

At China's Belt and Road Forum, UN chief Guterres stresses shared development goals

14 May 2017 – Speaking at a major international conference in Beijing, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today drew comparisons between China's 'One Belt, One Road' initiative and the Sustainable Development Goals, saying both are rooted in a shared vision for global development.

Both strive to create opportunities, global public goods and win-win cooperation. And both aim to [deepen 'connectivity' across countries and regions](#): connectivity in infrastructure, trade, finance, policies and, perhaps most important of all, among peoples, the Secretary-General said addressing Chinese President Xi Jinping and dozens of other state leaders at the Belt and Road Forum.

The attendees represent some of the more than 60 countries included in the Belt and Road plan that China introduced in 2013 to stimulate trade and economic growth along the ancient Silk Road and beyond.

In order for the participating countries along the Belt and Road to fully benefit from the potential of enhanced connectivity, it is crucial to strengthen the links between the Initiative and the Sustainable Development Goals, Mr. Guterres noted, adding that the 17 Goals can guide the policies and actions under the Belt and Road towards true sustainable development.

The initiative reportedly includes nearly \$1 trillion worth of infrastructure investments in Africa, Asia and Europe. As these projects which include bridges, nuclear plants and railways unfold, Mr. Guterres highlighted the need to work together to uphold international environmental and social standards, and ensuring that rural areas, not just cities, benefit.

With the initiative expected to generate vast investments in infrastructure, let us seize the moment to help countries make the transition to clean-energy, low-carbon pathways instead of locking in unsustainable practices for decades to come, he said, praising Chinese leadership on climate change.

He also urged donor countries to continue investing in development projects through official development assistance (ODA), and urged them to fulfil their commitments under the [Addis Ababa Plan of Action](#), which finances projects related to the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

Mr. Guterres also called on Governments to settle peacefully any tensions related to the One Belt, One Road initiative, saying that just as the initiative opens new corridors for goods, let us also keep open the channels

for dialogue.”

He praised the initiative for its “immense potential” to promote access to markets, and as “far-reaching in geography and ambition.”

Since arriving in China on 13 May, Mr. Guterres has met with senior Chinese officials, including Foreign Minister Wang Yi. He also held a meeting with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu.

[Armed group attacks civilians, UN in Central African Republic overnight; one peacekeeper killed](#)

13 May 2017 – The United Nations peacekeeping force in the Central African Republic is sending reinforcements to the south-eastern town of Bangassou, where an armed group opened fire on civilians overnight killing an undisclosed number and at least one UN peacekeeper.

“The armed elements [continue to systematically and deliberately attack](#) the MINUSCA base with heavy weaponry to impede the peacekeepers from doing their extremely vital task of protecting the civilian population and to divert them from their primary vocation of saving lives,” the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the country, known by the French acronym MINUSCA, said in a statement.

The Mission said that members of a wide coalition, including anti-Balaka elements attacked civilian populations overnight, targeting in particular Muslims, in the Tokoyo neighborhood of Bangassou.

“Despite heavy fire against MINUSCA's field office, peacekeepers attempted to respond to the attack in Tokoyo to protect civilians. In the firefight, which continued into the morning of 13 May, one peacekeeper of the Moroccan contingent died from gunshot injuries,” the Mission said.

According to preliminary information, displaced civilians have fled to the mosque, the catholic church and a hospital.

“At this time it is difficult to ascertain the humanitarian situation in Bangassou. However credible sources have confirmed an undetermined number of civilian casualties, MINUSCA said.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of MINUSCA Parfait Onanga-Anyanga vigorously condemned the attack, adding that “MINUSCA will do everything in its power together with the legitimate Central African authorities to arrest the perpetrators of these horrible

acts.”

He said the international community will be “relentless” in apprehending the perpetrators of these crimes and all their commanders, including some instigators who may be sponsoring these attacks from Bangui.

“Our actions will be relentless. The blood of peacekeepers and the blood of innocent Central Africans will not fall in vain in this country,” he added.

The attack came just hours after the UN held a memorial ceremony to honour five peacekeepers killed on 8 May in a nearby village of Yogofongo. People connected with the anti-Balaka group are also suspected in the attack.

