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## Innovators, UN discuss using tech to tackle world's development challenges



Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed addresses at the General Assembly Seventy-first session High-level SDG Action Event on Innovation and Connectivity. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

**17 May** – From drones dropping food and medicines, to handheld devices that can diagnose Ebola with a drop of blood – the latest technological advances are converging to make the “unthinkable happen,” said global innovators and heads of tech companies invited to the United Nations today to discuss how to emerging technologies can boost achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Living up to his promise to be “disruptive,” a famous Silicon Valley catchphrase, Peter Thomson, the President of the UN General Assembly told those gathered for the High-level SDG Action Event on Innovation and Connectivity that he had refrained from wearing a tie, while Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed kicked off her shoes before addressing the room.

“Today, in this world, everyone is closing their border,” she said, but partnerships are necessary for the SDGs to reach every corner of the globe. Indeed, many innovators know no borders, “like we do in these halls when we negotiate and we talk about red lines, blue lines and green lines.”

Ms. Mohammed underscored: “There are no red, blue or green lines as you walk through the Internet, social media, communicating across those borders. That is what is exciting. Because with that you can share knowledge, with that you can go to scale, with that you can partner to de-risk environments where ordinarily you would not go.”



The Action Event, which sought to get leading innovators from major global corporations to interact with UN Member States, featured two keynote speakers, with Dr. Peter Diamandis, Chairman of XPrize Foundation and Singularity University, telling the gathering that he believed that in seven years, the entire planet will be connected.

This is what he called the “dematerialization” of things that people used to own, and that are now free on our cell phones.

“The son or daughter of a billionaire here in Manhattan, or the son or daughter of the poorest person in Kenya, has access to the same free applications, the same knowledge and information. It's an incredible world. What we are seeing here is a dematerialization as all of these things become cheaper and cheaper and ultimately, a democratization where we have a billion handsets in Africa.”

Mr. Diamandis then asked participants to imagine the power of five billion new minds that had never been connected before.

“Change the world,” was his response.

The second keynote speaker, Astro Teller, Chief Executive Officer of Google Ex, said partnerships between inventors, technologists, governments and local communities are what matter the most.

The majority of 7.5 billion people living on the planet do not have access to the internet, he remarked.

“This is a picture in Brazil. There are so many people who climb up the trees in order to get cell phone signal that they call them fireflies because at night, all you can see in the darkness is all of the flashing lights of the cell phones high up in the trees as they are hoping to get a signal. In Peru, they climb to the top of water towers or walk for many kilometres for the hope of getting a signal,” he said.

In order to get more people online, Google Ex launched a balloon-powered Internet project, Loon, in Latin America with the help of the UN International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

Partnering, Mr. Teller stressed, is important for everyone, from the innovator to Governments. “No one can achieve the Sustainable Development Goals alone.”

## Amid 'alarming rise' in obesity, UN study finds one in three European adolescents overweight

**17 May** – Citing eating habits, physical activity and sedentary behaviours, the United Nations health agency launched a new publication today at the European Congress on Obesity in Portugal which revealed a rising number of obese adolescents in many countries across Europe.

“Despite sustained efforts to tackle childhood obesity, one in three adolescents is still estimated to be overweight or obese in Europe, with the highest rates found in southern European and Mediterranean countries,” said Dr. Zsuzsanna Jakab, Regional Director for Europe of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Noting with particular concern that the epidemic is on the rise in eastern European countries, where historically rates have been lower, she called for ambitious policy action to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target to halt the increase in childhood obesity. “Governments must target efforts and break this harmful cycle from childhood into adolescence and beyond.”



Others standing nearby, a baby sitting in a stroller is fed by her mother at Disney World amusement park in the southern city of Orlando, Florida, in mid-1997. Obesity is a significant nutrition-related problem in the United States. Photo: UNICEF/Toutounji

The latest WHO study on Adolescent obesity and related behaviours: trends and inequalities in the WHO

European Region, 2002-2014 points to evidence suggesting that up to one in three boys and one in five girls aged six to nine is now obese.

