

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*

UN agency concerned new US refugee plan may 'compound the anguish' of people fleeing conflict

6 March 2017 – Refugees are ordinary people forced to flee war, violence and persecution in their home countries and who remain in urgent need of life-saving assistance and protection, the United Nations refugee agency underscored today in the wake of the latest Executive Order signed by the President of the United States on refugee resettlement.

The imperative remains to provide protection for people fleeing deadly violence, and we are concerned that this decision, though temporary, may compound the anguish for those it affects, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said in a news release, adding that his Office (UNHCR) has long been a partner for the US in finding solutions to refugee problems, and we look forward to continuing this partnership.

Mr. Grandi's statement follows the signing earlier today by US President Donald Trump of an Executive order that, according to news reports, would, among other things, suspend the country's refugee programme for 120 days. It would also bar for 90 days travel to the US by citizens of Iran, Libya, Syria, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.

Today's measure follows a similar Order signed by the US President on 27 January, which barred all nationals from several majority Muslim countries Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen from entering the US for 90 days. Under that Order, Syrian refugees were barred indefinitely.

In the wake of the new Order, the UN refugee agency reiterated its readiness to engage constructively with the US Administration to ensure all refugee programmes meet the highest standards for safety and security.

Americans have long played a crucial role in promoting global stability while simultaneously exemplifying the highest humanitarian ideals, from support for refugee emergencies overseas, to welcoming some of the most vulnerable refugee families in the United States to rebuild their lives in

safety, freedom and dignity," said UNHCR.

"This is the gold standard in refugee protection and a powerful model for all countries," it said, adding that at a time of record-high levels of forced human displacement, "this kind of humane leadership is needed more than ever."

UN calls for support to recovery plan as Haiti loses \$2.7 billion in Hurricane Matthew

6 March 2017 – The United Nations office dedicated to disaster risk reduction today called for urgent support to improve disaster risk management in Haiti, following a damage assessment that shows the country lost \$2.7 billion, or 32 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), as a result of Hurricane Matthew six months ago.

"Hurricane Matthew revealed disturbing truths about least developed countries which lack the capacity to respond adequately to climate change and the rising intensity and frequency of weather-related disasters," said the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction, Robert Glasser in a press release.

His call came on the eve of the 5th Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Americas, which opens in Montreal, Canada, tomorrow.

"While the government's civil protection system prevented many deaths, it is unacceptable that over 600 people should have died in a hurricane that was so well-forecast," he added.

The magnitude of the losses shown by a thorough government-led Post-Disaster Needs Assessment would be a devastating blow to any economy. It came on top of two years of drought affecting the food security of one million people and the 2010 earthquake which cost 120 per cent of GDP, he said.

Mr. Glasser urged strong support for the three-year recovery plan developed by the Haitian government, the UN and other partners that seeks \$2.72 billion.

He said that Haiti demonstrated how implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the global plan to reduce disaster losses, has to take into account the role that poverty plays in driving disaster risk.

In 2012, it was estimated that 58.6 per cent of the 10.7 million people live

below the threshold of \$2.4 per day while 24 per cent live in extreme poverty or less than \$1.23 per day. Haiti is estimated to have lost on average 2 per cent of its GDP to weather-related disasters every year between 1975 and 2012.

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."

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.