

# Polluted environments kill 1.7 million children each year, UN health agency reports

6 March 2017 – Unhealthy environments are responsible for one-quarter of young child deaths, according to two new reports from the United Nations health agency, which reviewed the threats from pollutants such as second-hand smoke, UV radiation, unsafe water and e-waste.

According to the latest information, polluted environments take the lives of 1.7 million children under the age of five.

“A polluted environment is a deadly one – particularly for young children,” said Margaret Chan, Director-General of the UN World Health Organization (WHO). “Their developing organs and immune systems, and smaller bodies and airways, make them especially vulnerable to dirty air and water.”

In one of the two reports, *Inheriting a Sustainable World: Atlas on Children’s Health and the Environment*, WHO announced that many of the common causes of death among children aged between one month and five years of age are preventable with safe water and clear cooking fuels. These include diarrhoea, malaria and pneumonia.

The main pollutant is in the air, resulting in 570,000 deaths each year among children under five years old. Air pollution can stunt brain development and reduce lung function and trigger asthma. In the longer-term, exposure to air pollution can increase the child’s risk of contracting heart disease, a stroke or cancer.

To counter such exposure, WHO recommends reducing air pollution, improving safe water and sanitation, and protecting pregnant women and building safer environments, among other actions described in *Don’t pollute my future! The impact of the environment on children’s health*.

“Investing in the removal of environmental risks to health, such as improving water quality or using cleaner fuels, will result in massive health benefits,” said Maria Neira, WHO Director, Department of Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health.

One of the emerging environmental threats to children is electronic and electrical waste, according to the second WHO report. Appliances such as old mobile phones that are improperly recycled “expose children to toxins which can lead to reduced intelligence, attention deficit, lung damage, and cancer,” the UN agency reported.

At the current rate, the amount of such waste is expected to increase by 19 per cent between 2014 and 2018, up to 50 million metric tonnes.

The reports also point out harmful chemicals that work themselves through the food chain – such as fluoride, lead and mercury, as well as the impact that climate change and UV rays have on children’s development.

**AUDIO:** If you smoke, burn fossil fuels like coal or drive a vehicle, chances are, you’re polluting the air and harming the health of those around you, the World Health Organization (WHO) is warning. *Credit: UN News*

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## [In Niger, Security Council links aid and development in fight against Boko Haram](#)

5 March 2017 – The Security Council – which is in the Lake Chad Basin to draw attention to the humanitarian and development needs of a region grappling with Boko Haram’s terror – visited for the first time Niger, one of the poorest countries in the world.

Addressing media in Niamey, Ambassador Matthew Rycroft of the United Kingdom, who is leading the Council visit as president of the Security Council for the month of March, pledged solidarity with the people who the Council had met.

“We have demonstrated our commitment to further support Niger in its remarkable efforts to restore the security stability of the localities in the Lake Chad basin but also to provide the necessary protection and assistance to the populations affected by the crisis,” Mr. Rycroft told journalists.

Earlier, the Council members had met with President Mahamadou Issoufou.

They also heard from UN agencies and partners about the “dire situation” in the region of Diffa along Niger’s border with Nigeria. Last summer, tens of thousands of people fled Diffa as Boko Haram flooded the desert town from Nigeria.

In addition to insecurity, Niger is plagued by drought, desertification and a lack of jobs and schools for its young people, who make up two-thirds of the population. The country ranks 188th out of 188 countries on the 2015 UN Development Programme’s Human Development Index.

Speaking to the Council during its visit, the UNDP Resident Representative and Resident Coordinator, Fodé Ndiaye, said survivors of Boko Haram violence are being hosted by other poor and vulnerable communities.

“But they are showing humanity,” Mr. Ndiaye stressed.

One of the main observations from the visit, according to Mr. Rycroft, was the importance of Sustainable Development Goal 16. That Goal aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

“You can’t come to a place like the Lake Chad Basin without seeing the value of Goal 16,” Mr. Rycroft said.

The Security Council next heads to Maiduguri, Borno, in north-eastern Nigeria, known since 2009 as the epicentre of the Boko Haram insurgency. The Council members are meeting with local officials and civil society organisations before they are scheduled to visit a camp for internally displaced persons.

The Council members will also visit Abuja, where they will meet with acting President Yemi Osinbajo.

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## **UN in Central African Republic condemns threats by armed group against civilians, peacekeepers**

5 March 2017 – The United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic (CAR) is warning a rebel movement against impeding humanitarian access, saying any threats to peacekeepers, aid workers or civilians are “unacceptable” and could be tried as war crimes.

In a press release issued on Saturday, the UN Integrated Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in CAR, known by its French acronym MINUSCA, warned leaders of the Popular Front for the Rebirth of the Central African Republic (FPRC) that they will be held individually responsible if such acts are carried out.

“Any attack targeting the civilian population, UN and humanitarian personnel is a war crime that can be prosecuted in accordance with Central African law and international law,” MINUSCA underscored.

The Mission called on the FPRC and all armed groups “to refrain from any interference with the work of humanitarian workers, as well as threats against international humanitarian organizations and civilian populations.”

“No armed group has the right to prohibit or impede the free access of humanitarian actors to vulnerable populations, even in areas where these groups continue to have a negative influence,” MINUSCA continued.

In the same statement, the UN Mission rejected attempts to justify the travel to Bambari of 40 or so heavily armed members of the coalition as peaceful.