Childhood obesity is considered one of the most serious public health challenges of the 21st century, according to the study. Globally, around one in 10 young people aged five to 17 is overweight or obese – with rapidly increasing levels in recent years.

According to the publication, “the primary causes of overweight and obesity can be traced to energy-related behaviours – physical activity, sedentary behaviour, eating behaviour and sleep – which contribute to an energy imbalance between calorie intake and energy expenditure.”

While trends have previously been reported on separately, this study compiles together the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) data on obesity and obesity-related behaviours – reviewing the latest evidence and studying the range and complexity of influences on childhood obesity.

The health consequences of excess body weight are well documented. As the report points out, obesity increases the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, hypertension, sleep apnoea and cardiovascular disease. It also diminishes adolescents' quality of life and is related to various emotional and behavioural problems.

Additionally, the chronic nature of obesity can limit social mobility and perpetuates an intergenerational cycle of poverty and ill health. Many inequalities in obesity and related behaviours exist, with young people from lower socioeconomic groups generally reporting worse outcomes.

The study also notes that longitudinal studies have found that obesity early in life relates to less educational attainment and lower incomes in adulthood – even after differences in childhood socioeconomic position (SEP) are controlled. Furthermore, low SEP in childhood increases the risk for becoming obese in adulthood over and above the impact of adult SEP on obesity.

“Most young people will not outgrow the condition: about four in every five adolescents who become obese will continue to have weight problems as adults,” the study underscores.

The HBSC survey is a WHO collaborative cross-national study that monitors the health behaviours, health outcomes and social environments of boys and girls aged 11, 13 and 15 years every four years.

## Secretary-General Guterres praises a united Europe as 'fundamental pillar' of strong UN



Secretary-General of the United Nations António Guterres speaks in the the European Parliament in Strasbourg. Behind him Antonio Tajani, President of the European Parliament. Photo: European Union 2017- Source: EP

**17 May** – Secretary-General António Guterres today stressed that the European Union's contribution is absolutely essential for the United Nations, from support to peacekeeping to protecting human rights, solving conflicts, advancing the agenda for sustainable development and fighting climate change.

“A strong and united Europe is an absolutely fundamental pillar of a strong and effective United Nations,” Mr. Guterres told the plenary session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

“The European Union (EU) is clearly the most successful project of peace sustainability in the world,” he added, expressing his gratitude and appreciation for the EU's commitment to multilateralism and its contributions to development cooperation and humanitarian aid.

Addressing a number of issues, including Syria, migration, globalization and the need to preserve cultural diversity, the Secretary-General laid out his reform priorities to ensure the

UN is closer to the aspirations of the people it is serving.

Mr. Guterres also stressed the need for Governments, local authorities, civil society and religious authorities to foster social cohesion, inclusivity and tolerance.

According to his spokesperson, the Secretary-General also gave a press conference alongside European Parliament President Antonio Tajani during which he stressed the need for a united Europe to support the search for global solutions, as no issue today can be solved without global efforts.

On his way to Strasbourg, the Secretary-General had met with new French President Emmanuel Macron. They discussed peace and security issues, as well as issues related to sustainable development and climate change. The UN chief said he looked forward to working with the French President on all pressing issues, noting France's key role as a pillar of multilateralism, the spokesperson said.

## As four countries face famine, world 'must step up now' says top UN food security forum



Women carry emergency food supplies from a World Food Programme (WFP) helicopter that landed in Thanyang, South Sudan. Photo: UNICEF/Holt

**17 May** – With famine looming in four countries, the United Nations-backed Committee on World Food Security (CFS) stressed today the need to rally support for both immediate relief to people at risk and for longer-term initiatives.

“Governments, civic groups and businesses need to rally support for both immediate relief to people in countries at risk of famine and longer-term initiatives that will allow them to recover and restore their livelihoods,” Ambassador Amira Gornass, Chair of the CFS, said today in Rome.

Famine has been declared in some counties of South Sudan, and the number of people close to sliding from emergency to disaster is perilously high in north-eastern Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen, according to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and other

UN agencies.

