



Peace Offerings: August 2026

UN DAYS OF ACTION

19th August 2026: World Humanitarian Day

21st September 2026: International Day of Peace

11th October 2026: International Day of the Girl Child

15th October 2026: International Day of Rural Women

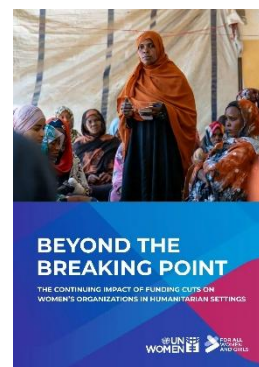
“Women do not stop giving birth in an emergency”

I was really stuck by this headline in an article about the aftermath of the two earthquakes that hit Venezuela in June. Women and girls can be particularly vulnerable during such times; as well as dealing with the trauma and loss that everyone in a community will experience, they continue to need obstetric care and sexual health services, and they still need protection from gender-based violence. The United Nations Population Fund has stepped in to provide emergency reproductive health services and is seeking \$10 million to put services in place and to create safe shelters. So far, only about 40% of this has been received.

The situation in Venezuela is one of many crises across the globe, but a recent report published by UN Women has found that cuts to international humanitarian aid are having a significant impact on women and girls. Since January 2025, 9 out

of 10 of the organizations which contributed to the report say they cannot meet demand, and at least 1 million women and girls have lost access to critical support. Clinics, safe spaces for women and gender-based violence initiatives are closing or restricting their work. Women in remote rural areas are especially vulnerable as services in these locations prove increasingly difficult to run.

The tension between funding domestic services and funding humanitarian aid is growing and all members of the G7 have cut aid budgets. However, as the report shows, it's not just about how much is donated by governments. How the money is used can make a huge difference. For example, direct funding to local women's groups can be more effective than funds being channeled through an intermediary such as a large international organization. Local women are best placed to know what will work and direct funding would give them the resources to act quickly in response to local needs. Putting them at the heart of humanitarian aid, and trusting them, would help address the challenges of reduced funding. Click [here](#) to read the full report.



Sisters' stories

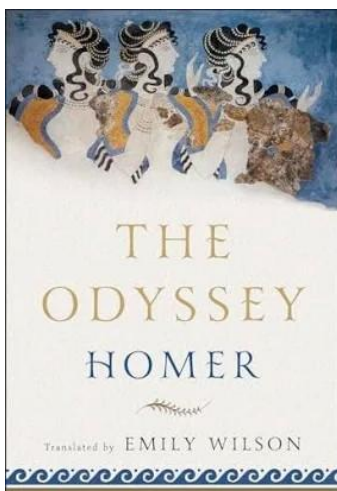
Women make history at the World Cup

You may have missed it amid all the drama of the recent men's FIFA World Cup, but there was some good news for women. For only the second time ever in the competition, a match was officiated by an all-women team. Referee Tori Penso, assisted by Brooke Mayo and Kathryn Nesbitt, were in charge of Czechia's 1–1 draw with South Africa on 18 June. It's taken a long time for women to break into officiating at this level, and female officials often face prejudice and abuse.

Canada, Mexico and the USA are leading the way in creating a pool of women who can oversee matches at the highest level. Football in the UK needs to catch up, and the FA's 'Our Whistle' programme, launched in 2025, is a start. This offers specialist refereeing training for women and girls. In addition to the training sessions, each participant receives a full refereeing kit and access to a dedicated mentor. The new referees are qualified to officiate at county and regional levels, giving them opportunities to advance through the leagues. You can see some of the young women who have been part of the programme [here](#). The girls know that their training is important. As one says, 'if you can see it, you can be it' and that's what girls need in football and beyond.



The Odyssey



Have you seen Christopher Nolan's new film, *The Odyssey*? His retelling of the story of Odysseus making his way home after the Trojan war has attracted a lot of attention, not least because he's been criticised for watering down the role of women in the story. It's true that the women get less screen time than the men, but the female characters have much to contribute to events. Penelope, played by Anne Hathaway, has spent 20 years holding off the suitors who want to marry her and become king. In one powerful scene towards the end of the film, Penelope rages against a system in which she has held her community together through difficult times but cannot be ruler in her own right because she's a woman. Helen, whose flight to Troy started the Trojan war, has returned to her husband and Lupita Nyong'o captures Helen's sorrow and frustration at being trapped in a marriage she never wanted. I thought the strongest female character in the film, was Circe, a witch, played by Samantha Morton. Circe turns Odysseus' men into pigs and

as she does so, she talks about the way women have suffered at the hands of men during war; it's a stunning piece of acting.

The translation of The Odyssey which Christopher Nolan credits as his inspiration is by a woman – Emily Wilson. She's not keen on the film but recognises the challenge of fitting the story into a limited period of time and welcomes the opportunity to bring the story to a new audience. It's a story which although it was probably written down almost three thousand years ago, still speaks to the experiences of women across the world today.

Good news in the drive to eliminate cervical cancer

A new study has found that girls in England having the HPV vaccination around 12-13 years old have close to zero risk of dying from cervical cancer before the age of 30. Between 2020 and 2024, no deaths from cervical cancer were recorded in women aged 20 to 24. Without vaccination, around 23 deaths would have been expected. This is the first time this has ever happened.



This is excellent news for women and girls but there's still work to be done. The World Health Organisation states that 90% of girls need to be vaccinated to fully eliminate cervical cancer. Data from the UK Health Security Agency shows that in 2024-2025, 76% of girls in the England had been vaccinated by the age of 15. Michelle Mitchell, Chief

Executive of Cancer Research UK says that the report is a powerful example of what's possible when science is backed by strong public health programmes but targeted action to increase the uptake of HPV vaccination in girls and boys is the next step in the work to eliminate cervical cancer by 2040.