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Record 'green' energy capacity added in 2016 as cost for renewables plunges – UN-backed report



Ain Beni Mathar Integrated Combined Cycle Thermo-Solar Power Plant. Photo: World Bank/Dana Smillie

7 June – The world is now adding more renewable green energy capacity each year than it adds in new capacity from all fossil fuels combined, a United Nations-backed report revealed today, showing that the “renewables train has already left the station” and that those who ignore this will be left behind.

Last year, renewable power instalments increased with 9 per cent over 2015 to nearly 2,017 gigawatts. Solar photovoltaic accounted for around 47 per cent of the total additions, followed by wind power at 34 per cent and hydropower at 15.5 per cent, according to the report.

“We all want a healthy environment and healthy people, and clean energy is central to the solution,” Erik Solheim, head of UN Environment Programme (UNEP) said in a response to the report launched today by REN21.

As the shift to clean power continues, renewables are becoming the least costly option as recent examples in Denmark, Egypt, India, Mexico, Peru and the United Arab Emirates show that energy has been delivered well below the equivalent costs for fossil fuel and nuclear energy in each of these countries.

“The world is adding more renewable power capacity each year than it adds in new capacity from all fossil fuels combined,” said Arthouros Zervos, Chair of the Renewable Energy Policy Network for the 21st Century (REN21).



This UNEP-hosted global renewable energy policy multi-stakeholder network reports that for the fifth consecutive year, investment in new renewables (including all hydropower) was roughly double the investment in fossil fuel generating capacity, reaching about \$250 billion dollars.

“As the share of renewables grows we will need investment in infrastructure as well as a comprehensive set of tools,” Mr. Zervos pointed out. To enable further growth he calls for integrated and interconnected transmission and distribution networks, measures to balance supply and demand, sector coupling (for example the integration of power and transport networks) as well as the deployment of a wide range of enabling technologies.

A slowdown in investment in renewables

A world that does not run on fossil fuels is no longer a far distant dream with the recorded exponential growth in solar and wind – although investments in renewables are diametrically different.

The UN agency warned that the energy transition is not happening fast enough to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement on climate change.

When it comes to the bottlenecks to ensure modern energy for all, projections show that global energy access progresses too slowly. “A global transition to renewable energy technologies like solar and wind are key ingredients of delivering on the Paris Agreement, keeping the global temperature rise below 2 degrees Celsius and avoiding catastrophic climate change,” said Mr. Sondheim, pointing out that “this new report shows where we are on this journey, and the data is clear: we need to move faster.”

The global cost for the newly added renewable energy capacity is set at about \$242 billion. Compared to the previous year, it is actually a 23 per cent reduction in investment, with the biggest falls among developing and emerging market countries.

At the same time, nuclear and fossil fuel subsidies continue to dramatically exceed those for renewable technologies. These subsidies continue to impede progress, says UNEP.

By the end of 2016, more than 50 countries had committed to phasing out fossil fuel subsidies, and some reforms have occurred, but not enough. In 2014 the ratio of fossil fuel subsidies to renewable energy subsidies was 4:1. For every dollar spent on renewables, governments spent four dollars on perpetuating the dependence on fossil fuels.

“The world is in a race against time,” says Christine Lins, Executive Secretary of REN21. “The single most important thing we could do to reduce CO2 emissions quickly and cost-effectively, is phase-out coal and speed up investments in energy efficiency and renewables. [The] withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement is unfortunate. But the renewables train has already left the station and those who ignore renewables' central role in climate mitigation risk being left behind.”

Energy is crucial for achieving almost all of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), from its role in the eradication of poverty through advancements in health, education, water supply and industrialization, to combating climate change.

Musician Cody Simpson to be named 'Ocean Advocate' for UN development agency

7 June – To mark World Oceans Day, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will name Australian musician Cody Simpson as its first-ever Ocean Advocate to help raise awareness of the crucial role the ocean plays in the health of the planet and people.

