UNDP assistant administrator begins Jordan visit

The UN assistant secretary general, UNDP assistant administrator and regional director for Arab States, Mourad Wahba, began a visit Jordan on Wednesday, according to a UNDP statement.

During the visit, Wahba is meeting with government officials, UNDP development partners and UNDP senior management and staff members, both at the UNDP Bureau for Arab States Regional Hub and at the UNDP Country Office.

Discussions during the visit focus on how best to further strengthen the partnership between the UNDP and Jordan, and to reiterate the UNDP’s commitment to continue supporting development efforts in the Kingdom, the statement said. The visit is part of a regional tour that includes Egypt and Sudan.

WFP welcomes $15m aid from Japan

The WFP has welcomed a contribution of more than $15 million from the Japanese government that will support almost 6 million people affected by the ongoing crisis inside Syria and neighbouring countries, according to a statement released by the UN agency on Sunday.

This contribution will enable the WFP to continue providing vital food assistance to the most vulnerable families inside Syria and to Syrians taking refuge in neighbouring countries. A portion will also be used to support vulnerable Jordanians who have been impacted by the crisis, the statement said.

“UNICEF”: studying the establishment of a school in “Zaatari” to address the overcrowded schools challenge
Published on 6 March 2017 in Al Ghad newspaper in Arabic: http://bit.ly/2maaX2S

UNICEF is currently considering the establishment of an educational complex in Zaatari refugee camp in Mafraq governorate’s sixth sector, thus contributing to the positive expansion of the school building according to the communications and media specialist in UNICEF, Samir Badran.

Badran clarified that UNICEF is considering this project in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, indicating that the school will be located in one of the districts that lacks school buildings in Zaatari camp. He also pointed out that UNICEF through its specialized team in educational systems is studying the implementation of a large project for the maintenance of one of the schools in Zaatari which will help in providing a good educational environment.

Badran said that the new school building will be allocated for 4th and 5th graders due to the fact that these two grades are those suffering most from overcrowded classes, indicating that the new school structure will reduce the number of students in these two classes which currently reaches up to 40 to 50 students in each class. He also pointed out that UNICEF is implementing this project in coordination with the Ministry of Education to expand the school buildings in Zaatari camp which might help in preventing children from dropping out. He also clarified that the school expansion aims at enhancing the quality of education in the different sectors.

It is said that there are 22 thousand Syrian children in the Zaatari schools which are organized in 12 educational complexes that includes 28 schools
Working to promote gender equality, women’s empowerment
Published on 6 March 2017 in the Jordan Times: http://bit.ly/2mZO3Lo

Women’s rights are human rights. But in these troubled times, as our world becomes more unpredictable and chaotic, the rights of women and girls are being reduced, restricted and reversed.

Empowering women and girls is the only way to protect their rights and make sure they can realise their full potential. Historic imbalances in power relations between men and women, exacerbated by growing inequalities within and between societies and countries, are leading to greater discrimination against women and girls.

Around the world, tradition, cultural values and religion are being misused to curtail women’s rights, to entrench sexism and defend misogynistic practices. Women’s legal rights, which have never been equal to men’s on any continent, are being eroded further. Women’s rights over their own bodies are questioned and undermined. Women are routinely targeted for intimidation and harassment in cyberspace and in real life. In the worst cases, extremists and terrorists build their ideologies around the subjugation of women and girls and single them out for sexual and gender-based violence, forced marriage and virtual enslavement.

Despite some improvements, leadership positions across the board are still held by men, and the economic gender gap is widening, thanks to outdated attitudes and entrenched male chauvinism.

We must change this, by empowering women at all levels, enabling their voices to be heard and giving them control over their own lives and over the future of our world.

Denying the rights of women and girls is not only wrong in itself; it has a serious social and economic impact that holds us all back.

Gender equality has a transformative effect that is essential to fully functioning communities, societies and economies. Women’s access to education and health services has benefits for their families and communities that extend to future generations.

An extra year in school can add up to 25 per cent to a girl’s future income. When women participate fully in the labour force, it creates opportunities and generates growth. Closing the gender gap in employment could add $12 trillion to the global GDP by 2025. Increasing the proportion of women in public institutions makes them more representative, increases innovation, improves decision making and benefits whole societies.

Gender equality is central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the global plan agreed by leaders of all countries to meet the challenges we face. Sustainable Development Goal 5 calls specifically for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and this is central to the achievement of all the 17 SDGs.

I am committed to increasing women’s participation in our peace and security work. Women negotiators increase the chances of sustainable peace, and women peacekeepers decrease the chances of sexual exploitation and abuse. Within the UN, I am establishing a clear roadmap with benchmarks to achieve gender parity across the system, so that our organisation truly represents the people we serve.

Previous targets have not been met. Now we must move from ambition to action. On International Women’s Day, let us all pledge to do everything we can to overcome entrenched prejudice, support engagement and activism, and promote gender equality and women’s empowerment.

The writer is UN secretary-general. The article was made available to The Jordan Times by the UN office in Amman.
Media literacy project gets ‘likes’ from young people
Published on 6 March 2017 in the Jordan Times: http://bit.ly/2n9xVpZ

An EU-funded media literacy project is equipping school students with the skills needed to access and analyse media content in a way that improves their ability to judge media messages.

As part of the “Support to Media in Jordan” project, implemented by UNESCO, eight schools have been hosting “Media and Information Literacy [MIL] clubs”, which serve as platforms for extracurricular activities related to media.

The clubs focus on digital media literacy, visual media creation, authenticity of news, ethical reporting, and online privacy and security, among other topics.

Enthusiastic and engaged students from Bint Adi Comprehensive Public School for Girls in Amman on Monday presented briefings on skills learned through the club.

“I learnt how to judge the content of a news item or a photo before believing it to be true. I used to be easily deceived, but now I have the tools to verify the information I get,” one of the students told the audience during a visit to the school organised by UNSECO, the Jordan Media Institute (JMI) and the Jordan Education Initiative.

The abilities to protect her cyber presence and safely navigate the Internet were the main lessons another student said she learnt from the club.

The seventh, eighth and ninth graders agreed that the club’s teachers, who received training from the JMI, were able to teach them to respect others’ opinions and be more careful about what they share on social media.

“We want to produce a generation who are aware, critical thinkers. We live in an era characterised by a deluge of information, and we want our students to differentiate between facts and rumours by equipping them to be predisposed to logic and objectivity,” Fatima Amouri, one of the club’s teachers, said.

In the presence of JMI Dean Basim Tweissi, Education Minister Omar Razzaz underlined the importance of the initiative, stressing that media is part of the country’s sovereignty and it is therefore necessary for the young generation to be media literate.

Under the project, UNESCO has partnered with the JMI in three main areas — policy advice to key educational policy makers to further develop MIL in Jordan, supporting teacher training to include MIL in the curriculum and supporting the Ministry of Education to introduce MIL for grades 7 to 9 through the creation of pilot MIL clubs, according to organisers.

Since late 2016, the MIL clubs have been regularly operating once a week, providing the necessary skills to ethically consume and produce media content.

“We are delighted to offer an opportunity to very senior personalities to witness firsthand the concrete results of this initiative and to realise its impact,” said UNESCO Representative to Jordan Costanza Farina.

“With the younger generation spending approximately six hours a day on social media, MIL can empower them in free self-expression, critical thinking, creativity and innovation, and can provide tools to guard young people against issues such as hate speech, extremism and violence,” she added.
Jordan marks women’s day with advancing struggle for gender equality

Published on 7 March 2017 in the Jordan Times: http://bit.ly/2mhC23T

Women’s rights activists in Jordan are marking International Women’s Day by renewing their calls to increase women’s political participation and ensure gender equality in all spheres.

The Kingdom is celebrating International Women’s Day, marked on March 8, with the slogan: “Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030”.

“We are exerting our efforts to reach the goal of 50-50 slogan of this year’s women’s day, and hopefully, by the year 2030, we will achieve similar gains to boost women’s participation in all fields,” said Laila Naffa, the programme director of the Arab Women Organisation. Naffa also praised the recent recommendations by the Royal Committee for Developing the Judiciary and Enhancing the Rule of Law.

The Royal committee recommended the scrapping of the controversial Article 308 of the Penal Code, which allows a sexual assault perpetrator to escape punishment if he marries his victim.

Among the Royal committee’s recommendations was an amendment, long-awaited by women activists, preventing a reduction in punishment if a woman was killed for reasons related to so-called “family honour”. “These recommendations are very important because they work to ensure women’s safety and security in Jordan, and we will work hard to lobby our parliamentarians and government to adopt these recommendations,” Naffa told The Jordan Times on Tuesday.

Former deputy and politician Abla Abu Olbeh said there have been some positive changes to legislation in favour of women. However, Abu Olbeh who is the secretary general of the Jordanian Democratic People’s Party, told The Jordan Times that “not all women are benefitting from the new changes”. “Poor and marginalised women do not benefit from new changes because either they do not know about them or they do not demand any of their rights, and this is one of the important segments that needs to be empowered to be able to participate equally in political life and in fighting extremist ideologies,” she added.

The Sisterhood is Global Institute (SIGI) advocacy group also issued a statement on this occasion, welcoming the Royal committee’s recommendations and calling for more changes to some of the articles in the Penal Code that were not tackled by the Royal committee.

One of the demands by SIGI was drafting a clear law that stipulates punishment for harassment at the workplace and in public.

The majority of women’s groups and organisations said one important amendment that is lacking was related to Article 6 of the Constitution and the inclusion of the word “sex”. The provision stipulates that Jordanians are equal before the law, regardless of their ethnicity, language or religion. Meanwhile, Basil Tarawneh, the government’s coordinator on human rights, issued a statement to mark the occasion, stressing the government’s commitment to empowering women and ensuring equal rights as stipulated in the Constitution and international conventions. He highlighted the achievements in 2016, saying that the government worked to ensure better representation for women in the political sphere by introducing quotas. Turning to the judiciary, Tarawneh said the number of female judges increased to reach 178 in 2016 and this is a “marked increase” since 2010, when only 60 female judges were on the bench.
The Social Security Corporation (SSC) also issued a statement, announcing a 2 per cent increase of active female subscribers.

