

Water is 'catalyst' for cooperation, not conflict, UN chief tells Security Council

6 June 2017 – Stressing the importance of diplomacy to prevent and resolve trans-boundary disputes over water resources, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today told the United Nations Security Council that water serves as “a catalyst” for cooperation among nations, even those that are not on good terms.

“Water, peace and security are inextricably linked,” said Mr. Guterres during a meeting on preventive diplomacy and trans-boundary waters, which was chaired by Evo Morales, President of Bolivia, which holds the Council’s presidency for the month.

“I commend this Security Council meeting for highlighting how water is and should remain a reason for cooperation not conflict,” Mr. Guterres added.

With climate change having a growing impact, water scarcity is a growing concern, he pointed out, noting that by 2050 at least one in four people will live in a country where the lack of fresh water is chronic or recurrent.

Three-quarters of UN Member States share rivers or lake basins with their neighbours. There are more than 270 internationally shared river basins, which serve as the primary source of fresh water for approximately 40 per cent of the world’s population, including the Nile, the Indus, the Ganges, the Euphrates-Tigris, and the Mekong.

“That is why it is essential that nations cooperate to ensure water is shared equitably and used sustainably,” he said.

In the second half of the 20th century alone, some 287 international water agreements were signed.

In South America, Lake Titicaca, the largest freshwater lake on the continent, has long been a source of cooperation between Bolivia and Peru. The 1960 Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan has survived three wars between the two countries.

The Albufeira Convention, agreed when Mr. Guterres was Prime Minister of Portugal, continues to promote good relations on water management between his country and Spain.

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes became open for all UN Member States as of March last year, offering the opportunity to create a global framework for preventive diplomacy for dealing with transboundary water issues.

“Let us commit to investing in water security to ensure durable peace and

security for all communities and nations," he concluded.

Addressing Human Rights Council, UN rights chief decries some States' lack of cooperation

6 June 2017 – In a major address in Geneva, the United Nations human rights chief today stressed that denying access or not cooperating with UN bodies would not diminish scrutiny of a Government's human rights record.

Addressing the 35th session of the Human Rights Council, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, decried some Governments for cutting off or selectively choosing how they cooperation with his office and UN bodies.

"It would be intolerable if delegations were to conclude that by maintaining minimal engagement with the human rights mechanisms they can evade or betray those commitments to their own peoples, and to the peoples of the world," the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said in an oral update this morning to the Council.

He underscored that every Government is party to at least one of the nine core human rights treaties and has accepted that it "is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedom."

Whether or not individual leaders consider this truth convenient, it is nonetheless a fact that denial of human rights in one county concerns every State in the Organization

Mr. Zeid noted that the world sees increasingly the results of discrimination, deprivation and injustice – in the escalation of crises and suffering, and the outbreak of war. "Whether or not individual leaders consider this truth convenient, it is nonetheless a fact that denial of human rights in one county concerns every State in the Organization," he stressed.

With a mandate from the international community to promote and protect all human rights, his office (OHCHR) represents the world's commitment to universal ideals of human dignity. Its thematic priorities include strengthening international human rights mechanisms; enhancing equality and countering discrimination; and early warning and protection of human rights in situations of conflict, violence and insecurity. It also supports the work of UN human rights mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council.

Taking place at the UN Office in Geneva, the Council's session will last three weeks and tackle a range of human rights issues currently before the world.

Refusal to cooperate with UN bodies

The senior UN official also spoke out against some Governments' decisions to keep UN rights experts out of their borders, and rallied against "absolutely unacceptable" incidents of threats and insults directed at UN Special Rapporteurs.

"I strongly contest the self-serving argument presented by some, that this Council should avoid addressing [country situations](#) – a view which is usually voiced by leaders of States that feature few independent institutions, and which sharply curtail fundamental freedoms," he stated.

He specified, for example, the Government of Burundi, which was elected to the Council in 2015, yet "continues to commit some of the most serious human rights violation dealt with by this Council" and has suspended all cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR).

"In September the Council's independent mission was declared persona non grata, and the current Commission of Inquiry has not been able to enter the country," Mr. Zeid added.

He noted a number of countries which are not members of the Council, which have not permitted any visits by Special Procedures representatives, such as Special Rapporteurs.

Included in this group is Syria, which has cut off access to OHCHR and the Syrian Commission of Inquiry.

"This is notwithstanding the continued horrific suffering of the Syrian people, particularly in besieged communities. I repeat my call for the release of all detainees wrongfully imprisoned in Syria," Mr. Zeid urged.

As for the already-dire situation in the Kasai provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which continues to deteriorate, spreading to other provinces and across the border with Angola, Mr. Zeid said that given the difficulties in accessing the areas where violations and abuses are occurring, he will be dispatching a team to the region next week to meet with people fleeing the attacks.

"Unless I receive appropriate responses from the Government regarding a joint investigation by 8 June, I will insist on the creation of an international investigative mechanism for the Kasais," he stated.