The risk of famine in all four countries – where some 30 million people are uncertain as to where their next meal will come from or rely on humanitarian assistance – is mostly induced by conflict, which has disrupted food production, blocked aid and commodities from accessing vulnerable communities and driven food prices beyond what people can afford.

“I urge you to take action now to relieve the impending suffering and to prevent further damage to livelihoods,” Ms. Gornass stated in a letter to CFS Members and stakeholders, as well as the international community at large, to step-up their response to the crises in the four countries.

Reiterating calls made by Secretary-General, António Guterres, the Ambassador wrote: “The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the primary mechanism for the coordination of humanitarian assistance, emergency and relief responses, can meet immediate needs if adequately funded.”

“Everyone should do what they can to support the IASC and to mobilize the necessary resources to enable emergency and relief activities to continue,” she added.

While emergency relief is an immediate priority, plans for medium and longer-term assistance to support recovery and prevent future famines must be supported, the CFS Chair emphasized.

“The affected populations of these four countries need our help now. We, as the international community, need to act

urgently and come together with effective actions,” she said.

In 2015 CFS approved the Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises that sets out concrete policy approaches that can build resilience. All stakeholders, public and private, should apply the principles and actions laid out in that document in the four countries and wherever there is a protracted crisis that threatens food security and nutrition.

“I am counting on you to respond in a way that will ensure that short-term relief is properly funded while medium and long-term measures are taken to build resilience and to eradicate hunger and malnutrition for good,” concluded Ambassador Gornass.

The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) is the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for all stakeholders to work together to ensure food security and nutrition for all.

## On day against homophobia, UN officials urge respect for sexual and gender diversity



Photo: ILO

**17 May** – Marking the international day against homophobia, senior United Nations officials today called for respect for sexual and gender diversity and urged the protection of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people from discrimination and harm.

“Today, I am deeply concerned by the excessive trivialization of insults, sexist and homophobic remarks in the media, in everyday life, on social networks, even from political leaders,” said UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Director-General Irina Bokova in her message for the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT), commemorated annually on 17 May.

She recalled the situation of homosexuals under the Nazi regime, interned in “re-education” camps, and killed. The UN was created to prevent such crimes from happening again, she stressed, noting that UNESCO is committed to protecting the rights of homosexual and transgender people by drawing across its mandate to advance education, the sciences, culture, communication and information.

“These are powerful tools to fight the prejudice, verbal violence and stigmatization that foreshadow physical violence and that violate the equality and inherent dignity of all. This work for reason and tolerance begins on the benches of school,” she said.

Research by the International Labour Organization (ILO) has found that workplace policies, often designed from a hetero-normative perspective, may fall short of addressing the issues and concerns of LGBTI workers. For example, LGBTI workers may be excluded from leave and benefit entitlements, such as parental leave, because their families do not fit traditional norms.

“In keeping with the principles of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, no LGBTI worker should be left behind. Today let us stand in solidarity for the rights of LGBTI workers and their families,” said ILO Director-General Guy Ryder.

Gender identity and sexual orientation can have an impact on a migrant's journey, unfortunately often in a negative and even dangerous way, warns the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

“IOM has a zero tolerance policy for any type of homophobia, transphobia or biphobia and does not tolerate any abuses against migrants and host communities receiving assistance or protection from IOM,” said Director General William Lacy Swing.

A group of UN and international human rights experts urged States and other stakeholders to protect trans and gender diverse children and adolescents effectively from discrimination, exclusion, violence and stigma and to foster supportive family environments for trans and gender diverse people.

“We urge States worldwide to adopt a legal and policy framework, with comprehensive implementation measures, to protect the rights of trans and gender diverse youth, respectful of gender diversity, and to enable the realization of their fullest potential,” they said in a news release from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) said that its vision of zero discrimination and ending AIDS by 2030 will only become a reality if the response to HIV reaches everyone, including LGBTI people.

