according to information from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Ms. Ero is the first Independent Expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council to monitor, report and advise on the situation of those worldwide who have albinism.

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.

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## [UN agencies supporting Kenyans in drought-hit areas](#)

3 March 2017 – Some 2.7 million people in parts of Kenya are in urgent need of water and sanitation following the onset of a severe drought, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) today announced, noting the UN’s support for what the Government is calling a national disaster.

UNICEF is working in Kenya to support the Government’s efforts, alongside the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Food Programme (WFP), and other partners, according to a press release.

“Our efforts should not only alleviate the current suffering brought about by this emergency, but should also aim to build the resilience of families and the capacity of local governments to deal with future droughts and other calamities,” the Representative of UNICEF in Kenya, Werner Schultink said.

In addition to the need for water and sanitation, some 1.1 million children are food insecure, the UN agency said.

UN efforts of support include dispatching 12,000 cartons of ready to use therapeutic foods for the severely-malnourished children, for example.

The President of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, recently declared the drought a national disaster and has called for international support.

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## [Hunger persists in chronic conflict zones despite strong global harvests – UN](#)

2 March 2017 – Despite robust food supply conditions, droughts are worsening food security across swathes of East Africa, and access to food has been dramatically reduced in areas suffering civil conflicts, a new United Nations report has found.

"This is an unprecedented situation. Never before have we been faced with four threats of famine in multiple countries simultaneously," Kostas Stamoulis, the Assistant Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), said in a news release issued today, noting that famine has been formally declared in South Sudan, and the food security situation is of grave concern in northern Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen.

According to the new edition of FAO's Crop Prospects and Food Situation report, some 37 countries require external assistance for food, 28 of them in Africa as a result of lingering effects of last year's El Niño-triggered droughts on harvests in 2016.

In South Sudan, 100,000 people were facing famine in Leer and Mayendit Counties, part of former Unity state. Overall, about 4.9 million people across the country were classified as facing crisis, emergency or famine.

In Yemen, 17 million people, or two-thirds of the population, are estimated to be food insecure. The report notes that "the risk of famine declaration in the country is very high."

In northern Nigeria, 8.1 million people are facing acute food insecurity conditions, and in Somalia, an estimated 2.9 million people have been severely food insecure from six months ago.

Conflicts and civil unrest in Afghanistan, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Myanmar and Syria are also exacerbating food insecurity conditions for millions of people as well as affecting nearby countries hosting refugees.

#### ***Global food supply conditions robust***

The report says, however, global food supply conditions are robust.



Various types of rice at a market in Hissar, Tajikistan. Photo: FAO/Nozim Kalandarov

Cereal production made quite strong gains in the world overall in 2016, with a record recovery in Central America, and larger cereal crops in Asia, Europe and North America.

Prospects are favourable for the 2017 maize crop in Brazil and Argentina and the outlook is generally positive for coarse grains throughout the Southern Hemisphere. Prospects for rice are mixed, but it is still too early to make firm predictions for many of the world's major crops.

Maize harvests in Southern Africa, slashed by El Niño, are forecast to recover this year, with South Africa's output expected to increase by more than 50 per cent from 2016.

Although FAO's first global wheat production forecast for 2017 points to a

1.8 per cent decline from last year's record level, that is due mostly to a projected 20 per cent output drop in the United States.

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## [UN-backed narcotics control body calls for more policies to address drug dependence among women](#)

2 March 2017 – Citing a significant rise over the past year in the number of women dying from drug overdoses globally, the independent expert body which monitors Governments' compliance with the United Nations international drug control treaties is today calling for the implementation of gender-sensitive drug policies and programmes.

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) said that women and girls comprise one-third of global drug users yet are only one-fifth of those receiving treatment, as significant systemic, structural, social, cultural and personal barriers affect women's ability to access substance abuse treatment..

Further, they are also more likely to be prescribed narcotics and anti-anxiety medication than men, and are thus more likely to abuse these medications.

For example, Germany and Serbia have reported that fatal overdoses from prescription drugs are more frequent among women. Additionally, countries such as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have seen larger increases in overdoses, of all substances, among women than among men.

These are among the key findings in the 2016 Annual Report launched today by the INCB. It stresses that Governments should prioritize providing health care for drug-dependent women, in addition to more funding and coordination to prevent and treat drug abuse among women.

"We want to change perceptions and remind people, particularly policymakers, of the importance of protecting the rights of women who use drugs or who have committed drug-related offences and the rights of their families," said the organization's President, Werner Sipp, in a news release.

The report also highlights the importance of targeting prevention programmes to specific populations, such as prisoners, pregnant women, people living with HIV/AIDS, and sex workers.

It notes that women prisoners and sex workers are at "particular risk" of drug use.

Countries are also encouraged to seek alternatives to imprisonment for drug-related offences, such as treatment, rehabilitation and social integration.

The INCB also repeated its longstanding call for countries to abolish the death penalty for drug-related offences.

Among its other observations, the Board noted with "great concern" recent reports in some countries of the targeting of individuals suspected of involvement in drug-related activity, including drug use, who have been subjected to violent acts of reprisal and murder at the hands of law enforcement personnel and members of the civilian population.

In some instances, those acts have been committed with the expressed or tacit approval, or even encouragement, of political forces and, in many cases, have gone unpunished, said the Board, emphasizing that it condemned such practices, including the extrajudicial targeting of persons suspected of drug use, "in the strongest possible terms," and denounced them as a "serious violation of human rights [...] and an affront to the most basic standards of human dignity."