The Human Rights Council chamber in Geneva. UN Photo/Elma Okic

Turning to representatives of his office, Mr. Zeid expressed very serious

concern about intimidation and reprisals brought on by State officials against people who engage with the UN on human rights. He specifically mentioned smear and hate campaigns against the Special Rapportuers on Myanmar, Summary Executions in the context of discussions on the Philippines, and on Iran.

"When Government or other officials intimidate, arrest or harm these individuals, they are attacking a fundamental element of the work of this Council and the UN, and it is our responsibility to do all we can to protect them," Mr. Zeid said.

He noted also that the Council's next annual report would focus on reprisals, and called for cooperation with Assistant Secretary-General Andrew Gilmour, who is leading UN action on that issue.

Condemning terrorism in all forms

Mr. Zeid began his address with a strong condemnation of terrorism throughout the world.

"The brutality of Da'esh [also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL] and other terrorist groups seemingly knows no bounds," he said.

"Yesterday, my staff reported to me that bodies of murdered Iraqi men, women and children are still lying on the streets of the al-Shira neighbourhood of western Mosul, after at least 163 people were shot and killed by Da'esh on 1 June to prevent them from fleeing."

After condemning the attacks, he called for Governments to eradicate the threat, but he cautioned against trampling on people's rights.

"Please remember this: for every citizen wrongfully detained under a vague anti-terrorism law, and humiliated, abused, or tortured, it is not simply one individual who then nurses a grievance against the authorities, but most of their family too. Send one innocent person to prison, and you may deliver six or seven family members into the hands of those who oppose the government, with a few who may even go further than that."

The UN Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the UN system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and make recommendations on them. It was setup by the UN General Assembly in March 2006, and replaced the Commission on Human Rights.

The Council is made up of 47 UN Member States which are elected by the General Assembly.

Syria: As airstrikes hit Raqqa, UN sounds alarm over plight of civilians

6 June 2017 – The United Nations humanitarian wing today said it is deeply concerned for the safety and protection of more than 400,000 civilians in Syria's war-torn Raqqa Governorate, who continue to be exposed to daily fighting and airstrikes.

The humanitarian situation in Al-Raqqa governorate remains dire, with the majority of the population reportedly facing critical problems in meeting their immediate needs. Alessandra Vellucci, Director of the UN Nations Information Service in Geneva on behalf of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)) told reporters at today's regular press briefing.

She also reiterated the UN's call for unconditional, unimpeded and sustained access to those affected by the fighting in Raqqa, and more broadly to the 4.5 million who are still in hard-to-reach areas across the war-torn country.

Turning to the internally displaced (IDPs), she pointed out that more than 160,000 people have been displaced since 1 May with the situation on the ground remaining fluid. There are some 87,200 in the Ar-Raqqa governorate; nearly 37,000 in Aleppo; over 33,400 in Idlib; and smaller numbers in Hama, Deir-ez-Zor and Homs.

On 3 June, three internally displaced people, including a pregnant woman, had been reportedly killed by a landmine. On 4 June, airstrikes on the al-Mashlab neighbourhood in Raqqa city had reportedly resulted in the destruction of two schools while mortar shelling in the vicinity of another school injured several people, she said.

Ms. Vellucci stated that since March, UN agencies continued to provide multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance through their local partners such as food, medical treatment and vaccinations throughout Raqqa, including IDPs in camps.

Some 60,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon in Jordan could lose assistance

For its part, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) sounded the alarm that humanitarian programmes supporting Syrian refugees and their host communities are quickly running out of resources.

Citing critical gaps in Lebanon and Jordan, UNHCR spokesperson Andrej Mahecic told journalists in Geneva that vital parts of its response to Syrian refugees were critically underfunded.

Despite generous pledges, humanitarian programmes in support of Syrian refugee and communities hosting them are quickly running out of resources. The situation is most dramatic in Lebanon and Jordan where a number of direct

cash assistance activities could dry up in less than four weeks,” he said.

Those who fled to Jordan face stark challenges.

“Refugees tell our staff that UNHCR monthly cash support means a meal a day, a better roof, their dignity. Now they fear losing everything. Many say would prefer to go back to Syria to die if they stop receiving this assistance,” continued Mr. Mahecic.

In Lebanon, where UNHCR urgently needs \$116 million, direct cash assistance programmes for refugees will be affected first.

“These include a lifeline of multi-purpose cash for 30,000 Syrian refugee families, a winter cash assistance for two months for another 174,000 families and protection cash assistance for 1,500 refugee households to help them overcome periods of hardship,” he continued.

“The funding gap also jeopardises 65,000 life-saving secondary health care interventions and support to UNHCR's and the Lebanese Authorities' capacity to issue and renew documentation for refugees, following a recent decision to waive the residency renewal fees which most refugees could not afford,” Mr. Mahecic added.

Mid-way through this year, the \$4.6 billion inter-agency appeal to meet the immediate humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees across the Middle East and North Africa is only 18 per cent funded.

