

**In the headlines:**

- Health services, especially vaccines, must 'reach the unreachable,' stress UN agencies
- UN report urges accelerated efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goals
- After Mosul victory, senior UN officials detail Iraq's political and humanitarian needs
- UN food standards body kicks off session by tackling arsenic in rice, pesticide residues
- Global problems need global solutions, UN officials tell ministers at development forum
- Civilians continue to bear the brunt of Afghanistan's 'ugly war' – UN report
- UN rights group concludes evaluation of Palestinians living under occupation
- As 'drivers' of innovation, youth need skills and capacity – UN General Assembly President
- FEATURE: Sustainable Development Goals through the lens of students
- Syria talks end with 'incremental progress' but 'no breakthrough' – UN envoy
- YouTube star Lilly Singh named UNICEF goodwill envoy
- Two years on, UN chief stresses 'sustained commitment essential' for Iran nuclear deal

Health services, especially vaccines, must 'reach the unreachable,' stress UN agencies

Health workers vaccinate a child in a medical centre in Al-Radwanieh village, rural Aleppo. Photo: UNICEF/ Al-Issa

17 July – Globally, nearly 13 million infants – almost one in ten – did not receive any vaccinations last year, putting them at serious risk of potentially fatal diseases, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) said today, urging greater efforts to extend the reach of health services.

“Every contact with the health system must be seen as an opportunity to immunize,” stressed WHO's Director of Immunization, Dr. Jean-Marie Okwo-Bele, noting that most of those who remained unimmunized were also the same as the ones missed by health systems.

“These children most likely have also not received any of the other basic health services. If we are to raise the bar on global immunization coverage, health services must reach the unreachable,” he added.

According to WHO and UNICEF estimates, 6.6 million children received their first dose of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTP) vaccines but did not complete the full, three dose DTP immunization regimen (DTP3).

Full completion of the vaccination series doses is critical to ensure the highest level of protection against those diseases.

Furthermore, according to the UN agencies, since 2010, the percentage of children who received their full course of routine

immunizations has stalled at 86 per cent (116.5 million infants).

Of the estimated 10 million children, in 64 countries out of 194 WHO member States which have not achieved this target, 7.3 million live in fragile situations or in humanitarian emergencies, including countries affected by conflict. Four million of them also live in just three countries – Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan – where access to routine immunization services is critical to achieving and sustaining eradication of diseases such as polio.

Similarly, Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Ukraine recorded less than 50 per cent coverage for DTP3, last year.

In the battle against measles, 85 per cent of children globally received the first dose by their first birthday but only 64 per cent received the second dose.

Additionally, concerted effort is required in the progress against rubella (which can cause hearing impairment, congenital heart defects and blindness and other life-long disabilities), which has seen global coverage increase from 35 per cent in 2010 to 47 per cent last year.

Furthermore, global coverage of more recently-recommended vaccines are yet to reach half the world's children. These include vaccines against major killers of children such as rotavirus, a disease that causes severe childhood diarrhoea, and pneumonia. Vaccination against both these diseases has the potential to substantially reduce deaths of children under five years of age, a key target of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Inequities in immunization coverage

According to WHO-UNICEF data, many middle-income countries still lag behind in the introduction of newer and more expensive vaccines and disparities persist within countries, implying the need for more work to reduce inequalities related to household economic status, mother's education as well as those living in rural and urban areas in many countries.

Stressing the importance of immunization as one of the most “pro-equity” interventions currently available, Robin Nandy, Chief of Immunizations at UNICEF, stated: “Bringing life-saving vaccines to the poorest communities, women and children must be considered a top priority in all contexts.”

Immunization currently prevents between 2-3 million deaths every year, from diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough and measles. It is one of the most successful and cost-effective public health interventions.

UN report urges accelerated efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goals



Children lining up for their one meal per day at a school in Bandarero, Northern Kenya. Photo: OCHA/ Daniel Pfister

17 July – If the world is to eradicate poverty, address climate change and build peaceful, inclusive societies for all by 2030, greater efforts are needed to accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), according to a United Nations report presented today by Secretary-General António Guterres.

