

Founders of 'Lonely Planet' awarded UN agency's lifetime achievement award

31 January 2017 – Hailing the impact of the popular 'Lonely Planet' travel guidebook series on global tourism, the United Nations tourism agency today awarded its founders with its 13th Lifetime Achievement Award.

"The inspirational role that Lonely Planet inferred worldwide to travellers, writers and the tourism sector in general has been the major reason to concede the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Lifetime Achievement Award to [Tony Wheeler and Maureen Wheeler]," noted the UN agency in a news release.

According to the agency, the Wheelers founded Lonely Planet Publications in 1972, after a trip across Asia.

In the last 40 years, their guidebooks have sold over 100 million copies in English and other languages. The books also ventured into many other travel areas including a television series and an award-winning travel website.

In addition, through their Planet Wheeler Foundation, Tony and Maureen Wheeler, have been involved in more than 50 projects in the developing world, principally in south-east Asia and east Africa, with a focus on poverty alleviation.

They are also involved in a number of ventures, including promoting literature and the arts, as well as entrepreneurship and protection and development of archaeological sites in developing countries.

The UNWTO Lifetime Achievement Award is conferred every year to individuals with visionary leadership and significant contributions to the global tourism sector.

Managing national borders 'cannot be based on any form of discrimination' – UN chief Guterres

31 January 2017 – Refugees fleeing conflict and persecution are entitled to protection, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said today, expressing concern at decisions around the world that have undermined the integrity of the international refugee protection regime.

"Refugees fleeing conflict and persecution are finding more and more borders closed and increasingly restricted access to the protection they need and are entitled to receive, according to international refugee law," Mr. Guterres said in a statement.

The UN chief made a particular mention of Ethiopia, the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa, that, he noted "for decades has been keeping its borders open to hundreds of thousands of refugees from its neighbours, many times in dramatic security situations."

Further stating that countries have the right and the obligation, to responsibly manage their borders to avoid infiltration by members of terrorist organizations, Mr. Guterres cautioned that this cannot be based on any form of discrimination related to religion, ethnicity or nationality, noting that doing so "is against the fundamental principles and values on which our societies are based."

He also warned that it could "trigger widespread anxiety and anger that may facilitate the propaganda of the very terrorist organizations we all want to fight against" and that "blind measures, not based on solid intelligence, tend to be ineffective as they risk being bypassed by what are today sophisticated global terrorist movements."

At the start of the regular noon-briefing at UN Headquarters, Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said Mr. Guterres is currently on his way back to New York from the African Union Summit in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, and he had had the opportunity to express his disagreement with the United States Executive Order on refugees.

The statement follows President Donald Trump's signing last Friday of an Executive Order that, among things, suspends the US refugee programme for 120 days and, according to the media, bars entry of refugees from several mostly Muslim countries, including Syria, until further notice.

Cut off by fighting, thousands of Yemenis urgently need aid and protection – UN official says

31 January 2017 – The senior United Nations humanitarian official in Yemen voiced extreme concern today about the safety and well-being of citizens in the south-eastern part of the country, where military operations are cutting off services and causing harm to civilians.

"A halt to the fighting is required to facilitate the delivery of assistance to Al Mokha and enable the free movement of civilians," said Humanitarian

Coordinator in Yemen, Jamie McGoldrick, in reference to the port city on the Red Sea coast of the country.

Up to 30,000 people are estimated to be trapped in Mokha, roughly one-third of the population, and in need of immediate protection and relief assistance, Mr. McGoldrick said.

He noted also that scores of civilians have been injured by repeated airstrikes, shelling and sniper attacks in and around Mokha, which has also ground most services, including the main market and the water supply system.

Meanwhile, in Dhubab, also a district of Taiz Governorate, tens of thousands of civilians are being forced to flee their homes to escape the fighting.

Mr. McGoldrick warned that some are using mined roads, and many have already been previously displaced or lost livelihoods in the fighting.

"I call on all parties to the conflict to meet their obligations under the international humanitarian law," he said, urging all parties to ensure the humanitarian organizations have "rapid, safe and unimpeded access to reach the people in need in the town of Al Mokha and the wider affected region."