“I grew up by the ocean and the beach,” said Mr. Simpson during an event held at UN Headquarters in New York. “I want to do everything I can in my own life to protect and preserve the ocean. Just as you should in yours.”

According to UNDP, Mr. Simpson will kick off his new role tomorrow as part of The Ocean Conference, which has been underway since Monday and which will wrap up on Friday, 9 June.

He will attend a photo exhibition, *Waves of Action*; explore an ocean lab; speak at the premiere of *Urban Bay*, a documentary exploring the underwater world of Rio de Janeiro's Guanabara Bay; and join the closing celebration with a live performance in the General Assembly.

The singer shared his personal connection to the ocean to urge the global community and his millions of devoted fans to join the #SaveOurOcean campaign.

“The oceans are in serious trouble right now and we need passionate advocates like Cody to help us restore them to health,” said Mila Rosenthal, UNDP Communications Director. “We are thrilled to team up with Cody, whose dedication we hope will inspire millions of others –especially young people – to play an active role in saving the oceans and protecting our shared future.”

UNDP has joined the Conference to highlight the direct link between a healthy ocean and ending poverty, which are part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of global goals agreed by world leaders to achieve by 2030.

UN chief, Security Council strongly condemns deadly terrorist attacks in Tehran



View of Nowruz Garden Park, Tehran, Iran. Credit: UN Information Centre Tehran

7 June – Secretary-General António Guterres and the United Nations Security Council today separately offered their condolences to the Iranian Government and families of the people killed in the attacks in the country's capital, Tehran.

In a statement this morning, his spokesperson said that “the Secretary-General strongly condemns the terrorist attacks.”

At least 50 people were killed or injured in the attacks on the mausoleum of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and the Parliament (Majlis) building.

Mr. Guterres called for those responsible for “this unjustifiable violence” to be brought to justice.

“All countries must work together in fighting terrorism while upholding the universal rights and values that bind the global community,” the spokesperson said.



The United Nations Development Programme to appoint globally-acclaimed Australian singer-songwriter Cody Simpson to inaugural role during the UN's first ever Ocean Conference. Credit: UNDP

In a separate statement, the UN Security Council, which called the attacks “barbaric” and “cowardly,” stressed the need to take measures to prevent and suppress the financing of terrorism, terrorist organizations and individual terrorists.

Desire for secure and peaceful future remains strong in Libya, Security Council told

7 June – Noting positive changes in the situation on the ground in Libya as a result of the Libyan Political Agreement, the United Nations envoy for the country highlighted that despite challenges, the desire for peace, security and a better future remain strong among the people and urged sustained international support for national efforts.

“We must move forward in supporting Libyan-led effort to find a durable solution,” said Martin Kobler, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya, told the Security Council today.

“Without progress in politics, the symptoms of conflict will only worsen,” he warned.

He also underscored the need to ensure respect for human rights and humanitarian principles, particularly given the precarious situation of migrants as well as attacks on civilians.

“We cannot compromise the basic principles that unite us, that make us human, nor can we afford to abandon our hopes and our desire for a better, more united Libya,” he underscored.

In his briefing, Mr. Kobler, who is also the head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) also updated the 15-member Security Council on the priority issues in the country, including the Political Agreement, efforts towards national reconciliation, the larger economic situation as well as the security situation.

In particular he underscored the urgent need to unify the country's security apparatus and that the fact that united Libyan security apparatus is vital for peace and prosperity was well understood by the stakeholders.

He also informed the meeting of efforts by Libya's neighbours as well as the African Union to help find a solution there. Speaking of the importance of cooperation, he said: “[The] collaborative approach where all initiatives work in a complementary manner to advance the UN-facilitated political process is very much needed.”

Also at today's meeting, in his capacity as the Chair of the Committee established pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1976 (2011), Ambassador Olof Skoog, the Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations, briefed the Council on the work of the Committee from 20 April to 7 June.

In particular, he spoke of the information it received from the Panel of Experts on its final report under Council resolution 2278 (2016) on issues including the arms embargo, assets freeze, travel ban and illicit trade in petroleum products, imposed upon certain actors in Libya.