“Implementation has begun, but the clock is ticking,” stated Mr. Guterres. “This report shows that the rate of progress in many areas is far slower than needed to meet the targets by 2030.”

Using the most recent data available, the annual SDGs report provides an overview of the world's implementation efforts to date, highlighting areas of progress and areas where more action needs to be taken to ensure no one is left behind.

Despite advances, accelerated efforts needed

While nearly a billion people have escaped extreme poverty since 1999, about 767 million people remained destitute in 2013, most of whom live in fragile situations.

Despite major advances, an alarmingly high number of children under age five are still affected by malnutrition. In 2016, an estimated 155 million children under five years of age were stunted.

Between 2000 and 2015, the global maternal mortality ratio declined by 37 per cent and the under-five mortality rate fell by 44 per cent. However, 303,000 women died during pregnancy or childbirth and 5.9 million children under age five died worldwide in 2015.

In the area of sustainable energy, while access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking climbed to 57 per cent in 2014, up from 50 per cent in 2000, more than 3 billion people, lacked access to clean cooking fuels and technologies, which led to an estimated 4.3 million deaths in 2012.

From 2015 to 2016, official development assistance rose by 8.9 per cent in real terms to \$142.6 billion, reaching a new peak. But bilateral aid to the least developing countries fell by 3.9 per cent in real terms.

Progress is uneven

The benefits of development are not equally shared. On average, women spent almost triple the amount of time on unpaid domestic and care work as men, based on data from 2010 to 2016.

Economic losses from natural hazards are now reaching an average of \$250 billion to \$300 billion a year, with a disproportionate impact on small and vulnerable countries.

Despite the global unemployment rate falling from 6.1 per cent in 2010 to 5.7 per cent in 2016, youth were nearly three times more likely than adults to be without a job. In 2015, 85 per cent of the urban population used safely managed drinking water services, compared to only 55 per cent of rural population.

“Empowering vulnerable groups is critical to ending poverty and promoting prosperity for everyone, everywhere,” stated Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs.

Harnessing the power of data

Effectively tracking progress on the SDGs requires accessible, reliable, timely and disaggregated data at all levels, which poses a major challenge to national and international statistical systems.

While data availability and quality have steadily improved over the years, statistical capacity still needs strengthening worldwide. The global statistical community is working to modernize and strengthen systems to address all aspects of production and use of data for the SDGs.

The SDGs Report 2017 is based on the latest available data on selected indicators of the global SDG indicator framework, prepared by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) with inputs from a large number of international and regional organizations.

After Mosul victory, senior UN officials detail Iraq's political and humanitarian needs



In East Mosul, 4,000 workers are helping clean up the city. Photo: UNDP/ Ahmed Swadi

17 July – Senior United Nations officials today called for regional and international support to stabilize newly liberated Mosul and to create conditions for peace and development throughout Iraq.

“The historic liberation of Mosul should not conceal the fact that the road ahead is extremely challenging,” the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Ján Kubiš, told the Security Council.

He praised the Iraqi security forces and international partners for “an exceptional effort” to save and protect civilians during the military drive to liberate the Iraqi city from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known by its Arabic acronym, Daesh, and for showing a readiness to be held accountable for violations.

The effort was “in stark contrast” to ISIL, which showed “absolute disregard for human lives and civilization” by booby-trapping and destroying homes and critical monuments, indiscriminately shelling civilians, and by having civilians “butchered” by females and brainwashed children suicide bombers.

“To turn the gains of the military victory into stability, security, justice and development, the Government will have to do everything possible to give the people back their lives in security and dignity,” said Mr. Kubiš, who also heads the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

De-mining, stabilization and reconstruction efforts to allow the return of displaced people, as well as the elimination of ISIL cells and militias, are among the priorities.

He noted that the Governments of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Kuwait had confirmed their willingness to assist the Government of Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi, and urged all of Iraq's partners to “stay on course.”

In addition, the Iraqi Government has to work for national settlement and societal reconciliation within the country, as well as to enter into negotiations with the Kurdistan Regional Government, the UN envoy said.

ISIL would ultimately be defeated only “through inclusive solutions, addressing the grievances, needs and aspirations of the Iraqi people,” noted Mr. Kubiš.

