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US decision to withdraw from Paris climate accord a 'major disappointment' – UN

1 June – The Spokesman for the United Nations Secretary-General today said that the decision by the United States to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on climate change is a major disappointment for global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote global security.

“The Paris Agreement was adopted by all the world's nations in 2015 because they recognize the immense harm that climate change is already causing and the enormous opportunity that climate action presents,” Stéphane Dujarric told the media at the UN Headquarters in New York, shortly after US President Donald Trump announced his country's withdrawal from the Agreement.

“It offers a meaningful yet flexible framework for action by all countries.”

He further added that Secretary-General António Guterres remains confident that cities, States and businesses within the US – along with other countries – will continue to demonstrate vision and leadership by working for the low-carbon, resilient economic growth that will create quality jobs and markets for 21st century prosperity.

“It is crucial that the United States remains a leader on environmental issues,” he noted.

Mr. Dujarric also said that the Secretary-General looked forward to engaging with the US Government and all actors in the country and around the world to build the sustainable future on which the future generations depend.



Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric for the UN Secretary-General, reads a statement on the United States decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on climate change. UN Photo/Manuel Elias

The landmark agreement, which entered into force last November, calls on countries to combat climate change and to accelerate and intensify the actions and investments needed for a sustainable low carbon future, and to adapt to the increasing impacts of climate change.

It also aims to strengthen the ability of countries to deal with the impacts of climate change and calls for scaled up financial flows, a new technology framework and an enhanced capacity-building framework to support action by developing countries and the most vulnerable countries in line with their own national objectives.

Climate action is not a burden, but an unprecedented opportunity Erik Solheim, head of UNEP

In a separate statement, the head of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) said the US decision to leave the Paris Agreement in no way brings an end to this unstoppable effort. China, India, the European Union and others are already showing strong leadership. Indeed, 190 nations are showing strong determination to work with them to protect this and future generations.

“The science on climate change is perfectly clear: we need more action, not less. This a global challenge. Every nation has a responsibility to act and to act now,” said UNEP Executive Director Erik Solheim, underscoring that there is incredible momentum on climate action and a single political decision will not derail this unparalleled effort.

Urging all parties to redouble their efforts, he said that UNEP would work with everyone willing to make a difference. “Climate action is not a burden, but an unprecedented opportunity. Decreasing our dependence on fossil fuels will build more inclusive and robust economies. It will save millions of lives and slash the huge healthcare cost of pollution.”

“Committing to climate action means helping countries like Iraq and Somalia on the front line of extremism and terrorism. It means helping coastal communities from Louisiana to the Solomon Islands,” explained Mr. Solheim, adding that it also means protecting food security and building stability to avoid adding yet more refugees to what is already an unprecedented global humanitarian crisis.

Local solutions, people-centred health systems key to ending AIDS epidemic – UN deputy chief



Fanaye Hailu says her daughter Betty was born HIV-free and is now eight years old and suggests that every mother, every pregnant woman must get tested for HIV which can save the lives of the mother and her baby. Photo: UNAIDS

1 June – While global optimism has fuelled a major push to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030 – the highest ambition within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – the United Nations today warned that the pandemic is far from over, and with more than 36 million people living with HIV, tackling it will require a life-cycle approach based on community-level solutions.

“Achieving our aims on AIDS is interlinked and embedded within the broader 2030 Agenda. Both are grounded in equity, human rights and a promise to leave no one behind,” Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed told delegations gathered for the General Assembly’s annual review of the Secretary-General’s report, this year calling for a reinvigorated global response to HIV/AIDS.

In 2016, The UN political declaration on ending AIDS set the world on a fast-track to stamp out the epidemic by 2030. In the first phase, countries agreed to reduce new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths to fewer than 500,000 by 2020. They also agreed to eliminate HIV-related stigma and discrimination by then.

However, according to the report, with less than four years to go, progress on reducing new HIV infections among adults has stalled, financing for the global response has dried up and more importantly, women and girls continue to bear the brunt of the AIDS epidemic.

Briefing Member States alongside Assembly President Peter Thomson and UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé, Ms. Mohammed warned that the pandemic is far from over. UNAIDS estimates that more than 36.7 million people are living with HIV globally.

