

Mongolia: Lethal livestock plague now hitting endangered antelope, warns UN agency

27 January 2017 – The international pledge to eradicate a devastating livestock disease affecting mostly sheep and goats has taken on new urgency in the wake of a mass die-off of a rare Mongolian antelope, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

A news release from FAO said that some 900 Saiga antelopes (*Saiga tatarica mongolica*), almost 10 percent of the sub-species' population, have been found dead in Mongolia's western province of Khovd.

Samples taken from carcasses indicated the animals were positive for Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR), a highly fatal viral disease with plague-like impact on domestic sheep and goat herds, killing up to 90 percent of infected animals.

While wildlife have long been considered potentially vulnerable, relatively few actual cases of PPR infection have been documented in free ranging wild goat-like species and never in free-ranging antelope.

FAO and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) are leading a multinational effort to eradicate PPR, which can have devastating food-security and economic impacts, by 2030.

Eighty percent of the world's estimated 2.1 billion small ruminants live in affected regions and constitute an important asset for a third of poor rural households. PPR, first identified in Côte d'Ivoire in the 1940s, is now threatening over 75 countries.

Saiga in Mongolia are not truly migratory but are certainly nomadic with an extensive range of about 130,000 square kilometers with seasonal movements in autumn for breeding and early spring for calving. The species, was once widely spread across the Eurasian steppes, is classified as critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

The dead are highly suggestive of a spillover event from domestic animals with which they share common grazing areas, especially in winter when foraging ranges are fewer. Efforts are ongoing to investigate the situation on the ground, geared in particular to investigating possible other causes, such as the bacterial infection (*Pasteurella multocida*) that is now suspected to have been the cause of death of hundreds of thousands of Saiga in Kazakhstan in 2015.

Warning against rising intolerance, UN remembers Holocaust and condemns anti-Semitism

27 January 2017 – Decrying the anti-Semitism that led to the Holocaust, the international community today remembered millions of people who suffered in the genocide and honoured the survivors who continue to educate future generations about the ills that hatred and discrimination can bring.

Calling the Holocaust “an unparalleled crime against humanity,” United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said that “history keeps moving forward, but anti-Semitism keeps coming back.”

He noted that after the Holocaust, the world seemed eager to find a more cooperative path, which led to the creation of the United Nations with its Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Genocide Convention.

“Humankind dared to believe that tribal identities would diminish in importance. We were wrong,” the Secretary-General said. “Irrationality and intolerance are back.”

Addressing representatives from the 193 Member States gathered in the General Assembly Hall to mark the annual Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, Mr. Guterres said that today anti-Semitism continues, alongside racism, xenophobia, anti-Muslim hatred and other forms of intolerance, triggered by populism and gaining ground in public discourse.

‘Dehumanization took hold and the descent into barbarity was quick’

He voiced his extreme concern at the discrimination faced by immigrants, refugees and minorities across the world, particularly the stereotyping of Muslims, referring to how the Holocaust was allowed to spread: “Hardships and instability created fertile groups for scapegoating.”



Wide view of the General Assembly on the occasion of the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust. UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Drawing attention to the powerful exhibit now at UN Headquarters called ‘State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda,’ he said propaganda helped erode the bonds of humanity. The word “Jewish” was used constantly in association with society’s ills. “Ultimately indifference prevailed, dehumanization took hold, and the descent into barbarity was quick,” he told those gathered at the ceremony, which this year focuses on educating for a better future.

History created lessons for our time, Mr. Guterres said, urging the international community to be vigilant, invest in education and youth, and to strengthen social cohesion “so that people feel that diversity is a plus, not a threat.”

In addition to remembering the survivors and victims of the Holocaust, 27 January was adopted by the General Assembly to condemn any denial of the Holocaust and to urge all Member States unreservedly to reject any denial of the Holocaust.

The UN chief spoke personally about the history of Jews in his home country, Portugal, noting that anti-Semitism is “more than a question of religion, [it] is essentially an expression of racism.”

Mr. Guterres added proudly, his wife signed on behalf of the Lisbon Municipality, an agreement with the Israeli Community of Lisbon to establish the Lisbon Jewish Museum.