He reiterated the UN's commitment to facilitating the national settlement process and supporting grassroots reconciliation efforts. Also, with ISIL pushed out of Mosul and the people held by the group freed, the UN is “repositioning” its response to supporting survivors of sexual violence and helping to integrate them back into their communities. The UN is also working to ensure that children arrested for terrorism-related charges are transferred to juvenile institutions.

‘Fighting may be over, humanitarian crisis is not’

Some 700,000 civilians have been displaced from Western Mosul, according to UN figures.

Speaking via videolink from Baghdad, UN Deputy Special Representative Lise Grande told journalists in New York that the top priority right now is to reach civilians who might still be in Mosul's old city.

“We believe perhaps hundreds of people are still there,” said Ms. Grande, who is also the UN's Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq. She noted that in the last week of fighting some 12,000 people were evacuated. The majority of them are children and the elderly, who without sufficient water or food were too weak to even walk on their own.

Triage stabilization units established right on the front lines by the UN World Health Organization (WHO) received up to 100 patients per hour, spending about 4 minutes to stabilize each patient, before passing him or her on to a field hospital.

“The fighting may be stopping but the humanitarian crisis has not,” noted Ms. Grande.

Of the 54 residential districts in western Mosul, 15 are heavily damaged, “basically flattened,” Ms. Grande said, 23 are moderately damaged and 16 neighbourhoods have light damage.

The UN estimates the costs to stabilizing these areas and making them liveable to be more than \$700 million, of which \$237 million would be for the moderately and lightly damaged areas and \$470 million for the more destroyed neighbourhoods.

“That is double the estimate for stabilization,” Ms. Grande said, due to fighting which was “so fierce and so much worse that what anyone else experienced.”

The UN has requested nearly \$1 billion in assistance to aid the people in Mosul, with a focus on re-establishing crucial services so that people can safely return home to western Mosul.

Meanwhile, in eastern Mosul, which has been liberated since January, “schools are open, businesses are thriving, the city is recovering,” said Ms. Grande.

Since the beginning of the fighting last year, about 940,000 civilians fled Mosul. Nearly all have been housed and are receiving direct assistance, an outcome that Ms. Grande called “very positive.”

The UN official attributed the ability of aid workers to stay “one step ahead” due to the UN’s early contingency planning under the Government’s leadership and a flash appeal that was 100 per cent funded; Iraqi forces’ commitment to protecting civilians during the battles; and strong civilian-military liaison communication.

She noted that an additional 100,000 civilians are expected to flee their homes by the end of this year, as Iraqi forces start to reclaim new areas in other parts of Ninewa and Anbar Governorates and in Kirkuk Governorate, where ISIL still holds territory.

UN food standards body kicks off session by tackling arsenic in rice, pesticide residues



Rice. Arsenic – an odourless and tasteless semi-metal that occurs naturally in rock and soil – enters the food chain mainly through crops absorbing contaminated irrigation water. Photo: FAO/J.Belgrave

17 July – A United Nations standards-setting body today adopted a number of decisions to ensure food safety, including maximum residue limits for a range of drugs used in cattle and other animals, as well as revisions to guidance on agricultural and hygienic practices to minimize microbial, chemical and physical hazards to fresh fruits and vegetables.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission, charged with protecting consumer health and ensuring fair practices in the food trade, is meeting in Geneva from 17 to 22 July 2017. Standards-setting for food is a joint initiative of two UN agencies – the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

At today’s session, the Commission set maximum residue limits for medicines Ivermectin, which is used to kill parasites in tissues from cattle; Lasalocid sodium, which is used for a similar purpose in tissues from chicken, turkey, quail and pheasant; and insecticide Teflubenzuron used in salmon.

The Commission also adopted revisions to its risk-based Code of Hygienic Practice for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables to provide detailed guidance to stakeholders along fresh fruit and vegetable value chains – from producers through to final consumers.

The aim is to minimize microbial hazards, avoid risks to health, and maximize the safety of these nutritious food products, which are also of major economic importance for many countries in global trade.

