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## **UN kicks off preparations for upcoming summit on oceans, launches voluntary commitment website**

**15 February** – The world dumps the equivalent of one garbage truck of plastic into the ocean every minute, the United Nations heard today at the start of a two-day meeting to prepare for this June's Ocean Conference that will aim to help safeguard the planet's oceans and help them recover from human-induced problems.

“When leaders from across Governments, international organizations, civil society, the private sector, and the scientific and academic communities, gather together in New York, from 5-9 June for The Ocean Conference, we will be witness to a turning point,” the President of the UN General Assembly, Peter Thomson, told the participants, who also included the Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden and the Minister for Fisheries of Fiji, the countries co-hosting the conference.

“We will witness the point in history when humanity truly began the process of reversing the cycle of decline that accumulated human activity has brought upon the Ocean,” Mr. Thomson added.

The high-level Oceans Conference aims to get everyone involved in conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goal 14.

The UN has called for voluntary commitments to implement Goal 14 and today launched an online commitment registry which has its first three commitments – the Swedish Government, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), and Peaceboat, a non-governmental organization. The site will be up through the end of the Conference, which starts on World Environment



Plastic bottles and garbage waste from a village in Timor-Leste wash on the shores of a river and then spill into the sea. UN Photo/Martine Perret

Day, marked annually on 5 June, and includes 8 June, celebrated as World Oceans Day.

The voluntary commitments “underscore the urgency for action and for solutions,” said Under-Secretary-General Wu Hongbo, who heads the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs and serves as the Secretary-General of the Conference.

Addressing participants today, Mr. Wu said preparations for the Conference are “on track.”

“The health of our oceans and seas, and the future wellbeing of our planet and our society, demand no less,” he said.

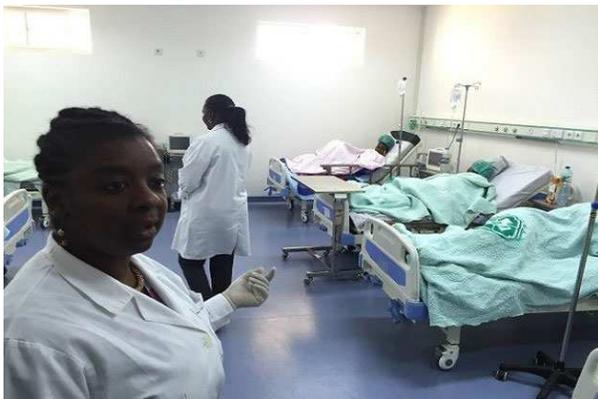
In addition to pollution, The Oceans Conference and SDG 14 address overfishing, as well as acidification and increasing global water temperatures linked to climate change.

Discussing the problems ahead of today’s preparatory meeting, Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden, Isabella Lovin said in a video log on Twitter that the Conference could be a “chance of a lifetime” to save the oceans under enormous stress.

“We don’t need to invent or negotiate something new, we just need to have action to implement what we already agreed upon,” she said in reference to the expected ‘Call to Action’ that will result from the Conference in connection with stopping illegal fishing, stopping marine pollution and addressing the special circumstances of small island developing States.

Representing one of the many small island nations struggling with these issues, the Minister for Fisheries of Fiji, Semi Koroilavesau, urged Conference participants to make voluntary contributions, saying the oceans are of “utmost importance” to his country.

## **Innovative, coordinated response helps end yellow fever outbreak in Angola, DR Congo – UN agency**



Female patients, who are suspected to have yellow fever, are treated in this room at the Hospital Geral de Luanda, Angola. WHO/Dalia Lourenço

**15 February** – With concerted response, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have successfully controlled one of the world’s largest and most challenging outbreaks of yellow fever, the United Nations health agency announced.

No new confirmed cases reported from both countries for the past six months

“We are able to declare the end of one of the largest and most challenging yellow fever outbreaks in recent years through the strong and coordinated response by national authorities, local health workers and partners,” said Matshidiso Moeti, the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for Africa, commending the unprecedented and immense response.

Since it was first detected in Angola in December 2015, the outbreak claimed at least 965 lives in the two countries, with thousands more suspected.

According to WHO, more than 41,000 volunteers and 8,000 vaccination teams with more than 56 non-governmental organizations undertook emergency inoculation campaigns, immunizing more than 30 million people.

The scale of response was so massive that the global stockpiles of yellow fever vaccines were exhausted several times.

In the first six months of 2016 alone, the partners delivered more than 19 million doses of the vaccine – three times the six million doses usually put aside for an outbreak.

