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UN forum highlights importance of stronger partnerships for financing sustainable development



A family in Uvs Province, Mongolia, using a solar panel to generate power for their ger, a traditional Mongolian tent. UN Photo/E. Debebe

18 April – Underlining the importance of sustainable finance for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, senior United Nations officials today called for stronger partnerships with a diverse range of stakeholders to ensure that resource requirements are met.

In her opening remarks at the high-level event, SDG Financing Lab – How to finance the SDGs, Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed recalled the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which was adopted in 2015 at the UN Third International Conference on Financing for Development.

She said the agreement – which sets out a series of bold measures to overhaul global finance practices and generate investments for tackling a range of economic, social and environmental challenges –

is a key component of the 2030 Agenda.

“The Action Agenda provides the framework for global cooperation to finance and implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by mobilizing public and private sources,” said Ms. Mohammed.

The deputy UN chief also noted that in addition to prioritizing domestic resource mobilization, aligning public spending with sustainable development and partnership with the private sector and businesses is equally important.

“It is in the interest of all countries, companies and people to tap the wealth of good that sustainable development will bring in environmental, economic and social terms,” she added.

In her remarks, Ms. Mohammed also noted that financial flows and investments are increasingly being aligned with the SDGs and said that with mobilization of large pools of capital such as pension funds and the insurance sector, “greater wins” for everyone can be realized.

“The dividends will reverberate far and wide [...] success on the SDGs will trigger beneficial results that will feed project pipelines leading to progress on gender, economic growth and climate action,” she added, noting examples from around the world that have shown such benefits.

Mobilizing the ‘right mix’ of resources vital – General Assembly President

Also speaking at the opening, the President of the General Assembly, Peter Thomson said that financing the SDGs could require some \$90 trillion over the next 15 years and called for “exponential transformation” in the global financial system that taps into all sources of funding.

“We are at a time when we must foment a global conversation bringing all stakeholders together to discuss how we can mobilize the right mix of resources to achieve the SDGs,” he said.

“We must distinguish between the various sources of capital and asset classes that they represent, and recognize their varying spheres of operation and influence – from multinational corporations through to grassroots small-holder farmers.”

Mr. Thomson also said that efforts by governments, central banks and financial regulators are already leading to positive developments but multiplying these efforts to reach the scale needed to achieve the global goals remains the main challenge.

In particular, he underlined the need for reforming existing policy and regulatory frameworks to leverage public and private financing for the SDGs, and to contribute to sustainable development, including through local and regional capital markets.

“If we are to succeed, today’s discussions cannot be a one-off occurrence. [It] will have to represent the start of an extended dialogue,” the President of the General Assembly said.

In addition to senior UN officials, Mahmoud Mohieldin, the Senior Vice President for Partnerships at the World Bank Group, also spoke at the high-level event, which also featured a panel discussion on sustainable development financing, an inter-governmental plenary debate, and workshops showcasing approaches to finance specific groups of SDGs.

Unity within Security Council vital to prevent mass atrocities – UN chief Guterres

18 April – Briefing the Security Council, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today stressed the importance of unity in the 15-member body to effectively address human rights violations as well as to prevent mass atrocities.

“Article 24 of the UN Charter is clear: the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security rests with this Council ‘in order to ensure prompt and effective action’,” said Mr. Guterres, speaking on the theme of *Human Rights and the Prevention of Armed Conflict*.

“We must collectively draw strength from the letter and spirit of the Charter to better prevent armed conflict and sustain peace through development [by] ensuring effective protection of all human rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural,” he added.



Secretary-General António Guterres briefs the Security Council. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

Noting that peace, security, sustainable development and human rights are mutually reinforcing, the UN chief underscored that peace must be “relentlessly pursued” along the gamut of prevention, conflict resolution and peacekeeping to peacebuilding and long-term development.

He further stressed that close cooperation between the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and all relevant UN bodies, including the Security Council, is vital given that human rights concerns are fundamental to maintaining peace and security as well as essential to informing Security Council deliberations and decision-making.

Failure to put an end to suffering of Syrian people ‘shames us all’ – Secretary-General

Mr. Guterres also underscored the importance of unity within the Security Council and called on its members to “spare no effort to put an end to the intolerable suffering of the Syrian people”.