The Committee is in the process of concluding its consideration of the recommendations, the Ambassador added.



A wide view of the Security Council Chamber as Martin Kobler (shown on screen), Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), briefs the Council via video teleconference. UN Photo/Kim Haughton

UN artificial intelligence summit aims to tackle poverty, humanity's 'grand challenges'

7 June – Artificial intelligence (AI) is responsible for self-driving cars and voice-recognition smart phones, but the United Nations this week is refocusing AI on sustainable development and assisting global efforts to eliminate poverty and hunger, and to protect the environment.

Starting today in Geneva, the AI for Good Global Summit, which is co-organized by the UN International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and the XPRIZE Foundation, with support for some 20 UN agencies, brings together key innovators in the field with humanitarian actors and academics.

“Artificial Intelligence has the potential to accelerate progress towards a dignified life, in peace and prosperity, for all people,” said UN Secretary-General António Guterres. “The time has arrived for all of us – governments, industry and civil society – to consider how AI will affect our future.”

In a video message to the summit, Mr. Guterres called AI “a new frontier” with “advances moving at warp speed.”

He noted that while AI is “already transforming our world socially, economically and politically,” there are also serious challenges and ethical issues which must be taken into account – including cybersecurity, human rights and privacy.

Mr. Guterres noted that developing countries can gain from the benefits of artificial intelligence, but are also at the highest risk of being left behind.

“This Summit can help ensure that artificial intelligence charts a course that benefits humanity and bolsters our shared values,” he underscored.

The opening session of the summit is expected to give voice to the leading minds in AI, with breakout sessions focusing on issues such as sustainable living and poverty reduction.

ITU Secretary-General Houlin Zhao, said the event “will assist us in determining how the UN, ITU and other UN agencies can work together with industry and the academic community to promote AI innovation and create a good environment for the development of artificial intelligence.”

He called the summit a “neutral platform for international dialogue” which can build a common understanding of emerging technologies and how they can apply to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adding that the diverse array of thought leaders gathered for the event will weigh in on such topics as “how far AI can go, how much it will improve our lives, and how we can all work together to make it a force for good.”

The summit will run through Friday, with a closing session on “applying AI for good.”



Nono-Y the robot was one of the highlights of the 2012 Geneva Inventions Fair. Photo: WIPO/Emmanuel Berrod

Gender-based killings, domestic violence forms of 'arbitrary execution' – UN rights expert



A woman stands in a shelter for girls and women who have endured sexual and gender-based violence, in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia. Photo: UNICEF/Kate Holt

7 June – A United Nations-appointed human rights expert today said that gender-related killings and domestic murders or intimate partner violence should be understood as forms of arbitrary execution and thus violates the right to life.

“Violations of the right to life have usually been understood to be killings involving State officials,” said Agnes Callamard, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, in her first report to the UN Human Rights Council, according to a news release from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

“It is time to recognize that gender-related killings, such as domestic and intimate partner violence, 'honour killings,' or killings of LGBTQI persons, can also amount to arbitrary executions.”

She urged Governments to pay greater attention to the significant role that gender plays in how likely people are to be arbitrarily deprived of their right to life.

“The fact is that gender plays an absolutely central role in predicting people's ability to enjoy their human rights in general, and their right to life in particular. It is an extraordinarily accurate predictor of people's enjoyment of the right to life. Misogyny persists at all levels of society,” she said.

Citing global statistics showing that almost half of female homicide victims are killed by family members or intimate partners, compared with just over five per cent of male victims, Ms. Callamard stated that there is unmistakable evidence of women's disproportionate risk of suffering harm and violence.

Her report details extreme rates of violations of the right to life perpetrated against women and girls with disabilities, indigenous women and transgender people amongst others.

Noting that it was clear that gender-based killings fell within her mandate to challenge arbitrary executions, she said: “A gender-sensitive perspective seeks to bring gender-based executions squarely within the mandate, [this includes] the importance of revealing the kinds of systemic discrimination which are currently being perpetrated, in order to remedy them and enable all people to enjoy equal rights.”