“While more than 18 million are now on life-saving treatment, this is just half of those who need it, and there is no decline in the number of new infections each year. People living with HIV who are on treatment can now expect the same life expectancy as someone who is not infected,” she said.

UN deputy chief spotlights ‘life-cycle’ approach to HIV

That is why a life-cycle approach to HIV is so important, she continued, to ensure that people have access to the services they need at every stage of life. Echoing the report’s concern, she cited other challenges, noting that key populations, including sex workers, people who inject drugs, transgender people, and men who have sex with men, remain at much higher risk of HIV infection. More than 10 million additional people living with HIV must access treatment by 2020; most of them are unaware of their HIV status.

“Now we need to do a better job of reaching young women and adolescent girls. This is true of Sub-Saharan Africa where adolescent girls account for three out of four new HIV infections among the 15 to 19 year olds. Women and girls’ heightened vulnerability of women and girls to HIV is intimately linked to “entrenched gender-based inequalities and harmful social attitudes,” she said, adding: “We also need to ensure a more integrated approach to HIV delivery. In particular, we need to integrate HIV, sexual and reproductive health programmes, including family planning.”

A blunt assessment would say that to date, our achievements have been mixed

For his part, Mr. Thomson said that while major advancements have been made, the scale of shortcomings remained deeply concerning. HIV prevention rates among adults around the world had largely stalled, with the number of new infections actually increasing in some regions. Some 1,800 young people a day were being newly infected with the virus, with young women at particular risk.

“A blunt assessment would say that to date our achievements have been mixed,” said the Assembly President, stressing that ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach that also targets education, information and services to people living with HIV and to those at risk.

“We must build on the tremendous advances we have already seen in science, technology and innovation to better support people living with HIV, and to find a path towards a vaccine or cure,” he said, adding that it is important to leverage the integrated nature of the SDGs by building on the synergies between the global AIDS response and efforts to achieve universal health coverage.

Adequate funding remains critical to meet the objectives, he added, emphasizing the need to close the \$7 billion funding gap for the global AIDS response.

UN urges aid for civilians swept up in Central African Republic's 'new spiral of escalating violence'

1 June – Warning that violence in the Central African Republic (CAR) is quickly escalating, the top United Nations aid official in the country today urged the international community to assist the tens of thousands of newly displaced civilians.

Speaking to representatives of UN Member States in Geneva, Najat Rochdi, the Humanitarian Coordinator and UN Resident Coordinator in the country, said the frequency and brutality of attacks in Bangassou, Bria, Alindao and other localities have reached levels not seen since August 2014.

“In the past two weeks the signs are very clear, violence in the Central Africa Republic has entered a new spiral of escalating conflict and the situation is quickly deteriorating,” Ms. Rochdi said.

“Over 100,000 people have been newly displaced, family running for their lives, leaving everything behind,” she added.

Humanitarian actors are facing logistical and security challenges to reach the people in need, as well as funding shortages. The UN requested nearly \$400 million on behalf of the humanitarian community to meet CAR's needs. So far, only about 25 per cent have been received, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Without sufficient resources, the most vulnerable people will be cut off from aid “many of them will be killed, and entire areas of the country abandoned,” warned Ms. Rochdi.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, plunged the country of 4.5 million people into civil conflict in 2013. According to the UN, more than half the population is in dire need of assistance. Despite significant progress and successful elections, CAR has remained in the grip of instability and sporadic unrest.

In her briefing today, she urged Governments to remain engaged in CAR: “This is not the time to let the people of the Central African Republic down. This is not the time to give up on peace.”

With innovative strategy, UN health agency launches new offensive against vector-borne diseases



An exterminator fumigates a house in Panama City, Panama, to control mosquito population. PAHO/WHO Photo

1 June – Spread of the Zika virus disease and emerging threat of dengue and chikungunya were the result of weak mosquito control policies adopted nearly half a century ago, the United Nations health agency has said, vowing a renewed attack on global spread of such vector-borne diseases.

“What we are seeing now looks more and more like a dramatic resurgence of the threat from emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases,” Margaret Chan, the Director-General of the UN World Health Organization (WHO) told the sixty-ninth World Health Assembly, in May last year.

