

Those responsible for St. Petersburg metro attack must be held accountable – UN chief Guterres

3 April 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has condemned today's explosion on the metro in Russia's second largest city of St. Petersburg and underlined need to bring those responsible to justice.

According to a statement issued by Mr. Guterres' spokesperson, the UN chief [expressed his deepest condolences](#) to the families of the victims and to the Government as well as to people of Russia.

He also underscored that those responsible for the "appalling act" must be held accountable.

According to reports, at least ten people were killed in the blast that hit a train as it was travelling between two underground stations. Dozens more are also said to have been injured.

Follow China's example, shut down ivory factories and shops, UN agency urges countries

3 April 2017 – Applauding the Chinese Government's closure of many of its ivory factories and retail outlets, the United Nations environment wing has called on other countries and territories to follow China's example and improve the survival prospects for elephants across the world.

The move, announced by the country's State Forestry Administration, represents the first concrete steps in an "almost complete" ban on the domestic trade in ivory. It was announced last year and expected to be fully implemented by the end of 2017.

"This is an historic step and may well be a turning point in our fight to save elephants from extinction," the Executive Director of UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)), Erik Solheim, said in a [news release](#) issued late last week.

"The true measure of the success of these new rules will be how well they are enforced," he added.

According to UNEP, the closures on 31 March represent the end of business for

around one-third of officially sanctioned ivory-carvers and licensed retailers in one of the world's largest markets for the sale of ivory, where elephant tusks are used to make decorative objects and as traditional gifts or displays of wealth.

With 100,000 elephants killed in the last decade alone and only around 500,000 left worldwide, bans like this cannot happen soon enough.

Mr. Solheim also pledged to work closely with the Chinese government to ensure a healthy natural legacy remains for the world's children and grandchildren.

Lower prices mean fewer poachers

Also, following the announcement of the ban, ivory prices have fallen by almost two-thirds and public awareness campaigns have played a key role in reducing the demand. These mean that the killing of elephants for their tusks and illicit trade of the ivory is not as lucrative as it once was.

Such legislation, enforcement and a change in public attitudes will not only protect wildlife but also benefit people who live in the countries where elephants are found.

Furthermore, combatting illegal trade in ivory helps the fight against corruption as well as helps curb the funding that finance the activities of criminal gangs.

What's good the elephants is good for everyone.

[Lack of infrastructure, jobs drives rural youth to cities, says UN rural poverty agency head](#)

3 April 2017 – Investing in rural youth is essential to stem the migration of young people looking for work in cities and to keeping a global food supply, the new head of the United Nations agency charged with eradicating rural poverty today said.

In one of his [first interviews](#) since taking on the leadership of the UN's International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Gilbert Hounbo said he wants people to see life in rural areas as a choice and not a necessity.

“Food security and nutrition are essential, but we have to go beyond that and really aim at the fight against poverty and look at agriculture as a decent income-generating activity,” noted Mr. Hounbo, who was

previously the Deputy Director-General of the International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)).

Without adequate investment in the world's most vulnerable communities, he continued, there will be increased instability and conflict and people will find it harder to bounce back from shocks, giving them more reasons to flee rural areas.

"We need to work on those hardships so that young people can be happy in a rural setting, instead of looking to go to the capital or move outside their country," he said.

Mr. Hounbou whose senior positions include serving as Prime Minister of Togo understands first-hand the challenges of living in the countryside, according to IFAD. Mr. Hounbou grew up in rural Togo, and pledged to work through IFAD to aid young people living in rural poverty.

"When I was a youngster of eight years old, I had to walk four kilometres every morning to go and get water for the house, and a few years later I had to walk 20 kilometres every day to get to high school," he said. "It is unacceptable that kids today have to go through the same thing 40 to 50 years later."

Mr. Hounbou said his priority is to ensure that IFAD continues to have the resources to invest in rural areas so that they become "places of prosperity and hope, where people can build decent lives and not be compelled to migrate."

[Syria: Agriculture should be kick-started now despite huge destruction – UN report](#)

3 April 2017 – With six years of conflict in Syria causing more than \$16 billion of lost crop and livestock production and destroyed farming assets, a United Nations report published today stressed the need to reboot and kick-start the agricultural sector now to dramatically reduce the need for humanitarian aid and migration.