Annual General Assembly Commemoration

Today’s event in the General Assembly Hall started with recognition of the Holocaust survivors in attendance and a minute of silence for the millions of people killed in Europe in the years leading up to 1945. It featured soulful performances by Jewish singers and musicians, as well as a dramatic recitation of memorial prayers.

The ceremony also paid tribute to UN Messenger of Peace and Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel, who died last year.

The President of the General Assembly, Peter Thomson, began his remarks by quoting Mr. Wiesel, asking: “‘How does one mourn for fix million people who died? How many candles does one light? How many prayers does one recite?’”

Mr. Thomson called for a rededication “to learning the lessons of the past so that humanity may never repeat such atrocities in the future.”

He called for education to teach the dangers of extremism, the importance of defending the vulnerable, and the need to stand up against racism and prejudice.

“Interfaith dialogue, respect for human rights, and the embracing of democratic and humanist values at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are central responsibilities for us all,” Mr. Thomson said, in reference to the 17 targets aiming to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all.

“Young people must be taught the ethics and logic inherent in defending our common humanity, of preventing mass atrocity crimes, and of bringing perpetrators to justice,” he added.

‘Those who could not keep rhythm were shot’

The keynote address was given by Noah Klieger. Born in 1926, Mr. Klieger, a

survivor of Auschwitz, had founded a youth movement to help Jews cross the Swiss border and went on to become one of Israel's most notable journalists. He is today allegedly the oldest working journalist in the world.



Noah Klieger, keynote speaker and Holocaust survivor, addresses the General Assembly on the occasion of the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust. UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Mr. Klieger, who travelled from Israel to participate in the ceremony, took the podium to a standing ovation. His grandson, seating nearby, reminded Mr. Klieger to speak English, to which the Holocaust survivor replied good humouredly, "Why don't you all learn Hebrew."

Speaking about the Shoah, as the Holocaust is known in Hebrew, he talked about the last days of the war, when the Germans forced people from the Auschwitz camp to march to the border town of Gliwica.

"We had to march in a rhythm that nobody could keep. And those who could not keep the rhythm were shot. The roads were full of those who had been shot by DSS before they couldn't make it. Others just laid down," Mr. Klieger said, about the five-day death march that killed 41,000 by his estimates.

In a speech peppered with jokes and poignant remembrances, Mr. Klieger recounted his days in the camp. He spoke about three dreams that he never thought would be possible; the first of which was to be free.

He praised the value of education and the creation of the Holocaust and the UN Outreach Programme to teach people around the world about what took place, but added that "one who has not lived through the German camps does not know about the German camps."

He called for the creation of a teaching programme in all schools around the world so that the horrors of the Holocaust are not repeated and to counter anti-Semitism.

Among other speakers today was Danny Danon, the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations. Calling the Holocaust "the most devastating tragedy in history," Mr. Danon said it was a failure "to recognize the warning signs of hatred and bigotry."

The Ambassador called on the UN to appoint a special envoy to combat anti-semitism so that the international community "would never remain silent."

"It is our duty to work together to prevent extremism and violence by promoting tolerance, understanding and compassion," Mr. Danon said.

Before leaving the podium, the Ambassador vowed that "anti-Semitism would not defeat us."

UN food relief agency chief welcomes progress on anti-hunger programmes in north-east Nigeria

27 January 2017 – The head of the United Nations food relief agency today welcomed the progress made by the humanitarian community and the Government of Nigeria in fighting hunger and malnutrition in the West African country's north-east.

"You can see the tremendous progress achieved in a matter of months," the Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme (WFP), Ertharin Cousin, said in a news release, issued following a visit to Pompomari camp for the internally displaced people (IDPs) in Damaturu, who fled Boko Haram militants in Yobe and Borno states.

"Children who could barely stand just last November are now on the road to recovery. They will continue to require our assistance in the coming months. The work of the international community in Nigeria is not over yet," she added.

By December 2016, an agile response, combining rapid air-and-road interventions, enabled WFP and partners to reach more than a million people in need, particularly in these high risk areas. And while some areas remain inaccessible, organizations are working together to reach as many as 1.8 million vulnerable people in the first quarter of 2017.

