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At Ocean Conference, UN agencies commit to cutting harmful fishing subsidies

6 June – As the international community focuses this week on preserving the health of global oceans and seas, the United Nations agencies on agriculture, environment and trade are committing to the sustainable trade of fisheries.

The agencies – the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) – are due to announce the commitment today at The Ocean Conference, which opened yesterday at UN Headquarters in New York and wraps up on Friday, 9 June.

“Trade and trade-policies can facilitate the transition to sustainable ocean-based economies by increasing resource efficiency, improving the environment, enhancing inclusiveness and creating new green business opportunities,” according to the voluntary commitment.

One of outcomes of the commitment is the removal or reduction of harmful fisheries subsidies which are estimated to be as high as \$35 billion.

The issue is “complicated and thorny,” according to the UN agencies. “For the majority of fisheries subsidies, there is a strong correlation with overcapacity and overfishing.”



Fishermen offloading tunas at the industrial fish port of Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Photo: FAO/Sia Kambou

The commitment likely involves requesting countries to provide information on what subsidies they provide and prohibiting those that contribute to overfishing, as well as potentially giving differential treatment to developing countries.

The Ocean Conference, which runs through Friday, focuses on the targets outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by Governments in 2015. In particular among the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Goal 14 highlights the need to conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources to benefit present and future generations.

The commitment on fisheries is one of some 850 commitments made at the Conference so far. The voluntary commitments are meant to be taken individually or in partnership by Governments, the UN system, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and others, to support SDG14.

In addition to marking voluntary commitments, participants this week are also due to adopt, by consensus, a “Call to Action” to protect the world’s oceans and seas.

Water is ‘catalyst’ for cooperation, not conflict, UN chief tells Security Council

6 June – Stressing the importance of diplomacy to prevent and resolve trans-boundary disputes over water resources, Secretary-General António Guterres today told the United Nations Security Council that water serves as “a catalyst” for cooperation among nations, even those that are not on good terms.

“Water, peace and security are inextricably linked,” said Mr. Guterres during a meeting on preventive diplomacy and trans-boundary waters, which was chaired by Evo Morales, President of Bolivia, which holds the Council’s presidency for the month.

“I commend this Security Council meeting for highlighting how water is and should remain a reason for cooperation not conflict,” Mr. Guterres added.

With climate change having a growing impact, water scarcity is a growing concern, he pointed out, noting that by 2050 at least one in four people will live in a country where the lack of fresh water is chronic or recurrent.

Three-quarters of UN Member States share rivers or lake basins with their neighbours. There are more than 270 internationally shared river basins, which serve as the primary source of fresh water for approximately 40 per cent of the world’s population, including the Nile, the Indus, the Ganges, the Euphrates-Tigris, and the Mekong.

“That is why it is essential that nations cooperate to ensure water is shared equitably and used sustainably,” he said.

In the second half of the 20th century alone, some 287 international water agreements were signed.

In South America, Lake Titicaca, the largest freshwater lake on the continent, has long been a source of cooperation between Bolivia and Peru. The 1960 Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan has survived three wars between the two countries.

The Albufeira Convention, agreed when Mr. Guterres was Prime Minister of Portugal, continues to promote good relations on water management between his country and Spain.

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes became open for all UN



Secretary-General António Guterres addresses Security Council meeting on Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Preventive Diplomacy and Transboundary waters. To his right is President Evo Morales Ayma of Bolivia. UN Photo/Kim Haughton

Member States as of March last year, offering the opportunity to create a global framework for preventive diplomacy for dealing with transboundary water issues.

“Let us commit to investing in water security to ensure durable peace and security for all communities and nations,” he concluded.

Super Dads: New UNICEF campaign spotlights fathers' critical role in children's early development



A four-year-old boy and his father Marshall Mejia, play in the water during a visit to the seashore, in their hometown of Dangriga, on the south-eastern coast of Belize. Photo: UNICEF/UN035756/LeMoyne

6 June – As more than 90 countries prepare to mark Father's Day later this month, prominent figures in sports and entertainment have joined 'Super Dads,' a campaign launched today by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) that celebrates a father's essential role in a child's early cognitive development.