The SSC stressed that the corporation’s law does not discriminate between men and women in terms of pension or other services. It expressed concern regarding the low participation of women in the private sector, saying they constitute only 13.2 per cent although the number of educated women is on the rise. “This is reflecting negatively on women who benefit from the SSC. Currently the number of women subscribers in the SSC is only 27 per cent,” the SSC said in its statement.

The League of Jordanian Democratic Women (Rand) also issued a statement, renewing demands to boost the status and role of Jordanian women and empower them to ensure they have their social, economic and cultural rights, in addition to their participation in public life and political decision making.

Marking the occasion, the Jordan Society for Human Rights highlighted the positive and negative developments regarding women’s rights. On the positive side, the society highlighted women’s representation in the Lower House and the recommendations of the Royal committee. However, the society said there has been an increase in “honour crimes” from 17 in 2015 to 26 in 2016. On the occasion, UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka called for “constructing a different world of work for women”. She said that worldwide, women have to spend too much time on household responsibilities, typically double the amount of time spent by men.

Statistics

The Department of Statistics (DoS) on Tuesday issued new figures to mark the occasion, stating that Jordan’s female population in 2016 stood at 4.6 million or 47 per cent, which indicates that for every 100 females there are 113 males. The Kingdom’s total population stands at around 9.5 million, according to DoS’ 2015 census.

DoS said females under the age of 15 comprise 35.6 per cent of all women, and females aged between 15 and 64 comprise 60.6 per cent, while women over 65 comprise only 3.9 per cent.

Statistics showed that illiteracy among females aged 15 years reached 10 per cent in 2016.

As for higher education, figures revealed that women enrolled in Jordanian universities comprised 51.8 per cent in 2015, showing that 55.3 per cent of females tend to study majors in the humanities compared to 47.9 per cent in scientific courses.

Over half of higher education graduates (55 per cent) are women, DoS said, adding that 27 per cent of teaching cadres at universities are women.

Regarding the job market, the survey for 2016 revealed weak participation by Jordanian women, DoS said in the report, noting that women’s economic participation stood at 13.2 per cent.

The majority of women are employees — 96.5 per cent — while the ratio of female business owners who do not work for other companies or institutions stood at 3.1 per cent out of all employed women, the report said.

The ratio of women who are members of professional associations stood at 34.5 per cent, according to 2015 statistics, while only 8 per cent are in professional association councils.

As for diplomatic and judicial affairs, 2015 figures show that one out of every five members in the diplomatic and judicial sectors is female and that one out of every three political party members is female.

In terms of owning property, 2016 data showed that 16.2 per cent of females in Jordan own land compared to 49.8 per cent of males, with their plots comprising 10.1 per cent of the total area while men own 68.4 per cent of the total.
Women’s Film Week opens today
Published on 7 March 2017 in the Jordan Times: http://bit.ly/2lWGBvP

The fifth edition of the Women’s Film Week opens on Wednesday on the occasion of the International Women’s Day, featuring seven movies from seven countries, according to the Royal Film Commission (RFC).

The seven movies will be screened at the Rainbow Theatre on Jabal Amman’s Rainbow Street, with a special focus on women and women’s empowerment in sports, politics and other fields, Marian Nakho, the RFC media and communication coordinator, said.

“UN Women has arranged for the screening of these movies in Amman in coordination with several embassies. These movies — including documentary or narrative features — have either won awards or participated in global film festivals,” she told The Jordan Times on Tuesday.

Nakho noted that the movies selected to be screened are not only women-centred, but are also directed by women. “The RFC is a responsible partner in any cinematic event especially one with a theme like this,” the RFC official added.

The four-day event will commence with the screening of “Eufrosina’s Revolution”. The documentary portrays the personal journey and social awakening of Eufrosina Cruz Mendoza, a young indigenous woman from Mexico fighting gender inequality, according to an RFC statement.

Eufrosina was denied the right to be mayor of her community only because she was a woman; this led her to fight for gender equality in indigenous communities, challenging the political leaders in the area, the statement said.

The film week wraps up on Saturday with a screening of the Spanish narrative feature “The Milk of Sorrow” and the Japanese documentary “Noriben - The Recipe for Fortune”.

More information on the event is available on the RFC’s website via the link (http://www.film.jo/Photos/Files/7637f869-79c5-4a42-b4ee-78a6291f8f3a.pdf).

Women coalition launched to lobby for implementation of 5th Sustainable Development Goal

Women groups and organisations on Tuesday announced the formation of a national coalition to follow up with the government on the Fifth Goal of the Sustainable Development Global Agenda (SGDA) 2030, which tackles gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The announcement was made during a workshop organised by the Arab Women Organisation (AWO) on “Rural Women, Leadership and Climate Change” and in celebration of the International Women’s Day, marked on March 8, attended by over 150 women representing various governorates in Jordan.

The Fifth Goal calls for the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women, human trafficking, sexual abuse, and early and forced marriage.
It also demands the recognition of women’s work in the household and in caring for children, as a step towards ensuring equal responsibility and work in the household.

Another point calls for ensuring gender equality in decision-making positions, as well as in the political, social and public spheres, while ensuring reproductive health services as stipulated in international conventions.

AWO President Randa Qsous called on the representatives of 95 women organisations that attended the event to unite women’s voices to work on the Fifth Goal because “it will help change the social culture that embraces extremism and supports security”.

“It is important to be careful not to support calls for security at the expense of human rights, because this would be a dangerous call,” Qsous said.

Amer Hiasat, who deputised for Social Development Minister Wajih Azaizeh at the meeting, praised the coalition launched on Tuesday saying it is “important to come up with concrete recommendations to ensure the application of the Fifth Goal of the SGDA”.

Hiasat added that the ministry is already applying the agenda of the Fifth Goal by fighting poverty, supporting economic empowerment for women and youth, providing reproductive health services, promoting human rights principles and supporting civil coalitions.

Also addressing the gathering was Salma Nims, the secretary general of the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW), who emphasised the importance of civil society in exerting pressure on the government to ensure gender equality on all levels.

“The coalition that you launched today complements the work of the JNCW to empower women and ensure sustainable development. We are ready to support you and invite you to be with us on the same table when we meet with government officials to discuss our demands,” Nims stressed.

Also during the workshop, Tahani Sadi from the AWO presented the local NGO’s shadow report that was presented before the UN committee of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, in its 66th session in Geneva in February.

The shadow report tackled several aspects, Sadi told the gathering, including women’s economic participation and the need to ensure equal pay and participation in the labour market, in addition to issues related to violence against women.

Another point in the report, according to Sadi, focused on the rights of Palestinian women refugees from Syria “who are forced to live in the Cyber City facility for refugees” in the northern region, “where their freedom is restricted and access to services is denied”.

Other points listed in the report focused on the Personal Status Law and the issues of male guardianship over women and the Nationality Law and the “privileges provided to children of Jordanian women married to non-Jordanians”, she added.

The workshop was supported by UN Women, the government of Japan, and the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development.
The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development commits UN member states to “leave no one behind”. One crucial component of that commitment — encompassed in the International Labour Organisation’s (ILO) own agenda — is decent work for all.

At a time when worker frustration and disillusionment is being expressed in elections across the world, this goal could not be more important.

Nowadays, the expectation that each generation will be better off than the previous one, both socially and economically, is no longer automatic.

For many, downwards mobility has become the new normal.

Little wonder, then, that long-simmering frustration with the way globalisation has been handled and resentment at the unfair distribution of its gains have fuelled the political backlash sweeping the world of late.

This disillusionment arises, at least partly, from people’s own experience of work, whether exclusion from the labour market, poor working conditions or low wages.

In many parts of the world, including some European countries, unemployment has been persistently high in recent years.

But even having a job is no guarantee of financial security: many employed people know that their jobs are vulnerable, and there has been inadequate progress in job quality, even in countries where aggregate economic indicators are improving.

According to the ILO’s global wage report, “Wage Inequality in the Workplace”, published last month, global wage growth has decelerated since 2012, from 2.5 per cent per year to 1.7 per cent in 2015 — its lowest level in four years. Remove China, which experienced particularly rapid wage growth, and annual growth in global wages dropped from 1.6 per cent to a mere 0.9 per cent.

Workers’ disillusionment is deepened by the knowledge that, as their average wages grow slowly or stagnate, the very wealthy are growing significantly wealthier.

As the ILO’s report shows, while wages have climbed gradually across almost the entire income distribution in most countries, they have risen sharply for the top 10 per cent, and even more for the top 1 per cent of employees.

In Europe, the highest-paid 10 per cent of employees account for, on average, 25.5 per cent of total wages, while the lowest-paid 50 per cent get just 29.1 per cent.

The share of earnings taken by the top 10 per cent is even higher in some emerging economies, such as Brazil (35 per cent), India (42.7 per cent), and South Africa (49.2 per cent).

In Europe, the top 1 per cent earn about 90 euros ($95) per hour — eight times more than median-wage earners, and 22 times the average wage of the bottom 10 per cent.

We are now faced with the twin challenges of improving the lot of those at the lower end of the wage distribution, while creating enough new high-quality jobs for the tens of millions of new labour-market entrants each year.

With the global economy having yet to recover fully from the global economic crisis that began a decade ago, meeting these challenges will be no easy feat.

Indeed, it is likely that labour-force growth will continue to outstrip job creation.
That is why the ILO’s “World Employment and Social Outlook — Trends 2017” projects that just over 201 million people worldwide will be unemployed this year, with another 2.7 joining their ranks in 2018.

The world needs economic growth that is more sustainable, equitable, and job-rich.

The key to success will be strong and relevant labour-market institutions, which rely on and advance internationally accepted principles and rights for workers.

Minimum wages and collective bargaining can play an important role here.