“Many young gay and transgender people are rejected by their families, living on the streets, facing all types of discrimination and violence,” said UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé. “This is not the path to healthy and productive societies. We must encourage inclusion and compassion and ensure that networks of support are in place, including access to essential health and social services.”

The Day's theme this year is 'Love Makes a Family.'

## Big data can have a 'big impact' on achievement of Global Goals, UN says on IT Day

**17 May** – Mastering and measuring 'big data' – to map poverty from space or use mobile phones to track food security – could boost evidence-based decision-making at local and global levels and drive the implementation of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the United Nations telecommunications agency said today.

“The theme for 2017 is Big Data for Big Impact, which will explore the power of big data for development and examine the opportunities to convert unprecedented quantities of data into information that can drive development,” said the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union, Houlin Zhao, in his message on the Day.

Mr. Zhao projects that the insight brought about by more focused data analysis will enable evidence-based decision-making at national, regional and international levels and help to advance the UN 2030 Agenda and its corresponding Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



World Bank Group/International Monetary Fund Spring Meetings event that explored the potential of Big Data and Internet of Things technologies to solve development challenges related to risk and resilience. Photo: Simone D. McCourtie/World Bank (file)

The World Telecommunication and Information Society Day is celebrated annually on 17 May to help raise awareness of the possibilities that the use of the Internet and other information and communication technologies (ICT) can bring to societies and economies, as well as of ways to bridge the digital divide.

This year's commemoration also provides an occasion to take a closer look at the importance of governance and regulation, says Mr. Zaho, highlighting the implications for personal privacy and security given the future exponential growth in data and connectivity.

The ITU Secretary-General further states that activities undertaken by the ITU membership will contribute towards building momentum to embrace big data on a global scale and to seize new opportunities to address development challenges.

Recently ITU announced the top-90 winning Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) initiatives from around the world competing for prestigious WSIS Prizes 2017, with over a million online votes casted for 345 nominated projects. The winners will be announced during ITU's World Summit on the Information Society Forum in

June.

## As Somalia combats insecurity, drought worsens 'more rapidly than projected' – UN official

**17 May** – The humanitarian crisis in Somalia is worsening, a senior United Nations official told the Security Council, calling for more than \$800 million in aid to offset the impact of a severe drought in a country that is already battling insecurity and poverty.

“The humanitarian crisis has deteriorated more rapidly than was originally projected,” the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia, Raisedon Zenenga, told the Council in New York.

He said that people are dying and need protection, particularly women and children, as drought conditions force them to migrate from rural areas to town, and as sexual violence increases in displacement camps.



A wide view of the Security Council meeting on the situation in Somalia. UN Photo/Manuel Elias

“The scaled up response by humanitarian agencies has averted a famine in the country thus far, but the crisis is unlikely to abate any time soon. The needs for humanitarian assistance are increasing faster than the pace of response,” said Mr. Zenenga, who is also the deputy of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia or UNSOM.

At least \$669 million has been received or pledged for the effort, leaving a gap of \$831 million in the revised 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan.

More than six million people are affected, of whom only about three million have been reached with food rations.

In the longer-term, the country's structural problems must be addressed and resilience built, so the country can withstand extreme climatic conditions, the senior UN official said.

### *Peacebuilding and State-building*

Aside from the humanitarian needs, Somalia faces continued insecurity, predominantly from Al Shabaab.

In today's address, Mr. Zenenga applauded the Security Council-mandated African Union troops, known as AMISOM, which have provided “the backbone of security in Somalia over the past 10 years.”

He called on donor countries to assist with “predictable funding,” ideally through assessed contributions, to support the troops.

The call echoes that of the Special Representative, Michael Keating, who took part last week in the London Conference on Somalia.

As a result of the Conference, the international community reached a security agreement and defined a so-called New Partnership for the country, which sets out a framework to meet the Government's priority political, security and economic recovery plan. A follow-up meeting is planned for October.

These efforts build towards universal elections which are scheduled for 2020, what Mr. Zenenga called “a defining litmus test of the progress made towards a properly functioning State.”