The Super Dads initiative is a part of a larger campaign called #EarlyMomentsMatter, which aims to bring awareness to the significance of early childhood experiences on a child's future.

Mahershala Ali, David Beckham, the All Blacks, Daniel Cormier, Novak Djokovic, Lewis Hamilton, Hugh Jackman, Sachin Tendulkar, Thalia and Chris Weidman are among the celebrities who will be featured for their “super dad” moments on UNICEF's Instagram and Twitter. These UNICEF ambassadors and supporters have also shared their thoughts on the importance of their own fathers in their

childhoods.

“When I was a young child, my father gave me the right amount of love, freedom and support to shape who I am today,” said UNICEF Ambassador Sachin Tendulkar. “Every kid needs protection, love, good food and play to support growth and development, and it's up to both parents to provide these.”

Stars are not the only super dads that will be featured. Moving stories of fathers raising their children under difficult circumstances will be also posted alongside pictures and videos of celebrity dads.

One such story is of South Sudanese refugee Idro, a father of three daughters in Uganda's Bidi Bidi refugee settlement. “If I can't fulfil for my family, I am not happy,” said Idro, reflecting the fatherly compassion that the campaign advocates for. Idro fled from violence with his family in order to protect his daughters and continues to provide them with as much support as possible. He tries to provide a stable environment by playing games and comforting his daughters despite their hardships.

“Good parenting for young children living in highly stressful conditions like conflict or extreme poverty can even provide a buffer, helping them to fully develop despite adversity,” said Pia Britto, UNICEF Chief of Early Childhood Development. Children's brains form important neural connections within the first 1,000 days, which could decide their health, learning abilities, and income in later years.

Research also shows that positive interactions with fathers allow children to have better psychological health and life satisfaction in the future. Britto urges the private sector and governments to “break down the employment and societal obstacles” that prevent parents from giving their children the highest starting point possible.

Super Dads calls for families across the world to join in by sharing photos and videos of their own with the hashtag #EarlyMomentsMatter, which will be featured in a gallery for the campaign. Additionally, UNICEF will post the best submissions on its various digital platforms.

Syria: As airstrikes hit Raqqa, UN sounds alarm over plight of civilians



Displaced men, women and children after fleeing ISIL-controlled areas in rural Raqqa to Ain Issa, the main staging point for displaced families, some 50 Km north of Raqqa city (November 2016). Photo: UNICEF/UN039561/Soulaiman

6 June – The United Nations humanitarian wing today said it is deeply concerned for the safety and protection of more than 400,000 civilians in Syria's war-torn Raqqa Governorate, “who continue to be exposed to daily fighting and airstrikes.”

“The humanitarian situation in Al-Raqqa governorate remains dire, with the majority of the population reportedly facing critical problems in meeting their immediate needs,” Alessandra Vellucci, Director of the UN Nations Information Service in Geneva on behalf of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) told reporters at today's regular press briefing.

She also reiterated the UN's call for unconditional, unimpeded and sustained access to those affected by the fighting in Raqqa, and more broadly to the 4.5 million who are still in hard-to-reach areas across the war-torn country.

Turning to the internally displaced (IDPs), she pointed out that more than 160,000 people have been displaced since 1 May with the situation on the ground remaining fluid. There are some 87,200 in the Ar-Raqqa governorate; nearly 37,000 in Aleppo; over 33,400 in Idlib; and smaller numbers in Hama, Deir-ez-Zor and Homs.

“On 3 June, three internally displaced people, including a pregnant woman, had been reportedly killed by a landmine. On 4 June, airstrikes on the al-Mashlab neighbourhood in Raqqa city had reportedly resulted in the destruction of two schools while mortar shelling in the vicinity of another school injured several people,” she said.

Ms. Vellucci stated that since March, UN agencies continued to provide multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance through their local partners – such as food, medical treatment and vaccinations throughout Raqqa, including IDPs in camps.