Special Representative Onanga-Anyanga was joined by the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, and other senior UN officials, who are on a special visit to the country. Earlier in the day, they visited the 10 Cambodian and Moroccan peacekeepers injured in the attack and wished them a speedy recovery.

[ESCAP: 70 years of UN efforts to advance socio-economic development in Asia and the Pacific](#)

12 May 2017 – Notwithstanding the challenges faced by countries in Asia and Pacific, the region has witnessed economic and social achievements beyond expectations over the past 70 years, according to the head of the United Nations body assisting with development efforts.

As Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific ([ESCAP](#)), Shamshad Akhtar leads an entity with a geographical scope that stretches from Turkey in the west to the Pacific island nation of Kiribati in the east, and from Russia in the north to New Zealand in the south, and covers a region that is home to 4.1 billion people, or two-thirds of the world's population.

Founded in 1947, as the then Economic Commission for Asia and the Far-East, to assist the region's countries with economic reconstruction in the devastating aftermath of the Second World War, the Commission's geographical scope and mandate were expanded in the 1970s to reflect changes on the ground.

When ESCAP convene its [seventy-third session](#) next week at its headquarters in Bangkok, top government officials will discuss further strengthening the implementation of the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development and the

Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

In addition, member States will deliberate on regional cooperation for sustainable energy, an issue vital in a region where millions suffer from severe energy insecurity and lack of access. Also on the agenda are exchanges on infrastructure development in least developed, landlocked developing and Pacific island developing countries, applications of space technology for environment and resilience against water-related disasters.

UN News spoke to Ms. Akhtar, a Pakistani national and seasoned economist, about development efforts in the region, including ongoing challenges, as well as the work of ESCAP and what is expected during the upcoming session.



A train snakes its way through Seoul, Republic of Korea. Photo: Kibae Park



A park in Bangkok, Thailand, where accessibility and assistive features such as detectable guides and warnings have been installed. Photo: UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe



A shopkeeper at a local grain market in Tachileik, Myanmar. Photo: Kibae Park



A worker at an integrated resource recovery centre aerates organic waste to speed up the composting process. Matale, Sri Lanka. Photo: ESCAP



A student at the Tailulu College in Nukua'lofa, Tonga, where broadband internet connectivity has been installed, transforming the way students access information. Photo: Tom Perry/World Bank

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***UN News:* Can you tell us about the current socio-economic development snapshot of the region and how this has changed over the past 70 years?**

Shamshad Akhtar: Asia-Pacific is a very vibrant and dynamic region. It has come a long way since ESCAP was created in 1947 to assist countries emerging from the devastation of World War II.

I have to say that the region has witnessed economic and social achievements beyond expectations – it is the region that led the drive for poverty reduction and is today known for being the driver of the global economic recovery. Asia-Pacific is the region that today accounts for 40 per cent of global trade.

UN News: That said, Asia and the Pacific also has its fair share of challenges. Can you elaborate?

Shamshad Akhtar: Of course the region has challenges. Because the region is growing very fast, pollution is a major concern. Greenhouse gas emissions from Asia-Pacific account for over half of the total greenhouse gas emissions around the world [and this is] just based on the performance of few countries.

There are about 400 million people still poor in the region. This number rises to 900 million if measured using the multi-dimensional poverty index. So reducing poverty is a major issue

Secondly, the region has been at the frontier of export-led development. Now it is time for it to move towards domestic-driven growth. Given its potential and the value-added relationships that it has developed, Asia-Pacific has the potential to further stimulate the regional demand.

Another challenge is poverty. There are about 400 million people still poor in the region. This number rises to 900 million if measured using the [multi-dimensional poverty index](#), so reducing poverty is a major issue.

Furthermore, some larger economies in the region are undergoing rebalancing from excessive structural surpluses to stimulating more domestic demand-led growth.

Also, there is the question on how to absorb the growing workforce because there will be significant demographic changes that the region will face – both in terms of further growth in population as well as in terms of the rise in the [aging population](#).

Video: Ms. Akhtar highlighting progress made by the Asia-Pacific region and the challenges before it.

UN News: In light of these challenges, as well as for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, what has ESCAP been doing to assist its members?