One remarkable trend of the last few years has been the adoption or increase of minimum wages by countries hoping to mitigate inequality, with Mexico being the most recent example. And the trend is set to continue: South Africa, for one, is also considering adopting a national minimum wage.

This is good news.

Recent evidence, including by the Minimum Wage Commission in Germany, shows that well-designed minimum wages — which meet the needs of workers and their families, while also accounting for economic conditions — can make a real difference at the lower end of the income distribution, without significantly harming employment.

Action can also be taken at the international level, by implementing support systems to help advance key goals relating to decent work and economic inclusiveness.

That is why the ILO and the World Bank have launched a Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection, which aims to ensure that social safety nets — including pensions and parental, disability and child benefits — are made available to all people, covering the hundreds of millions worldwide who are currently unprotected.

Expanding access to decent work opportunities is the most effective way to increase labour-market participation, lift people out of poverty, reduce inequality and drive economic growth.

It should be at the centre of policymaking. The alternative is a dog-eat-dog world in which too many will feel left out.

One need look no further than today’s headlines to see the instability and insecurity that can result — and has resulted — from this approach.

The writer is director general of the International Labour Organisation. ©Project Syndicate, 2017. www.project-syndicate.org

Cabinet approves memo with UN on container control
Published on 8 March 2017 in the Jordan Times: http://bit.ly/2n2oT1Y

The Cabinet on Wednesday approved a memorandum of understanding to be signed with the UN on the Container Control Programme (CCP) by creating a special unit for this purpose at various ports, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

The decision delegates the authority to the Jordan Customs Department (JCD) director general to sign the memo on behalf of the government. CCP aims to combat smuggling in containers by creating a joint unit among the JCD, the Anti-Narcotics Department, the Preventive Security Department and the General Intelligence Department.
JNCW marks women’s day, silver jubilee


The Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) on Wednesday celebrated International Women’s Day, which coincided this year with the silver jubilee of the commission.

On the occasion, a conference was held to discuss Jordanian women’s economic participation and challenges, which still hinder their engagement in the labour market.

“Today, at this remarkable stage in the progress of Jordanian women, we look back 25 years to the establishment of the Jordanian National Commission for Women, which has witnessed both success and struggle,” said HRH Princess Basma, the UN Women goodwill ambassador.

Citing achievements realised by the commission to improve the overall situation of women throughout the years, the princess noted that the JNCW, along with its partners from across different sectors, have “focused tirelessly on gender mainstreaming in government development programmes”.

“Efforts are being exerted on the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to achieve equality and empowerment for women and girls, and to ensure that the National Strategy for Women remains an integral part of the government’s plans,” added the princess, who chairs the JNCW.

With the conference titled “Women’s Economic Participation in the Changing World of Work”, Princess Basma highlighted that its theme reflected a difficult economic situation in Jordan and throughout the region.

In a country where unemployment among women stands at 24.5 per cent, one of the highest rates in the region, participants at the one-day conference discussed restrictions that hinder women from work.

During the event, the JNCW announced that 2018 will be a national year to empower women economically.

Commission Secretary General Salma Nims underlined the importance of joint efforts to empower women and increase their participation in all areas.

Ziad Sheikh, UN Women’s representative in Jordan, noted that huge numbers of Jordanian women work in the informal labour market, which means that they are often working without social security or legal protection and getting lower wages than their male counterparts.

“This also means that they are at greater risk of harassment and discrimination at the workplace,” he said.

The Kingdom is celebrating International Women’s Day, marked on March 8, with the slogan: “Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030”.
Jordan is the second largest refugee-hosting country in the world when compared to the size of its population, according to a new report by the United Nations Higher Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

The UNHCR’s Mid-Year Trends 2016 report, posted on its website, indicted that Lebanon was the first refugee-hosting country in the world when compared to the size of its population and Turkey was in the 3rd place, while Chad was in the 4th place.

According to the report, out of 1,000 per capita of the population in Jordan 89 are refugees.

Commenting on the report, Government Spokesperson Mohammad Momani said "Jordan takes pride in its humanitarian role", noting that it has shouldered "more than its responsibilities in this regard".

"Jordan is not getting enough aid to deal with the consequences of the influx of refugees," Momani, who is also minister of state for media affairs, told The Jordan Times, stressing that the Kingdom has reached the "saturation point".

“We thank the international community for the support, which reached 60 per cent of needed aid, yet we call for more,” the minister said.

In Lebanon, 173 out of each 1,000 per capita are refugees, while the rate is 35 out of 1,000 per capita in Turkey and 27 out of 1,000 per capita in Chad, according to the report.

According to official figures by the Planning and International Cooperation Ministry, the indirect economic impact of the Syrian crisis on Jordan between 2013 and 2016 has reached $12.37 billion.

Conflict, persecution and violence newly uprooted at least 3.2 million people in the first half of last year, and low- and middle-income countries played the greatest role in sheltering the world’s displaced, the report indicated.

In the first half of last year, 1.7 million people were newly displaced within their own country, while 1.5 million had crossed an international border, it showed.

More than half the new refugees in the first half of 2016 fled Syria’s conflict, with most staying in the immediate region — Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt. Other sizeable groups fled Iraq, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan.

Of all countries, Turkey sheltered the greatest number of refugees, hosting 2.8 million by mid-2016. It was followed by Pakistan (1.6 million), Lebanon (1 million), Iran (978,000), Ethiopia (742,700), Jordan (691,800), Kenya (523,500), Uganda (512,600), Germany (478,600) and Chad (386,100).

“Today we face not so much a crisis of numbers but of cooperation and solidarity — especially given that most refugees stay in the countries neighbouring their war-torn homelands,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi.

“The biggest contributors [to] providing a safe haven to the world’s uprooted people are poorer communities,” Grandi said in the report.

According to the latter economic measure, eight out of ten of the top countries hosting refugees are in Africa, with the remaining two in the Middle East. Lebanon and Jordan rank among the top ten hosting countries across all categories — absolute numbers, economic contribution and per capita.

At mid-2016, Syrians continued to be the largest group of refugees worldwide, making up 32 per cent (5.3 million out of 16.5 million) of the global total under UNHCR’s mandate.
Bold blue of Indian indigo gives Ghor Al Safi women an economic lifeline

Published on 9 March 2017 in the Jordan Times: http://bit.ly/2mac0yJ

Indigo and pomegranate, alongside other substances cultivated in Jordan, were the focus of a workshop in Amman on Wednesday that gave artists, fashion designers and the public a glimpse of ways to naturally dye clothes.

Held on International Women’s Day, the Nature andColour workshop was part of UNESCO’s “Empowering Rural Women and Increasing Resilience in the Jordan Valley” project, funded by the Drosos Foundation and held to celebrate Ghour Al Safi Women’s Association (GSWA)’s handicrafts brand “Safi Crafts”.

UNESCO project officer Nuria Roca Ruiz said that the main aims of the project are to support women in Ghor Al Safi and to combine women’s empowerment with culture.

Fifteen women are bringing up their families and generating income through their work in Safi Crafts, she explained. Head of GSWA, Naifa Nawasrah said the project started in 1999, then called the “Traditional Embroidery Project”, where women used to dye fabrics using 12 natural colours extracted from sands found in the area around the Dead Sea.

In 2006, the association started to dye using other natural substances, such as eucalyptus trees, tea, rubia (a plant that grows in Tafileh’s Dana area), but they struggled to produce a blue colour, she noted.

In 2013, UNESCO were helping Safi Crafts with design, training and marketing, but it was the importation of indigo seeds from India which had a profound impact.

Managing to realise this once-elusive indigo colour, the women experimentally planted the seeds on a one-dunum plot of land in the Safi area, Nawasrah said.

The indigo seeds were a success and the women are now planting 5 dunums as part of the second phase of the project, with plans to sell this valuable product for around JD250 per kilo, she added.

Among those who attended the workshop and was introduced to Safi Crafts’ products was UN Women Jordan Representative, Ziad Al Sheikh. He told The Jordan Times that many women in Jordan are working hard to not only improve their own lives, but also the lives of their families and the country’s economy.

“Today [March 8] is International Women’s Day and the special theme for this year is the role of women and the changing world of work. These kinds of projects are incredibly important because they are very much focused on sustainability,” Sheikh said.

While praising the importance of projects like Safi Crafts, he also said that there is still much to be done, as women’s participation in the workforce stands at an “incredibly low” 14 per cent.
Princess Basma opens Women’s Film Week
Published on 9 March 2017 in Al Rai Newspaper in Arabic: http://bit.ly/2msQJyW

Under the patronage of HRH Princess Basma bint Talal, UN Women Goodwill Ambassador, the fifth edition of the Women’s Film Week was launched in Amman which is organized by UN Women in collaboration with the Royal Film Commission.

Activities began with the screening of a Mexican film Eufrosina’s Revolution by Luciana Kaplan. The week will include the screening of other films focusing on the determination and power of women in overcoming challenges and drawing their path with courage and hope towards achieving their aspirations.

According to the Artistic Director Ghada Saba, the films which will be screened during the week are on the occasion of International Women’s Day, in celebration of the achievements of women who were able to prove their capabilities in different areas.

Private school teachers reach collective agreement with employers

A collective agreement regulating the working conditions of private schools teachers in Jordan was signed on Thursday between the General Trade Union of Private Education Employees (GUPWE) and the Private Schools Owners’ Association (PSOA).

The new collective contract, effective from the start of the 2017/18 academic year, was signed under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour, represented by its General Secretary Farouk Hadidi in his capacity as chairperson of the National Committee on Pay Equity (NCPE).

The agreement establishes a standard contract for teachers in the private sector, which will be mandatory unless an alternative contract offers better benefits.

The contract requires all salaries to be paid into bank accounts, unless agreed otherwise by the employees in a written statement. The agreement also increases the minimum monthly wage to JD220, with a teaching allowance of JD10 per month, an annual raise of at least 5 per cent and an increase of JD5 per month for each year of employment in a school.

The contract obligates schools to provide day care centres in accordance with Article 72 of the Labour Law, while also making enrolment in social security compulsory for all workers.

