



In the headlines:

- Milestone events at UN to kick-start action on new sustainability goals, climate pact
- Ecuador: top UN relief official stresses 'solidarity' as earthquake recovery efforts continue
- Fiji: humanitarian work 'far from over' two months after storm, UN reports
- UN refugee agency says up to 500 lives lost after boat sinks in Mediterranean
- Ban hails rule of law as 'foundation of progress' as 'World Court' marks 70th anniversary
- 'Bold and decisive' action needed for Africa's future, UN deputy chief tells Member States
- FEATURE: As UN 'World Court' turns 70, long-time registrar sees evolution of body's work
- UN health agency launches global strategy to end leprosy
- Egypt: Ban calls for fair trial standards in judicial proceedings against rights defenders

Milestone events at UN to kick-start action on new sustainability goals, climate pact



Effects of climate change: the Tunari Mountain, part of the Andes Range, near the city of Cochabamba, Bolivia, used to be covered by snow most of the year, and it was an important source of water. Currently snow is only present a few weeks a year. Photo: UN/Robert Brockmann

20 April – In a watershed moment for international cooperation, global political, business and civil society leaders are headed to New York where they will pledge fast action on the new United Nations sustainable development agenda and the landmark Paris climate agreement, to build on momentum from 2015 to create a better future for people and the planet.

“From a historical perspective, this will be a great day for the United Nations,” Selwin Hart, the Director of the UN Secretary-General’s Climate Change Support Team, recently said in reference to this coming Friday, when leaders from more than 160 countries are expected at UN Headquarters to sign the Paris Agreement, adopted last December at the UN climate change conference (COP21).

The event is being preceded on Thursday by a High Level Thematic Debate on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of 17 global goals to wipe out poverty, fight inequality and tackle climate change over the next 15 years. These are the basis of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by UN Member States last September.

Speaking at a press conference on Tuesday, David Nabarro, the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Climate Change, told reporters that the signing of the Paris Agreement is crucial because achieving progress in relation to climate change is central to the broader effort of achieving the SDGs.



“Most people who looked at the global situation say that if we don’t succeed in maintaining the world under a 2 degrees Celsius rise, then it’s going to be incredibly difficult to realize the Sustainable Development Goals,” he warned. “And so implementing the Paris agreement is important for promoting prosperity, improving people’s wellbeing, and protecting the environment.”

The universal agreement’s main aim is to keep a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius and to drive efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

The agreement will enter into force 30 days after at least 55 countries, accounting for 55 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, deposit their instruments of ratification or acceptance with the Secretary-General.

Also speaking at the press conference, Selwin Hart announced that approximately ten countries, mostly Small Island Developing States, will both sign and ratify the document. Turning to key greenhouse gas emitters, the UN official said China and India intend to ratify it in 2016, an announcement recently made in a joint presidential statement.

“So [we are] gathering momentum for an early entrance into force of the Agreement,” he underlined, noting that generating this momentum is one the UN chief’s key objective at the event, followed by wanting to demonstrate that all segments and sectors of society and the “real economy” are mobilizing in support of ambitious action.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – the UN entity leading climate negotiations – today highlighted the record number of countries set to sign the Agreement, calling it “a critical juncture in a global effort to ensure lasting hopes for secure and peaceful, human development.”

“More carbon in the atmosphere equals more poverty,” said Christiana Figueres, the Executive Secretary of UNFCCC. “We cannot deliver sustainable development without tackling climate change, and we cannot tackle climate change without addressing the root causes of poverty, inequality and unsustainable development patterns.”

According to UN records, the largest ever number of countries to sign an international agreement in one day was in 1982, when 119 countries signed the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. The Paris Agreement is expected to break a record in this respect, and ensure as soon as possible that a massive global transformation can begin towards a sustainable future for people everywhere.

Ecuador: top UN relief official stresses ‘solidarity’ as earthquake recovery efforts continue



Food assistance for people severely affected by the 7.8-earthquake that hit the coast of Ecuador on 16 April 2016 being unloaded from a convoy sent by the World Food Programme (WFP). Photo: WFP

20 April – United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien said that more than 21,000 people are in need of immediate shelter following the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that struck Ecuador on Saturday night, while the Government has stepped up recovery efforts in conjunction with several UN agencies.

Speaking to reporters from a tarmac in Canoa, a coastal town near the earthquake’s epicentre, Stephen O’Brien, who leads the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said that, according to the latest assessment, more than 480 people died in central Ecuador – a number which is likely to rise to about 500 – and that hundreds more are still missing, although services for the immediate detection of life have concluded.