“The failure to do so is a tragedy that shames us all,” he stressed.

Speaking on initiatives already taken by the Security Council, such as incorporating a human rights component in the mandate of UN peace missions, the UN chief noted that the systematic monitoring and reporting of human rights violations not only gave “a voice” to victims but also helped the fight against impunity.

That work also contributed to the protection of civilians under threat, helped build capacities and, in some circumstances, preserved democratic space.

“[However] despite all these efforts, millions of people still need to be protected from crises and far more time and resources continue to be spent responding to crises rather than preventing them,” noted the Secretary-General, underscoring that preventative efforts needed to be prioritized and root causes of conflict had to be addressed.

“That is the lesson of so many conflicts.”

He also stressed that ensuring improved and less politicised action on human rights is also vital for progressing on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Concluding his briefing, the UN chief informed the Security Council that he has set in motion various reforms of the Secretariat which will enable it to play its role better and in keeping with the mandates and trust the UN Member States have place in it.

“The resolutions on sustaining peace and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are cause for hope,” he said, noting: “Progress on human rights aspects would further complement these advances.”

Diseases and sexual violence threaten Somalis, South Sudanese escaping famine – UN



A mother with her children at the Liibaan Internal Displaced Person (IDP) settlement, Baidoa, Somalia. Photo: UN News/Runa A

18 April – Millions of people are facing the peril of famine in Somalia and South Sudan, and the situation is expected to worsen as the drought and violence fuelling the crises widen, cautioned senior United Nations officials who have just returned from the area.

Speaking to journalists in New York, John Ging, from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said that situation in Somalia was “very fast moving” with more than 6.2 million people in need of food and water, and at risk for cholera and measles.

“My overall impression of the response in Somalia is that the needs are moving very quickly, escalating, but the response is currently keeping pace with those needs. That does not mean that we should be complacent, but it does mean that we have the right team on the

ground doing an outstanding job,” said Mr. Ging, who led a team that also included representatives from the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

The visit by the so-called emergency directors’ group was meant to ensure coordination among all those involved and to mobilize all the support possible for both countries.

Donors have funded 70 per cent of the \$825 million humanitarian appeal for Somalia – which is “unprecedented,” according to Mr. Ging.

The financial support follows the collective failure in 2011 to stop an earlier famine in Somalia, the senior UN official said, and is today seen as a strong message from the international community to work with the Somali Government to prevent a reoccurrence.

In addition to humanitarian aid, families are also receiving more cash-for-work as part of a project led by UNDP and partners. UNDP’s Mourad Wahba said the project is part of an effort to help families “take it into their own hands to decide how aid should be spent.”

The scale-up on the funding side in Somalia is in sharp contrast to the situation in South Sudan, where only about 27 per cent of the \$1.6 billion appeal has been met.

“That really leaves our operations very vulnerable at the scale and needs that are required,” said Mr. Ging.

The scale of the needs in South Sudan is bigger – with 7.5 million people in need, roughly half of them displaced within the country and as refugees in neighbouring countries.

In addition, South Sudan is now considered one of the most dangerous places for humanitarian workers. Since the latest outbreak of violence in South Sudan, 82 aid workers have been killed – nine just in the past month.

The face of the famine, however, is a woman with her child, according to Ugochi Daniels, Chief of the Humanitarian and Fragile Contexts Branch at UNFPA.

“In both countries, we have over 200,000 pregnant women who are affected. Because of the impact of the drought, men stayed behind on the farms and to tend livestock. Women are the ones walking with children,” Ms. Daniels said, underscoring the risk for sexual violence and protection concerns.

In South Sudan, sexual violence against girls and women is particularly grave with much younger children and elderly

women being attacked.

Manuel Fontaine, Director of UNICEF's Office of Emergency Operations, noted that more than 200,000 children in Somalia already face severe malnutrition which is expected to worsen as rains dry up over the coming months.

He also expressed concern about cholera, noting an increase in cases of 700 per cent from the same period last year in the Horn of Africa nation.