These men and the rest of the elements of the coalition violated the demarcation line established by MINUSCA, approaching Bambari with Kalashnikovs and rocket launchers, posing a risk of the city burning to disastrous consequences for the civilian populations, the Mission said.

According to MINUSCA, the threats contained in the communiqué of the FPRC prove once again its warlike character and the rejection by its leaders of any peaceful solution to the current crisis, as advocated by the Central African Government and by the international community.

MINUSCA said it would pursue its mission impartially and reserves the right to use all means at its disposal by the Security Council to achieve this, in support of the Central African Government.

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## [In Chad and Cameroon, Security Council hears of Boko Haram terror and survivors' needs](#)

4 March 2017 – The United Nations Security Council is today in Chad, as part of a four-country visit to shine a spotlight on the ongoing humanitarian challenges in the Lake Chad Basin region and draw international attention to the plight of about 11 million people.

In the Chadian capital of N'Djamena, the Council met with Prime Minister Albert Pahimi Padacké and visited the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which includes troops from the four affected regional countries Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, plus Benin in the fight against Boko Haram.

The Security Council welcomed the efforts to fight Boko Haram and encouraged more regional cooperation, according to a Tweet by the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom to the UN which has the Security Council's rotating presidency for the month of March and is leading the visit.

Discussions with the Prime Minister also focused on the economic situation in Chad and the importance of women participating in the economy and politics.

Also today, the Council members met with representatives of the UN agencies, funds and programmes and non-governmental organizations working in the country.

They are working to aid the millions of people who, in addition to the security threat from Boko Haram and the fight against the terror group, also face a major food and nutrition crises. Some 2.4 million people are currently displaced in the area, according to UN figures, and more than 7.1 million are severely hungry.

In his conversations with the Council, Stephen Tool, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Coordinator in Chad, detailed the severe challenges in the countries, which include malnutrition, disease and health, sanitation. He noted, however, that “you cannot deal with humanitarian issues without looking at the root causes” which include insecurity, development gaps, lack of education, poor agriculture, and so on.

*‘That’s who we’re fighting for’*

The Security Council delegation, led by Ambassador Matthew Rycroft of the United Kingdom, had yesterday visited Cameroon, where members met with President Paul Biya and other senior Government officials.

The Council also met with refugees and people displaced by Boko Haram and the forces tracking them.

In a blog post, Mr. Rycroft detailed meeting two young survivors of Boko Haram’s violence. The first, a boy who was 13 years old when the terrorist group stormed his village and killed his friends and family. The other boy was about 10 years when he was kidnapped, escaped, and has since 2014 lived in a camp for internally displaced persons.

“They are heroic beyond measures,” Mr. Rycroft said. “That’s who we’re fighting for.”

Speaking earlier in the day, Mr. Rycroft outlined his vision for the visit.

“First of all, we came here in order to shine a spotlight on the situation in the Lake Chad Basin.

“We came to hear the individual stories of people involved, whether they are refugees or displaced people or other victims of Boko Haram.

“We stand with the government and the people of Cameroon, and the wider region, in tackling the scourge of terrorism, and in encouraging them to look broadly and deeply at the root causes of the set of crises going on here.”

The delegation heads to Niger later today, and is scheduled to continue on to Nigeria tomorrow.

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# UN aid chief calls for access, funds to prevent spread of South Sudan's famine

4 March 2017 – Hundreds of thousands of people in South Sudan will starve unless relief workers gain access to needy populations and more funding is raised, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator today warned after meeting malnourished children who fled the raging conflict in the country.

Stephen O'Brien, who is also the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, travelled to Ganyiel, Southern Unity state, considered one of the most violent areas in the fight for political control of the country.

Among the people he met was a starving boy whose grandmother carried him through waist-high swamp to get away from the fighting. His parents are apparently missing.

"1000s similar. Horrendous," Mr. O'Brien wrote on social media, posting a number of photos of people who had fled the fighting and sexual violence.

Humanitarian partners, such as the International Red Cross, are setting up clinics directly in the swamps to reach more people, he noted. Some people with nothing to eat survived by chewing on water lilies.

"Millions of people prevented from receiving aid by parties to conflict. Immoral, unlawful and unacceptable. We need access now," Mr. O'Brien has said.

He is in South Sudan to see first-hand the critical humanitarian situation and the response which his agency, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), is assisting.

RELATED: Famine declared in region of South Sudan & UN

The UN declared a famine in parts of South Sudan on 20 February, increasingly blaming the lack of food and the collapsing economy on the rival forces of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) loyal to President Salva Kiir and the SPLA in Opposition backing Riek Machar.

A formal declaration of famine means that people have already started dying of hunger.

About 100,000 people are facing starvation, and an additional one million are on the brink of a famine, according to the UN. The total number of food insecure people is expected to rise to 5.5 million at the height of the lean season in July if nothing is done to curb the severity and spread of the food crisis.

The situation is worsened for the 3.4 million Sudanese, some of whom Mr.

O'Brien met today, who have been displaced and separated from their families.

Humanitarian organizations have appealed for \$1.6 billion to provide life-saving assistance and protection to some 5.8 million people across South Sudan in 2017.

Mr. O'Brien came to South Sudan from Kenya and previously, from Yemen. He is next scheduled to visit Somalia.