This past February, the Parliament elected Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo to be the new President since direct elections

could not be held safely in the country. In 2020, Somalia aims to hold direct elections.

Ahead of that vote, building up the country's security and police force, so that it can start taking over responsibility from AMISOM, is a top priority.

## Côte d'Ivoire: UN chief welcomes country's return to calm after unrest



UNOCI officers conduct a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration operation with ex-combatants in the Abobo area of Abidjan in February 2012. UN Photo/Hien Macline

**17 May** – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has commended the Government of Côte d'Ivoire for restoring security following a mutiny over pay, his spokesperson said.

“The Secretary-General welcomes the return to calm in Côte d'Ivoire following the unacceptable acts of violence committed by soldiers of the Forces Armées de Côte d'Ivoire (FACI) over the past few days,” said Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesman for the Secretary-General, in a statement issued overnight.

“The Secretary-General expresses the United Nations continued support to the Government of Côte d'Ivoire in its efforts to sustain the hard-won gains of peace and stability in the country, including with the assistance of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and other international actors,” Mr. Dujarric said.

The unrest took place as UNOCI prepares to complete its mission on 30 June. The Mission was established 13 years ago by the Security Council, following a peace agreement between parties to a civil war.

## UN agency, IKEA partnership leads to first solar farm in refugee camp



Azraq refugee camp's solar farm stretches out into the desert, Adeb al Bassar, Jordan. Photo/IKEA Foundation/Vingaland AB

**17 May** – The world's first solar farm in a refugee camp switched on today in northern Jordan, providing renewable energy sources to about 20,000 Syrians living in the Azraq camp, the United Nations refugee agency today said.

Calling it a “milestone,” the deputy from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said the 2-megawatt solar photovoltaic (PV) plant, funded by IKEA Foundation's Brighter Lives for Refugees campaign, allows all residents to leave more dignified lives.

“Lighting up the camp is not only a symbolic achievement; it provides a safer environment for all camp residents, opens up livelihoods opportunities, and gives children the chance to study after dark,” said UNHCR Deputy High Commissioner, Kelly Clements.

A lack of electricity was one of the main challenges in Azraq, which opened in April 2014, and which has 5,000 shelters.

“Each family can now connect a fridge, a TV, a fan, have light inside the shelter and charge their phones, which is critical for refugees to keep in contact with their relatives abroad,” the UN agency said.

In addition, 50 refugees have been trained and employed to help build the solar farm under the supervision of a Jordanian company, and some will work on its maintenance.

The solar farm is expected to save about \$1.5 million per year in electric costs. Once it is upgraded from 2-megawatts to 5, it will cover all the refugee camp's needs. Any extra electricity will be sent for free to the cover the host community's energy needs.

## Reporting of global death statistics improving, UN agency reports

**17 May** – An increasing amount of deaths have recorded causes, but more than half still have incomplete or incorrect information, the United Nations health agency reported.

“If countries don't know what makes people get sick and die, it's a lot harder to know what to do about it,” said Marie-Paule Kieny, UN World Health Organization's (WHO) Assistant Director-General for Health Systems and Innovation.

Of the estimated 56 million deaths globally in 2015, 27 million were registered with a cause of death, according to one of WHO's annual flagship publications, the

World Health Statistics . That figure is up from 2005, when only about one-third of deaths had a recorded cause.

Collecting vital statistics is also important in monitoring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly the third SDG related to ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for people of all ages.

The Governments of China, Turkey and Iraq are among those that have made “significant” strides towards strengthening their data collection, according to WHO.

Ninety per cent of deaths in those countries are now recorded with detailed cause-of-death information, as compared with five per cent in 1999.

However, “while the quality of health data has improved significantly in recent years, many countries still do not routinely collect high-quality data to monitor health-related SDG indicators,” the UN agency said.

In countries where such information is recorded, WHO found that essential health service coverage has improved since 2000, with greatest improvement in coverage of treatment for HIV and bed nets to prevent malaria.



Government statisticians from Chile attending a FAOSTAT training session held at FAO headquarters. Photo: FAO/Giulio Napolitano