Shamshad Akhtar: For the 2030 Agenda, ESCAP's intergovernmental focus and work programme has been transformed to support the development of a cohesive, coherent and coordinated institutional framework, which is called the [Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development](#).

Also, our member States have worked with us to develop a regional road-map for implementation of the 2030 Agenda and they have also given mandates to have a regional follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.

We are updating our analysis of regional cooperation and integration to help strengthen the sustainable development agenda.

This will in turn, help the region get connected in a much more sustainable manner

We will carry on this work while continuing to support the implementation of sustainable development through our second core mandate – [Regional Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific](#). We are also updating our analysis of regional cooperation and integration to help strengthen the sustainable development agenda. This will in turn, help the region get connected in a much more sustainable manner.

At the same time, the 2030 Agenda includes a number of transboundary goals so we hope to leverage regional cooperation and integration to fast-track implementation of these particular goals.

We are also supporting the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda: We have a track for [financing for development in Asia-Pacific](#) where we are raising awareness on the significance of, as well as on the means of, boosting domestic resource mobilization, in particular the tax-to-GDP ratio as well as formulating tax policies that are supportive of the sustainable development agenda.

We also continue to work on infrastructure financing and capacity building, and also looking at climate change, financial inclusion, science, technology and innovation, and a range of other issues.

UN News: You mentioned the fact that the Asia-Pacific region is very diverse. How are you able to cover the entire region while operating out of Bangkok?

Shamshad Akhtar: The ESCAP region covers a lot of countries. It has [53 member countries and nine associate members](#). Given the diversity of the region, we have subregional offices across the region: one in Suva, Fiji, for the Pacific; in Incheon, Republic of Korea, for North and North-East Asia; in Delhi, India, for South and South-West Asia; and in Almaty, Kazakhstan for North and Central Asia.

These offices both maintain relationships with the countries as well as coordinate and conduct core work programmes in their respective subregions. The work programme of the subregional offices and the functional divisions [at ESCAP headquarters in Bangkok] are aligned, making sure that leadership comes from the principal office in Bangkok and support from the subregional offices.

UN News: The Commission will be holding its seventy-third session during the week of 14 May. What are the major issues on the agenda?

Shamshad Akhtar: The session will be revolving around issues concerning sustainable development as well as the regional cooperation and integration agenda. We will also be discussing a [thematic report on energy efficiency](#). Having expanded our work programme to include energy, this will help us promote sustainable energy for all, while enhancing energy connectivity in the region and diversifying energy sources to include renewable sources.

We will also be discussing the overall economic and social situation in the region in addition to our core mandate of sustainable development and how they mutually support each other.



Sala Santithan, the complex that housed the headquarters of the then ECAFE, in Bangkok, Thailand, prior to the construction of its current offices.

Photo: ESCAP archives



Representatives from the then ECAFE member States attend the sixth session of the Commission (1950). Photo: ESCAP archives



U Nyun, Executive Secretary of the then ECAFE, delivering an address at the twenty-first session, held in Wellington, New Zealand, in 1965. Photo: ESCAP archives



Delegates attend the seventy-second session of the Commission in May 2016.

Photo: ESCAP



ESCAP headquarters in Bangkok, Thailand. The UN Conference Centre is in the foreground and the ESCAP secretariat building is in the back. Photo: ESCAP

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UN News: What are the major outcomes expected this year?

Shamshad Akhtar: Deliberations at the Commission will provide us with greater understanding on what support the region and the countries need from ESCAP. The Commission will guide us on what we can do for the member States to further support them in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and other mandates that have been assigned to us. But the ultimate test will be how we can match the demand with the supply.

UN News: Would you like to add anything else?

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Shamshad Akhtar: One thing I would like to mention is that regional commissions are a very important arm of the United Nations. However, because they are not based in New York, they often are not so visible.

The technical work done at the subregional level or at the country level is actually being done by the regional commissions.

We play a very important role in connecting the global with the national through the bridge of the regional commissions. We are going to be supporting a lot of knowledge-sharing and all kinds of technical work at the regional level, not for the sake of doing it, but to ensure that these are all consolidated with the discussions at the global level.

[Time now to maximize on the opportunities offered in Haiti, highlights head of UN advisory group](#)

12 May 2017 – Following their recent visit to Haiti, a United Nations advisory group on the island nation called on the international community to work closely with the Government and capitalize on the opportunities that have presented there.