The announcement by DRC proclaiming the end of the outbreak was made yesterday. It followed a similar announcement by Angola on controlling the disease last December.

### ***Introduction of an innovative emergency response***

The first cases in this outbreak were identified on 5 December 2015 in Viana, Luanda Province, Angola. It spread to the entire country and to neighbouring DRC, where local transmission was established in March 2016.

One of the major achievements of the response was the introduction of an innovative dose-sparing strategy – using one fifth of a regular dose of the yellow fever vaccine.

This technique, approved by WHO’s global vaccine expert group, ensured protection of as many people as possible from the immediate threat of a major urban outbreak.

For instance, in the DRC capital of Kinshasa, WHO supported the Ministry of Health to vaccinate 10.7 million people using this dose-sparing strategy as a short-term measure that will provide immunity against yellow fever for at least 12 months and likely longer.

ination campaigns, WHO and partners continue to provide support to the two countries to strengthen disease surveillance, control the spread of mosquitoes and engage with communities so that they can protect themselves.

However, with new threats posed by climate change, increased mobility of people within and across, and the resurgence of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, risks of yellow fever epidemics are increasing.

“Yellow Fever outbreaks like the one in Angola and the DR Congo could become more frequent in many parts of the world unless coordinated measures are taken to protect people most at risk,” said Ibrahima Socé Fall, WHO Regional Emergency Director.

“Therefore we need to implement a strong preventive approach to vaccinate the population at risk across the region.”

In one such response, WHO and its partners recently developed a new strategy calling for the Elimination of Yellow fever Epidemics to strengthen global action and integrate lessons learnt from the Angola and DR Congo outbreak.

## **Teleworking may seem easier, but it could disrupt your work-life balance – UN reports**

**15 February** – Using smartphones, laptops and other technology to work from home can be a blessing – it does away with rush hour traffic, for example – but it also diminishes personal space and contact with colleagues, according to a new study released today by the United Nations labour agency and a private sector partner, which recommends how to address these work-life disparities.

“This report shows that the use of modern communication technologies facilitates a better overall work-life balance,” said the Jon Messenger, co-author of the joint report by the UN International Labour Organization (ILO) and Eurofund.

The study, *Working anytime, anywhere: The effects on the world of work* is based on interviews with workers and experts in 10 European Union member states, Argentina, Brazil, India, Japan and the United States.



A young woman checking her smartphone, Washington DC., USA.  
Photo: World Bank/Simone D. McCourtie

It highlights positive effects of teleworking, such as greater autonomy on working time and better work-day organization, and reduced commuting time resulting in a better overall work-life balance and higher productivity.

On the down side, teleworking “blurs the boundaries between work and personal life, depending on the place of work and the characteristics of different occupations,” Mr. Messenger said.

People teleworking have a tendency to work longer hours, and have higher levels of stress as a result of overlapping paid work and personal life.

As telework becomes more prominent so too has the need to disconnect in order to separate paid work and personal life, with France and Germany beginning to look at arrangements at the company level, and at existing and new legislation, such as the “right to be disconnected” (*le droit à la déconnexion*) in the most recent revision of the French Labour Code.

According to the report, there are distinctions between home-based teleworkers who seem to enjoy better work-life balance and 'high-mobile' workers who are more at risk of negative health and well-being outcomes.

The report recommends promoting formal part-time teleworking so that people working from home can maintain their ties with co-workers and improve their well-being.

## In a period of 'profound uncertainty,' stand up for human rights, urges UN rights chief in global appeal

**15 February** – Urging action for greater freedoms, stronger respect and more compassion, the United Nations human rights arm today launched a \$253 million appeal – its largest to date – to bolster its 2017 work programme to protect and advance the rights of people around the world.

“In numerous countries, even the rules are under attack – xenophobia and calls for racial and religious discrimination have entered mainstream discourse and every day, seemingly, are more widespread and more deeply rooted,” said Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in a news release issued by his office (OHCHR) announcing the appeal.

“More and more people are suddenly realizing we can no longer afford to be complacent about human rights, and that the erosion of other people's human rights will sooner or later lead to the erosion of our own.”

According to OHCHR, the extra-budgetary funds will augment its work in providing in-country assistance, supporting UN independent rights experts and the Human Rights Council, as well as contribute to a number of trust funds on issues such as torture, rights of indigenous peoples and contemporary forms of slavery.