Some 60,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon in Jordan could lose assistance

For its part, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) sounded the alarm that humanitarian programmes supporting Syrian refugees and their host communities are quickly running out of resources.

Citing critical gaps in Lebanon and Jordan, UNHCR spokesperson Andrej Mahecic told journalists in Geneva that vital parts of its response to Syrian refugees were critically underfunded.

“Despite generous pledges, humanitarian programmes in support of Syrian refugee and communities hosting them are quickly running out of resources. The situation is most dramatic in Lebanon and Jordan where a number of direct cash assistance activities could dry up in less than four weeks,” he said.

Those who fled to Jordan face stark challenges.

“Refugees tell our staff that UNHCR monthly cash support means a meal a day, a better roof, their dignity. Now they fear losing everything. Many say would prefer to go back to Syria to die if they stop receiving this assistance,” continued Mr. Mahecic.

In Lebanon, where UNHCR urgently needs \$116 million, direct cash assistance programmes for refugees will be affected first.

“These include a lifeline of multi-purpose cash for 30,000 Syrian refugee families, a winter cash assistance for two months

for another 174,000 families and protection cash assistance for 1,500 refugee households to help them overcome periods of hardship,” he continued.

“The funding gap also jeopardises 65,000 life-saving secondary health care interventions and support to UNHCR's and the Lebanese Authorities' capacity to issue and renew documentation for refugees, following a recent decision to waive the residency renewal fees which most refugees could not afford,” Mr. Mahecic added.

Mid-way through this year, the \$4.6 billion inter-agency appeal to meet the immediate humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees across the Middle East and North Africa is only 18 per cent funded.

Updating essential drugs list, UN health agency aims to preserve potency of 'last resort' antibiotics



Photo: WHO/Jim Holmes

6 June – As part of its effort to combat growing drug resistance, the United Nations health agency today announced that it is classifying antibiotics into three categories and providing new advice on which to use for common infections and which to preserve for the most serious circumstances.

According to a news release issued by the agency, a key revision in this year's update was the grouping of antibiotic medicines into three categories – Access, Watch and Reserve to enhance treatment outcomes, reduce the development of drug-resistant bacteria, and preserve the effectiveness of “last resort” antibiotics that are needed when all others fail.

Also, 10 antibiotics for adults and 12 for children were also added to the list.

“The new WHO list should help health system planners and prescribers ensure people who need antibiotics have access to them, and ensure they get the right one,” said Suzanne Hill, the Director of Essential Medicines and Health Products at the UN agency, in a news release in which she also underscored the importance of proper use of these drugs given rising antimicrobial resistance in populations around the globe.

The updates to the antibiotics section are also in support of the UN agency's global action plan on antimicrobial resistance, the news release added.

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is the ability of a microorganism (like bacteria, viruses, and some parasites) to stop an antimicrobial (such as antibiotics, antivirals and antimalarials) from working against it. As a result, standard treatments become ineffective, infections persist and may spread to others.

In addition to the antibiotics, new drugs included in the WHO Essentials Medicines List (EML) contain new medicines, such as two oral cancer treatments, a new pill for hepatitis C (HepC) that combines two medicines, a more effective treatment for HIV as well as an older drug that can be taken to prevent HIV infection in people at high risk, new paediatric formulations of medicines for tuberculosis (TB), and pain relievers.

Further in the release, Marie-Paule Kieny, WHO Assistant Director-General for Health Systems and Innovation also highlighted that safe and effective medicines form an essential part of any health system.

“Making sure all people can access the medicines they need, when and where they need them, is vital to countries' progress towards universal health coverage,” she said.

The WHO list of essential medicines was launched in 1977, coinciding with the endorsement by governments at the World

Health Assembly of “Health for all” as the guiding principle for WHO and countries' health policies.

Many countries have adopted the concept of essential medicines and have developed lists of their own, using the EML as a guide. The EML is updated and revised every two years by the WHO Expert Committee on the Selection and Use of Essential Medicines.