In addition, a 45-day mutual probation period is stipulated, with no obligation imposed on employers or employees in case the teacher finds a better job, with guarantees that the teacher will be paid for all work done during this period.
The collective agreement applies to all private schools, regardless of their affiliation to the Union of Private Sector Schools or the membership of the workers to the General Union of Workers in Private Education.

The collective contract is the result of a long negotiation process promoted by the NCPE, which is chaired by the Ministry of Labour and the Jordanian National Commission for Women, with the support of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The ILO has provided extensive technical support to the national committee and supported the social dialogue platform that allowed all different actors, including the female teachers, to be involved in the negotiations.

Over the past years, the NCPE has brought to public attention the lack of decent work in the private education sector in Jordan, where many teachers, especially women, were not enjoying fair wages and decent working conditions.

This collective contract is the result of first-of-its-kind collective action from grassroots workers — especially women workers — in Jordan.

For some two years, organised teachers in Irbid have voiced their needs through the “Stand up with the teacher’s campaign” that has mobilised teachers in the country and conveyed their interests to the representatives of the GUPWE and the PSOA in a process of social dialogue.

It is predicted that the new collective agreement will impact around 37,000 private school teachers, the majority of them women.

It is a highly positive step in the right direction towards achieving women’s economic empowerment through collective action and representation. The NCPE will congratulate all actors involved in a ceremony, to take place in the coming weeks.

The ILO, jointly with the NCPE, will continue to work closely with social partners in the private schools sector to support the implementation of the agreement.

Majority of unemployed women want to work - study

A UN study on Jordanian and Syrian refugee women published on Sunday indicated that almost half of those who are unemployed would work if they had the opportunity.

The study’s findings were presented at the launch of the report “Women Working: Jordanian and Syrian Refugee Women’s Labour Force Participation and Attitudes Towards Employment (2016)”.

The study indicated that 57 per cent of those not currently in employment want to work if they had the opportunity, with economic reasons and a desire for greater independence and self-confidence the primary motivations.

The findings suggest that external obstacles are contributing to the gender gap in the Jordanian labour market, rather than women’s individual attitudes.

On the other hand, 37 per cent of women reported they would not want to work even if given the opportunity, instead preferring to stay at home and care for children and undertake household responsibilities.
The event, held at the Landmark Hotel as part of this year’s celebrations of International Women’s Day, embraced the global theme of “Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50:50 by 2030”.

The study also revealed that only 19 per cent of Jordanian women surveyed are employed, with 81 per cent not working. The report also touched on some of the societal and structural obstacles facing both Jordanian and Syrian refugee women, such as cultural and religious pressures and finding jobs that match women’s qualifications. The study also indicated that only two per cent of Syrian refugee women have work permits. “Women either lack information or think it is not worth their time to apply for a work permit, although it is a legal requirement to work in the country,” the report said. The study was carried out through a nationwide telephone survey of 306 with Jordanian women and 303 Syrian refugee women, all over the age of 18, as well as 12 focus group discussions. The survey was designed to measure the prevalence of employment indicators, including women’s current employment status, employment sectors, reasons for economic inactivity or unemployment, perceptions of availability of and obstacles to women’s employment, as well as preferences for employment inside or outside the home.

UN Women Country Office Representative Ziad Sheikh said that the “most significant findings of the study presented today is that most women [both Syrian and Jordanian] who are currently not employed would want to work, if they had the opportunity.” Jordanian women, especially young women, Sheikh added, face several socio-cultural and structural challenges entering the labour market, yet they want to work. Meanwhile, she said that Syrian refugee women almost exclusively rely on their friendship or family networks to find employment, which consistently limit their opportunities compared with their male counterparts. Increasing efforts should be focused on reaching out to these women and informing them about the availability of sustainable livelihood opportunities — inside or outside the house — while also raising their awareness on their rights when entering the Jordanian labour market, according to Sheikh.

The launch event aimed to introduce the key findings of the research to humanitarian and development actors in Jordan, including the UN agencies and NGOs. The event also included group discussions — organised according to the main research themes — to discuss the key findings and to reach actionable, context-specific recommendations to promote women’s economic empowerment in Jordan.

Bothaina Qamar, livelihoods specialist at UN Women, said the purpose of the event and group discussions among agencies was to “have operational recommendations and to hear people in the field, and on the policy and programme level”. “We want to explore what could be done and how things can be improved for both Jordanians and Syrian refugee women, because now there is a lot of focus towards engaging also Syrian women in the labour market with Jordan’s commitment under the Jordan Compact,” Qamar told The Jordan Times.

The goal of the workshop, she explained, was to produce a document that would be distributed publicly, instead of only “discussing it among UN women, and to reach conclusions from their own perspectives”. “We want to trigger players in the field to enhance their programming by listening to other people’s experiences and reflect on the study’s findings,” Qamar added.

The study was carried out by UN Women and the REACH Initiative with support from the Japanese government. The Jordan Compact is part of the international community’s response to the ongoing Syrian crisis.

It aims to support the resilience and welfare of both Syrian refugees and Jordanian hosts, promising legal access to livelihoods for Syrian refugees and expanding employment opportunities for both Syrian refugees and Jordanian host communities.
Planning minister discusses preparations for Brussels Conference on Syria with co-hosts

Planning and International Cooperation Minister Imad Fakhoury on Wednesday headed a meeting to discuss preparations for the Brussels Conference on “Supporting the future of Syria and the region” to be held from April 4-5.
The meeting was attended by ambassadors from co-host countries including the EU, the UK, Germany, Norway, Kuwait and the UN, according to a Planning Ministry on Wednesday.

Fakhoury highlighted the importance of the conference as a follow-up to the London donor conference held in 2016, during which the Jordan Compact was showcased as a new approach, necessary to deal with the repercussions of the Syrian crisis.

“The Brussels conference is an opportunity to showcase the progress in implementing the commitments mentioned in the London donor conference 2016,” Fakhoury said, stressing the importance to maintain the momentum through 2017 and to build on achieved successes.

He said the conference is a good opportunity to once again highlight the international community’s responsibilities in the region, to foster more commitment towards funding, and to demand priority funding for host communities that include capital projects, in accordance with the Jordan Response Plan 2017-2019.

The main conference day’s agenda will include a high-level session focusing on the future support to Syria and the region as well as the issues of refugees and host communities, according to Fakhoury.

Also on Wednesday, the planning minister participated in a panel discussion organised by the European Investment Bank and EDAMA Association for Energy, Water and Environment, another statement from the ministry said.

The panel was held to discuss enhancing Jordan’s economic resilience through boosting the private sector investments.

During the session, Fakhoury briefed the attendees on Jordan’s efforts to sustain its resilience as a core issue, noting that the Kingdom’s stability came from its vision lead by His Majesty King Abdullah and the commitment towards the holistic and accumulative reform programme.
$1.5 million Chinese aid for Syrian refugees in Jordan
Published on 16 March 2017 in Al Ghad Newspaper in Arabic: http://bit.ly/2mLY3rV

$1.5 million aid has been committed by China to the World Food Programme to provide urgent food assistance to the Syrian refugees in Zaatari and Azraq refugee camps.

The Country Representative Majeed Yahia said that a part of this assistance will be used to assist around 4 thousand refugees who moved to the camps from urban areas because they were unable to sustain to cost of living outside of the camp and lacked the basic food, shelter and healthcare services.

He added that the programme will provide daily meals to newcomers until the completion of their registration through the Iris scan system. The assistance from China will also be used to provide healthy school meals to more than 12 thousand students in Zaatari camp through a new project which will be launched at the end of the month in collaboration with the Ministry of Education.

Army rises to Rakban camp challenge, security threats
Published on 16 March 2017 in the Jordan Times: http://bit.ly/2mEQ0vo

In an arid land 500 kilometres from Amman lies the northeastern border with Syria, where the Rakban refugee camp emerged into existence and started to grab headlines.

A temporary home to 70,000 residents stuck on the Jordanian-Syrian border, the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army, along with international humanitarian agencies, are working around the clock to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the area and the refugees, enduring “very harsh circumstances.”

"It is our responsibility to protect an area that extends for 450km. We guard our borders from terrorist attacks and any infiltration or smuggling attempts, while helping stranded Syrians from the Rakban and Hadalat camps in cooperation with international relief agencies," Border Guards Commander Brig. Gen. Barakat Aqeel said.

Speaking from the service centre, which was established four months ago to provide relief services to Syrians, he underlined that the Daesh terrorist group is only three kilometres away from the camp, while some of the group’s members are suspected of hiding inside the camp.

On June 21 last year, Jordan promptly declared the northern and northeastern border areas sealed military zones, after a car bomb attack on a forward military post near Rakban camp, which was serving Syrian refugees on the northeastern front, killed seven soldiers and injured 13. “The borders are completely closed for refugees, but we receive people with humanitarian needs; basically medical care. They are treated in the healthcare centre and sent back to where they came from,” Aqeel told reporters.
He stressed that any attempt to threaten the borders will be handled according to the military’s rules of engagement, noting that the border guards have human resources and state-of-the-art electronic systems that tightly monitor the entire borderline. “Iraq, on the other hand, guards 170 kilometres of the Jordanian-Iraqi border, but there is absolutely no presence of the Iraqi army in the remaining 23 kilometres, which places additional burdens on us,” the commander revealed, adding that the area is considered a passageway for terrorist groups from Iraq trying to reach Syria. Aqeel reiterated that the army coordinates with Syrian “tribal army” leaders, who serve as unofficial police, responsible for maintaining safety and security inside the camps and helping humanitarian agencies to register the refugees.

On the numbers of infiltrations, he noted that 85 infiltrations took place in 2015, involving 132 people, while in 2016, the units responded to 79 infiltrations involving 151 people. So far in 2017, the number stands at 24, in which 65 people have been involved.

“As for the number of infiltration attempts, meaning those who tried to reach the Jordanian side but failed, there were 34 cases in 2015, involving 85 people, 22 in 2016 with 45 people and 4 in 2017 with 9 people attempting to cross the border,” the army official highlighted.