Erosion of other people's human rights will sooner or later lead to the erosion of our own

“Through human rights advocacy, advice on laws and constitutions, training of State authorities as well as of non-governmental organizations, fact-finding and hard-hitting investigations that lay the groundwork for accountability and amplify the voices of victims of human rights violations – through these and other means, [OHCHR] helps in the push for better human rights protections for all,” said High Commissioner Zeid.

The Office has some 60 field presences in different locations around the globe. These include country, regional and stand-alone offices, human rights advisers, and human rights components of UN missions.



OHCHR human rights officers speaking with a member of the Chepang indigenous community in Nepal. (file) Photo: OHCHR/Robert Few

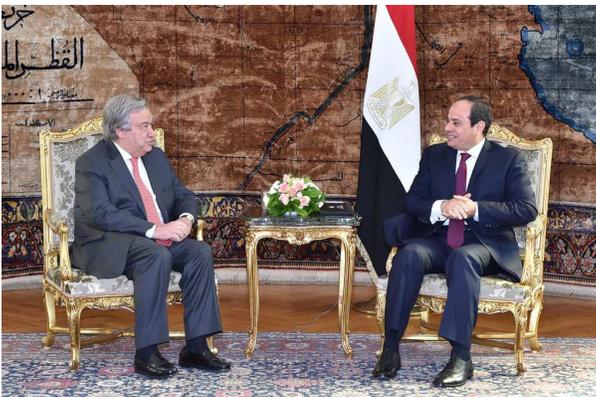
However, it struggles with “dramatic and chronic” underfunding.

“More than ever, we need strong partners to stand with us [...] We need to broaden our financial support base to include more Member States, and encourage participation from a much broader range of private donors,” said Mr. Zeid, calling for their support to help prevent human rights crisis from escalating as well as contributing to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

“We can advocate a broad, open democratic space and impartial rule of law institutions in every country [...] we can push back against the current assaults on values, and act swiftly to uphold the human rights laws and principles we fought so hard to build,” he highlighted, adding:

“The time to stand up for human rights is now. We are counting on your support.”

## In Cairo, UN chief Guterres underscores political solutions to ease tensions in regional hotspots



Secretary-General António Guterres (left) meets with President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt in Cairo. Photo: Office of the Presidency of Egypt

**15 February** – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today reiterated his commitment to fighting terrorism but underlined also the importance of political solutions to the crises in Syria and the wider region, and put his weight behind the intra-Syrian negotiations expected to begin later this month in Geneva.

Speaking to reporters in Cairo after meeting Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the Secretary-General praised Egypt as a “central player” and an “absolutely essential contributor” to finding a solution to regional problems.

He referred to the international talks on Syria held earlier this month in the Kazakh capital of Astana which resulted in an agreement on how to monitor the ceasefire effort started in December 2016.

“The Astana talks were an important contribution because they led to a ceasefire and we hope that the ceasefire will be maintained,” Mr. Guterres said, “but we consider that without a political solution, not only ceasefires cannot hold, but more than that the fight against terrorism will not be effective.”

“That is why we are so committed to make sure that the political process moves on and I hope that Geneva will be an important step in that direction,” he added in a press conference alongside the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sameh Shoukry.

Mr. Guterres also made reference to the Security Council, saying that it was “very important to recognize that the United Nations will be what Member States allow it to be.”

He stressed his personal commitment – echoing comments in Dubai days earlier – to reform the UN Secretariat and help to create “effective coordination and accountability” in the different UN bodies to strengthen the reputation of the United Nations at a global level.

During the press encounter, the Secretary-General also stated that there was “no Plan B” to the two-state solution between Israelis and Palestinians: “Everything must be done to preserve that possibility.”

He also noted the situations in Libya and Yemen, calling for effective reconciliation and reconstruction to aid the people and the stability of the region.

Turning to Syria, Mr. Guterres noted that he has consistently said that the countries of the region that have been receiving so many Syrian refugees, as well as those from Iraq and from many other crises, the countries of the region – Lebanon, Jordan,

Turkey, Egypt – have not had enough support from the international community in general, from Europe in particular, both in relation to the refugees themselves and their living conditions and in relation to the host communities that share with them sometimes resources that are quite meagre.

Stressing that refugee protection is not only the responsibility of neighbours, but of the entire international community, The UN chief said it would be important to substantially increase the number of refugees that are resettled into Europe and other parts of the world in order to show effective solidarity with the countries of first asylum.

### *Role of youth in addressing today's challenges*

Also today, delivering a lecture at Cairo University, Mr. Guterres underlined the importance of young people in addressing the challenges confronting the contemporary world, including those to peace, impacts of climate change and growing inequalities.

