

Faced with 'clear science, real threats' countries must remain committed to Paris climate deal – UN

23 March 2017 – Climate change is an unprecedented and growing threat to peace, prosperity and development and addressing it presents an economic opportunity for Governments and business, senior United Nations officials said today.

“We are dealing with scientific facts, not politics. And the facts are clear. Climate change is a direct threat in itself, and a multiplier of many other threats,” UN Secretary-General António Guterres told a General Assembly High-Level action event aimed at invigorating political momentum on climate change, highlighting its deep links to the UN 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

Mr. Guterres said his messages to the meeting are simple.

“First, climate change is an unprecedented and growing threat – to peace and prosperity and the same in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Second, addressing climate change is a massive opportunity that we cannot afford to miss,” he said.

The Paris Agreement on climate change adopted in December 2015 is unique in its universality, with every single government having signed it. The pact entered force in less than a year. To date more than 130 Parties have ratified it, and the numbers are growing monthly.

The countries that supported the Paris Agreement are the same that adopted the 2030 Agenda – they comprise all UN Member States.

The reason for this consensus is clear: all nations recognize that implementing the 2030 Agenda goes hand-in-glove with limiting global temperature rise and increasing climate resilience.



Secretary-General António Guterres addresses a General Assembly High-Level action event aimed at invigorating political momentum on climate change, highlighting its deep links to the UN 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.
UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

Mr. Guterres said that last year was once again the hottest on record. Sea ice is at a historic low and sea levels at a historic high. These trends are indisputable, he stressed, explaining that consequences of climate change include food insecurity, water scarcity, poverty and displacement.

Tackling climate change is a tremendous opportunity for Governments and

business as there is no trade-off between a healthy environment and a healthy economy.

"We can have both. Green business is good business," he said.

Climate action is a necessity and can advance the attainment of sustainable development goals.

"How we go about it can be the subject of scientific and political debate. But there is no question that we must act, urgently and decisively, now," Mr. Guterres said. "And it remains the only viable way to safeguard peace, prosperity and a sustainable future."

Also addressing the event, were Peter Thomson, President of the General Assembly, and Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Still possible to bend curve on climate change trajectories

Mr. Thomson said that he had recently met with Petteri Taalas, the Secretary-General of the UN World Meteorological Organization (WMO), who confirmed that the world is currently on track towards a 3 to 4°C increase in global temperatures.

"I have always understood [...] that once we reach the 3°C – 4°C range, humanity's survival on this planet will be put in jeopardy," he said.

Cyclone Winston and Cyclone Pam which devastated Fiji and Vanuatu in recent years were among the strongest tropical cyclones to ever make landfall in the Southern Hemisphere. Fiji, an island nation from which Mr. Thomson hails, has already begun relocating low-lying villages to higher ground, away from the encroaching shoreline and the rising threat of storm surges.

"While the prognosis is dire, the scientific community assures us it is possible to bend the curve on current trajectories, if we work together to curb the growth of global greenhouse gas emissions," Mr. Thomson said, reiterating his call for all parties to the Paris Agreement to ratify it without delay and for those that have already done so to deliver on their commitments.

'Nothing can grow without water,' warns UNICEF, as 600 million children could face extreme shortages

22 March 2017 – Warning that as many as 600 million children – one in

four worldwide will be living in areas with extremely scarce water by 2040, the United Nations children's agency has called on governments to take immediate measures to curb the impact on the lives of children.

In its report, *Thirsting for a Future: Water and children in a changing climate*, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) explores the threats to children's lives and wellbeing caused by depleted sources of safe water and the ways climate change will intensify these risks in coming years.

This crisis will only grow unless we take collective action now, said UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake in a news release announcing the report, launched on World Water Day.

But around the world, millions of children lack access to safe water endangering their lives, undermining their health, and jeopardizing their futures, he added.

According to the UN agency, 36 countries around the world are already facing extremely high levels of water stress.