“I have seen and spoken to a number of people in a number of communities who have gone through terrible suffering,” he said on a call in to the daily briefing at UN Headquarters in New York. “This is a massive earthquake with devastating consequences to people and buildings, and basic services,” he underscored.

Thousands of people are living outdoors, there are lines for food, and drinking water is needed, as many of the systems have broken, Mr. O'Brien said.

"The Government is very much stepping up with its plans to meet the needs as best as it can, and it's clear that they have been working extremely hard and urgently," he said.

Upon his return to New York on Thursday or Friday, Mr. O'Brien said he plans to work with Member States and the international community to allocate resources from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) in order to complement and make available the necessary extra resources to support the Government's recovery programme.

"We at the United Nations certainly in solidarity [with] the people and in support of the Government of Ecuador's plans and actions to meet the needs of their people," he emphasized.

Mr. O'Brien noted that the Disaster and Assessment Coordination Team (UNDAC) has been making quick assessments regarding immediate life-saving and also shelter. In addition, UN agencies and other partners, among them the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO), are assisting with recovery efforts.

Asked by a reporter whether grant aid should be given to Ecuador, Mr. O'Brien said his focus is on humanitarian and immediate needs, although it is also important to mobilize international resources to help the people of Ecuador.

Fiji: humanitarian work 'far from over' two months after storm, UN reports



Tropical Cyclone Winston left a path of destruction across Fiji on 20 and 21 February 2016. Photo: OCHA/Danielle Parry

20 April – Marking two months since Tropical Cyclone Winston hit Fiji, the United Nations senior humanitarian official in the South Pacific has said that "work is far from over" and that there are significant needs for continued relief efforts.

"As planning begins for longer-term recovery and reconstruction, it is important to emphasize that humanitarian efforts must continue, particularly in locations hit by both the cyclone and subsequent flooding," said Humanitarian Coordinator Osnat Lubrani.

Urgent needs include the distribution of agricultural supplies, construction of shelter and toilets, mosquito control and surveillance measures to stop the spread of disease, and the provision of psychosocial support, she said.

The recent flooding has eroded some of the gains made through early humanitarian action with many of the crops re-planted post-Winston now washed away.

"Our work is far from over," Ms Lubrani said. "There is an acute need for the distribution of more seeds and seedlings to kick-start food production in areas hit by the cyclone and floods. This is vital to reducing the risk of food insecurity over the months ahead."

Training to help people build back stronger, safer houses is also among the country's most critical ongoing needs. In addition, there is continued demand for expert support to help the country cope with the psychosocial impacts of this traumatic event, especially among children, she said.

Fiji's Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management, Inia Seruiratu, noted that emergency food, shelter, water, and medical supplies reached thousands of people in their hour of need.

“It has been an enormous effort but there is still a long road ahead and we will continue to work with the support of our international partners to ensure that no one is left behind,” he said.

The cyclone and a massive storm surge left a path of destruction across Fiji on 20 and 21 February, leaving more than 40 people dead, damaging or destroying more than 31,000 houses and wiping out life-sustaining food crops. Flooding over recent weeks has compounded the suffering of many who are still living without a permanent roof over their heads.

UN refugee agency says up to 500 lives lost after boat sinks in Mediterranean

20 April – The United Nations refugee agency said today that as many as 500 people may have lost their lives this past week when an overcrowded boat carrying refugees and migrants sank in the Mediterranean Sea at an unknown location between Libya and Italy.

The 41 survivors of the incident – which, if confirmed, could be one of the worst involving refugees and migrants in the past 12 months – include 37 men, 3 women and a 3-year-old child who were rescued by a merchant ship and taken to Kalamata, in the Peloponnese peninsula of Greece, on 16 April, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said in a press release.

Those rescued include 23 Somalis, 11 Ethiopians, 6 Egyptians and a Sudanese.

The survivors told UNHCR staff that they had been part of a group of between 100 and 200 people who departed last week from a locality near Tobruk in Libya on a 30-metre-long boat.

“After several hours at sea, the smugglers in charge of the boat attempted to transfer the passengers to a larger ship carrying hundreds of people in terribly overcrowded conditions,” UNHCR said. “At one point during the transfer, the larger boat capsized and sank.”

The survivors include people who had not yet boarded the larger vessel, as well as some who managed to swim back to the smaller boat. They drifted at sea possibly for three days before being spotted and rescued, the agency said.

UNHCR visited the survivors at the local stadium of Kalamata, where they have been temporarily housed by local authorities while they undergo police procedures.