As such the report highlights that gender-based violations of the right to life stem not only from intentional acts, but also from a lack of basic conditions and services that guarantee life, such as access to food, water, health services and housing.

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.

As booming digital economy sprints past poor countries, UN report urges closing investment divide

7 June – Even though digital multinational enterprises – Internet and e-commerce platforms such as Uber, Instagram and Facebook – witnessed “dramatic” growth over the past few years, more than 60 of the top 100 such ventures were concentrated in three countries (the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany), leaving much room to grow elsewhere, a new, ground-breaking United Nations report has revealed.

According to the *World Investment Report 2017: Investment and the Digital Economy*, released today by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), only four companies in the top 100 were based developing nations.

“The digital economy has important implications for investment, and investment is crucial for digital development,” Mukhisa Kituyi, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, said in a news release announcing the findings.

“[However] developing countries cannot be left behind. We need to create enabling policies that close the digital divide in global investment.”

The divide also held true for affiliates of those top 100 ventures as only 13 per cent were based in developing and transition economies, compared to about 30 per cent overall.

In terms of business and operations, digital multinational enterprises recorded about 70 per cent of their sales abroad but only 40 per cent of their assets were based outside their home countries, resulting in fewer jobs created directly in host countries.

However, such investments can increase competition and spur digital development, argued UNCTAD, emphasizing the need for regulations and policies for the promotion of investment that consider the new cross-border operating models of multinationals as well as those that strengthen digital development strategies.

Digital development in all countries, and particularly the participation of developing countries in the global digital economy, calls for targeted investment policies to build connectivity infrastructure, promote digital firms and support digitalization of the broader economy.

“This means creating and maintaining a conducive regulatory framework for digital firms, as well as active support measures, which may include establishing technology or innovation hubs, building or improving e-government services, and supporting venture capital funding and other innovative financing approaches,” it noted.

Global foreign direct investment could reach \$1.8 trillion, but geopolitical risks could impact growth

The *World Investment Report* also pointed out that global foreign direct investment (FDI) flows could rise by about 5 per cent, reaching almost \$1.8 trillion in 2017 and this modest increase is expected to continue into 2018, taking flows to \$1.85 trillion, and projections indicate that the US, China and India could be the top prospective destinations for FDI.

The Report also showed that the prospects remained moderately positive for most other regions – except Latin America and the Caribbean – with developing countries as a group expected to gain about 10 per cent.

“The road to a full recovery for FDI remains bumpy, but we are cautiously optimistic,” said Mr. Kituyi, expressing some



Two users browse websites on their computers (content blurred for privacy). Photo: ITU/A.Mhadhbi

concern that other factors such as the elevation of geopolitical risks and policy uncertainty may impact the scale of the upturn.

UN Africa forum launches high-level migration panel to help create political momentum for change



Migrants at a detention centre in the city of Zawiya, Libya. Photo: Mathieu Galtier/IRIN

7 June – Amid growing concern for the safety of migrants, particularly in Africa, as they undertake extreme risks in hopes of a better future or to escape violence and persecution, a high-level body established by the United Nations development arm in the continent has launched a process to help forge political consensus to address challenges and save lives.

Furthermore, border control measures and stringent policies also prevent Africa from realizing the benefits of migration, underscored Abdalla Hamdok, the Acting Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) at the launch of the High Level Panel on Migration in Africa.

“Travel in Africa by Africans is curtailed by stringent visa requirements, excessive border controls and immigration restrictions,” said Mr. Hamdok, noting that it not only increased costs, but multiplied the risks that migrants are forced to undertake.

“Data shows that less than three per cent of Africa's population have migrated internationally and less than 12 per cent of the total migrant [population] in Europe are from Africa,” he added.

On top of this, the issue of safe migration for the continent given that every year, thousands of migrants perish while trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea to reach mainland Europe.

“Just last week, some forty young men and women died of thirst in the Sahara Desert, while trying to reach Europe,” said President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who also chairs the High-Level Panel.

Maureen Achieng from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) also shared this view.

