

Pro-poor urbanization, sustainable infrastructure can unlock Asia-Pacific's prosperity – UN

29 March 2017 – Some 400 million people in Asia and the Pacific still confront poverty as part of their daily lives due to widening income inequality, despite the region's impressive gains in reducing poverty in recent decades, a United Nations-backed report has found.

As outlined in the report, a renewed strengthening of the social contract is critical for addressing multi-dimensional poverty and the high marginalization and exclusion of people, the Executive Secretary of ESCAP, Shamshad Akhtar, told the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD 2017), according to a press release from ESCAP.

Titled *Eradicating Poverty and Promoting Prosperity in a Changing Asia-Pacific*, the report notes that on top of the 400 million people, or one in 10, living in extreme poverty, more than one in four people in the region's developing countries experience poverty in multiple dimensions, including additional deprivations that impact their health, education, and standard of living.

The report underscores the importance of addressing poverty through pro-poor urbanization, effective management of rural-urban transitions, and investment in sustainable infrastructure.

Although people in extreme income poverty are more likely to live in rural areas, they are increasingly found in cities, therefore provision of high quality, low-carbon, and resilient infrastructure is essential.

Asia's infrastructure needs are large and will only grow, with our recent report suggesting that the region will need \$1.7 trillion annually in climate-resilient infrastructure investments, said ADB's Vice-President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development, Bambang Susantono.

How our region chooses to bridge the infrastructure gap will have profound global implications. Concerted efforts, as highlighted in the tripartite report, can help us cover the last mile for infrastructure towards inclusive and sustainable development, he added.

Also addressing the forum was Haoliang Xu, UN Assistant Secretary-General and UNDP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific.

As urbanization booms across Asia and the Pacific, its cities are powering innovation, economic growth, and prosperity, lifting many out of poverty. But there has also been an increase in inequality and exclusion in some regions, he said.

To be more inclusive and to leave no one behind, cities must adopt

innovative policies that align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and prioritize building the resilience of the most vulnerable groups," he added.

ESCAP, ADB, and UNDP also launched a new SDG Data Portal today to provide up to date data on SDG indicators for governments and stakeholders in Asia and the Pacific, along with an outlook assessment on SDGs in the region.

APFSD 2017 is being held by ESCAP in Bangkok from 29 to 31 March 2017. The conclusions and recommendations at the forum will inform discussions of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development at the global level, to be convened in New York in July 2017.

[In Jordan, UN chief urges region's leaders to shape 'new Arab world' able to address differences through cooperation](#)

29 March 2017 – Addressing the League of Arab States Summit in Jordan today, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres highlighted the importance of unity among the countries in the region to confront the challenges it is facing.

"Divisions in the Arab world have opened the door to foreign intervention and manipulation, breeding instability, sectarian strife and terrorism," said Mr. Guterres.

"At this time of transition and upheaval, unity will be critical," he said, emphasizing: "I appeal to your leadership in shaping a new Arab world able to address and solve, by itself, differences through dialogue and cooperation."

In his remarks, the Secretary-General also underscored the importance of partnership between the UN and the Arab League and said that it was his responsibility to use his good offices, in cooperation with Member States, as an added dimension for conflict resolution.

"It is time to end the fighting in Syria," he said, expressing hope that the Astana process can achieve an effective ceasefire.

"By now it should be clear to all involved that while fighting terrorism is essential, any success will prove ephemeral without a political solution that allows the Syrian people to freely decide their own fate," he added, underlining the need, also, to support Syrian refugees in their hour

of need.

Further, welcoming the progress in retaking territories held by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), the UN chief expressed hope that the violence in Yemen and Libya can be resolved soon.

Turning to the peace process in the Middle East, Mr. Guterres underscored that the two-state solution is the only path to ensure that Palestinians and Israelis can realize their national aspirations and live in peace, security and dignity.

“There is no Plan B,” he stated.

Concluding in his address, the Secretary-General highlighted the importance of addressing youth unemployment as well as empowerment of women – both as a matter of human rights as well as a spur to human development.

“Let us recognize the power and responsibility that lies in our hands to improve the lives of the people we serve.”

DR Congo: UN and regional partners express concern about Kasai unrest

28 March 2017 – The United Nations and regional partner organizations today expressed deep concern about the situation in the central Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) where at least two United Nations experts disappeared two weeks ago and dozens of police officers were reportedly found dead.