“Haiti now has a Government and a President that has been elected – a Government that has been put in place and which seems to be functioning,” Marc-André Blanchard, Chair of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) [Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti](#) and the Permanent Representative of Canada to the UN, told a press conference at the UN Headquarters in New York.

“They have priorities that are very interesting and aligned with the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development, so there is an opportunity for action,” he added.

He further highlighted that the focus in the impoverished country, hit hard by a number of natural disasters, is moving from humanitarian assistance towards development and that the international community should collaborate with the Government to ensure that the priorities set by the countries can be implemented.

The Advisory Group, mandated by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to closely follow and provide advice on the long-term development strategy of Haiti to promote socioeconomic recovery, reconstruction and stability, conducted a mission to the country from 8 to 10 May during which it met with a broad range of stakeholders, including Government officials, parliamentarians, civil society and development agencies on the ground.

Further at the press conference, Mr. Blanchard recalled the contributions made by the UN mission in the country, known by its French acronym, MINUSTAH, and noted that while it was deployed to the island at a difficult time, it “was actually able to achieve a lot.”

“Everybody agrees that the country is [...] in a better situation now than it was five years ago [and that] the country is more secure now than it was a few years ago,” he said.

However, he added that some security concerns, issues with institutions and corruption remained and underscored that the transition of MINUSTAH to a new mission, the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH), with the added focus on the rule of law, governance and institutions “institutions is the right one for the future involvement of the UN.”

The 17-member Advisory Group consists of Canada (Chair), Argentina, Bahamas, Belize, Benin, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, France, Haiti, Mexico, Peru, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and the United States.

Central African Republic: UN honours fallen ‘blue helmets’

12 May 2017 – The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic ([MINUSCA](#)) held a memorial ceremony today in honour of five peacekeepers who lost their lives after their convoy was attacked in the south-eastern part of the country earlier this week.

On a special visit to the Central African Republic, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, [UN Mission in Colombia, presided over the ceremony](#), in the presence of Government officials and alongside the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of MINUSCA, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Najat Rochdi, and MINUSCA Force Commander Lt. Gen. Balla Keita.

The deadly attack on the MINUSCA convoy – perpetrated by suspected anti-Balaka elements – occurred Monday, 8 May, near the village of Yogofongo. During the exchange of fire, one Cambodian peacekeeper and eight anti-Balaka elements were killed. There were a number of injured on both sides. Three of the four peacekeepers reported missing after the fire fight were found dead the next day. The fourth was found dead yesterday.

Mr. Lacroix paid tribute to “the [five soldiers](#) serving under the UN flag and who made the ultimate sacrifice in the name of peace,” emphasizing that “their sacrifice must not be forgotten and will not be in vain.” He saluted the courage of the 10 Cambodian and Moroccan peacekeepers injured in the attack and wished them a speedy recovery.

MINUSCA peacekeepers undertake a difficult and honourable endeavour. Their critical work protecting civilians, opening roadways and building bridges helps to bring unity to a divided country.



Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix visits a peacekeeper injured in an attack on the convoy on 8 May 2017 in southeast Central African Republic (CAR). Photo: MINUSCA

Addressing mourners, Mr. Lacroix said: “This attack is an attack against the United Nations’ ideals of peace and security that these soldiers defend here in the Central African Republic. This attack must not go unpunished and the perpetrators of this act of extreme cruelty must be prosecuted.”

“Those who accept to work in difficult conditions show remarkable courage and I am humbled by the courage of the personnel of the Mission,” said Mr. Lacroix, who laid wreaths on the coffins of the slain peacekeepers during the ceremony.

The ceremony at the Mission’s headquarters in in the capital, Bangui, was attended by senior Central African Government officials, the diplomatic corps, humanitarian community representatives and hundreds of deeply saddened UN personnel in CAR, the Mission reported.

Earlier in the afternoon, Mr. Lacroix visited the survivors of the attack at the MINUSCA hospital.

The remains of the fallen peacekeepers will be transferred to a UN regional support base in Entebbe, Uganda, from where they will be flown home to Cambodia and Morocco.