Sri Lanka: UN assists storm victims, seeks to contain diseases 'spiralling out of control'

6 June – In the aftermath of a devastating tropical storm in Sri Lanka, United Nations agencies are working to provide shelters and other emergency kits while seeking to contain a mosquito-borne disease that is starting to “spiral out of control.”

Heavy flooding, landslides and flash floods caused by Tropical Cyclone Mora in Myanmar and Bangladesh, and torrential monsoon rains have affected some 684,000 people in south and central Sri Lanka. The flooding, which is believed to be the worst in over a decade, has left at least 212 people dead and 79 missing.

Sri Lanka's Disaster Management Centre (DMC) estimates that over 2,500 houses were destroyed and nearly 15,900 damaged. These numbers could rise as data from damage assessments is compiled in the coming weeks.



In the wake of Cyclone Mora, flood waters flattened many homes in this village in Kalutara, Sri Lanka. Photo: IOM

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) plans to provide 3,700 shelter repair kits, 5,000 non-food relief item kits and 250 temporary shelters, with funding sought from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), said the UN migration agency in a press release. The intervention will help an estimated 74,750 people.

Nearly 22,000 people are still sheltering in over 200 overcrowded sites, including schools, temples and churches, the agency said.

In flood-affected areas people are expected to return to their homes as water levels recede. But in landslide-affected areas, people currently staying in evacuation centres or with relatives and friends are unlikely to be able to return to their homes in the short term.

“There will likely be a need to track displacement, return, and site closure. People will need shelter and other non-food relief items (when they leave the sites) and we will need to ensure that aid is distributed at the location most useful and appropriate for each affected family,” said IOM Sri Lanka Chief of Mission Giuseppe Crocetti.

On Friday, the UN Humanitarian Country Team launched an emergency response plan seeking \$22.7 million to address the critical life-saving and protection needs of 374,000 people in seven districts, targeting four priority sectors, including shelter, food, health and water and sanitation.

IOM will co-lead the emergency shelter and non-food item sector, which is appealing for \$6.5 million.

Meanwhile, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) is calling for \$3.5 million to keep vulnerable children safe.

“So far we have delivered water and sanitation supplies, we are working on education supplies, strengthening health systems and rehabilitating basic health services and working on disease control for both diarrhoea and dengue which is starting to spiral out of control,” said UNICEF country representative Tim Sutton.

He said flood waters have not receded in the southern district of Matara, raising fears of mosquito-borne disease

transmission. He noted that so far this year there have already been more than 53,000 cases of dengue, a mosquito-borne tropical disease, which causes severe flu-like symptoms. It is a leading cause of death among children and adults in Sri Lanka.

Falling aid for education putting global goals at risk, warns UN agency



Children at Bahadoub 2 school in Timbuktu, Mali. © UNICEF/PFP2013P-0035/Harandane Dicko

6 June – Against the backdrop of aid allocations to education falling for the sixth year in a row, the United Nations agency mandated with promoting education globally has called on the donor community to focus more attention on the vital sector, especially in countries where needs are the greatest.

According to a policy paper by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Global Education Monitoring Report, total aid to education stands at \$12 billion – 4 per cent lower than the figure in 2010.

“Aid remains far short of what is needed to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4, putting our commitments at risk,” said Irina Bokova, the Director-General of UNESCO, in a news release announcing the findings.

“[Resources] need to be multiplied by at least six to achieve our common education goals and must go to countries most in need,” she cautioned, calling on donors not to shift their attention away from the poorest countries.

Based on newly released data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee, the study revealed that aid to basic education, such as support to pre-primary and primary education, as well as adult education and literacy programmes – stands at \$5.2 billion, 6 per cent lower than the amount in 2010.

It also noted that, while humanitarian aid to education reached a “historic high” – increasing almost 55 per cent from 2015 to 2016 – education received only 2.7 per cent of total aid available and less than half (48 per cent) of the amount needed.

In terms of national contributions, the United States and the United Kingdom were the two largest donors to basic education, but their allocations fell by 11 per cent and 9 per cent respectively in 2014-2015.

In contrast, contributions from Norway and Germany increased by 50 per cent and 34 per cent respectively, noted the UN agency.