Grotesque rape chants expose 'campaign of terror' in Burundi – UN rights chief



High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein. UN Photo/Pierre Albouy

18 April – Raising alarm over an apparent “widespread pattern” of rallies in many places across Burundi where young men from the Imbonerakure militia – the youth wing of the ruling political party – repeatedly chant a call to impregnate or kill opponents, the top United Nations human rights official has called on the authorities to promptly act to stop such incitement to violence.

In a news release issued today by his office (OHCHR), UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said that it was particularly worrying that instead of putting a stop to such events, senior Government officials continue to take part in such rallies.

“The grotesque rape chants by the young men [...] are deeply alarming – particularly because they confirm what we have been hearing from those who have fled Burundi about a campaign of fear and terror by

this organized militia,” said High Commissioner Zeid.

The news release mentions a chilling video, circulating on social media of a rally in the Ntega commune, Kirundo province (northeast Burundi), in which more than 100 Imbonerakure members are seen repeating dozens of times their call to “make opponents pregnant so that they can give birth to Imbonerakure”.

In the same video, another group then repeats a chant – audible some 19 times – “he or she should die”.

The UN human rights wing noted that the ruling CNDD-FDD party, on 5 April, issued a statement condemning the chanting. OHCHR, however, added that recent reports indicate that similar, larger rallies have been organized across the country by officials from the Government and the President's party.

“[The] condemnation is meaningless if, instead of a putting a stop to such events, senior Government officials continue to take part in such rallies,” stressed Mr. Zeid, adding: “The Government needs to stop pretending that the Imbonerakure are nothing but a community development group. Such blatant and brazen hate speech and incitement to violence must not be tolerated, nor encouraged.”

Condemnation is meaningless if, instead of a putting a stop to such events, senior Government officials continue to take part in such rallies

In the news release, the UN rights chief also voiced concern over continuing reports of serious human rights violations in the African country, including “systematic use” of torture by security forces, increasing cases of enforced disappearance, nightly raids by the Imbonerakure militia into homes of people who refuse to join the ruling party, and people targeted due to their ethnicity.

According to UN estimates, more than 400,000 people have fled the African nation over the last two years fearing for their safety.

“Those responsible for human rights violations, regardless of their position or rank, must be held accountable,” said Mr. Zeid, underlining that the authorities in Burundi must send clear, unequivocal instructions to the police, security, intelligence and military officers to operate in line with international human rights law.

“Impunity for human rights violations by security forces and the Imbonerakure must be brought to an end.”

The High Commissioner also asked the Government to grant OHCHR unfettered access, to be able to monitor the human rights situation throughout the country, to be able to independently verify allegations of grave violations and to support the authorities in bringing the perpetrators to justice.

AUDIO: Scott Campbell of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) explains to UN News who the militia members are.

Recent attack on evacuated civilians in Syria 'likely a war crime,' says UN rights office



A boy pulls a wheelchair along a debris strewn street in Al-Mashatiyeh neighbourhood of eastern Aleppo, Syria. Photo: UNHCR/Bassam Diab

18 April – The United Nations human rights office today expressed great concern about the safety of civilians being evacuated in Syria, saying a weekend attack on a convoy near Aleppo likely amounts to a war crime and the situation in Syria should be referred to the International Criminal Court.

“We add our voice to the condemnation of the attack near Rashideen near western rural Aleppo Governorate that hit a convoy carrying people from the besieged Syrian towns of Fuha and Kefraya to Government-controlled areas, killing dozens of people,” Rupert Colville, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), told journalists in Geneva.

“It is an attack which likely amounts to a war crime,” he stressed.

OHCHR is calling on all parties to ensure the safety and protection of people being evacuated.

“We reiterate the High Commissioner’s call for accountability and the need to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court,” Mr. Colville said.

He noted that while OHCHR cannot confirm how the attack was carried out or those responsible, footage seen by the Office “showed children gathering around a person giving out sweets just prior to the explosion.”

Hospitals in Aleppo city received the bodies of 96 civilians, including 67 children, Mr. Colville confirmed, adding that the number of children reportedly killed is “particularly abhorrent.”

In addition to the people killed, OHCHR has confirmed that some of the injured civilians remain missing.