Thus far this year, 179,552 refugees and migrants have reached Europe by sea across the Mediterranean and Aegean. At least 761 have died or gone missing attempting the journey, UNHCR said.

The agency reiterated a call for increased regular pathways for the admission of refugees and asylum-seekers to Europe, including resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes, family reunification, private sponsorship and student and work visas for refugees.

“These will all serve to reduce the demand for people smuggling and dangerous irregular sea journeys,” UNHCR said.



On 26 January 2016, refugees and migrants wait to enter the Miratovac Refugee Aid Point in southern Serbia, on the border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, after crossing the Mediterranean. Photo: UNICEF/Emil Vas

Ban hails rule of law as 'foundation of progress' as 'World Court' marks 70th anniversary



The Great Hall of Justice of the Peace Palace, The Hague, seat of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), during solemn sitting to mark the Court's 70th anniversary. Photo: Frank van Beek/UN Photo/ICJ-CIJ/POOL

20 April – The collective jurisprudence of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has made an “enormous contribution” to international law, benefiting both nations and citizens around the world, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today marking the 70th anniversary of the main judicial organ of the United Nations.

In opening remarks at a solemn sitting of the Court at its headquarters in the Peace Palace in The Hague, Netherlands, to commemorate the anniversary of the ICJ – commonly referred to as the ‘World Court’ – Mr. Ban said that while the UN has grown in size and scope, the world body is still defined by the rule of law.

The Court was established by the UN Charter in June 1945 and began its activities in

April 1946. It has a twofold role: first, to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States (its judgments have binding force and are without appeal for the parties concerned); and, second, to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by duly authorized UN organs and agencies of the system.

“Respect for the rule of law – within and among nations – is one of the foundations of progress in virtually all areas of our work,” the UN chief said.

“It is an essential thread in the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” he added.

For its part, Mr. Ban said, the ICJ has over the years made a central contribution to the rule of law.

“It has stepped in effectively where diplomatic or political measures have failed. It has helped countries to settle their disputes by peaceful means. And it has compiled a solid record of effective and impartial judgments, thereby building global trust in the Court’s work and faith in the power of law,” Mr. Ban said.

Indeed, the Court’s docket is fuller than ever, with Member States turning to the ICJ on some of their most complex matters, the UN chief said.

He noted that the Court is also modernizing its working methods, with judgments being delivered more swiftly, thereby leading to increased certainty for the parties involved.

“Each individual judgement of this Court benefits the States involved, resolving the specific dispute at issue and providing certainty in their mutual relations,” Mr. Ban stressed.

“In addition, the collective jurisprudence of the Court has made an enormous contribution to public international law. This benefits the broader community of nations and, ultimately, the well-being and protection of the people we serve,” he added.

Noting the wisdom and judgement of the Court on complex legal issues, the Secretary-General also commended all States that have peacefully settled their disputes before the World Court.

In that vein, he called on all States that have not yet accepted the Court’s jurisdiction to do so.



Similarly, he also called for “steadfast compliance” with the Court’s judgements.

“The importance of resolving disputes peacefully and in accordance with international law has never been more important. Conflict is the most efficient method of derailing development known to humankind,” the Secretary-General said.

“If the path of peace is chosen, if States entrust the Judges of this august institution to determine their differences, stability is fostered and the broader international community benefits,” he emphasized, adding that the Court’s presence and work remain “as relevant as ever” for the international community.

Also speaking at the anniversary celebration today was ICJ President Ronny Abraham, who presided over the ceremony and highlighted that in the past 70 years, the face of the world has changed substantially, which is reflected in the Court’s work.

“At 70, the International Court of Justice has reached a serene maturity,” he said.

“Conscious of the importance of the mission with which it has been entrusted by the Member States, it is ready to face the new challenges that might arise in the coming decade,” he added.

Changes in the world have, in particular, had an impact on the type of cases brought before the ICJ, Mr. Abraham said. While it continues to hear cases on subjects over which it has been called on to exercise its jurisdiction since its inception, the Court as of late has had occasion to hear a number of disputes concerning relatively new areas, such as international environmental law. Such cases may involve the analysis of complex factual data, such as raw scientific data and reports by science experts.

The Court has also heard a growing number of cases involving alleged violations of human rights and humanitarian law, through which it has been able to develop its jurisprudence, he said.

Moreover, the increase in the number of States has led to greater diversity in the geographic origin of the disputes heard by the Court. In the past few years, the Court has handed down decisions in cases involving States from South America, Africa, Asia and Europe, the ICJ President noted.