Regarding smuggling cases, Aqeel said that the Border Guards foiled 33 smuggling attempts in 2015, 47 in 2016 and 8 since the start of this year, noting that the forces seized in 2015 alone a total of 878,209 palm-sized sheets of hashish, 84,672 million narcotic pills, 573 Captagon pills and 1,467 “pieces of weapons”.

“Of course, these items were seized on the border and did not enter Jordanian territory,” he underlined.

With the newly established medical centre receiving 1,037 cases so far and referring 51 people to the hospital, the officer noted that the facility deals with around 25 to 30 patients a day.

Helene Daubelcour from the UNHCR Jordan operations underlined that providing care to the people in Rakban is “not an easy task”, adding that the UN agencies operating at the service centre include UNICEF, the WFP and the UNFPA. She explained that assistance provided by the agencies at the site includes food, water and relief assistance, while the healthcare services cover basic and reproductive health needs.

“We have provided 1,000 consultations since we opened in the site. Our operations here are one of the most challenging and we could not have managed without the support and facilitation of the Jordanian Armed Forces,” she said.

“The population here is in dire need, but we are here, as close as we can, to deliver and save lives,” Daubelcour added. Refugees interviewed by The Jordan Times voiced their appreciation for the care they receive on the Jordanian border, but agreed that more humanitarian support is required to meet their needs back in the camp.

The second leg of the visit was the “service distribution centre”, where tens of Syrians were waiting to cross the border. Salah Abu Odai, a member of the tribal army, said that he coordinates with the Border Guards to ensure access to medical care for people from the Syrian side.

“I escort them to the Jordanian border, where they are received by soldiers,” he told The Jordan Times.
Against odds, Jordanian women develop small, home-based businesses

Despite the numerous obstacles faced by Jordanian women, many are using their skills and experiences to successfully develop small and home-based businesses.

In celebration of International Women’s Day and Mother’s Day, around 55 women with small and home-based businesses came together in a bazaar at Amman Marriott Hotel on Friday to showcase their products and promote their businesses.

Participants from projects involved with the Jordan River Foundation, USAID, UNESCO, Microfund for Women, Ruwwad Al Tanmeya and other individual projects took part in the bazaar to celebrate working women.

Um Ali, a mother of four, has been baking bread and delivering orders for around 20 years in Amman and surrounding governorates.

“I managed to find a balance between my family and the orders I receive. I finish working and go home, and when I work I am satisfied and happy,” she told The Jordan Times.

Suheir Smadi, who owns a small business making cookies and deserts, has been working from home for five years.

“My children are very cooperative when it comes to my work. When they go to school, I organise my time in order to bake. When you have five to six hours to accomplish your goal, you will definitely succeed,” Smadi said.

She added: “Women shouldn’t depend on their husbands for everything. There should be mutual cooperation and understanding, as life necessities are getting more expensive.”

“It’s very important to encourage and invite women to start their own businesses, if they have the time for it, to boost the economy in Jordan,” she said.

The owner of a kitchen in Amman, Muheeda Sayyed, said she started her business three years ago, providing healthy and homely meals for households in Amman and Irbid.

One of the challenges she faced initially was society’s perception of working women in rural areas, Sayyed said, adding that she managed to overcome it and is now taking delivery orders from different areas around Jordan.

Ruba Jaradeh, a mother of four, started a project with her friend, who is also a mother, with the idea of entering the business field without distancing themselves from their families.

“We can all do it. If we managed to raise children, take care of them and hold our families together, we can do anything,” Jaradeh added.

For her part, Khadra Hussein, who owns an embroidery business in Amman, said family support of working women is one of the vital elements to achieve success in any field.

Joanne Bisharat, a student at the Princess Sumaya University for Technology and a member of the DART student entrepreneur club, said the bazaar aimed to support and empower Jordanian women with home-based businesses.

Proceeds from the bazaar will be sent to the King Hussein Cancer Centre and Foundation, according to organisers.
ESCWA resigning chief receives widespread support in dispute with UN

NGOs, grassroots, and even Lebanon’s Hizbollah, voiced support for outgoing UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia's (ESCWA) top official, Rima Khalaf, in her dispute with UN chief over her organisation's report on Israel's "apartheid".

Khalaf, undersecretary general and executive secretary at ESCWA, announced her resignation on Friday, stating that the UN secretary general had asked her to withdraw a report in which she accused Israel of being an "apartheid state", Agence France-Presse (AFP) reported.

Reactions in Jordan, Khalaf's home country, came widely in support of her decision. A civil society coordinating coalition in Jordan, HIMAM, denounced the UN's decision and praised Rima Khalaf.

In a statement sent to the Jordan Times on Saturday, HIMAM said: "The coalition expresses its sorrow and condemnation of the decision of the UN Secretary General to withdraw the report issued by [ESCWA]."

"HIMAM adds its voice to those around the globe fighting for freedom and independence and the right to self determination. HIMAM calls for the implementation of the recommendations made in the report as a prelude to prosecuting Israel at the International criminal court which considers racism and national discrimination a crime of war," the statement added.

It described the report as an objective investigation away from political biases, saying that the proceedings and the data were professionally documented and showed that Israel was imposing “racist separation” on the Palestinian people.

The leader of the Lebanese Hizbollah Movement Hassan Nasrallah denounced the UN on Saturday as “weak” after the withdrawal of the report, according to Reuters.

Nasrallah said in a televised speech on Saturday that the incident served as a reminder of the “truth of this organisation, that it’s weak... and it succumbs to the will of the United States and Israel”. The UN is “incapable of taking a stand” and the debacle over the report proved it cannot be counted on “to defend human rights in our region”, he said.

Users of social media quoted Khalaf’s resignation letter and described her as an “iron lady” and a “true Palestinian heroine”. Siddharth More, a Facebook user, wrote: “On one hand, we should acknowledge courage and devotion shown by this ‘Iron Lady’ for the cause of human rights. At the same time... [we should] seriously think about the credibility crisis that these global institutions like the UN have been facing in terms of their inability to deal in a nonpartisan manner with the Palestinian cause and therefore global justice as such.” Estella Saville commented on Facebook: “It is outrageous that she should be forced to resign after telling the truth as it is. Corruption at every level”. On Twitter, Ahmad Al Issa tweeted: “A woman with conscience resigns from a UN without conscience.”

UN chief Antonio Guterres accepted Khalaf’s resignation on Friday, his spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters in New York, while denying that the secretary general had acted under US pressure, according to AFP.

Khalaf told a news conference in Beirut: “The secretary general asked me yesterday morning to withdraw [the report].” “I asked him to rethink his decision, he insisted, so I submitted my resignation from the UN.”

“We expected of course that Israel and its allies would put huge pressure on the secretary general of the UN so that he would disavow the report, and that they would ask him to withdraw it,” she added.
“It’s only normal for the criminal to attack those defending the cause of his victims, but I cannot accept being subjected to such pressures,” she told reporters in Beirut, quoting from her resignation letter.

On Wednesday, the United States demanded that Guterres withdraw an ESCWA report entitled “Israeli Practices towards the Palestinian People and the Question of Apartheid”.

The report concluded that “available evidence established beyond a reasonable doubt that Israel is guilty of policies and practices that constitute the crime of apartheid”.

**UNDP-Madrasati initiative seeks to shield students from radicalisation**


Within the framework of a cooperation agreement between the UNDP and the “Madrasati” Initiative (My School), five student clubs under the title “Masahati” (My Space) were established.

The clubs operate at five public schools in Zarqa Governorate to promote physically, socially and emotionally safe and supportive learning environments for the youth, a statement from the UNDP said on Monday.

The clubs will provide a safe and interactive platform for young people “to meet, learn and discuss ways to encourage tolerance and promote peacemaking and social cohesion”, the statement said.

The project aims to prevent the youth from falling into extremist ideologies by building young people’s resilience to radicalisation. Nearly 500 students and 35 teachers participated in the activities in the five schools.

Her Majesty Queen Rania launched Madrasati in April 2008 with the aim of improving infrastructure through programmes that develop the educational environment.

**UN representative presents credentials**


Foreign Ministry Secretary General Bashir Zu’bi on Tuesday received the credentials of United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Jordan Anders Pedersen, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

During the ceremony, the two officials discussed cooperation between Jordan and the UN, voicing their keenness to further enhance coordination and cooperation.

Prior to his new position, Pedersen was the UN resident coordinator and UNDP resident representative for Botswana, according to a UN statement sent to The Jordan Times.
Jordan hosts 657,000 registered Syrian refugees

Published on 22 March 2017 in the Jordan Times: http://bit.ly/2mrsRBg

Out of some 4.9 million Syrians registered with the UNHCR in the region by mid March, around 657,000 are Syrian refugees hosted in Jordan, according to the Syria Regional Refugee Response’s Inter-Agency Information Sharing Portal posted on UNHCR’s website.

The total number of Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR until mid March included 2 million in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, 2.9 million in Turkey and more than 29,000 in North Africa, according to UNHCR data.

Of the total, only 490,658, or 10 per cent, live in camps, while the rest live in urban, peri-urban and rural areas.

In Jordan, the data showed that 657,000 Syrian refugees are registered with the agency. Around 177,070 are in Amman, 158,585 in Mafraq, 108,826 in Zarqa and 135,535 in Irbid.

The UNHCR data indicated that there are 1.011 million Syrians registered with the agency in Lebanon.

In remarks to The Jordan Times, Minister of State for Media Affairs Mohammad Momani said there are around 1.3 million Syrian refugees in Jordan, representing almost 20 per cent of the country's population.

“We appreciate the international community’s support for Jordan and its efforts to help refugees and the host communities,” said Momani, who is also the government’s spokesperson, adding that of the total pledge, the aid delivered to Jordan last year reached around 60 per cent.

“By helping Jordan, the international community is actually investing in the stability of the region and the entire world as refugee crises are cross-national by definition,” he said.