Starting in June 2016, the UN health agency began developing a comprehensive response to strategically guide countries and partners to urgently strengthen vector control as a fundamental approach to



Displaced people carry belongings through the M'Poko airport camp in Bangui, Central African Republic. Photo: OCHA/Phil Moore

preventing disease and responding to outbreaks.

The unique fast-track process culminated this week with the adoption of the *Global Vector Control Response 2017–2030* by the World Health Assembly (at its seventieth session).

The Response is also expected to go a long way in supporting implementation of approaches to vector control and achieve disease-specific national and global goals as well as for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Of most direct relevance are Goals 3, 6 and 11 on ensuring health and well-being and clean water and sanitation, and on sustainable cities and communities.

Riding on wave of economic development

In particular, the Global Response calls for aggressive pursuit of promising new interventions such as new insecticides, spatial repellents and odour-baited traps, improved house screening, and developing common bacterium which can stop viruses from replicating inside mosquitoes.

At the same time, economic development can help bring solutions.

“If people lived in houses that had solid floors and windows with screens or air conditioning, they wouldn't need a bednet,” said Professor Thomas Scott from the Department of Entomology and Nematology at the University of California, who co-lead a group of eminent scientists and public health experts in the development of the Response.

“By improving people's standard of living, we would significantly reduce these diseases,” he added.

At the same time, programmes targeting specific diseases have also yielded remarkable results.

One such example is Malaria: massive use of insecticide-treated bednets and use of residual insecticides inside houses has helped reduce the disease's incidence in sub-Saharan Africa by 45 per cent over the past 15 years.

'Disappearing' public health entomologists

But that success has had a down side.

“We've been so successful, in some ways, with our control that we reduced the number of public health entomologists – the people who can do this stuff well,” said Professor Steve Lindsay, a public health entomologist at Durham University in Britain. “We're a disappearing breed.”

To counter this phenomenon, the Global Vector Control Response urges countries to invest in a vector-control workforce trained in public health entomology and empowered in health care responses.

“We now need more nuanced control – not one-size-fits-all, but to tailor control to local conditions,” added Professor Lindsay, noting that under the new strategic approach, individual diseases such as Zika, dengue and chikungunya will no longer be considered as separate threats.

“What this represents is not three different diseases, but one mosquito – *Aedes aegypti*,” said Professor Lindsay.

A change in mentality needed

Experts have also highlighted that while the task ahead will not be easy, the Global Response offers room for optimism.

“Most of all, this document is a call for action”, said Dr. Ana Carolina Silva Santelli, who co-led the eminent group with

Professor Scott, presently the deputy director for epidemiology in the Brasilia office of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, noting that integrating vector-control efforts across different diseases will require more equipment, people and resources.

But above all, a change in mentality is needed, she noted. “The risk of inaction is greater [...] given the growing number of emerging disease threats.”

UN human rights chief urges repeal of repressive NGO law in Egypt



Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.
UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

1 June – The United Nations human rights chief today urged Egyptian officials to repeal a new law on non-governmental organizations, saying that it “further tightens the noose” around NGOs trying to hold the Government to account for human rights obligations.

Law 70 of 2017, which was enacted on 24 May, requires all NGOs to work in line with the Government’s development and social welfare plans or face jail time.

“The crucial function of these NGOs – to hold the State accountable for its human rights obligations – has been severely hampered already through asset freezes, travel bans, smear campaigns and prosecutions,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said. “This new law further tightens the noose.”

The law also requires civil society groups to report all information on their funding, activities and programmes to authorities, and to seek permission for conducting surveys and any other activities.

The latest law replaces Law 84 of 2002, which Mr. Zeid said was “already repressive.” In recent years, hundreds of civil society groups were dissolved or had their assets frozen under this legislation.

More than 37 Egyptian NGO workers and leaders have been accused of “illegal receipt of foreign funding” and “working without legal permission,” according to the Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR). None of them have been officially charged.

The revised law “places such tight restrictions on civil society that it effectively hands administration of NGOs to the Government,” Mr. Zeid said.

He added that while national security is a consideration in Egypt, “muzzling” civil society is not the solution.

“Civil society and media oversight of the Government are essential elements of a strong and stable society, where grievances can be openly aired. Muzzling dissent can only lead to further instability,” he warned.