Highlighting that a significant number of the States concerned by those decisions did not exist at the time the UN was created, Mr. Abraham said that it is therefore quite clear that the political and legal environment in which the Court operates has changed considerably since 1945.

“However, the need for a world court working for international peace and justice is as strong today as it was when the [UN] Charter was first signed,” he said. “The Court’s judgements on the merits all represent disputes that have been settled, and situations that might otherwise have led to open conflict and that have found a peaceful outcome.”

'Bold and decisive' action needed for Africa's future, UN deputy chief tells Member States

20 April – The United Nations and African countries are working as one to support the continent's people in realizing their hopes and aspirations for peace and development, which will require “bold and decisive” action, Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson said today at a special event on the continent's future.

Last year, when the world adopted the historic 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as the Paris Agreement on climate change, Africa adopted its own transformative Agenda 2063 and Ten-Year Implementation Plan.

“These global and regional frameworks share a focus on people and their well-being on a healthier planet. They include pledges on justice and are rooted in respect of human rights,” Mr. Eliasson told delegates attending a High-Level Forum entitled *The Africa We Want in 2030, 2063 and Beyond*.

According to the UN, both the 2030 Agenda and Africa's Agenda 2063 aim at structural transformation and a more equitable sharing of income and wealth, stressing inclusive growth and sustainable development. “These high ambitions require bold and decisive action from everyone involved. The people of the world are looking to their leaders on all levels to act and to be accountable for their actions,” said the UN deputy chief.

Organized by the African Union, the Government of Sweden, and the UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, the meeting aims to delve into thematic areas which exhibit a strong link between the agendas. In his remarks, Mr. Eliasson underlined his wish to focus on three points in particular:

- Women's empowerment is one of the main themes of the meeting and a vital area for the global community's work;
- Both agendas stress the importance of ending conflict, through Sustainable Development Goal 16 and Agenda 2063's aspiration for “a peaceful and secure Africa”;
- Sufficient resources, both in terms of capacity and, financing, will play a decisive role in tackling the UN and African agendas.

“Carrying out these agendas will require stronger policy-making capacities and effective cooperation and coordination,” the Deputy Secretary-General insisted, adding that there is work to be done on data, indicators, and monitoring mechanisms.



Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

FEATURE: As UN 'World Court' turns 70, long-time registrar sees evolution of body's work



A view of the Peace Palace in The Hague, the headquarters of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), in 1957. UN Photo/VW

20 April – Having ruled on such diverse issues as plunder of natural resources in Africa to border disputes in South America and whale hunting in the Pacific, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) – the main judicial organ of the United Nations – turns 70 today and *UN Radio* has talked with long-time registrar Philippe Couvreur about the evolution of the tribunal's vital work.

Assessing the major milestones of the ICJ – commonly referred to as the 'World Court' – Mr. Couvreur, who has served as Registrar for 15 years, noted that focus of the Court's cases has changed over the past 70 years; whereas it focused on boundary issues in its earlier years, over time, the Court began dealing with more political disputes.

“Originally, the Court was busy with land or maritime boundary issues – these are very important issues to prevent conflicts – but from the 80s, it has been called upon to deal with disputes which were politically, let's say, more important – cases concerning the use of force between States. So the activity of the Court has adapted itself to the evolution of international relations,” he said.

The ICJ – the successor to the Permanent Court of International Justice – began its work in April 1946, in the aftermath of World War II. Based in The Hague, it comprises 15 judges, who are each elected for nine-year terms by the UN General Assembly and the Security Council. The Court is also the only main organ of the UN not located in New York.

The Court's first case was

submitted in May 1947, the *Corfu Channel*, a “contentious case” concerning state responsibility for damages at sea involving the United Kingdom and Albania.

Mr. Couvreur, who began his career at the Court in 1982, is currently serving his third seven-year term, having been first elected in 2000. As the Court's Registrar, he keeps the general list of all cases and is responsible for recording documents in the case files. Among other tasks, Mr. Couvreur also manages the case proceedings.

Asked about some of the challenges that might impede the ICJ in achieving a path to justice, he emphasized that, through its mandate, the Court is tasked with settling legal disputes submitted by States.

“It is very important to understand that the Court cannot seize itself of cases and intervene in disputes between States without being seized by those States,” he said. “The activity of the Court is highly dependent on the use States want to make of it or international organizations.”

Indeed, under the UN Charter – which established the ICJ in June 1945 – the World Court is tasked with settling legal disputes submitted by States and with giving advisory opinions on legal questions that authorized UN and specialized agencies refer to it.