Warmer temperatures, rising sea levels, increased floods, droughts and melting ice affect the quality and availability of water as well as sanitation systems. These combined with increasing populations, higher demand of water primarily due to industrialization and urbanization are draining water resources worldwide. On top of these, conflicts in many parts of the world are also threatening access to safe water.



According to a recent UN-Water report, about two-thirds of the world's population currently live in areas that experience water scarcity for at least one month a year. Source: World Water Development Report 2017

All of these factors force children to use unsafe water, exposing them to deadly diseases like cholera and diarrhoea.

Many children in drought-affected areas spend hours every day collecting water, missing out on a chance to go to school. Girls are especially vulnerable to attack and sexual violence during these times.

However, the impact of climate change on water sources is not inevitable, noted the report, recommending actions to help curb the impact of climate change on the lives of children.

One of the points it raised is for governments to plan for changes in water availability and demand in the coming years and to prioritize the most vulnerable children's access to safe water above other water needs to maximize social and health outcomes.

It also called on businesses to work with communities to prevent contamination and depletion of safe water sources as well as on communities to diversify water sources and to increase their capacity to store water

safely.

“Water is elemental and without it, nothing can grow,” said Mr. Lake, urging for efforts to safeguard children’s access to water.

“One of the most effective ways we can do that is safeguarding their access to safe water.”

[ICC adds one year to Bemba’s conviction for attempted bribery of witnesses](#)

22 March 2017 – The United Nations-backed International Criminal Court (ICC) today sentenced the former Congolese Vice-President, Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, to another year in prison and about \$325,000 in fines for interfering with his trial.

Judges ordered that the sentence be served consecutively to Mr. Bemba’s existing 18 year sentence for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the Central African Republic between October 2002 and March 2003.

In their ruling, the judges ordered the fine to be paid within three months to the ICC and then transferred to the Trust Fund for Victims, according to a press release.

Mr. Bemba, along with two of the four other people accused, were found guilty in October for having jointly committed the offences of intentionally corruptly influencing 14 defence witnesses, and presenting their false evidence to the court.

Mr. Bemba was also found guilty of soliciting the giving of false testimony by the 14 defence witnesses and attempting to corruptly influence two defence witnesses.

These charges were in addition to the main ruling issued in March 2016, in which the ICC found Mr. Bemba guilty beyond reasonable doubt on two counts of crimes against humanity (murder and rape) and three counts of war crimes (murder, rape and pillaging) committed in the Central African Republic in 2002-2003.

Mr. Bemba had been the commander-in-chief of the former Congolese rebel group, the Movement for the Liberation of Congo, as well as a vice-president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the 2003-2006 transition.

Wastewater should be recognized as a valuable resource, UN says on World Water Day

22 March 2017 – In a world where the demand for water continues to grow and the resource is finite, a new United Nations report argues that wastewater, discarded into the environment every day, once treated, can help meet the needs for freshwater as well as for raw materials for energy and agriculture.

Needless to mention, treating wastewater and removing pollutants can also remarkably reduce the impact on the environment as well as on health.

“Improved wastewater management is as much about reducing pollution at the source, as removing contaminants from wastewater flows, reusing reclaimed water and recovering useful by-products [as it is about increasing] social acceptance of the use of wastewater,” noted Irina Bokova, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Director-General in her foreword to the *World Water Development Report 2017 Wastewater: An untapped resource*.

The report, launched today in Durban, South Africa, on the occasion of World Water Day, also highlights that improved management of wastewater is essential in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

“It’s all about carefully managing and recycling the water that runs through our homes, factories, farms and cities,” said Guy Ryder, the Director-General of the UN International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Chair of UN-Water, urging for reducing and safely reusing more wastewater.

“Everyone can do their bit to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal target to halve the proportion of untreated wastewater and increase safe water reuse by 2030.”

Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG6) has specific targets on halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally (target 6.3) as well as supporting countries in wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies (target 6.a).