“We stand on high moral ground when it comes to aiding refugees and we hope the international community helps us shoulder this international responsibility,” the minister added, highlighting the impact of hosting some 1.3 million Syrian refugees on several sectors in the country, whose public schools, for example, host around 180,000 Syrian children.

According to the UNHCR data, of the total number of registered Syrian refugees who live outside camps, around 49 per cent are aged between 18-59 years. Those aged between 5-11 years stand at about 19 per cent of the total registered Syrians.

UNHCR data indicated that the total Syrian asylum applications in Europe between April 2011 and October 2016 reached 884,461. Around 64 per cent of those were in Sweden and Germany and 22 per cent in Hungary, Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark and Bulgaria.

Of the total funding requirement for aid to refugees this year, which stands at about $4.6 billion, around $124 million or 3 per cent was received until mid March, the international agency said.
Children issues ‘superficially reported’ in Jordanian media – UN-NCFA assessment

Published on 23 March 2017 in the Jordan Times: http://bit.ly/2nqe2hY

Coverage of children’s issues by local media tends to be “superficial”, with “many” journalists lacking the legal understanding of concepts pertaining to child protection, according to an assessment report.

The “Journalists Practices on Child Protection” survey, conducted by UNICEF, cooperation with the National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA), showed that some journalistic practices are not aligned with ethical standards of reporting.

“For instance, 11 per cent [of the interviewees] reported a trend of bribing children with money, goods or promises of help for an interview,” the report stated.

It also noted that 20 per cent of interviewees did not ensure that a parent/guardian was present when interviewing a child, while 19 per cent had interviewed women and children in a state of distress.

On the other hand — considering that child protection issues rank second in areas of media coverage after politics — the survey showed a “high demand and willingness among journalists to be part of a network that contributes towards the promotion and protection of children’s rights in Jordan”.

In general, respondents felt that many journalists were more interested in stories with “sensationalised content”, the study showed.

The methodology of assessment was based on a multi-method approach, including 16 in-depth interviews conducted with industry experts, representing all forms of news media. The response rate of the survey was a little more than one-fourth of the total 444 journalists approached, with 118 journalists’ responses to the survey, according to the study’s authors.

Speaking at an event announcing the outcomes of the assessment on Wednesday, Minister of State for Media Affairs and Communications Mohammad Momani underlined the need for the media to focus on child-protection issues, especially in light of the conflicts and crises children are enduring nowadays.

Citing the impact of new media and technology on children, he also stressed the media’s role in raising awareness on media related dangers and in protecting children against easily spreadable “poisonous” ideologies.

NCFA Secretary General Fadel Hmoud noted that the council contributed to conducting the survey out of “its belief in the significance of media as a tool for influencing social change”.

Robert Jenkins, UNICEF Representative, added that UNICEF recognises media’s role as an observer and advocate for all causes, especially those related to children and children’s rights.

The survey presented several recommendations including the need to engage editors in efforts to improve coverage of child-related issues, to implement a training to help and assist journalists to specialise in child-rights reporting, to invest in creating and sustaining a network of dedicated journalists from all media outlets, and to increase access of journalists to related published material.

During the ceremony, Jordan Media Institution Dean Basim Tweissi introduced an action plan aimed to improve the capabilities of media professionals in covering child issues. He noted that a taskforce of 30 journalists are currently being trained to lead a media network specialised in child causes.
**Guterres arrives in Jordan next week to participate in the League of Arab States Summit**


UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will travel to Jordan next week to attend the League of Arab States Summit after a disagreement on a UN report which accused Israel of “apartheid” against the Palestinians.

The UN Spokesperson said that the Secretary-General will arrive in Amman on Monday to hold talks with His Majesty King Abdullah II and visit a refugee camp in advance of the summit which will be held in the Dead Sea on Wednesday.

Last week a Jordanian diplomat, Rima Khalaf, resigned in protest of the Secretary-General’s request to withdraw the report.

Rima Khalaf served as Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission of Western Asia (ESCWA) based in Beirut and groups 18 Arab States in its membership.

The US expressed its disapproval of on the outcomes of the report and demanded its withdrawal however the UN Spokesperson denied that the withdrawal was a result of the US’s request.

Guterres will hold bilateral meetings on the side of the summit which will focus on the conflicts taking place in Syria, Yemen, Libya, and the Israeli and Palestinian conflict.

**Project supporting youth from marginalised backgrounds through research**


While conducting a research, Nour Khaled discovered an opportunity to shed light on an every-day issue facing young women in her community, and to spread societal awareness and better communicate about it.

The 20-year-old Syrian residing in Amman’s Sahab neighbourhood lived in what she calls a “closed” community that did not allow young women to leave their houses for education or work purposes.

“Girls would stay at the house for days without leaving, an issue that started negatively affecting their psyche and complicated their relations with their family members,” she told The Jordan Times on Thursday, while attending a national workshop held by the Participatory Action Research Project for Adolescent Engagement, part of the No Lost Generation initiative.

After she conducted a number of interviews, Khaled concluded that “closed-mindedness” of some families, which they attribute to cultural norms and traditions, negatively affects many young women. This is when she decided to dig deeper and look for a comprehensive solution.

In her study, Khaled recommended conducting awareness sessions with parents and allowing “more open-minded women to visit more conservative women” to convince them of the benefits of women’s participation in society. But Shobak resident Raghed Shobaki, 21, described the spread of wasta (nepotism) as a major hindrance to equality and justice. He then decided to conduct his own study on the topic.
He found out wasa to be a “very negative” influence, as it contributes to brain drain and ignites animosities.

After studying the causes and effects of this problem, and conducting the necessary interviews, Shobaki identified a set of measures to be taken to eradicate this “unhealthy” phenomenon.

Khaled and Shobaki are part of a larger group of 46 young researchers aged 14-24 participating in the national version of a regional project seeking to support young people from vulnerable and marginalised backgrounds, by teaching them how to conduct research.

Under the project, carried out by UNICEF and other partners, young people are trained on research methodologies that are sought to help them determine and understand the underlying causes of problems affecting them and their community. It will also allow them to develop and implement possible solutions to such issues, including advocacy with key stakeholders, said the organisers.

The pillars of the regional project, implemented in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria and also including Palestinian and Iraqi youth, are capacity building, data collection and analysis, and advocacy and action.

Syrians make up for 54 per cent of participants in the national workshop, while Jordanians amount to 39 per cent. The remaining participants are Palestinians and Iraqis, according to organisers.

While 26 per cent of the young researchers are in school, 24 per cent are working, and 74 per cent are out of school, with females comprising almost half of the participants.

Commenting on the project, UNICEF Representative in Jordan Robert Jenkins said the project provides a platform for vulnerable youth to engage in their communities and ask questions to solve problems. He cited engagement and self-expression as direct successes of the project, adding that, even if change is slow, progress is noticeable. Although a lot of the issues that were raised require long-term solutions, he highlighted the need for continuity in providing platforms of engagement for the youth to contribute and feel part of a bigger network.

Yazan Mashini, who provided technical assistance to researchers at Zaatari refugee camp, said that participants were introduced to several research tools, such as individual interviews and mind-mapping.

Another researcher, Natalie Ismael, said the progress that participants have achieved is “impressive”, adding that some of them are at a “humble level” of education, and initially seemed unable to grasp the point behind the project, but then developed a desire to learn and give back to the community.

Participants discussed their research outcomes with private and public stakeholders, as well as decision makers, and will continue working with the project to develop advocacy and implementation skills.

Khaled and Shobaki expressed their hope for their voices to be heard and their research outcomes to be implemented.
Youth and women “left behind” in Arab region development progress - UNDP


Despite significant progress in human development over the past 25 years, Arab countries have the highest youth unemployment rate and the lowest number of primary school-aged children attending school, in comparison with other developing regions of the world, a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report stated.

These findings were released in a UNDP report titled ‘Human Development for Everyone’ that sought to evaluate the impact of development barriers on various demographical groups, with a focus on youth and women.

The report found that although average human development improved significantly across all regions from 1990 to 2015, one in three people worldwide continue to live in low levels of human development, as measured by the Human Development Index (HDI). And Arab states were designated as some of the weakest in terms of equal development for all sections of society.

“The world has come a long way in rolling back extreme poverty, in improving access to education, health and sanitation, and in expanding possibilities for women and girls,” said UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, speaking at the launch of the report in Stockholm. “But those gains are a prelude to the next, possibly tougher challenge, to ensure the benefits of global progress reach everyone."

In the Arab states, over half the population is under the age of 25. Yet, the percentage of children of primary school age currently in school was found to be the lowest in the developing world.

Youth unemployment was also pointed out as the highest among developing regions, with 29 per cent of individuals between 15 and 24 currently out of employment.

The report also found out one of the widest gaps between male and female’s positions in the Arab world. Women in the Arab states still suffer from dire inequalities. The difference between the HDI values for the female and male population in this region, as measured by the Gender Development Index, is the second largest across all developing regions, the report showed.

Regarding employment rates, the region displayed the largest gap between male and female labour participation rates. Only 22 per cent of women aged 15 and older were employed outside the home in 2015, compared with 75 per cent of men.

The report noted the grave consequences of regional crises, including five years of civil war in the Syria, the spillover into Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, highlighting the impact of such events on human development levels. Refugee children and adolescents are five times more likely to be out of school than their non-refugee peers. Refugees also tend to face more barriers to access work and political participation, the report noted. Countries hosting people fleeing conflicts and violence are also affected, especially Jordan and Lebanon, which have taken in the vast majority of Syrian refugees.

The UNDP report called on greater attention to the empowerment of the most marginalised individuals in society.

“As this report notes, in order to ensure that no one is left behind, the region needs to focus on those excluded and on actions to dismantle deep-rooted and often unmeasured barriers to development,” said Mourad Wahba, UNDP assistant administrator and regional director for the Arab States.