As such, Mr. Couvreur said that States have the right to choose how to solve their own disputes.

“The Court is what the States make of it [...] only if they choose the Court can the Court act,” he stressed, adding that this doesn't make the Court any less effective.

“To say that the Court was not successful is certainly not correct, because when the Court is seized it settles the dispute efficiently. There have been some minor difficulties, but at the end of the day,” almost all of the Court's cases have been

implemented immediately, Mr. Couvreur said. He also noted that the Court had not backlog of cases.

In fact, he said, the Court's permanent presence and long jurisprudence have resulted in States having a "strong confidence" in the ICJ. The registrar also noted that the Court's budget is less than one per cent of the UN's regular budget.

UN health agency launches global strategy to end leprosy

20 April – The United Nations health agency today launched a new global strategy for a world free of leprosy, calling for stronger commitments and accelerated efforts to stop disease transmission and end associated discrimination and stigma.

The strategy aims to, by 2020, reduce to zero the number of children diagnosed with leprosy and related physical deformities; reduce the rate of newly-diagnosed leprosy patients with visible deformities to less than one per million; and ensure that all legislation that allows for discrimination on the basis of leprosy is overturned.

"A strategy can only be as good as its implementation," Poonam Khetrupal Singh, Regional Director of the World Health Organization (WHO) South-east Asia, said in New Delhi at the launch of the global strategy for 2016-2020 'Accelerating towards a leprosy-free-world.'



Leprosy patients. Photo: UNICEF/Sanjay Acharya

"The new global strategy is guided by the principles of initiating action, ensuring accountability and promoting inclusivity. These principles must be embedded in all aspects of leprosy control efforts," she said.

Leprosy was eliminated globally in the year 2000 with the disease prevalence rate dropping to below one per 10,000 population. Though all countries have achieved this rate at the national level, at the sub-national level, it remains an unfinished agenda.

Of the 213,899 new cases in 2014, 94 per cent were reported from 13 countries – Bangladesh, Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Madagascar, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Tanzania. India, Brazil and Indonesia account for 81 per cent of the newly diagnosed and reported cases globally.

Main challenges

The main and continuing challenges to leprosy control have been the delay in detection of new patients and persisting discrimination against people affected by leprosy which has ensured continued transmission of the disease. Several leprosy-affected countries still have legislation in place that allows discrimination against people suffering from leprosy.

Social stigma impedes early detection of the disease, particularly in children, and increases disabilities. Stigma also facilitates transmission among vulnerable groups, including migrant populations, displaced communities, the ultra-poor and hard-to-reach population. Combatting stigma and ensuring early diagnosis through active case-finding, which the new strategy emphasizes, is critical to making progress.

Key interventions

The key interventions include; detecting cases early before visible disabilities occur, with a special focus on children as a way to reduce disabilities and reduce transmission; targeting detection among higher risk groups through campaigns in highly endemic areas or communities; and improving health care coverage and access for marginalized population.

Screening all close contacts of leprosy affected persons, promoting a shorter and uniform treatment regime and incorporating specific interventions against stigma and discrimination are the other strategic interventions that endemic countries need to include in their national plans to meet the new targets.

The new strategy builds on the success of previous leprosy control strategies. It has been developed in consultation with national leprosy programs, technical agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as patients and communities affected by leprosy. The strategy focuses on equity and universal health coverage which will contribute to reaching the Sustainable Development Goal on health.

Egypt: Ban calls for fair trial standards in judicial proceedings against rights defenders

20 April – United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has announced he is closely following the judicial proceedings in Egypt against a number of civil society organizations and human rights defenders.

Case number 173, commonly referred to as “the case on foreign funding of civil society”, is expected to resume on Wednesday in Cairo. In March, UN rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein expressed grave concern over the closure of hundreds of non-governmental organizations in Egypt and the prosecutions of numerous rights defenders for their legitimate work, urging the Government to end such repressive measures.



Photo: UNODC

“Defendants in the case must be able to benefit from all due process and fair trial standards,” indicated a statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson.

The UN chief also underscored the important role that civil society plays in ensuring that States meet developmental, social and civic objectives and obligations. He stressed the need for human rights defenders and civil society in general, as well as the media, to work without undue restrictions.

“The Secretary-General notes that the Government of Egypt has accepted a number of recommendations under the second Universal Periodic Review cycle to promote and protect the rights to freedom of association, as well as to adopt a new non-governmental organization (NGO) law that is compliant with the Egyptian Constitution and international human rights,” the statement added.