The UNESCO policy paper, *Aid to Education is Stagnating and Not Going to Countries Most in Need* also voiced concern over skewed allocations by donors leading to aid not reaching places it is most needed.

Sub-Saharan Africa, home to over half of the world's out-of-school children currently receives less than half the aid to basic education it used to in 2002, and only 26 per cent of the total aid to basic education globally.

This contrasts to the 22 per cent allocation to the northern Africa and western Asia region, where 9 per cent of children are out of school.

Calling for urgent action to rectify the problems, UNESCO urged donors to “reverse the move away from education” and focus their attention on campaigns such as the Global Partnership for Education Replenishment campaign which is seeking to raise \$3.1 billion between 2018-2020 and programmes such as the Education Cannot Wait fund (established in 2016) that aims to raise \$3.85 billion by 2020, with the potential to transform the delivery of education in emergencies.

Addressing Human Rights Council, UN rights chief decries some States' lack of cooperation

6 June – In a major address in Geneva, the United Nations human rights chief today stressed that denying access or not cooperating with UN bodies would not diminish scrutiny of a Government's human rights record.

Addressing the 35th session of the Human Rights Council, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, decried some Governments for cutting off or selectively choosing how they cooperate with his office and UN bodies.

“It would be intolerable if delegations were to conclude that by maintaining minimal engagement with the human rights mechanisms they can evade or betray those commitments to their own peoples, and to the peoples of the world,” the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said in an oral update this morning to the Council.



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

He underscored that every Government is party to at least one of the nine core human rights treaties and has accepted that it “is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedom.”

Mr. Zeid noted that the world sees increasingly the results of discrimination, deprivation and injustice – in the escalation of crises and suffering, and the outbreak of war.

“Whether or not individual leaders consider this truth convenient, it is nonetheless a fact that denial of human rights in one county concerns every State in the Organization,” he stressed.

With a mandate from the international community to promote and protect all human rights, his office (OHCHR) represents the world's commitment to universal ideals of human dignity. Its thematic priorities include strengthening international human rights mechanisms; enhancing equality and countering discrimination; and early warning and protection of human rights in situations of conflict, violence and insecurity. It also supports the work of UN human rights mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council.

Taking place at the UN Office in Geneva, the Council's session will last three weeks and tackle a range of human rights issues currently before the world.

Refusal to cooperate with UN bodies

The senior UN official also spoke out against some Governments' decisions to keep UN rights experts out of their borders, and rallied against “absolutely unacceptable” incidents of threats and insults directed at UN Special Rapporteurs.

“I strongly contest the self-serving argument presented by some, that this Council should avoid addressing country situations – a view which is usually voiced by leaders of States that feature few independent institutions, and which sharply curtail fundamental freedoms,” he stated.

He specified, for example, the Government of Burundi, which was elected to the Council in 2015, yet “continues to commit some of the most serious human rights violation dealt with by this Council” and has suspended all cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR).

“In September the Council's independent mission was declared persona non grata, and the current Commission of Inquiry has not been able to enter the country,” Mr. Zeid added.

He noted a number of countries which are not members of the Council, which have not permitted any visits by Special Procedures representatives, such as Special Rapporteurs.

Included in this group is Syria, which has cut off access to OHCHR and the Syrian Commission of Inquiry.

“This is notwithstanding the continued horrific suffering of the Syrian people, particularly in besieged communities. I repeat my call for the release of all detainees wrongfully imprisoned in Syria,” Mr. Zeid urged.

As for the already-dire situation in the Kasai provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which continues to deteriorate, spreading to other provinces and across the border with Angola, Mr. Zeid said that given the difficulties in accessing the areas where violations and abuses are occurring, he will be dispatching a team to the region next week to meet with people fleeing the attacks.

“Unless I receive appropriate responses from the Government regarding a joint investigation by 8 June, I will insist on the creation of an international investigative mechanism for the Kasais,” he stated.