The UN, the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU) and the International Organization of La Francophonie (IOF) today released a joint statement warning that the level of violence and reported human rights violations necessitate “an urgent response from the country’s political leaders.”

The statement calls on defence and security forces to exercise restraint in the efforts to restore order, and encourages the recently-initiated dialogue between the Government and the Kamuina Nsapu militia.

The UN, AU, EU and IOF also reiterated their call for a credible investigation into the human rights violation and assurances that the perpetrators are held to account.

In the joint statement, the organizations underscored their support for the 31 December 2016 political agreement.

The agreement – facilitated by Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo (CENCO) mediators, and reached in DRC’s capital, Kinshasa, on 31 December

2016 – represents a significant step towards a peacefully managed transition consistent with the democratic principles enshrined in the country's Constitution.

Belarus: UN expert decries Government's return to mass violence against peaceful protestors

28 March 2017 – A United Nations-appointed independent expert on the human rights situation in Belarus has expressed dismay over the Government's return to the policy of violent mass repression against peaceful demonstrators, non-governmental organizations, journalists and political opponents, and is calling on the authorities there to stop harassment and violence.

"The events of the last weekend prove the pre-meditated character of the repressive measures, and show an open return by the Government to its old policy of mass repression against citizens who exercise or dispense defense for human rights provided by the constitution and international treaties," said the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Belarus, Miklós Haraszti, in a news release from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

He was referring to the crackdown on March 25 and 26 against dozens of human rights defenders, both local and international, that came after hundreds of peaceful demonstrators against the Government's social policies had been violently attacked, arbitrarily arrested and deprived of their liberty, and then summarily fined or sentenced to prison from one to two weeks.

Since early February, demonstrators have been protesting against a decree under which a fine can be levied against anyone who does not work more than 183 days and is not declared officially unemployed.

Mr. Haraszti said he was "particularly shocked" by the raid against non-governmental organizations, such as Viasna, in their own offices, accompanied by physical violence, and by the disappearance for three days of political opponent Mikalai Statkevich, who was eventually released from the facility of the intelligence service.

"Two weeks ago, I, together with other human rights experts, had warned that further violations could be committed by the Government of President Lukashenko, known for its history of violent oppression of any form of dissenting views," the expert said, expressing regret that his fears materialized.

"I will continue to be vigilant and call on the international community to

press for opening to dialogue with human rights defenders and those who promote peaceful and democratic change in Belarus,” Mr. Haraszti said.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

Protecting human rights essential in promoting sustainable supply chains – UN experts

28 March 2017 – The only way to achieve socially sustainable supply chains is if human rights are protected and respected, a group of UN experts said today in an open letter addressed to G20 leaders currently meeting in Geneva.

Despite contributing positively to social and economic development worldwide, links between global supply chains and negative human rights impacts persist, the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights said.

Michael Addo, the current head of the Working Group said: “All too often, global supply chains are associated with human rights violations and abuses such as unsafe working conditions, child and forced labour, livelihoods destroyed by toxic industrial wastes, land seizures without compensation, and persecution of those who speak up against such abuse.”

Millions of lives are affected by the actions of companies in global supply chains and as such, governments and companies have enormous potential to promote sustainable development and uphold human rights, as long as they work together to do so, the working group noted.

The letter calls on governments to “lead by example,” in their roles as economic actors in ensuring that state-owned or controlled business respect human rights.

G20 members are meeting to prepare a ministerial declaration for more inclusive global economic growth.

“The G20 represents 85 percent of global economic output, 75 percent of world trade, and two-thirds of the world’s population, and includes both major ‘developed’ and ‘emerging’ economies,” Mr. Addo noted.

“G20 leaders are therefore uniquely placed to address the human rights risks and impacts associated with global supply chains. They also have a unique responsibility to demonstrate leadership on this critical issue for our

time," he said.

The UN Working Group also said that any commitments to promoting sustainable supply chains must be founded on the globally-agreed UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

The Working Group on human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises was established by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2011. Along with current Chair Mr. Addo, its members are: Surya Deva, Dante Pesce, Anita Ramasastry and Pavel Sulyandziga.

The Working Group reports to the UN Human Rights Council and to the General Assembly. Its experts Special Procedures are independent and are not UN staff. They are also independent from any government or organization. They serve in their individual capacity and do not receive a salary for their work.