

UN health agency highlights importance of measles vaccine amid Europe outbreak

29 March 2017 – Hundreds of measles cases have been reported in Europe where the disease was believed to be nearing elimination leading the United Nations health agency to urge families to vaccinate their children and for national authorities to take urgent measures to stop transmission at the borders.

“Outbreaks will continue in Europe, as elsewhere, until every country reaches the level of immunization needed to fully protect their populations,” said Zsuzsanna Jakab, World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for Europe.

At least 500 cases were diagnosed since this January, the majority in France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania, Switzerland and Ukraine.

Measles are endemic in all of the above countries, and the estimated national immunization coverage with the second dose of measles-containing vaccine is believed to be less than the 95 per cent threshold.

“Measles continues to spread within and among European countries, with the potential to cause large outbreaks wherever immunization coverage has dropped below the necessary threshold,” WHO reported.

The largest outbreaks are in Romania, where more than 3,400 cases have been reported since January of last year, and in Italy, where more than 850 cases are expected in the coming weeks.

Measles is a highly contagious virus that remains endemic in most parts of the world. International standards recommend that the Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) vaccine be given in two doses, starting at 12 to 15 months of age, and the second dose at 4 through 6 years of age.

“I urge all endemic countries to take urgent measures to stop transmission of measles within their borders, and all countries that have already achieved this to keep up their guard and sustain high immunization coverage. Together we must make sure that the hard-earned progress made towards regional elimination is not lost,” said Dr. Jakab.

Pro-poor urbanization, sustainable infrastructure can unlock Asia-Pacific's prosperity – UN

29 March 2017 – Some 400 million people in Asia and the Pacific still confront poverty as part of their daily lives due to widening income inequality, despite the region's impressive gains in reducing poverty in recent decades, a United Nations-backed report has found.

As outlined in the report, a renewed strengthening of the social contract is critical for addressing multi-dimensional poverty and the high marginalization and exclusion of people, the Executive Secretary of ESCAP, Shamshad Akhtar, told the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD 2017), according to a press release from ESCAP.

Titled *Eradicating Poverty and Promoting Prosperity in a Changing Asia-Pacific*, the report notes that on top of the 400 million people, or one in 10, living in extreme poverty, more than one in four people in the region's developing countries experience poverty in multiple dimensions, including additional deprivations that impact their health, education, and standard of living.

The report underscores the importance of addressing poverty through pro-poor urbanization, effective management of rural-urban transitions, and investment in sustainable infrastructure.

Although people in extreme income poverty are more likely to live in rural areas, they are increasingly found in cities, therefore provision of high quality, low-carbon, and resilient infrastructure is essential.

Asia's infrastructure needs are large and will only grow, with our recent report suggesting that the region will need \$1.7 trillion annually in climate-resilient infrastructure investments, said ADB's Vice-President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development, Bambang Susantono.

How our region chooses to bridge the infrastructure gap will have profound global implications. Concerted efforts, as highlighted in the tripartite report, can help us cover the last mile for infrastructure towards inclusive and sustainable development, he added.

Also addressing the forum was Haoliang Xu, UN Assistant Secretary-General and UNDP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific.

As urbanization booms across Asia and the Pacific, its cities are powering innovation, economic growth, and prosperity, lifting many out of poverty. But there has also been an increase in inequality and exclusion in some regions, he said.

To be more inclusive and to leave no one behind, cities must adopt

innovative policies that align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and prioritize building the resilience of the most vulnerable groups," he added.

ESCAP, ADB, and UNDP also launched a new SDG Data Portal today to provide up to date data on SDG indicators for governments and stakeholders in Asia and the Pacific, along with an outlook assessment on SDGs in the region.

APFSD 2017 is being held by ESCAP in Bangkok from 29 to 31 March 2017. The conclusions and recommendations at the forum will inform discussions of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development at the global level, to be convened in New York in July 2017.

[In Jordan, UN chief urges region's leaders to shape 'new Arab world' able to address differences through cooperation](#)

29 March 2017 – Addressing the League of Arab States Summit in Jordan today, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres highlighted the importance of unity among the countries in the region to confront the challenges it is facing.

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

"At this time of transition and upheaval, unity will be critical," he said, emphasizing: "I appeal to your leadership in shaping a new Arab world able to address and solve, by itself, differences through dialogue and cooperation."

In his remarks, the Secretary-General also underscored the importance of partnership between the UN and the Arab League and said that it was his responsibility to use his good offices, in cooperation with Member States, as an added dimension for conflict resolution.

"It is time to end the fighting in Syria," he said, expressing hope that the Astana process can achieve an effective ceasefire.

"By now it should be clear to all involved that while fighting terrorism is essential, any success will prove ephemeral without a political solution that allows the Syrian people to freely decide their own fate," he added, underlining the need, also, to support Syrian refugees in their hour

of need.

Further, welcoming the progress in retaking territories held by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), the UN chief expressed hope that the violence in Yemen and Libya can be resolved soon.

Turning to the peace process in the Middle East, Mr. Guterres underscored that the two-state solution is the only path to ensure that Palestinians and Israelis can realize their national aspirations and live in peace, security and dignity.

“There is no Plan B,” he stated.

Concluding in his address, the Secretary-General highlighted the importance of addressing youth unemployment as well as empowerment of women – both as a matter of human rights as well as a spur to human development.

“Let us recognize the power and responsibility that lies in our hands to improve the lives of the people we serve.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“In case of criminal acts, the UN will do everything possible to ensure

that justice is done,” he stressed.

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

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

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

In Senegal, UN General Assembly President calls for sustainable management of marine resources

28 March 2017 – Visiting a traditional fishing community in Senegal, the President of the United Nations General Assembly has called on the countries in the region to prioritize conserving and sustainably managing their marine resources.

"I learned a lot today about how ocean issues like acidification, rising temperatures, overfishing and marine pollution affect the daily lives of fishermen," said Assembly President Peter Thomson.

Mr. Thomson is currently in Senegal as part of his visit to several African countries to build momentum towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), one of which specifically deals with the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources.

"Understanding and acting upon the perspectives and expectations of artisanal fishers is an important component of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14) that will be covered in The Ocean Conference this June," added the UN official.

Being held from 5 to 9 June at the UN Headquarters, in New York, the Conference aims to reverse the decline in the health of oceans for the benefit of the people and the planet.

SEE ALSO: UN kicks off preparations for upcoming summit on oceans, launches voluntary commitment website

Involving all relevant stakeholders, including Governments, intergovernmental organizations, financial institutions, non-governmental and civil society organizations as well as the academia and scientific communities, the Conference will also contribute to the follow-up and review process of the 2030 Agenda and provide input to the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

Also, while in Senegal, the Assembly President met with the country's Minister of Fisheries and Maritime Economy and discussed the country's response to challenges facing oceans such as overfishing, marine pollution, acidification and ocean warming.