Turning to representatives of his office, Mr. Zeid expressed very serious concern about intimidation and reprisals brought on by State officials against people who engage with the UN on human rights. He specifically mentioned smear and hate campaigns against the Special Rapporteurs on Myanmar, Summary Executions in the context of discussions on the Philippines, and on Iran.

“When Government or other officials intimidate, arrest or harm these individuals, they are attacking a fundamental element of the work of this Council and the UN, and it is our responsibility to do all we can to protect them,” Mr. Zeid said.

He noted also that the Council’s next annual report would focus on reprisals, and called for cooperation with Assistant Secretary-General Andrew Gilmour, who is leading UN action on that issue.

Condemning terrorism in all forms

Mr. Zeid began his address with a strong condemnation of terrorism throughout the world.

“The brutality of Da’esh [also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL] and other terrorist groups seemingly knows no bounds,” he said.

“Yesterday, my staff reported to me that bodies of murdered Iraqi men, women and children are still lying on the streets of the al-Shira neighbourhood of western Mosul, after at least 163 people were shot and killed by Da’esh on 1 June to prevent them from fleeing.”

After condemning the attacks, he called for Governments to eradicate the threat, but he cautioned against trampling on people’s rights.

“Please remember this: for every citizen wrongfully detained under a vague anti-terrorism law, and humiliated, abused, or tortured, it is not simply one individual who then nurses a grievance against the authorities, but most of their family too. Send one innocent person to prison, and you may deliver six or seven family members into the hands of those who oppose the government, with a few who may even go further than that.”

The UN Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the UN system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and make recommendations on them. It was setup by the UN General Assembly in March 2006, and replaced the Commission on Human Rights.

The Council is made up of 47 UN Member States which are elected by the General Assembly.

Nothing short of a 'sea change' will end years of gross neglect in mental health care – UN expert



A young man, 17 is part of a “national reintegration strategy” in Burundi. At this re-education centre the children are provided help including access to social workers and psychologists. Credit: UNICEF/Prinsloo

6 June – Citing decades of neglect in mental health care, a United Nations human rights expert today denounced “biomedical gatekeepers” perpetuated stigma and urged States and psychiatrists to act with courage to reform a “crisis-hit system built on outdated attitudes.”

“We need little short of a revolution in mental health care to end decades of neglect, abuse and violence,” Dainius Pūras, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health said after presenting his latest report to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

The UN expert reported that right violations affect often the socially challenged groups including persons with intellectual, cognitive and psychosocial disabilities. He also stressed that people of all ages, when they have mental health needs, too often suffer from either an absence of care and support or from services that are ineffective and harmful.

Mū. Pūras suggested moving away from traditional practices and thinking, and enabling a long overdue shift to a rights-based approach.

“Where mental health systems exist, they are segregated from other healthcare and based on outdated practices that violate human rights,” he noted, underscoring that mental health policies and services are in crisis – not a crisis of chemical imbalances, but of power imbalances – and called for bold political commitments, urgent policy responses and immediate remedial action.

Turning to the underlying causes of these imbalances delaying the transition to rights-based care, he said that the dominance of the biomedical model, with its overdependence on medication, and the “biased” use of evidence, contaminates knowledge about mental health.

“There is now unequivocal evidence of the failures of a system that relies too heavily on the biomedical model of mental health services, including the front-line and excessive use of psychotropic medicines, and yet these models persist,” Mr. Pūras explains.

“This pattern occurs in countries across the national income spectrum”, he added. The UN expert points out that it “represents a failure to integrate evidence and the voices of those most affected into policy, and a failure to respect, protect and fulfil the right to health.”

In his report, Mū. Pūras warns that power and decision-making in mental health are concentrated in the hands of “biomedical gatekeepers”, particularly those representing biological psychiatry.

“These gatekeepers, supported by the pharmaceutical industry, maintain this power by adhering to two outdated concepts: that people experiencing mental distress and diagnosed with “mental disorders” are dangerous, and that biomedical interventions are medically necessary in many cases.”

In order to ensure compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Mr. Pūras calls for a paradigm shift as these concepts keep alive stigma and discrimination.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.