The Commission also adopted the Nutrient Reference Values for vitamins D and E to be used for nutrient content labelling that would help consumers make informed choices to support healthy diets.

On spices and culinary herbs, the Commission adopted commodity standards, such as tolerances for defects, permitted levels of food additives and labelling, for cumin, dried thyme and pepper, which are among the world's most widely used seasonings.

Global problems need global solutions, UN officials tell ministers at development forum



The Peace Through Adult Literacy programme operates with the support from various organizations including the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). UN Photo/Harandane Dicko

17 July – Opening the high-level segment of the annual forum designed to discuss implementation of the anti-poverty agenda, top United Nations officials today stressed the importance of multilateralism to address global problems.

“Solidarity and working together is more important than ever,” Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava, the President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), told the opening of the high-level segment of the Council’s 2017 session, which coincides with the three-day ministerial meeting of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF).

He noted that more than 767 million people lived in extreme poverty, according to 2013 figures cited by the UN. In addition, inequalities remain deep, conflicts and terrorism threaten humanity, and global temperatures are on the rise.

“Multilateralism is based on the recognition that we cannot overcome these – and other – global challenges in isolation,” Mr. Shava underscored. “Collective support for the poor and most vulnerable is in the interest of all of us.”

Also speaking at the opening, Secretary-General António Guterres noted the interlinkages between sustainable and inclusive development, conflict prevention and natural disaster preparedness.

One of the main stressors on the world, he said, is climate change, impacting global megatrends – such as population growth, climate change, food insecurity, water scarcity, and chaotic urbanization in certain parts of the world.

He urged the more than 70 ministers and other senior government officials participating in the Forum to recommit to the Paris Agreement and its implementation: “This is something that I believe is very important not only because of its absolute need for mankind and the future of the planet but because it is also the right and smart thing to do.”

In his speech, Mr. Guterres also urged developed countries to abide by their commitments in relation to official development aid, while at the same time noting that this is not enough to fund the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“We need to create conditions to help States be able to mobilise more their own resources,” he said, citing the need for tax reforms and fighting money laundering and the illicit flows of capital.

This year's meeting, the second since the adoption of the new development agenda in 2015, is on the theme of 'Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world.'

In addition to the high-level discussions, this year's Forum, which began on 10 July and will run through Wednesday, includes discussions on the challenges and gaps in reaching the development agenda in 44 countries that volunteered to give progress reports, and more than 120 side events related to the SDGs.

To achieve the Goals, the "essential ingredient is partnership," said Peter Thomson, President of the 71st session of the General Assembly, at the opening of the 2017 Partnership Exchange, which is being held as part of the Forum.

Mr. Thomson urged "effective collaboration and partnerships between governments, private sector, civil society, local authorities, schools, universities and our communities."

He echoed the Secretary-General's call for critical funding, from development assistance as well as private financing, and also highlighted collaboration in technology and innovation, and the need to raise awareness about the development agenda.

"The 2030 Agenda is a new social contract for the world," said Mr. Thomson. "As such, global consciousness must be raised to its contents, to its transformative message and to what I see as a set of individual rights and responsibilities that emerge from it."

Civilians continue to bear the brunt of Afghanistan's 'ugly war' – UN report



Aftermath of an explosion in the centre of Kabul, Afghanistan, on the corner of Passport Lane and the Indian Embassy. Photo: UNAMA/Jawad Jalali (file)

17 July – Civilians lives – including those of women and children – continue to be lost at record high levels amid a worsening toll of suicide attacks, the United Nations mission in Afghanistan said today, calling on anti-government forces to stop indiscriminate attacks against civilians as well as on the Government to stop using mortars and rockets in populated areas.

"The human cost of this ugly war in Afghanistan – loss of life, destruction and immense suffering – is too far too high," said the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Tadamichi Yamamoto, in a news release today.

"The continued use of indiscriminate, disproportionate and illegal IEDs [improvised explosive devices] by anti-government elements is particularly appalling and must immediately stop."

According to the UN Mission's 2017 Mid-year Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, 1,662 civilian died (up two per cent on the same period last year) and 3,581 were injured (down one per cent) between 1 January and 30 June 2017.

