

In cyclone's wake, UN appeals for \$20 million to help affected populations in Madagascar

23 March 2017 – The United Nations and humanitarian partners are appealing for \$20 million to address the devastating consequences of Cyclone Enawo in Madagascar.

“Despite the fact that 200,000 square kilometres covering half of Madagascar’s 22 regions have been affected, the country will not be left behind,” said Bary Rafatolaza, Deputy Foreign Minister of Madagascar, in a news release from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

“We are working closely with national and local authorities to meet the needs of those affected by the storm,” said Violet Kakyomya, UN Resident Coordinator in Madagascar, commending the Government both in evacuating people endangered by the storm before its arrival and in mobilizing the national and international response to the cyclone.

Enawo struck the coast of Madagascar as a Category 4 cyclone on 7 March, causing extensive damage due to high winds and flooding in north-eastern parts of the country. Between 8 and 10 March, the cyclone traced an arc nearly the length of the island nation, bringing heavy rainfall and flooding to central and southeastern areas.

At least a quarter of a million people in the worst-affected areas require urgent life-saving humanitarian assistance and protection in the storm’s wake. The Government has declared a national emergency and requested international support.

Some 20,000 families who lost their homes need emergency shelter and more than 100,000 children whose schooling has been disrupted need temporary learning spaces.

Up to 85 per cent of planted subsistence crops were lost in some areas, while more than 1,300 wells – the major source of household water – are flooded and contaminated. More than 100 health centres and 3,300 classrooms were damaged by the cyclone.

Of the nearly 250,000 people who sought shelter in evacuation centres during the storm, more than 5,300 of the most vulnerable have no home to return to and remain in displacement sites.

In addition to providing water, sanitation and hygiene assistance for 168,000 people, the \$20 million will fund food assistance for 170,000 people, and support more than 230,000 farmers in replanting crops and replacing livestock.

Images of the devastation wreaked by Cyclone Enawo in Madagascar. Credit: Johnnah Raniriniaina (Maroantsetra)/OCHA

Faced with 'clear science, real threats' countries must remain committed to Paris climate deal – UN

23 March 2017 – Climate change is an unprecedented and growing threat to peace, prosperity and development and addressing it presents an economic opportunity for Governments and business, senior United Nations officials said today.

“We are dealing with scientific facts, not politics. And the facts are clear. Climate change is a direct threat in itself, and a multiplier of many other threats,” UN Secretary-General António Guterres told a General Assembly High-Level action event aimed at invigorating political momentum on climate change, highlighting its deep links to the UN 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

Mr. Guterres said his messages to the meeting are simple.

“First, climate change is an unprecedented and growing threat – to peace and prosperity and the same in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Second, addressing climate change is a massive opportunity that we cannot afford to miss,” he said.

The Paris Agreement on climate change adopted in December 2015 is unique in its universality, with every single government having signed it. The pact entered force in less than a year. To date more than 130 Parties have ratified it, and the numbers are growing monthly.

The countries that supported the Paris Agreement are the same that adopted the 2030 Agenda – they comprise all UN Member States.

The reason for this consensus is clear: all nations recognize that implementing the 2030 Agenda goes hand-in-glove with limiting global temperature rise and increasing climate resilience.



Secretary-General António Guterres addresses a General Assembly High-Level action event aimed at invigorating political momentum on climate change, highlighting its deep links to the UN 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

Mr. Guterres said that last year was once again the hottest on record. Sea ice is at a historic low and sea levels at a historic high. These trends are indisputable, he stressed, explaining that consequences of climate change include food insecurity, water scarcity, poverty and displacement.

Tackling climate change is a tremendous opportunity for Governments and business as there is no trade-off between a healthy environment and a healthy economy.

“We can have both. Green business is good business,” he said.

Climate action is a necessity and can advance the attainment of sustainable development goals.