At Pompomari camp, which hosts some 2,000 IDPs, WFP provides cash assistance in the form of money credited electronically to mobile phones. The spending helps to stimulate local markets. To prevent and treat child malnutrition, children under the age of five receive a highly nutritious, peanut-based supplement, while pregnant and nursing women receive nutritional support.

But amid concerns over continued funding, Cousin sounded a note of caution. "The world should not wait for babies to die before taking action," she warned, appealing to the international community not to prioritize one hungry child over another.

Human rights community mourns passing

of Sir Nigel Rodley, former UN rights expert

27 January 2017 – Expressing sadness at the passing of noted rights icon, Sir Nigel Rodley, the United Nations human rights wing today recalled the contributions of one of the “best known public faces, and most eloquent voices” of the UN Human Rights Committee.

Affectionately known to the human rights community as ‘Sir Nigel,’ the rights expert passed away on 25 January, at the age of 75.

“He would speak directly and frankly to anyone, even the most powerful; yet would also treat everyone with great humanity and kindness,” Rupert Colville, the spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), told the regular bi-weekly media briefing in Geneva.

In addition to serving at the Human Rights Committee – the independent expert body that monitors worldwide implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – for 16 years between 2001 and 2016, Sir Nigel was a former UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment from 1993 to 2001, a devoted human rights defender and also an academic.

“For us at the UN Human Rights Office, he was someone who was always willing to pass on his knowledge and experience to a younger generation,” said Mr. Colville.

Sir Nigel was also the Professor of Law and Chair of the Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex in the United Kingdom. Many of his students are now working at OHCHR as well as at various other human rights institutions around the world.

Quoting OHCHR staff, he added: “Sir Nigel could be sharp, and he certainly pointed out your mistakes, but he was also generous with his praise.”

AUDIO: OHCHR spokesperson Rupert Colville speaking on what made Sir Nigel so special.

With 2.2 million Afghans feared to be on the move, UN agency to begin

tracking displacements, aid relief

27 January 2017 – Amid concerns of a severe humanitarian crisis induced by sudden return home of hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees and undocumented citizens, coupled with conflict-induced displacement, the United Nations migration agency has launched a new displacement tracking system to better understand population movements and needs in the crisis-struck country.

“There is an urgent need to know where people in vulnerable situations are living and what their needs are,” said the head of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) operations in Afghanistan, Laurence Hart.

In a news release issued earlier today, he added: “With a system in place to clearly track these concerns, humanitarian actors and the Government can deliver assistance and services to the families and communities that need it most.”

The UN agency hopes that with the launch of its Displacement Tracking Matrix – a system that employs a range of tools and processes to track and monitor population movement during crises – humanitarian actors will have a better understanding of the movements and evolving needs of vulnerable populations, whether on site or en route, and be alerted to urgent concerns, greatly facilitating humanitarian response.

According to IOM, in 2016, more than 600,000 registered refugees and undocumented Afghans returned back from Pakistan and, based on estimates, a further 1 million are expected to return in 2017.

On top of the returning population, last year also saw conflict-induced displacement of over 623,000, and an additional 450,000 people are expected to become internally displaced due to the ongoing conflict this year.



Children from an Afghan returnee family at their home in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. Photo: IOM (file)

Additional strain on overstretched services

There are particular concerns that such large-scale returns and intensified conflict, combined with rapid urbanization, have created additional strain on already overstretched local services. Further compounding the issue is the lack of accurate information on the location and needs of people who have returned or those who have been forced to leave their homes.

The first phase of the Displacement Tracking Matrix in Afghanistan will put a framework in place to track at risk populations in Nangarhar, Laghman and Kunar provinces.

IOM said that its staff in these provinces will consult with community leaders and elders, national and local authorities, as well as previous registrations and assessments. They will also conduct field visits to get a comprehensive picture of the estimated number of returnees from abroad, internal movements and needs and conditions at the village, district and provincial levels.

“While there is good tracking along the borders, there is little knowledge of the actual final destinations, the villages and neighbourhoods, where people are arriving,” said IOM Human Mobility Tracking Expert Vlatko Avramovski. “The Matrix will deliver this information regularly and accurately.”