“Migration from Africa towards other regions is taking place in a much lower level than one might think,” she said.

The 14-member High-Level Panel was established in April last year by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) to push migration issues to the top of policy agenda by engaging major stakeholders and partners.

Over the next few months, it will hold consultations at the national, regional and global levels and propose recommendations on building and sustaining broad political consensus on the implementation of the international migration development agenda, while taking into account the particular challenges of countries in conflict and post-conflict situations.

The report will be submitted to the African Union Summit in July 2018.

FEATURE: Relationship with ocean vital part of Trinidad and Tobago culture



Boats bob in the water at Buccoo Bay, Tobago. Tourism is the top industry on the island, employing more than half of the approximately 60,000 residents. Photo: UN/Lulu Gao

7 June – Oceans comprise roughly three-quarters of the Earth’s surface and play an essential role in human well-being, producing half the oxygen necessary for life on the planet. They also serve as the backdrop for another important component of a well-rounded life: recreation.

The multiple benefits provided by the world’s oceans, seas and marine resources are the focus of the first-ever Ocean Conference taking place this week at UN Headquarters in New York.

The Conference seeks to achieve the targets laid out under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14, including galvanizing action on ocean-related issues such as protecting coral reefs, reducing plastic pollution, and addressing the impact of climate change.

Spending time beside, in, or on the ocean is a major reason why millions of people escape to destinations such as Trinidad and Tobago, an island nation in the southern Caribbean.

The diversity of its people – mainly descendants of enslaved Africans and indentured workers from India, though indigenous Caribs, Syrians, Lebanese, Chinese and a smattering of other nationalities have added to the gene pool – is reflected in the marine and coastal environments, home to fish, sharks, turtles, manatees, mangrove, sea grasses, coral reefs and numerous invertebrates and other marine organisms.

Neila Bobb Prescott with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is the Chief Technical Advisor for a project that supports improved management of the nation’s forests and other protected areas, some of which are linked to the sea. She summarized the significance of the ocean to “Trinis,” as citizens proudly call themselves.

“Oceans are part of what it means to be Trinidadian,” she told *UN News*. “We have rituals when your baby is born. There’s a specific time when you take them to the beach to dip their feet in the saltwater to kind of bring them to the age. When you’re ailing and there’s something wrong with you, you go to the sea for a specific purpose, and then you drink some of the salt water, too, if you have troubles with your stomach. So the sea is part of us in terms of our culture...it’s just part of us.”

Naturally, going to the beach to unwind is also part of the culture, and citizens and visitors swarm spots such as Maracas Bay in Trinidad, famous for stands selling “bake and shark,” a fried fish sandwich that can be seasoned with an endless array of toppings. But for serious relaxation, people head for the sister island of Tobago, a 20-minute flight from the high-octane capital, Port of Spain.

Tourism is the island’s mainstay, employing more than half the roughly 60,000 residents. John Arnold, Senior Tourism Coordinator in the Tobago House of Assembly, the local government, said ocean conservation is a given for a destination billed as being “clean, green, safe, serene.”

While the UN reports that some 20 per cent of the world’s coral reef has been lost and another 20 per cent degraded, those in Tobago are still “fairly intact,” according to coral reef ecologist Neil Cook with the Environmental Research Institute Charlotteville (ERIC), recipient of a small grant administered through the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

World-class diving draws people to the sleepy village of Speyside, where Sean Robinson opened the first dive shop some 30 years ago. On a recent Saturday afternoon he was fresh from taking SCUBA enthusiasts into the emerald waters of a location known as the Cathedral, where they were greeted by “a beautiful eagle ray” along with barracudas and stingrays.

“We here have been fairly lucky that the quality of the reefs has just about remained the same, but the challenges that we are getting now here in the environment is with this whole concept of global warming,” he said. “We are now getting a problem with something that is very strange, which is sargassum.”

No doubt islanders will not soon forget the carpet of reddish-brown sargassum seaweed which fouled the Atlantic shoreline in 2015 and cost millions to clean up.