“How we go about it can be the subject of scientific and political debate. But there is no question that we must act, urgently and decisively, now,” Mr. Guterres said. “And it remains the only viable way to safeguard peace, prosperity and a sustainable future.”

Also addressing the event, were Peter Thomson, President of the General Assembly, and Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Still possible to bend curve on climate change trajectories

Mr. Thomson said that he had recently met with Petteri Taalas, the Secretary-General of the UN World Meteorological Organization (WMO), who confirmed that the world is currently on track towards a 3 to 4°C increase in global temperatures.

“I have always understood [...] that once we reach the 3°C – 4°C range, humanity’s survival on this planet will be put in jeopardy,” he said.

Cyclone Winston and Cyclone Pam which devastated Fiji and Vanuatu in recent years were among the strongest tropical cyclones to ever make landfall in the Southern Hemisphere. Fiji, an island nation from which Mr. Thomson hails, has already begun relocating low-lying villages to higher ground, away from the encroaching shoreline and the rising threat of storm surges.

“While the prognosis is dire, the scientific community assures us it is possible to bend the curve on current trajectories, if we work together to curb the growth of global greenhouse gas emissions,” Mr. Thomson said, reiterating his call for all parties to the Paris Agreement to ratify it without delay and for those that have already done so to deliver on their commitments.

World Meteorological Day celebrates importance of clouds for weather, climate and water

23 March 2017 – Clouds inspire art and thought, but few natural phenomena are as important to weather, climate or water, the United Nations meteorological agency today said, launching a digital cloud atlas to celebrate World Meteorological Day.

“If we want to forecast weather we have to understand clouds. If we want to model the climate system we have to understand clouds. And if we want to predict the availability of water resources, we have to understand clouds,” said World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Secretary-General Petteri Taalas.

World Meteorological Day commemorates the coming into force on 23 March 1950 of the convention establishing the WMO. This year’s theme is “Understanding Clouds.”

In conjunction with the Day, WMO today launched for the first time a primarily on-line digital edition of the International Cloud Atlas, which features hundreds of images and information about clouds, as well as meteorological marvels, such as rainbows and halos.

The new Atlas “combines 19th century traditions with 21st century technology,” the UN agency said, noting that the International Cloud Atlas was first published some 200 years ago.

It contains pictures, definitions, and explanations that are accepted and used by all of WMO’s 191 members, as well as all types of measurements from space and through remote sensing.

For example, the Atlas includes “volutus, a roll cloud; clouds from human activities such as the contrail, a vapour trail sometimes produced by airplanes; and asperitas, a dramatic undulated cloud which captured the public imagination,” according to WMO.

In his message for the Day, Mr. Taalas noted the importance of understanding weather and climate changes in protecting people and property, and assisting communities to become more resilient.

FEATURE: Humanity at the core as UN readies for first-ever Ocean Conference

22 March 2017 – Over a year ago, on 20 February 2016, Tropical Cyclone Winston made a category 5 landfall along the north coast of Fiji’s largest, most populous island, Viti Levu, killing at least 44 people, and grounding flights to and from the Pacific Island nation.

“It was one of the strongest cyclones to have hit any country in the Southern Hemisphere,” recalls Mr. Semi Koroilavesau, Fijian Minister for Fisheries. “That was quite catastrophic for Fiji and we are still recovering from it,” he adds, sombrely.

Mr. Koroilavesau was speaking recently at a panel discussion on the margins of the first preparatory meeting – convened by the President of the United Nations General Assembly at the UN Headquarters in New York – for the first-ever UN Ocean Conference, to be co-hosted by the Governments of Fiji and Sweden, from 5 June to 9 June 2017.

“Our ocean is warming up and changing the pattern of our main product, which is tuna,” said Mr. Koroilavesau underlining the significance of the ocean to the Fijian people.