“Some are believed to have been taken by armed opposition groups to opposition-controlled hospitals in Idlib Governorate,” he said. “Due to their perceived sympathies for the Government of Syria, their families are concerned for their safety.”

The groups are among those being evacuated from Fuha and Kerfraya as part of the “Four Towns Agreement” negotiated by Qatar and Iran. The two other towns are Madaya and Zabadani.

“These people had been living under incessant shelling for more than two years, with little food or medical supplies, and under the constant fear of attack by armed groups,” Mr. Colville said.

Also today, the Security Council condemned in the strongest term the “barbaric and cowardly” attack, and expressed sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims and all other people in Syria.

In a press statement, the 15-member Council also reiterated the need to combat terrorism and to bring the perpetrators, as well as any group that financed or sponsored the attacks, to justice.

Today’s condemnations echo senior UN officials, including the Organization’s top humanitarian official and the head of the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), who have expressed “horror” at the attack on civilians evacuated from the besieged towns.

UN blue helmets and Malian forces targeted in ‘cowardly’ terrorist attacks

18 April – The head of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Mali today strongly condemned the “cowardly” attacks that took place against its personnel as well as members of the national armed forces, and voiced deep concern at ongoing insecurity in the northern and central parts of the country.

Early this morning, a vehicle belonging to the peacekeeping mission (MINUSMA) struck an improvised explosive device or mine about 30 kilometres south of Tessalit in the Kidal region, according to a news release issued by the mission. Two peacekeepers and one civilian were seriously injured; the vehicle, part of an escort of a logistics convoy, was damaged.



UN peacekeepers patrolling Tessalit, northern Mali. Photo: MINUSMA/Marco Dormino

Also today, unidentified armed men targeted positions of the Malian Armed Forces and the National Guard at Gourma Rharous, located about 120 kilometres east of Timbuktu, according to the mission.

MINUSMA deployed its attack helicopters to the site in support of the Malian Forces and facilitated the medical evacuation of the wounded by air.

“There is hardly a day when reports of abominable acts of terrorism committed by the enemies of peace and the enemies of this country and its people are not received,” said Mahamat Saleh Annadif, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and head of MINUSMA, calling the attacks “cowardly.”

“Their real target is the failure of the peace process and their goal is to impose the reign of violence and chaos,” he said, adding that the UN remains more committed than ever to support the Malian authorities and the country’s defense and security forces.

Mr. Annadif also stressed the need for all Malian parties to redouble their efforts to advance the peace process.

UN human rights arm urges Nepal to carry out conviction of soldiers in teen's murder

18 April – Welcoming the conviction of three army officials accused of the murder of a 15-year-old girl during the armed conflict in Nepal more than 13 years ago, the United Nations human rights arm has called on the authorities to implement the court's decision.

“It is the first time that Nepal Army personnel have been convicted by a civilian court for crimes committed during the 1996-2006 conflict,” Rupert Colville, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) told journalists in Geneva.

“None of the officers were present in the District Court of Kavre, and it still remains to be seen whether they will actually be arrested and serve their sentences,” he added, urging the country's authorities to implement the verdict on what he called an “extremely important emblematic case.”

On 16 April, three soldiers – Babi Khatri, Amit Pun and Sunil Prasad Adhikari – were sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment for the murder of Maina Sunuwar, who was picked up from her home in a village in central Nepal on 17 February 2004 and interrogated for suspected links to Maoist rebels by soldiers who were looking for her mother.

She was allegedly subjected to torture and later that month died in the custody of the army at the Birendra Peace Operations Training Centre in Panchkal, located about 15 kilometres from the village where she was arrested.

According to the OHCHR spokesperson, the Nepalese Army and the Government initially denied any knowledge of Ms. Sunuwar's fate or whereabouts and her body was buried secretly.

A fourth officer who had been charged – a major who was repatriated by a UN peacekeeping mission in Chad in 2009 because of the arrest warrant against him – was acquitted by the court.

Mr. Colville added that OHCHR as well as other human rights organizations have persistently advocated for those responsible to be held fully accountable, and the convictions this Sunday come after a long succession of unsuccessful attempts to seek justice for the murder.



Rupert Colville, spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. UN Photo