Sargassum originates in a swirling section of the North Atlantic near Bermuda known as the Sargasso Sea, first identified by 15th century Portuguese mariners. It has affected other parts of the Caribbean, which is the most tourism-dependent region in the world, according to the UN Economic and Social Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

Helping governments in 33 of the region’s countries to address seaweed infestations, and other challenges, is Julio Orozco, Director of Sustainable Tourism with the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), a UN partner.

“Right now, we are trying to support projects that are taking care of all these problems that we experience in the whole Caribbean Basin like sargassum, like coastal erosion, which has been a very difficult problem with climate change,” Mr. Orozco said. “Since 2001, the Association has been promoting the Declaration of the Sustainable Tourism Zone in order that the countries, through specific destinations, can implement indicators of sustainability in order to protect their different resources: not only the sea, of course, but also fauna, flora and cultural resources.”

Back on Trinidad’s north-eastern coast, Stephen McClatchie has been calling for action to counter a problem affecting his village, Toco, situated at the part of the island that is physically closest to Tobago.

As head of the group Stakeholders Against Destruction, or S.A.D., for Toco, he lamented the long weekend and holiday hordes who come to Salybia Bay to hang out, or “lime,” to use the local expression.

“Imagine hundreds of people in a beautiful bathing area with no established facility for human needs,” he said. “When collectively that kind of behavior is taking place in an area like that, you understand the dangers to health, the damage to the environment, and for years, for decades, we have been pleading with the powers that be to do something about it, but very little or nothing is being done.”

Weekend “limes” also sour the serenity of Las Cuevas Beach on the other side of Trinidad, which has received certification for its water quality from Denmark-based environmental group Blue Flag. It is among 17 beaches in Trinidad and Tobago where leatherback turtles, an environmentally sensitive species, come to nest.

Despite the accolades, veteran surf instructor Jonathan Torry, who is at the beach practically every day, still has to fish the odd beer bottle or other garbage from the sand.

He believes surfers are just naturally environmentally conscious and protective of the ocean.

“As surfers, we look forward to being on the ocean all the time. To us, it’s like heaven,” he said, the wind and waves drowning his words. “We cannot exist without the ocean. If we didn’t have the ocean and we didn’t keep it clean, to us, life would be very simple, very blah.”

In February of this year, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) launched the #CleanSeas campaign to combat marine litter by reducing plastic production and use. It warned that unless people stop dumping bottles, bags, cups, straws and other plastic items, by 2050 there could be more plastic in the oceans than fish.

Ocean stewardship is also a byproduct of sailing lessons at the Trinidad and Tobago Sailing Association, which uses Hart’s Cut Bay in Chaguaramas as a classroom. Students like Luke Frankland, 11, have already grasped the main message of SDG 14: life on land affects life below water.

“I think we need to start recycling more and being more mindful of where we put our garbage when we’re done with it,” he said. “Some people just throw it on the floor when they’re done with it. They should put it in a bin, or, even better, recycle



it. Almost always it ends up in the ocean. It harms us in some ways, but it harms the sea creatures more.”

Life lessons of a different kind are also being learned in the waters at Buccoo Point, Tobago, home to the Healing with Horses Foundation.

There, children with disabilities, or who come from troubled homes, develop confidence and leadership skills by interacting with 11 rescued ponies, some of whom have challenges of their own.

The therapy also involves riding bareback in nearby Buccoo Bay.

“When we are with the horse in the ocean, the child feels not only carried by the horse but also carried by the water,” said German native Veronika Danzer-La Fortune, who runs the foundation alongside her Trinidadian husband, Lennox. “The water has a very soothing, calming effect. The water also helps the children to relax their muscles.”

Healing with Horses Foundation has found a friend in the UN Information Centre (UNIC) for the Caribbean Area, based in Trinidad and Tobago’s capital, Port of Spain.

In addition to participating in a summer camp in 2016, the UN office has supplied the organization with information about UN priority areas such as human rights, the rights of people with disabilities, autism awareness and, of course, the Sustainable Development Goals.