“The best hope [to address these] challenges is with the new generations, we need to make sure that we are able to strongly invest in those new generations,” said the Secretary-General, urging the international community to be fully engaged in addressing a key problem of youth unemployment.

“The frustration generated in young people that have no hope in the future is a major source of insecurity in today’s world. And it is essential that when Governments plan their economic activities, when the international community develops forms of cooperation, it is essential to put youth employment, youth skills [at] the centre of all priorities, [at] the centre of all projects,” he noted, adding: “Unfortunately, this sometimes tends to be forgotten. And one way to avoid this to be forgotten is to bet strongly on the empowerment of young people.”

## **Situation in Central African Republic warrants continued international attention, UN Security Council told**



Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous briefs the Security Council on the situation in the Central African Republic (CAR). UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

**15 February** – Despite improving security situation in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic (CAR), concerns remain in other parts of the country, the top United Nations peacekeeping official told the Security Council today, underlining the need for continued international attention.

Particularly worrying were clashes between the *Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique* and the *Union pour la paix en Centrafrique* groups in the country’s central region which had assumed ethnic overtones, said Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping in his briefing to the 15-member Council.

He added that the two groups were outside an ongoing dialogue, established by the country’s President, Faustin Archange Touadera, with other armed groups which was making progress in such areas as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.

In the briefing, the UN official further said that the organization supported an initiative for a national peace and reconciliation agreement recently launched by the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECOWAS) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, as well as Angola, Chad and the Congo.

Similarly, adapting to the changes, the UN mission in the country (MINUSCA) is rearranging its deployment to ensure greater flexibility and dedicate more forces to its operations.

Also, the Portuguese rapid reaction force is now in place and French surveillance drones will be deployed to deter activities

of armed groups.

On the humanitarian side, Mr. Ladsous voiced concern, particularly for the areas outside the capital. He informed the council that more than half of the population (over 2.2 million people) faced food insecurity and more than 100,000 had been newly displaced.

Furthermore, with 31 per cent of global security incidents involving non-governmental personnel reported in CAR in 2016, the country remained particularly challenging for aid workers.

Going forward, he urged the international community to continue to support the CAR, and pointed out that, all too often, it reacted at the height of a crisis, only to exit before economic development had taken root and human rights had been assured.

Also briefing the Council today, Omar Hilale, the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations and the Chair of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission echoed Mr. Ladsous concerns regarding the security situation.

Recent clashes in which hundreds were killed and thousands more displaced underscored the need to urgently address the security challenges, he stressed.

Further, Mr. Hilale also hailed the Government's adoption of a national disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation strategy, a security policy, and a five-year capacity-building and development plan, and called on the to tackle the root causes of the conflict and urged the international community for their support.

He also informed the Security Council that an international conference on the CAR, held in the Belgian capital, Brussels, in November last year generated \$2.2 billion in pledges and spoke of the Peacebuilding Commission's work in the country.

## UN emergency food agency to feed some 220,000 people in conflict-affected Ukraine

*15 February* – Access to food is becoming harder in eastern Ukraine as prices are outpacing incomes, the United Nations emergency food agency today said, warning that without longer-term intervention, more people will need humanitarian aid in the months and years to come.

“Food prices are increasing at a time when household incomes are impacted by unemployment, and we see many families resorting to negative coping strategies in the face of economic hardship,” said the World Food Programme (WFP) in Ukraine, Dorte Ellehammer.

The UN agency said there are about 70,000 people in eastern Ukraine considered “most vulnerable.” This group includes the elderly, families headed by a single mother, people with chronic illnesses or disabilities, and people who do not receive other humanitarian aid.



Displaced families and the elderly in Ukraine line up for WFP food vouchers, which enable them to obtain food including milk, fresh fruit, vegetables, eggs and meat. Photo: WFP/Abeer Etefa

In addition, there are up to 150,000 people considered “moderately food-insecure,” meaning that they struggle to find or buy enough food on a daily basis, according to WFP.

“As the conflict has continued, many Ukrainians have become more vulnerable due to the lack of sufficient social benefits to cover food and other living expenses,” the agency said in a press release.

To help Ukrainians cope, WFP said that it would scale up its use of cash-based transfers in areas where the banks are

functioning properly and there is food in the stores.

During the coming spring and summer, the agency said that it plans to implement small-scale early recovery projects to increase incomes, diversify crops and help to inject some money into local businesses.

WFP has urgently requested more than \$30 million to provide much-needed food aid to eastern Ukraine through the end of 2017.