Sri Lanka: UN assists storm victims, seeks to contain diseases 'spiralling out of control'

6 June 2017 – In the aftermath of a devastating tropical storm in Sri Lanka, United Nations agencies are working to provide shelters and other emergency kits while seeking to contain a mosquito-borne disease that is starting to “spiral out of control.”

Heavy flooding, landslides and flash floods caused by Tropical Cyclone Mora in Myanmar and Bangladesh, and torrential monsoon rains have affected some 684,000 people in south and central Sri Lanka. The flooding, which is believed to be the worst in over a decade, has left at least 212 people dead and 79 missing.

Sri Lanka's Disaster Management Centre (DMC) estimates that over 2,500 houses were destroyed and nearly 15,900 damaged. These numbers could rise as data

from damage assessments is compiled in the coming weeks.

The International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) plans to provide 3,700 shelter repair kits, 5,000 non-food relief item kits and 250 temporary shelters, with funding sought from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund ([CERF](#)), said the UN migration agency in a [press release](#). The intervention will help an estimated 74,750 people.

Nearly 22,000 people are still sheltering in over 200 overcrowded sites, including schools, temples and churches, the agency said.

In flood-affected areas people are expected to return to their homes as water levels recede. But in landslide-affected areas, people currently staying in evacuation centres or with relatives and friends are unlikely to be able to return to their homes in the short term.

“There will likely be a need to track displacement, return, and site closure. People will need shelter and other non-food relief items (when they leave the sites) and we will need to ensure that aid is distributed at the location most useful and appropriate for each affected family,” said IOM Sri Lanka Chief of Mission Giuseppe Crocetti.

On Friday, the UN Humanitarian Country Team launched an emergency response plan seeking \$22.7 million to address the critical life-saving and protection needs of 374,000 people in seven districts, targeting four priority sectors, including shelter, food, health and water and sanitation.

IOM will co-lead the emergency shelter and non-food item sector, which is appealing for \$6.5 million.

Meanwhile, the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) is calling for \$3.5 million to keep vulnerable children safe.

“So far we have delivered water and sanitation supplies, we are working on education supplies, strengthening health systems and rehabilitating basic health services and working on disease control for both diarrhoea and dengue which is starting to spiral out of control,” said UNICEF country representative Tim Sutton.

He said flood waters have not receded in the southern district of Matara, raising fears of mosquito-borne disease transmission. He noted that so far this year there have already been more than 53,000 cases of dengue, a mosquito-borne tropical disease, which causes severe flu-like symptoms. It is a leading cause of death among children and adults in Sri Lanka.

Falling aid for education putting global goals at risk, warns UN agency

6 June 2017 – Against the backdrop of aid allocations to education falling for the sixth year in a row, the United Nations agency mandated with promoting education globally has called on the donor community to focus more attention on the vital sector, especially in countries where needs are the greatest.

According to a [policy paper](#) by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's ([UNESCO](#)) Global Education Monitoring Report, total aid to education stands at \$12 billion – 4 per cent lower than the figure in 2010.

“Aid remains [far short of what is needed](#) to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4, putting our commitments at risk,” said Irina Bokova, the Director-General of UNESCO, in a news release announcing the findings.

“[Resources] need to be multiplied by at least six to achieve our common education goals and must go to countries most in need,” she cautioned, calling on donors not to shift their attention away from the poorest countries.

Based on newly released data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee, the study revealed that aid to basic education, such as support to pre-primary and primary education, as well as adult education and literacy programmes – stands at \$5.2 billion, 6 per cent lower than the amount in 2010.

It also noted that, while humanitarian aid to education reached a “historic high” – increasing almost 55 per cent from 2015 to 2016 – education received only 2.7 per cent of total aid available and less than half (48 per cent) of the amount needed.

In terms of national contributions, the United States and the United Kingdom were the two largest donors to basic education, but their allocations fell by 11 per cent and 9 per cent respectively in 2014-2015.

In contrast, contributions from Norway and Germany increased by 50 per cent and 34 per cent respectively, noted the UN agency.

The UNESCO policy paper, [Aid to Education is Stagnating and Not Going to Countries Most in Need](#) also voiced concern over skewed allocations by donors leading to aid not reaching places it is most needed.

Sub-Saharan Africa, home to over half of the world's out-of-school children currently receives less than half the aid to basic education it used to in 2002, and only 26 per cent of the total aid to basic education globally.

This contrasts to the 22 per cent allocation to the northern Africa and

western Asia region, where 9 per cent of children are out of school.

Calling for urgent action to rectify the problems, UNESCO urged donors to reverse the move away from education and focus their attention on campaigns such as the Global Partnership for Education Replenishment campaign which is seeking to raise \$3.1 billion between 2018-2020 and programmes such as the Education Cannot Wait fund (established in 2016) that aims to raise \$3.85 billion by 2020, with the potential to transform the delivery of education in emergencies.