“By eliminating deep, persistent, discriminatory social norms and laws, and addressing the unequal access to political participation, which have hindered progress for so many, poverty can be eradicated and a peaceful, just, and sustainable development can be achieved for all,” Helen Clark added.
The report stressed the importance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to build on human development gains, noting that the agenda and human development approach are mutually reinforcing.

**Youth network gathers in first annual summit forum seeking active civic engagement**


Around 500 young people took part in the first annual Jeel962 Forum at Al Hussein Cultural Centre in Amman on Saturday, under the theme “Technology & Us: hand-in-hand in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda”.

A youth volunteer network, Jeel962 focuses on the spread of active civic engagement throughout Jordan. It offers a platform for young people to interact, learn, analyse and take actions on rights; a coaching process that builds the capacity of members and other young people to become active citizens and, eventually, effective change agents in their communities, according to an organisers’ statement.

The event was hosted by UNICEF and Tech Tribes.

Khaled Hijab, the founder and executive director of Tech Tribes, said the organisation had worked in partnership with UNICEF for three years in order to establish and support the youth network and help young people connect with each other.

“In this network, there are around 15,000 volunteers. Today’s activity is a new brand, and we are working to have it held as an annual gathering with a different theme every year. This year, we talk about technology as a support tool for the efforts of children to achieve the goals of the 2030 sustainable development agenda,” he told The Jordan Times in an interview ahead of the forum’s opening.

Hijab noted that, over the past three years, they had wanted to invest in technology and that UNICEF believed in the idea of launching a website to bring together as many young people interested in voluntary works as possible to share their ideas.

“Also, we created an interactive map showing 17 goals, which are the goals of sustainable development. The person gets involved in this website by voting on one of these goals. Online visitors can also endorse an initiative which will receive their vote. The initiative that receives the greatest number of votes will be adopted by UNICEF and supported for one year,” he added.

Hijab said the idea behind the whole project was to provide new creative and technology-based channels for people to get engaged in various issues, noting that existing channels are "too traditional".

Ettie Higgins, deputy representative of UNICEF Jordan, praised the event: “We want to bring as many young people as possible here, from all governorates. Because it is the launch of something that UNICEF has not done to this extent in any country in the region before. It provides a platform for youth to get engaged and be able to get their voice heard by key decision makers, to connect with other people in their community and raise issues of concern to them,” she added.

The network targets young people aged 10-24 across Jordan, capitalising on their enthusiasm to engage in governance and decision-making, according to the statement.

The forum is held to acknowledge the achievements of young people, encourage them to be active members in society and help them plan future steps in their project.
His Majesty holds talks with UN, OIC chiefs, Mogherini
Published on 29 March 2017 in the Jordan Times: http://bit.ly/2o5VRyD

His Majesty King Abdullah on Tuesday discussed regional developments with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, according to a Royal Court statement.

The meeting, held at Basman Palace, focused on regional and international efforts to revive Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations, based on the two-state solution.

The two men also discussed the Syrian crisis and the importance of finding a political solution to the conflict. They urged the international community to shoulder its responsibilities towards host communities, by assisting them in providing relief and humanitarian aid to refugees.

Guterres, who will be attending the Arab summit's opening ceremony on Wednesday, commended Jordan's role in dealing with the region's crises to achieve peace and global security.

On his personal twitter account, the King posted "So happy to see my old friend @antonioguterres. Gives me confidence to see a man of such great vision leading the United Nations".

Also on Tuesday, Guterres visited the Zaatari refugee camp in Mafraq to check on refugees' living conditions, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported. He praised Jordan's role in "alleviating the burdens of life" for refugees. Referring to the UN's efforts to end the Syrian crisis, he stressed the need to minimise the burdens shouldered by Jordan in facing the repercussions of the conflict. Guterres visited the UN Women's Oasis and the “comprehensive centre” for women and girls, affiliated with the Jordan Health Aid Society, in addition to several schools and a centre for joint distribution of humanitarian aid. He also met with a number of Syrian refugees, who voiced their hope in seeing the crisis of their country come to an end as soon as possible.

Also on Tuesday, His Majesty met with EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini to discuss Jordan-EU partnership, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported. After a discussion on regional developments, King Abdullah commended the advanced level of strategic relations between Jordan and the EU. He later voiced hope that the international conference on Syria, to be organised by the EU next month, will help in designing visions to rebuild Syria once a political solution is forged and build on the outcomes of last year’s London donor conference to help countries hosting Syrian refugees.

During the meeting, the King and Mogherini stressed the importance of enhancing the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, based on a two-state solution. They also held talks over regional and international efforts to combat terrorism, and the situation in Iraq. For her part, Mogherini, also in Amman to attend the opening session of the Arab summit, voiced the EU’s commitment to supporting the Kingdom. The meeting was attended by Royal Court Chief Fayez Tarawneh, Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi, King’s Office Director Jafar Hassan and Planning and International Cooperation Minister Imad Fakhoury.

King Abdullah also met on Tuesday with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation’s (OIC) secretary general, Yousef Bin Othaimin, to discuss regional circumstances. His Majesty and the secretary general reviewed the top priorities of the Arab summit and highlighted the importance of institutionalising joint Arab action to better serve causes of the Arab and Islamic nations, according to the Royal Court. King Abdullah stressed the significant role of OIC in enhancing solidarity among Islamic countries, and defending their causes. For his part, Bin Othaimin expressed his appreciation for the Monarch’s efforts in explaining the true image of Islam, spreading justice and moderation values, and enhancing dialogue and understanding among followers of different faiths through his attendance of international events.

Royal Court Chief Fayez Tarawneh, Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi and King’s Office Director Jafar Hassan attended the meeting.
Food security missing in region’s social protection plans - report
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Despite plans implemented to provide support to refugees and host communities, the national social protection strategies of the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region lack food security as a core component, according to a recent report.

The Near East and North Africa Regional Overview of Food Insecurity report, released by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), indicated that food security and nutrition were not treated as key components of current national social protection schemes, with the exception of programmes focusing on internally displaced persons and refugees in a humanitarian context.

The report suggested that sustainable agriculture and water management are central to ending hunger and adapting to climate change, noting that NENA countries have been facing increased economic and social challenges since the influx of Syrian refugees.

It cited Jordan, Iran, Iraq and Lebanon as host countries dealing with these challenges.

“Despite plans to address the influx of refugees, such as Jordan’s National Resilience Plan and Response Plan and Lebanon’s Roadmap of Priority Interventions for Stabilisation from the Syrian Conflict, in general, national social protection strategies lack food security as a core component in their design and result frameworks,” the report indicated. Conflicts and political instability in several parts of the region are major causes of disruption in food availability and accessibility, the report stated, noting that regional conflicts are a leading cause of the surge in undernourishment among children.

The FAO’s report also highlighted that the region is cognisant of the interrelation of food security, water and climate change, with the majority of NENA countries considering climate change to be a major threat to their food security and agricultural sectors. The report also noted that measures to address the impacts of climate change have been set as a foremost priority.

According to the report, recent FAO studies highlighted Jordan’s potential in exporting vegetables and broiler meat, while recommending the establishment of an agribusiness hub in the Jordan Valley, accompanied by supportive policies and investments.

NENA is the most arid region in the world, the report pointed out, indicating that the availability of per capita renewable freshwater is less than 10 per cent of the world average.

The report also noted that water scarcity is expected to worsen as a result of population growth and climate change. Countries of the region need to implement long term and comprehensive sustainable water management strategies to manage agricultural production and adapt to climate change, the report concluded.
Arab summit concludes with a ‘message of peace’, call for solidarity
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The 28th Arab summit meeting held on Wednesday at the Dead Sea concluded with a message of peace, full support for Palestine and a call for pan-Arab solidarity in the face of challenges.

The summit also saw mending of fences between key Arab states. In his closing remarks, His Majesty King Abdullah, who presided over the meeting after receiving the rotating presidency from Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, voiced appreciation for all participants, whom he said have shown keenness to make the summit a "success" in light of the challenges that the region is going through.

“We discussed all issues in a transparent manner to come up with several recommendations and resolutions. We will now make all efforts to translate them into reality,” said King Abdullah. His Majesty concluded on the need for institutionalising Arab action to enable “us to overcome challenges that face and that serve our nation”.

This year’s summit was attended by heads of 15 of the 22 Arab states, while the remaining were represented by high-ranking official delegations. It was the fourth time for Jordan to host the high-profile gathering since it was first held in 1964.

In his opening remarks, His Majesty said Jordan is the closest to the Palestinian cause, noting that Jordanian soldiers sacrificed their lives defending Palestinian land, and that the Kingdom is “aware of the daily struggle of the Palestinian people, Jerusalemites in particular”. He added that the Hashemite Custodianship of Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem is a historical responsibility Jordan is honoured to undertake on behalf of the Arab and Muslim nations. His Majesty then listed challenges facing the Arab nation and urged active and concrete joint action to overcome them.

As Wednesday’s meetings concluded, Arab leaders expressed their unified support to the Palestinian cause, urging all countries not to relocate their embassies in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, or even recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. They also warned against unilateral measures by Israel altering Jerusalem’s status quo, according to the Amman Declaration.

Amongst other statements, the declaration called on a UN resolution stating that Israel’s settlements have no legal validity, and urged the enforcement of last year’s UN Security Council Resolution 2334. The resolution outlined the continued work for serious and effective peace talks between the Palestinians and the Israelis, renewing the commitment to the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. The declaration also called for the release of all prisoners, as well as resolving the issue of refugees, in line with the international resolutions in this regard.

Regarding Syria, Arab leaders agreed on the need to reach a political solution to end the conflict and preserve the unity and territorial integrity of the country. The declaration urged Turkey to withdraw its forces from Iraqi territories, noting that their presence constitutes a violation of Iraq’s sovereignty and a threat to the pan-Arab security.

The statement highlighted Iraq’s efforts in uprooting terrorism and praised its work in eradicating Daesh from its territory.
Terrorism was pointed out as a common threat to the Arab nation, separate from any religion, and requiring a comprehensive counterstrategy. The declaration also condemned interference in the Arab states’ internal affairs.