In addition to concerns for civilians, the UN aid official expressed concern about recent damage to roads and bridges connecting the port city of Al Hudaydah with other governorates.

Noting that infrastructure is vital for moving humanitarian and commercial supplies, Mr. McGoldrick said he deplored such actions "as they risk further isolating Yemeni communities and aggravate the already alarming food security situation."

UN agencies and partners are mobilizing food, water, shelter and medicines for those in need, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Banks, UN set standards on channelling investments for sustainable development

31 January 2017 – Nearly 20 leading global banks and investors, totalling \$6.6 trillion in assets, have launched a United Nations-backed global framework aimed at channelling the money they manage towards clean, low carbon and inclusive projects.

The Principles for Positive Impact Finance – a first of its kind set of

criteria for investments to be considered sustainable – provide financiers and investors with a global framework applicable across their different business lines, including retail and wholesale lending, corporate and investment lending and asset management.

“Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – the global action plan to end poverty, combat climate change and protect the environment – is expected to cost \$5 to \$7 trillion every year through 2030,” said the head of the UN Environment Finance Initiative, Eric Usher, in a press release.

The UN Environment Finance Initiative is a partnership between the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the global financial sector created in the wake of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, widely known as the Earth Summit, with a mission to promote sustainable finance. Over 200 financial institutions, including banks, insurers and fund managers, work with UN Environment to understand today’s environmental challenges, why they matter to finance, and how to actively participate in addressing them.

“The Positive Impact Principles are a game changer, which will help to channel the hundreds of trillions of dollars managed by banks and investors towards clean, low carbon and inclusive projects,” Mr. Usher said.

The Principles provide guidance for financiers and investors to analyse, monitor and disclose the social, environmental and economic impacts of the financial products and services they deliver.

“With global challenges such as climate change, population growth and resource scarcity accelerating, there is an increased urgency for the finance sector both to adapt and to help bring about the necessary changes in our economic and business models,” said Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Société Générale, Séverin Cabannes.

“The Principles for Positive Impact Finance provide an ambitious yet practical framework by which we can take the broader angle view we need to meet the deeply complex and interconnected challenges of our time,” he added.

The Principles were developed by the Positive Impact Working Group, a group of UN Environment Finance Initiative banking and investment members, as part of the implementation of the roadmap outlined in the Positive Impact Manifesto released in October 2015.

Currently, the Positive Impact Working Group includes: Australian Ethical, Banco Itaú, BNP Paribas, BMCE Bank of Africa, Caisse des Dépôts Group, Desjardins Group, First Rand, Hermes Investment Management, ING, Mirova, NedBank, Pax World, Piraeus Bank, SEB, Société Générale, Standard Bank, Triodos Bank, Westpac and YES Bank.

Clashes in north-eastern South Sudan halt UN migration agency's humanitarian work

31 January 2017 – Thousands of people in need of aid in South Sudan's Upper Nile area will have to wait indefinitely, after fighting forced the United Nations migration agency to suspend humanitarian activities in the area.

Violence in Upper Nile has once again hindered the ability of IOM and other relief agencies to provide assistance to populations seriously in need,” said the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) South Sudan Chief of Mission, William Barriga. “Civilians will undoubtedly suffer as sporadic fighting makes it more difficult for aid workers to deliver services.”

In addition to aid, the agency was in the process of registering people to receive supplies, when clashes between the Government and opposition forces forced everyone to evacuate. An estimated 2,000 to 3,000 people remained in line when the team was forced to flee.

According to IOM, clashes reached Wau Shilluk on 27 January, just as a 14-person team from the UN agency was about to resume registration. A partner organization, which provides aid, was with UN agency at the time.

Wau Shilluk is located north-eastern South Sudan, across the White Nile River from Malakal town. Malakal was one of South Sudan's largest urban areas before the current crisis and home to more than 33,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are sheltering at the protection of civilians (PoC) site, said IOM.

The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) yesterday condemned the latest fighting and urged all parties to protect civilians.