UNICEF urges Governments to close data gaps on vulnerable children in residential care



A nine-year-old child and his younger, eight-year-old, brother sit in their room, drawing and colouring. They are living live with foster parents in Lipova commune, Bacau county, Romania. Photo: UNICEF/Vladimir Kostyak

1 June – At least 2.7 million children live in residential care worldwide and face increased risk of violence, abuse and long-term damage to their cognitive, social and emotional development, a United Nations study says, warning that “this is just tip of the iceberg.”

According to the study *Child Abuse & Neglect*, published by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), official records in many countries only capture a small fraction of the actual number of children living in residential care and children in privately owned centres are often not counted.

“It is critical that governments keep more accurate and comprehensive listings of all existing residential care facilities, as well as regularly undertake thorough counts of children living in these facilities in order to help strengthen official records,” said Claudia

Cappa, Statistics Specialist at UNICEF and co-author of the study. “That way we will be able to measure the breadth of the problem and work with governments to respond effectively.”

In residential care, such as institutions or orphanages, children who are already vulnerable due to family separation are at increased risk of violence, abuse and long-term damage to their cognitive, social and emotional development, said Cornelius Williams, Associate Director of Child Protection at UNICEF.

Research shows some of the key risk factors that result in children being placed in residential care include family breakdown, health issues, poor or unequal provision of social services, disability and poverty.

Governments are urged to reduce the number of children living in residential care by preventing family separation where possible, and by seeking homes for children in family-based care such as foster homes. Stronger investment in community-based family support programmes is also needed, UNICEF said.

UNICEF's new estimate is based on data from 140 countries. Central and Eastern Europe was found to have the highest rate worldwide, with 666 children per 100,000 living in residential care, over 5 times the global average of 120 children.

Industrialized countries have the second-highest rate with 192 children, followed by East Asia and the Pacific region at 153.

'Beginning of end for rogue fishing,' says UN agency as more States back landmark treaty

1 June – A new agreement aimed at stopping rogue fishing practices represents the capstone of years of diplomatic effort to combat the scourge of illegal fishing, according to the United Nations food agency.

The Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing, gives the world "all the instruments necessary to achieve our goal," said José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in a press statement.

Mr. Graziano da Silva spoke at the first Meeting of the Parties, hosted by the Government of Norway to hammer out details regarding the treaty's implementation, such as defining the responsibilities of States, regional fisheries management organizations and other international bodies, including FAO.

Soon to have 48 parties – counting all 28 European Union members, with Japan and Montenegro about to join depositing their instruments of accession – Mr. Graziano da Silva expressed confidence that more countries would join in the near future, saying "this gives the one-year-old treaty added heft."

The FAO-brokered treaty restricts port access to fishing vessels that fail to comply with a set of rules, including proof that they have proper operating licenses and transparent disclosure of the species and quantity of fish caught.

Years of IUU fishing, which has yielded up to 26 million tons, worth some \$23 billion a year, represents a huge threat to all efforts to bolster sustainable fishing in the world's oceans.

Parties to the PSMA currently account for more than two-thirds of the global fish trade, according to FAO.

Mr. Graziano da Silva also noted a number of its additional benefits, such as promoting marine fisheries' sustainability, improving livelihoods and food security of coastal communities and reducing illegal activities often linked to IUU fishing, namely trafficking, labour abuses and slavery.

The PSMA also represents a large contribution toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal 14, which expressly calls for an end to IUU fishing by 2020.

Focus on implementation

Protocols under discussion include how to assure proper real-time exchange and information publication, as port States must signal eventual violations to a ship's flag State in addition to regional authorities.

Further technical requirements of developing States will also be addressed. An ad hoc working group will meet later this week to make recommendations on establishing suitable funding mechanisms to make sure all members, including Small Island Developing States located amid some of the world's most attractive fishing areas, can carry out their tasks.

The PSMA treaty itself demands that members contribute to the capacity-building effort required to make the agreement work.

"This is a crucial moment," Mr. Graziano da Silva said, noting that FAO itself has already committed \$1.5 million of its own funds toward the effort.



Dried fish village in Bangladesh Photo: FAO/Zakir Hossain