“The migratory pattern has changed because of the conditions of the water. The degradation of the water is also depleting our resources and creating a lot of havoc in our ocean,” he told the high-level panel, which included Peter Thomson, President of the UN General Assembly, Isabella Lövin, Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden, and Wu Hongbo, UN Under-Secretary-General and head of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).

“Fiji has about 320 islands. Ocean is quite an important item to us both in our daily lives and... also as transportation between the islands,” said Mr. Koroilavesau.



A fisherman in Grenada hauls his net ashore hoping to catch fish from the Caribbean Sea. Photo: UNEP/ Kadir van Lohuizen / NOOR

In the run-up to the June Conference, four themes will shape the focus of the preparations that, according to the President of the UN General Assembly, “will lay the foundations upon which the Oceans Conference will stand.”

“Our efforts at this time and in the years ahead, will determine whether our children, and those who come after them, will know the joy and the sustenance of the oceans bounty that was provided to us in our youth. Let’s not deny them that bounty,” Mr. Thomson had said earlier, in a message that resonated

strongly with the theme for the month of February, which is *People and Oceans*, with a focus on livelihoods, tourism, food security, maritime transport and trade.

“Whether you look at the declining fish stocks that are reaching a tipping point, or the ocean acidification level or whether you look at the level of plastics in our oceans, I think any sensible person can conclude that time is running out fast and we need to take action fast,” said Mr. Thomson, during the preparatory meeting.

SDG14 and the whole development agenda

Under-Secretary-General Wu Hongbo underlined the nexus between oceans and people, especially in the context of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14, which has to do with conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

“When we talk about SDG 14, we are thinking about navigation in the sea, we think about catching fish in the sea for food, we are thinking about doing tourism, but that is not all. Health of the sea and sustainable use of marine resources have a direct impact in the implementation of the many SDGs,” noted Mr. Wu, calling for voluntary commitments to implement Goal 14.

VIDEO: Ahead of the UN Ocean Conference in June 2017, UN chief of Economic and Social Affairs, Wu Hongbo says the Conference will be a ‘game changer’ and a chance for the international community to raise awareness about the importance of the oceans.

Noting that SDG 14 is one of the vanguards for the whole Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, Mr. Wu also makes the connection between oceans and the goal to eliminate hunger. “We are actually receiving a lot of nutrition and the food from the sea so we have to protect the sea,” said Mr. Wu.

Besides food and nutrition, Mr. Wu pointed out the significant contribution of the ocean to people’s overall wellbeing and in mitigating the effects of climate change.

“The ocean and the sea are the natural regulator of our climate and they are good for sanitation,” noted the UN Under-Secretary-General. “People are saying that the oceans sink one third of greenhouse gas emission. If we lose the sea and oceans, just imagine what kind of situation we are going to have,” warned Mr. Wu, who also made a connection between oceans, employment and economic growth.

“I think the best or sustainable use of marine resources would really have a big boost to the economic growth and create a lot of jobs,” said Mr. Wu.



Residents of Taveuni island in Fiji helping to unload food rations that were delivered to affected villages in the south of the island. The southern part of Taveuni Island is among areas that were most affected by Cyclone Winston.

Some villages were completely destroyed and people were left without food for about a week, as access to the island was cut. After the runway and roads were cleared, people in affected villages started to receive food rations, but most of them were still in shock after they lost everything they had.
Photo: UNICEF/ Sokhin

Transformative commitments to drive Conference outcomes

The outcomes of the Oceans Conference will, according to the President of the UN General Assembly, include a call to action and a conference report that will constitute the global body's work plan for implementing the SDG 14.

"We must keep our vision clear. We must universalise our efforts. We must maintain the momentum towards the transformative commitments that will emerge from the Oceans Conference in June," underscored Mr. Thomson during the first preparatory meeting.

Mr. Thomson places particular significance to the outcomes of the Ocean Conference which, he noted, would constitute "a turning point in history."

"This is the opportunity for any human being to be a part of the recovery of the ocean. For any human being who cares about the health of the ocean," said Mr. Thomson, during the meeting.