Health and environmental dimension particularly stark for low-income countries

The report also revealed that low-income countries are particularly impacted by the release of waste water into the environment without being either treated or collected, where, on average, only 8 per cent of domestic and industrial wastewater is treated, compared to 70 per cent in high-income countries.

As a result, in many regions of the world, water contaminated by bacteria, nitrates, phosphates and solvents is discharged into rivers and lakes ending up in the oceans, with negative consequences for the environment and public health.

For instance, in Latin America, Asia and Africa, pollution from pathogens from human and animal excreta affects almost one third of rivers, endangering the lives of millions of people.

Furthermore, growing awareness on the presence of hormones, antibiotics, steroids and endocrine disruptors in wastewater poses a new set of complexities as their impact on the environment and health have yet to be fully understood.

These set of challenges underscore the need for urgent action on collection, treatment and safe use of wastewater.

Wastewater as a source of raw materials

In addition to providing a safe alternative source for freshwater, wastewater is also a potential source of raw materials, noted the report.

Owing to developments in treatment techniques, certain nutrients, like phosphorus and nitrates, can now be recovered from sewage and sludge and turned into fertilizer. It is estimated that nearly 22 per cent of the global demand for phosphorus (a depleting mineral resource) can be met by treating human urine and excrement.

Use of treated wastewater has long been practised by astronauts, such as those on the International Space Station who have been reusing the same recycled water for over 16 years

Similarly, organic substances contained in wastewater can be used to produce biogas, which could power wastewater treatment facilities as well as contribute to energy needs of local communities.

In addition, use of treated wastewater is growing for agricultural irrigation. At least 50 countries around the globe are now using treated wastewater for this purpose, accounting for an estimated 10 per cent of all irrigated land.

Lastly, the report also mentioned that treated wastewater can augment drinking water supplies, although this is still a marginal practice. Cities such as Singapore, San Diego (United States), and Windhoek (Namibia) have been treating wastewater to supplement drinking water reserves.

A great example is use of treated wastewater, long practised by astronauts, such as those on the International Space Station who have been reusing the same recycled water for over 16 years.

Vital for Sri Lanka to send message that 'impunity is no longer tolerated' underlines UN rights chief

22 March 2017 – Presenting an oral update on the rights situation in Sri Lanka, the top United Nations human rights official today said that a general lack of trust in the impartiality of the justice system in the country regarding past violations and continuing unwillingness or inability to address impunity reinforces the need for international participation in a judicial mechanism.

“It is important for the country’s future to send the signal that impunity is no longer tolerated,” Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, told the UN Human Rights Council today.

“For this to be credible, [the judicial mechanism] should include a special counsel, foreign judges and defence lawyers, and authorized prosecutors and investigators,” he added, noting that national consultations had also identified international participation as a way to gain the trust of the victims.

He also said that while the design of truth and reparations processes appear to be underway, such efforts needed to be in consultation with victims and the civil society, and that the repeal of the terrorism prevention act and its replacement with legislation that complies with international human rights law is to be concluded.

Also in his remarks, the UN rights chief hailed the work of the civil society and human rights defenders in the country and underlined that they must be protected from harassment and intimidation.

Making particular reference to the reports of intimidation of members of civil society at the Palais des Nations (the UN Office at Geneva), the High Commissioner said that his office (OHCHR) would be looking into the issues closely.

He also called on the Sri Lankan Government to consult the independent commissions in the country, the Human Rights Commission, which he said play an invaluable role in strengthening good governance.

“I encourage respect for their mandate and autonomy, adequate financing, and implementation of their recommendations,” he added.

Mr. Zeid also welcomed a number of directives made by the President of Sri Lanka regarding detention but noted that reports of torture, excessive use of force and failure to respect due process are a cause for worry.

There is clearly a need for unequivocal instructions to all branches of the security forces that any such conduct is unacceptable and that abuses will be punished,

In conclusion, the UN rights chief said that victims should be kept at the centre of the efforts in the island nation and noted that justice for them was vital to ensure sustainable peace.