

In Juba, UN peacekeeping chief urges political solution for South Sudanese crisis

21 March 2017 – The security situation in South Sudan is “very worrisome,” the head of United Nations peacekeeping operations today said, warning that the number of people fleeing the country showing no signs of slowing, and calling for a political solution to the hostilities.

“You cannot hope that a solution will come by the use of weapons, the solution has to be political,” said outgoing Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous in a press conference in Juba, alongside Jean-Pierre Lacroix, who will take up the position in April.

Mr. Ladsous underscored the importance of the 2015 peace agreement signed by President Salva Kiir and opposition groups, but noted that there are concerns about implementing an agreement which will shortly be two-years old.

Earlier in the day, Mr. Ladsous said he spoke with President Kiir in what he described as a “good” meeting. Among the topics discussed were the challenges to humanitarian action, including impediments to getting clearances, as well as instances of aid workers killed or injured while on the job.

Meanwhile, the needs in the country are greater than ever with two counties in Unity state – Mayendit and Leer – formally declared famines.

Mr. Ladsous warned that the situation is “man-made” after several years of fighting and “is not going to improve” because it is now crop planting season and all farmers are displaced or seeking refuge in neighbouring countries.

Speaking to journalists, Mr. Ladsous also noted that the first vanguard of the UN Security Council-mandated Regional Protection Force should be deployed to Juba “in the next few weeks.” The units will be comprised of Bangladeshi, Nepalese, and Rwandan troops, followed by Ethiopian forces and troops from other countries.

The senior UN official added that he will meet tomorrow in New York with Member States who are contributing troops to discuss the deployments.

Once deployed to Juba, the Force will free a number of UNMISS units to “the countryside to better protect the civilians,” he said.

Mr. Ladsous noted, however, that the main responsibility for protection is with the Government of South Sudan: “We cannot have one blue helmet behind every single South Sudanese citizen. The responsibility to protect its own citizens is that of the Government. And we are here to support, to facilitate, to help the Government of the sovereign country of South Sudan.”

Greener energy for a third of the world bodes well for all, says UN on International Forest Day

21 March 2017 – Cautioning the impact of human activity such as practices use of woodfuel on world's forests, the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) today called for better wood-energy conversions technologies and more sustainable management of forests so that everyone benefits.

"This is an area where we can make a real difference," said Wu Hongbo, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs.

"Sustainably managed forests are productive and resilient ecosystems, providing people with livelihoods and renewable energy, along with timber, food, shelter, clean air, water and climate benefits," he added.

At the same time, fuel wood – the primary source of energy for nearly a third of the world's population and a product derived from forests – is also an important part of the energy equation.

However, current fuel production practices (such as production of charcoal) are not only contributing to degradation of forests and soils, they are estimated to cause up to seven per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions caused by humans.

Most of the emissions is largely due to unsustainable forest management and inefficient charcoal manufacture and fuelwood combustion, FAO said in the report, *The Charcoal Transition*, which was launched coinciding with the International Day of Forests .

"This is especially important for poor people in rural areas of developing countries, where wood is often the only energy source available [and its] conversion to charcoal is often done using rudimentary and polluting methods," noted FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva announcing the report at a ceremony marking the International Day in Rome.

Forests, energy, climate change and sustainable development

Forests and energy are also linked to sustainable development and can help combatting climate change.

According to estimates, about a third of the world's population (about 2.4 billion people) still rely on the traditional use of woodfuel for cooking, and many small enterprises use fuelwood and charcoal as the main energy carriers for various purposes such as baking, tea processing and brickmaking.



Efficient charcoal manufacture and use can help mitigate climate change. A man arranging bags of charcoal to a temporary holding area in Ntendesi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photo: FAO/Giulio Napolitano

Of all the wood used as fuel worldwide, about 17 per cent is converted to charcoal, however the production often relies on inefficient technologies and unsustainable resources and in some cases the emission of greenhouse gas can be as high as nine kilograms of carbon dioxide-equivalent per kilogram of charcoal produced.

“Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [and it is] fundamental for addressing the impacts of climate change and eliminating extreme poverty and hunger,” explained the head of FAO.

“We need, for instance, to adopt improved technologies for energy conversion,” he noted, referring to the UN agency’s programmes to deliver fuel-efficient stoves, especially for poor people in Latin America and Africa.

Greening the charcoal value chain and applying sustainable forest management practices can, therefore, mitigate climate change and further efficiencies can be gained by reducing charcoal waste, for example, by transforming charcoal dust into briquettes, adding a new iteration to the energy cycle.

Economic benefits and environmental improvements

The FAO report also argues that although the transition from unsustainable to sustainable sourcing could impose costs on the charcoal value chain, a greener charcoal sector would have an overall positive economic impact.

For instance, a cost-benefit analysis in Kenya estimated that a transition to efficient charcoal production would require an investment of \$15.6 million per year excluding upfront costs. However, it would generate \$20.7 million in benefits.

At the same time, demand for sustainable charcoal production can provide opportunities for afforestation and reforestation. And providing local people with greater tenure security can increase their willingness and ability to invest in sustainable approaches.

Furthermore, fostering an enabling political environment and an attractive investment climate for transition to a greener charcoal sector can also help increase government revenue collection and investments in sustainable forest management and efficient wood conversion technologies.

A win-win for all concerned, including for the forests.

Despite progress, world's most marginalized still left behind – UN development report

21 March 2017 – A flagship United Nations report launched today finds that although the average human development improved significantly since 1990, progress is uneven, with systemic discrimination against women, indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities.

