

## 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,&#8221 underlined the High Commissioner.

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.

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## UN atomic agency co-hosts international meeting on cancer in developing countries

22 March 2017 – Cancer can be a death warrant in some developing countries, spurring the United Nations atomic agency and the international community today to hold a high-level discussion on how to get more funding and support for treatment to parts of Africa, the Middle East and South Asia.

&#8220The rising tide of cancer calls for additional human and financial resources, as well as infrastructure,&#8221 Nelly Enwerem-Bromson, Director of the Programme of Action for Cancer Therapy at the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said at the meeting in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum. He spoke alongside Sudanese Vice-President Hassabo Mohammed Abdalrahman, who opened the meeting.

The event, co-organized by the IAEA and the Sudanese Government, brought together health and finance representatives from 16 Governments to discuss their funding proposals on how to better detect and treat breast and cervical cancer, and develop nuclear medicine and radiotherapy as part of national cancer control programmes.

Each year, 8.8 million people die from cancer, mostly in low- and middle-income countries, according to figures from the World Health Organization (WHO). The figure is so high that it accounts for two and a half times more people killed than those who die from HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria combined.

Cervical cancer is particularly deadly and disproportionately affects women in developing countries, where 83 per cent of all new cases occur, IAEA reported.

One of the plans discussed proposes to establish a permanent screening centre in Cameroon, where 1,400 new women are diagnosed with cervical cancer each year, and 700 die.

The meeting also reviewed a proposal to expand cancer services for low-income people in Jordan, including refugees. The only public radiotherapy facility is in the capital, Amman, which treats around 50 patients per day.

The Governments represented at today's meeting are members of the IAEA, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the Islamic Development Bank.

Other institutions present included the African Development Bank, the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa and the WHO.

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## **DR Congo: UN, partners need urgent aid for over 370,000 displaced in south-east province**

22 March 2017 – Intercommunal violence in south-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has forced hundreds of thousands of people from their homes, a top United Nations aid official in the country has said, warning that the current response is being outstripped by the needs.

“Unless peaceful coexistence is fully restored between the two communities, humanitarian needs will continue to spiral out of control,” said the Humanitarian Coordinator in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mamadou Diallo, wrapping up a three-day visit to the region on 20 March.

Some 370,000 people have fled the cascading violence across all six territories that make up the province, in the last nine months, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated.

The insecurity has disrupted aid operations resulting in what Mr. Diallo called “among the most urgent humanitarian hotspots in a country experiencing a worsening humanitarian situation.”

The UN Humanitarian Coordinator led a group that included representatives from UN agencies, donors and non-governmental organizations to Tanganyika's Kalemie and Manono territories.

In Kalemie, the delegation visited the Kalunga site, home to some 17,000 people, where UN partners are providing emergency water and health care services amidst ongoing shelter concerns.

“Speaking to the delegation, a displaced woman pleaded for education projects for the thousands of children living in the site, to avoid their further marginalization,” OCHA said.

The group then visited the Kamala site in Manono “considered the cradle of the intercommunal conflict” where “the delegation saw first-hand the burned, destroyed huts of people forced to flee.

On behalf of the international humanitarian community, the UN asked for \$40 million to cover all the humanitarian needs, including \$20 million for the most urgent, life-threatening needs for the displaced families.

The DR Congo Common Humanitarian Fund and the UN Central Emergency Response Fund have recently allocated \$5 million each for the response, with the Humanitarian Fund planning an additional allocation of \$2 million.

The humanitarian concerns came as the Secretary-General's Special Representative for DRC, Maman Sidikou, briefed the Security Council about the deteriorating security situation and the need to implement the 31 December agreement on the electoral process.

Under the agreement, President Joseph Kabila would stay in office until elections are held by the end of 2017. During this period, a 'National Council for Overseeing the Electoral Agreement and Process (CNSAP)' would be set up, and a new prime minister named from opposition ranks.

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## **'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 – 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.”

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## **New superbug could be epidemic, scientists find**

Chinese scientists have discovered a new drug-resistant strain of bacteria that can spread stealthily and has epidemic potential.

The superbug is a strain of *Salmonella typhimurium* whose plasmid – mobile DNA that can be easily copied and shared between bacteria – contains the MCR1.6

gene, a newly discovered variant of the drug-resistant MCR1 gene.

“This is the first time the MCR1.6 gene has been found in Salmonella, a common foodborne pathogen, and from a healthy carrier,” said Kan Biao, deputy director of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Institute for Communicable Disease Control and Prevention.

MCR1 and its variants could help bacteria resist polymyxins – a last-resort class of antibiotics that includes colistin, the most potent, but toxic, antibiotic – according to studies by the institute, the results of which were published this month by Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy, a journal produced by the American Society for Microbiology.

Bacterial infections caused by the MCR1 gene and its variants are treatable with other antibiotics, “but often at the cost of killing good bacteria and breaking the body’s microflora balance”, Kan said.

Kan’s team first discovered the MCR1.6 gene in a 2014 fecal sample of a 46-year-old woman from the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

“The situation is alarming because healthy individuals may have been unknowingly spreading this superbacteria for years. Salmonella is one of the major micro pathogens of food poisoning and can cause diarrhea and vomiting. A drug-resistant version could pose a serious threat to public health.”

Kan added that the superbug has the possibility of becoming an epidemic, similar to the typhoid outbreak in the early 20th century, when a healthy female carrier, Mary Mallon, is believed to have infected two dozen people with typhoid fever while displaying no symptoms.

Since its discovery in 2015, the MCR1 gene has spread to more than 30 countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, India and Malaysia, according to Kan.

“The MCR1.6 gene or other MCR1 gene variants might begin to appear in other countries,” he warned. “A conservative estimate of more than 3 million Chinese suffer from Salmonella-related illnesses each year, with children and the elderly most at risk.”

Salmonella outbreaks also occur in the US on a regular basis, with the last major outbreak in late November, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

To tackle the superbug issue, governments should strictly regulate the use of antibiotics in livestock farming, educate the public on antibiotic uses, strengthen surveillance of resistant bacteria, and promote research and development of new antibiotics, Kan said.

For the general public, “something as simple as washing your hands, cooking food properly and strictly following a doctor’s prescription for antibiotics can greatly reduce the chance of catching a serious infection”, he added.