Sweden's Deputy Prime Minister Isabella Lövin sees the Ocean Conference as an opportunity to "share experiences, share best practices," she told the high-level panel. "This Ocean Conference will be the hub where we can actually share this knowledge, also transfer technology, and support developing countries so they will have access and the capacity to share the way that is needed for the oceans because the oceans connect us all," she said.

VIDEO: In preparation for June's Ocean Conference that aims to help safeguard the planet's oceans, UN General Assembly President said it's time to 'take action fast' and the June conference will be a 'turning point' in history for protecting the ocean.

Ms. Lövin also expressed concerns about unsustainable exploitation of ocean resources and pollution, warning, "If these trends continue, with the overfishing, with more and more plastic pollution in our oceans, we will have more plastics than fish in our oceans by 2050."

Like her fellow panellists, she made an urgent call to action. "It's really, really serious so this is what we have to do now in order to leave our planet with good conscious to our children and grandchildren," she said, adding, "We need to take action now and we can do it. We don't have any excuses for not doing it."

The UN has called for voluntary commitments to implement Goal 14 and established an online commitment registry. The voluntary commitments, according to Under-Secretary-General Wu, "underscore the urgency for action

and for solutions.”

Other themes in focus every month ahead of the Ocean conference include: Ocean Pollution (marine litter, land-based water pollutants, shipping waste, oil spills); Marine Biodiversity (overfishing, marine habitat loss, species loss); and Oceans and Climate Change (sea-level rise, ocean warming, ocean acidification, coral bleaching).

VIDEO: Ahead of the first-ever UN conference on oceans, Swedish Deputy Prime Minister Isabella Lövin says the international community should share knowledge, technology and support developing countries on issues related to oceans.

[DR Congo: UN, partners need urgent aid for over 370,000 displaced in south-east province](#)

22 March 2017 – Intercommunal violence in south-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has forced hundreds of thousands of people from their homes, a top United Nations aid official in the country has said, warning that the current response is being outstripped by the needs.

“Unless peaceful coexistence is fully restored between the two communities, humanitarian needs will continue to spiral out of control,” said the Humanitarian Coordinator in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mamadou Diallo, wrapping up a three-day visit to the region on 20 March.

Some 370,000 people have fled the cascading violence across all six territories that make up the province, in the last nine months, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated.

The insecurity has disrupted aid operations resulting in what Mr. Diallo called “among the most urgent humanitarian hotspots in a country experiencing a worsening humanitarian situation.”

The UN Humanitarian Coordinator led a group that included representatives from UN agencies, donors and non-governmental organizations to Tanganyika’s Kalemie and Manono territories.

In Kalemie, the delegation visited the Kalunga site, home to some 17,000 people, where UN partners are providing emergency water and health care services amidst ongoing shelter concerns.

Speaking to the delegation, a displaced woman pleaded for education projects for the thousands of children living in the site, to avoid their further marginalization, OCHA said.

The group then visited the Kamala site in Manono considered the cradle of the intercommunal conflict where the delegation saw first-hand the burned, destroyed huts of people forced to flee.

On behalf of the international humanitarian community, the UN asked for \$40 million to cover all the humanitarian needs, including \$20 million for the most urgent, life-threatening needs for the displaced families.

The DR Congo Common Humanitarian Fund and the UN Central Emergency Response Fund have recently allocated \$5 million each for the response, with the Humanitarian Fund planning an additional allocation of \$2 million.

The humanitarian concerns came as the Secretary-General's Special Representative for DRC, Maman Sidikou, briefed the Security Council about the deteriorating security situation and the need to implement the 31 December agreement on the electoral process.

Under the agreement, President Joseph Kabila would stay in office until elections are held by the end of 2017. During this period, a 'National Council for Overseeing the Electoral Agreement and Process (CNSAP)' would be set up, and a new prime minister named from opposition ranks.