The latest Human Development Report, released annually by the UN Development Programme (UNDP), found that while many people have greater access to education, health and sanitation, for example, more focus needs to be paid to who has been excluded and why.

“By eliminating deep, persistent, discriminatory social norms and laws, and addressing the unequal access to political participation, which have hindered progress for so many, poverty can be eradicated and a peaceful, just, and sustainable development can be achieved for all,” said UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, speaking at the report launch in Stockholm, alongside Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and the report’s lead author and Director of the Human Development Report Office, Selim Jahan.

Entitled *Human Development for Everyone*, the report noted that one in three people worldwide continue to live at a low level of human development, as measured by the Human Development Index – essentially a ranking of countries based on strides made with a peace-centric model of progress.

According to the report, women and girls are systematically excluded by economic, political, social and cultural barriers.

“Women tend to be poorer, earn less, and have fewer opportunities in most aspects of life than men,” according to the report.

Authors found that in 100 countries, women were legally excluded from some jobs because of their gender, and in 18 countries, women needed their husband’s approval to work.

The report also points to “dangerous practices,” such as female genital mutilation and forced marriage, which continue to hamper the development of women and their inclusion in society.

In addition to women and girls, the report points to “patterns of exclusion and lack of empowerment” of people in rural areas, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, migrants and refugees, and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community.

The report calls for far greater attention to empowering the most marginalized in society, and recognizes the importance of giving them greater voice in decision-making processes.

The report also warns that key development metrics can overstate progress when they focus on the quantity, rather than the quality, of development. For instance, girls' enrolment in primary education has increased, but in half of 53 developing countries with data, the majority of adult women who completed four to six years of primary school are illiterate.

Unlike in previous years, this year's report is also available in an app for iOS and Android.

'Stand up against intolerance and eliminate discrimination,' says UN chief Guterres

21 March 2017 – Against the backdrop of rising discrimination and violence against those perceived as different, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today urged the world to stand up against intolerance and build communities that recognize diversity not as a source of weakness, but a source of strength and richness.

"In a time of upheaval and change, it is easy to paint vulnerable communities as the cause of problems [...] people are being targeted because of their race, nationality, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation," warned Mr. Guterres at an event at the UN General Assembly commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Highlighting the particular plight of migrants as well as those, especially women and girls, from minority communities who are often targeted as "scapegoats" and experience racial profiling by authorities, the UN chief underscored the collective responsibility "to do better" and to protect human rights of all.

"We all have a role to play [...] after all, racial discrimination destabilizes societies, undermines democracies and erodes the legitimacy of governments," he said. "By acting together to end discrimination, we can lift humanity as a whole."

In his remarks, the Secretary-General also reminded that international law requires States to take effective actions to prevent and eliminate discrimination on all grounds and in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life.

RELATED: In Geneva, UN urges upholding human rights amid rising populism and extremism

"They must be vigilant and respond immediately and appropriately, including by prohibiting incitement to racial, national and religious hatred and ending racial profiling," he said, making a specific call on politicians and leaders to speak up and counter hateful speech.

"Let us stand up against intolerance and eliminate discrimination," he noted, "Let us join forces in our global campaign – Together for Respect, Safety and Dignity for all."

Marked on 21 March, the International Day commemorates the killing of 69 unarmed protestors in 1960 in Sharpeville, South Africa, who were staging a peaceful protest against the discriminatory pass laws of the racist apartheid regime.

Assembly honours memory of late Russian Ambassador Churkin

Also today at the General Assembly, UN chief Guterres paid a tribute to Ambassador Vitaly Churkin, the Permanent Representative of Russia to the United Nations who passed away last month, a day before his 65th birthday.

"Ambassador Churkin was truly one-of-a-kind – an outstanding diplomat, a man of many talents and interests, and a human being whose friendship touched many of us here in this hall today," said Mr. Guterres in his message, offering his condolences to the late Ambassador's wife, son and family as well as to the people and Government of Russia.

[UN agency voices concern about forced return of Nigerian refugees from Cameroon](#)

21 March 2017 – The United Nations refugee agency today expressed concern that forced returns of refugees from Cameroon's far north region to crisis-gripped north-eastern Nigeria are continuing despite the recent signing of a tripartite agreement aimed at ensuring the voluntary nature of returns.

So far this year, Cameroon has forcefully returned over 2,600 refugees back to Nigerian border villages against their will, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

"UNHCR is particularly concerned as these forced returns have continued unabated after the governments of Nigeria and Cameroon signed a tripartite agreement with UNHCR in Yaoundé on 2 March," UNHCR Spokesperson Babar Baloch

told reporters at the UN's Geneva Office.

The forced return of asylum-seekers and refugees is known as *refoulement*, or forced return, and constitutes a serious violation of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 OAU Convention, both of which Cameroon has ratified.

While acknowledging the generosity of its Government and local communities that host over 85,000 Nigerian refugees, UNHCR calls on Cameroon to honour to its obligations under international and regional refugee protection instruments, as well as Cameroonian law.

Insecurity persists in parts of north-eastern Nigeria, and access to basic services remains limited. Most returning refugees find themselves in situations of internal displacement upon return and are unable to return to their places of origin.

Inside Nigeria, UNHCR teams have heard and documented accounts about Cameroonian troops returning refugees against their will – without allowing them time to collect their belongings.

Amid the chaos, some families were separated and some women were forced to leave their young children behind in Cameroon, including a child less than three years old.

While recognizing the legitimate national security concerns of the Cameroon Government, UNHCR reminds authorities that refugees are themselves fleeing violence and attacks from Boko Haram and that their access to asylum and protection must be ensured.