Many of those casualties occurred in a single attack in Kabul city on 31 May, when a truck bomb killed at least 92 civilians and injured nearly 500. This was the deadliest incident documented by UNAMA since 2001.

Women and children in the country continue to be particularly affected. In the report, the UN Mission noted that so far this year, 174 women were confirmed killed and 462 injured (an overall rise of about 23 per cent), reversing a decline documented in 2016.

Child casualties, overall also increased by one per cent, with 436 deaths (a nine per cent increase) and 1,141 injuries, it added, highlighting that the use of pressure-plate IEDs and aerial operations in civilian-populated areas led to substantial

increases in both women and child casualties.

Also in the news release, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights underscored that behind each death or injury, there is a broken family, unimaginable trauma and the brutal violation of people's rights.

“Many Afghan civilians are suffering psychological trauma, having lost family and friends, and are living in fear knowing the risks they face as they go about their daily lives. Many more have been forced from their homes and suffered lasting damage to their health, education and livelihoods,” he stated.

“The continuing national tragedy of Afghanistan must not be overlooked.”

Highest number of casualties occurred in Kabul

The UNAMA report also highlighted that 40 per cent of all civilian casualties during the six-month period were due to anti-government forces using IEDs, such as suicide bombs and pressure-plate devices.

In total, anti-government forces caused the deaths of 1,141 people and injured 2,348. These deaths and injuries represent 67 per cent of the total number of civilian casualties, with 43 per cent attributed to the Taliban, five per cent to Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP), and the rest to unidentified attackers.

Also in the report, the UN Mission noted continued efforts by the Afghan security forces to reduce civilian casualties resulting from ground engagements, which represent the second leading cause of deaths and injuries.

Pro-government forces were responsible for 327 civilian deaths and 618 injuries, a 21 per cent decrease compared with the same period last year, although UNAMA noted a 43 per cent rise in civilian casualties during aerial operations (95 deaths and 137 injuries).

In terms of locations, 19 per cent of the casualties occurred in the capital, Kabul and deaths and injuries increased in 15 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, mainly due to increased attacks by anti-government forces. After Kabul, the highest numbers of casualties occurred in Helmand, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Uruzgan, Faryab, Herat, Laghman, Kunduz and Farah provinces.

Recommendations

In its recommendations, the report has called on anti-government forces to stop targeting civilians and to enforce directives from the Taliban leadership calling for an end to such attacks. It has also urged the Government to stop using weapons such as mortars and rockets in civilian populated areas, and to disband pro-government militias and similar groups.

It also recommended ongoing support from international military forces to support and train the Afghan national army.

In the news release, the UN Mission also noted that the report includes only those incidents that have been confirmed after a thorough verification process, meaning that the actual figures could be higher.



UN rights group concludes evaluation of Palestinians living under occupation



On 20 April 2016 in Gaza, Occupied Palestinian Territories, a student looks inside of one of the classrooms that was destroyed during the 2014 hostilities. Photo: UNICEF/ El Baba

17 July – A committee of United Nations experts has completed its annual evaluation of the situation of people in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, hearing serious concerns about Israel’s human rights record, including the deteriorating situation in Gaza, inadequate protection for detained children and increasing obstacles being faced by human rights defenders and journalists.

In a news release, the UN Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories said that during its fact-finding visit to Amman, Jordan, its members heard testimony on the expansion of settlements, the ongoing use of administrative detention, excessive use of force and possible extrajudicial killings, and lack of accountability.

“Based on this testimony, the Committee clearly observed that the Israeli authorities continue with policies and practices that negatively impact the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory,” it said in the release.

The Committee also heard troubling testimony regarding the arrest and detention of children, including cases of reported ill-treatment and lack of adequate protection.

Other testimony described grave concern over the situation of Palestinian detainees reportedly living in difficult conditions in Israeli prisons, as well as the continued use of administrative detention.

Other issues raised included the effects of the separation wall on Palestinians’ rights, and the demolition of homes and other structures in the West Bank including East Jerusalem, as well as in the Syrian Golan. The use of punitive demolitions in the West Bank including East Jerusalem was described as a form of collective punishment.