The Arab leaders decided to task a ministerial committee to work out mechanisms to help countries hosting refugees, focusing on neighbouring nations. The declaration also voiced the leaders’ support to Yemen’s legitimate government, welcoming the organisation of an Arab-European summit for cooperation. At a press conference following the release of the Amman Declaration, Minister of Foreign Affairs Ayman Safadi announced: “We sent a message of peace to the world… We want to work with the US administration to achieve peace and we are looking forward towards intensified talks with them.” “We want peace that fulfils the legitimate rights of the Palestinians,” Safadi said.

As he commended a “successful” summit, Safadi warned of unrealistic expectations. “We do not expect to overcome the challenges overnight.”

League Secretary General Ahmed Aboul Gheit underlined “indications that there will be something at the end of April,” referring to His Majesty King Abdullah, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi’s planned visit to the US for talks with President Trump.

For his part, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres highlighted the plight of refugees and commended Jordan for hosting those fleeing conflicts during his address to the 28th Arab summit, while bemoaning the fact that developed countries have closed their borders to the region’s displaced. Guterres defined the two-state solution as the only solution to the Palestinian issue, stating that “there is no plan B”. As he acknowledged the “deep sense of despair of the Palestinian people”, the UN chief stressed that “Palestinians and Israelis do not need conflict management; they need conflict resolution”. He also warned of anti-Muslim hatred spread by “populist leaders”, who have increased “prejudice” against Arab and Muslim communities around the world. He bemoaned the “trap of presenting the despicable acts of Daesh or Al Qaeda as driven by Islam, when in fact they utterly defy the faith”, agreeing with Arab leaders that Muslims themselves are the primary victims of terrorism. Guterres urged Arab leaders to shape “a new Arab world”, based on cooperation and dialogue, to address and resolve common challenges. “Divisions in the Arab world have opened the door to foreign intervention and manipulation, breeding instability, sectarian strife and terrorism,” he deplored. Regarding the Syrian crisis, he expressed hope that the Astana process would achieve an effective ceasefire, saying that the UN “will do everything [it] can to enable the Geneva-based political talks to lead to genuine negotiations”. Guterres also welcomed progress achieved by Iraqi forces in retaking territories from the Daesh terror group. The UN chief highlighted the need to address youth unemployment, considering that two-thirds of people in the Arab world are under the age of 30 — “the highest share ever”. “Fighting youth unemployment must be the top priority from the point of view of not only development, but also security for communities in the region,” Guterres said, adding that “the empowerment of women is especially crucial — as a matter of human rights and as a spur to human development”.

The Palestinian cause constituted the highlight of discussions and the final communiqué. In his remarks, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas underscored the need to intensify and coordinate joint efforts to move forward with the Middle East peace process, which should achieve a comprehensive and just peace.

Abbas called for restoring momentum to the Palestinian cause, which he described as “the core conflict in the region”. All leaders also agreed on the importance of boosting Arab solidarity in the face of regional challenges, stressing the need for a stronger and more unified Arab action that would help resolve common issues.

Sustained cooperation and consultation over regional issues were highlighted as requirements to serve the causes and interests of the Arab nation and its people.

During the day, His Majesty King Abdullah hosted a lunch banquet in honour of Arab and world leaders participating in the summit.

The banquet was attended by members of the Royal family and senior officials.
UN Chief urges ‘new Arab world’

Published on 30 March 2017 in the Jordan Times: http://bit.ly/2oaQIoQ

UN Secretary General Antonio Gutierres on Wednesday highlighted the plight of refugees and commended Jordan for hosting those fleeing conflicts, while bemoaning the fact that developed countries have closed their borders to the region's displaced.

Addressing the 28th Arab summit, the UN chief said that "refugee protection is deeply rooted in the traditions of the Arabian Peninsula — refugee protection defined not only for Muslims but for all". Gutierres said that across the world, Arab and Muslim communities face "growing prejudice", noting that "populist leaders" are inciting anti-Muslim hatred.

"Too many people have fallen into the trap of presenting the despicable acts of Daesh or Al Qaeda as driven by Islam, when in fact they utterly defy the faith. Indeed, Muslims themselves are the primary victims.

"And too many populist political leaders — for short-sighted and cynical reasons — distort Islam to spread anti-Muslim hatred, playing into the hands of terrorist and extremist groups," Gutierres said.

The UN chief urged Arab leaders to shape "a new Arab world" which is capable of addressing and resolving its challenges through cooperation and dialogue.

"Divisions in the Arab world have opened the door to foreign intervention and manipulation, breeding instability, sectarian strife and terrorism," he said.

Regarding the occupation of Palestine, Gutierres said the two-state solution is the only solution and "there is no Plan B". "I understand the deep sense of despair of the Palestinian people. The dreams of generation after generation have been confined by the parameters of conflict, humiliation and half a century of occupation," the secretary general said. Gutierres noted that "Palestinians and Israelis do not need conflict management; they need conflict resolution".

Regarding the Syrian crisis, he expressed hope that the Astana process will achieve an effective ceasefire, saying that the UN "will do everything we can to enable the Geneva-based political talks to lead to genuine negotiations".

Gutierres also welcomed the progress made by Iraqi forces in retaking territories from the Daesh terror group. He said fighting youth unemployment is vital, as two-thirds of people in the Arab world are under the age of 30 — "the highest share ever", the UN chief added.

"Fighting youth unemployment must be the top priority from the point of view of not only development, but also security for communities in the region," Gutierres said, adding that “the empowerment of women is especially crucial — as a matter of human rights and as a spur to human development”.

“I myself come from a part of the world where the Arab heritage is strong — Al Gharb Al Andalus. I stand before you today as someone with profound appreciation for the contributions of the Arab world to global civilisation,” he concluded.
UN, EU support Arab stand on Mideast two-state solution
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Representatives of the UN and EU on Wednesday expressed support for Arab stand on the Middle East conflict, stressing that was no alternative to the two-state solution.

At the 28th Arab summit, Arab leaders said a solution that ensures the creation of an independent Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital was the only "valid" and "acceptable" solution to resolve the conflict.

His Majesty King Abdullah, who took over the presidency of the summit, told Arab leaders there can be no peace or stability in the region without a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian cause. He stressed the two-state solution is the only way to solve what he called the "core issue" of the Middle East.

By focusing on the two-state solution, Arab officials are sending a clear message to the US administration that there is no alternative to the creation of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. This statement comes amid discussions by US President Donald Trump to relocate its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and repeated remarks that the two-state solution was not the only solution, which is seen as a jeopardy direct threat to long lasting peacemaking efforts.

Several Arab leaders stressed the centrality of the Palestinian issue, with King Salman saying developments in the Middle East should not overshadow the Palestinian issue, the “core issue” in the Middle East. "Such regional developments should not hinder any efforts to resolve the Palestinian issue based on legitimate international resolutions and the Arab peace initiative," the Saudi King said.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres stated that there was no alternative to the two-state solution in order to end the decade-long Palestinian Israeli conflict. "The two-state solution is the only path to ensure that Palestinians and Israelis can realise their national aspirations and live in peace, security and dignity," Guterres said to leaders attending the summit. "There is no plan B…That is why it is important to stop all unilateral actions that can undermine the two-state solution," the UN chief said.

He added: "This is particularly true in relation to the need to stop settlement activities, which are illegal under international law. It is also important to condemn terrorism and to avoid incitement." "For far too long, the international community has failed to provide the avenues and support for a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine," he said. In an address to the summit, EU Foreign Policy chief Federica Mogherini said: "We deeply believe that the two-state solution is the realistic method to end the conflict. We realise that any changes to the 1967 borders must be done after negotiation, especially regarding Jerusalem." "We will remain committed as the international community, in cooperation with our American friends… We also believe that the Arab peace initiative is relevant and still alive, and has a central role to play. If translated into actions, the initiative will be a framework for peace," she noted.
Arab leaders call for end of ‘interference’ in domestic affairs

Arab leaders and international community representatives on Wednesday united in calling for an end to “external interference” in regional affairs, noting that addressing this issue is a prerequisite to overcoming other challenges.

In his address at the opening session of the leaders' summit, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres highlighted Arab countries' need to stand united against external interferences.

"Divisions in the Arab world have opened the door to foreign intervention and manipulation, breeding instability, sectarian strife and terrorism," Guterres said, underscoring the importance of unity at this time of transition and upheaval for the region.

Saudi King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud denounced external interference in Arab countries, saying it represents a clear violation of international law and the sovereignty of countries.

As for Kuwaiti Emir Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, he noted that international laws ban countries from interfering in other countries' domestic issues, expressing hopes for "constructive dialogues" to continue with Iran, and for Tehran to respect the principle of the "good neighbour policy".

"It is about time that we take a clear and decisive stance against external interference that seeks to enforce sectarian and ideological dominance in the region," said Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi.

He added that "it is unfortunate to see some powers taking advantage of the unprecedented conditions our region is going through to enforce their influence and control under different names and pretexts, either political, economic or military, without having the slightest interest in the safety and unity of our people".

"I am telling you with honesty and frankness that we must take a clear stance against this and convey a strong message that we will not allow any external power to meddle in our matters. All attempts to enforce one's dominance will be met with overwhelming and decisive stances to protect sovereign countries," Sisi underlined.

Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani said differences among Arab brothers are never "unsolvable", and must not affect cooperation.

For her part, Federica Mogherini, high representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, said the EU expects freedom and independence for all countries, adding that the EU will shoulder its responsibilities towards peacemaking in the region.

Arab Parliament Speaker Meshal Sulami highlighted Iranian intervention in Arab countries' affairs as one of the biggest challenges for the region, in addition to the Israeli occupations of Palestine and parts of Syria and Lebanon, and the issue of terrorism.

He added that the Iranian threat had exceeded the occupation of three Emirati islands, to include fuelling sectarianism in Arab countries, in addition to forming and supporting armed militias that seek to destabilise regimes, and incite internal conflicts in Arab countries.