"Ramping up investment in the recovery of the agriculture sector could dramatically reduce the need for humanitarian aid. It could also have a significant impact on stemming the flow of migrants," [said](#) Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) Director-General José Graziano da Silva on the report, which was released ahead of an international conference on Syria's future in Brussels.

The report, Counting the Cost: Agriculture in Syria after six years of crisis, presents the first comprehensive nationwide assessment of the damage of the war on the agriculture sector. The assessment, which took place in August and September 2016, included surveys of more than 3,500 households across Syria, interviews with more than 380 community groups and analysis of primary and secondary agricultural data.

Of the \$16 billion total bill, the cost of damage to assets – such as tractors, machinery, commercial farms, veterinary clinics, animal sheds, greenhouses, irrigation systems and processing facilities – is estimated at over \$3 billion, though this number is likely to rise significantly when the full extent of damages in the main conflict areas can be better assessed.

About \$6.3 billion of the total is made up of damage and loss in crop production. In the livestock sector, damage and loss was calculated at around \$5.5 billion, and in the fisheries sector the estimate is almost \$80 million.

The initial cost of rebuilding the agriculture sector over a three-year period is estimated at between \$10.7 and \$17.1 billion in total, depending on whether there is no change in the conflict, a partial return to peace or a full return to peace.

The report outlines a response plan under each of these possible scenarios, including addressing underlying issues such as sustainable water use for irrigation.

Rural households are clear about what they require to resume or boost their agricultural production. Basic supplies such as fertilizer, seeds and veterinary medicine for livestock are urgently needed. After those needs have been met, emphasis should shift to credit, processing and marketing support, and repairing critical assets such as irrigation infrastructure.

Around 95 per cent of communities surveyed felt that if they were assisted with even basic agricultural support such as seeds, fertilizers and fuel to power irrigation pumps, it would reduce the number of people abandoning rural areas to find opportunities elsewhere, and also encourage the return of migrants and internally displaced people.

[UN, partners warn 108 million people face severe food insecurity worldwide](#)

31 March 2017 – Despite international efforts to address food insecurity, around 108 million people worldwide were severely food insecure in 2016, a dramatic increase compared with 80 million in 2015, according to a United Nations-backed report on food crises that offers benchmark for action needed to avoid catastrophe.

"The cost in human and resource terms only increases if we let situations deteriorate," said UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) Director-General José Graziano da Silva, in a news release on the [Global Report on Food Crises 2017](#).

"We can prevent people [dying from famine](#) but if we do not scale up our efforts to save, protect and invest in rural livelihoods, tens of millions will remain severely food insecure," he added.

Civil conflict is the driving factor in nine of the 10 worst humanitarian crises, underscoring the strong linkage between peace and food security, says the report.

The report represents a new and politically innovative collaboration between the European Union and USAID/FEWSNET, regional food security institutions together with UN agencies including the FAO, the World Food Programme and the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)).

"Hunger exacerbates crisis, creating ever greater instability and insecurity. What is a food security challenge today becomes tomorrow's security challenge," said WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin. "It is a race against time – the world must act now to save the lives and livelihoods of the millions at the brink of starvation."

"This report highlights the critical need for prompt and targeted action to effectively respond to the food crises and to address their root causes," said Neven Mimica, Commissioner for EU's International Cooperation and Development, noting that in 2016, the EU allocated €550 million already, followed by another €165 million that we have just mobilized to assist the people affected by famine and drought in the Horn of Africa.

This year, the demand for humanitarian and resilience building assistance will further escalate as four countries are at risk of famine: South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and north-east Nigeria.

Other countries that require massive levels of assistance because of widespread food insecurity are Iraq, Syria (including refugees in neighbouring countries) Malawi and Zimbabwe. In the absence of immediate and substantive action, the food security situation in these countries will continue to worsen in coming months, according to the new report.

AUDIO: There has been a "dramatic increase" in food insecurity around the world the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has said, launching a joint agency report showing that some 108 million people were categorized as "severely food insecure" during 2016.