Many organizations highlighted with concern the continued lack of accountability for allegations of excessive use of force and violations of international law by the Israeli forces, including during the 2014 hostilities in Gaza. A number of organizations emphasized that the lack of accountability further exacerbated the cycle of violence.

Human rights defenders and journalists seeking to highlight violations of human rights and humanitarian law told the Committee that the space in which they were free to operate was shrinking at an alarming rate. They reported cases of the detention of peaceful demonstrators and the targeting of journalists covering protests.

The news release also noted that the Government of Israel does not recognize the Committee, which was therefore unable to speak to the relevant Israeli authorities or access the occupied territories.

The Committee will submit a full report on its mission and other activities to the UN General Assembly in November 2017.

The Committee was established by the UN General Assembly in December 1968 to examine the human rights situation in the occupied Syrian Golan, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. It is composed of three UN Member States: Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Senegal.

As 'drivers' of innovation, youth need skills and capacity – UN General Assembly President



An 11 year old boy grins while using a laptop computer at Makani centre in the Za'atari camp for Syrian refugees in Jordan. "I love watching cartoons, and want to learn to make animations one day," says the boy, who regularly visits the centre. Photo: UNICEF/ Herwig

17 July – Underscoring the importance of well trained and capable youth to realize the opportunities offered by advances in technology and innovation, the President of the United Nations General Assembly today called for building their capacities to ensure that they can fulfil their potential as well as support sustainable development.

“As the main beneficiaries of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and as the drivers of innovation and change, it is vital that the enthusiasm and ingenuity of youth are harnessed to transform the world for the better,” Peter Thomson said at an event held at UN Headquarters in New York on the theme *Skills for the future of work*.

“Just as youth need education and training to access decent jobs in and of the future, they also require skills development to fulfil their vital role in SDG implementation,” he added.

In his remarks, Mr. Thomson called for targeted policies and resources to develop the digital skills of today’s youth, as well as for specific programmes to ensure that women and girls have access to education, health and employment opportunities.

Doing so, he said, would make sure they secure decent jobs and are never left behind again.

“We must see investing in quality education and training as fundamental for a world of sustaining peace and sustainable development,” he noted.

In particular, Mr. Thomson highlighted the need to work cooperatively with all stakeholders in building the education and training systems that are responsive to the needs, and given the complexities involved, called for international cooperation, strategic partnerships, and transfer of technology.

“The multilateral system has a responsibility to bring together governments, youth, employers, educators, and innovators to demystify the labour markets of the future, and to find innovative ways of building digital skills across the world, all in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” he stressed.

Speaking alongside Mr. Thomson, Jayathma Wickramanayake, the UN Envoy on Youth, also called for greater and more coherent efforts to better forecast the skills that will be needed in the future.

“We must adapt existing policies and initiatives to be fit for the digital era and ensure that we remain flexible enough, to adapt these further in the future,” she said, citing the example of the technological advances made since the turn of the millennium and signs that this will not slow down in the years ahead.

“We must [also] ensure that national youth policies are integrated, holistic and funded,” she added.

In her remarks, the Youth Envoy also underscored the need for holistic education to address evolving technical skills as well as impart competencies required to adapt to changing and demanding workplaces.

In this regard, she highlighted that formal education alone would not be enough, and stressed the importance of non-formal and informal education.

“With all this talk of change in such little time, one truth remains: there is no better investment a country can make than in the capacities and potential of its young people,” she stated.

FEATURE: Sustainable Development Goals through the lens of students



Photo/Nicolás Monteverde Bustamante, 23, Peru (Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas, Lima, Peru)

17 July – Prize-winning photographs taken by students from around the world – currently exhibited at United Nations Headquarters in New York – encapsulate their own ideas and feelings about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“Photos have the power to go beyond borders, which makes it an ideal medium to connect young people from all over the world,” said Kaoru Nemoto, Director of the UN Information Centre (UNIC) in Tokyo, which organized the exhibition “Spotlight on SDGs.”

With 17 goals and 169 targets, communicating the SDGs to the public has proven to be a challenge in many countries.

But engaging youth is vital to successful implementation of those objectives by 2030, a target year for the international community to eradicate poverty, address climate change and build peaceful, inclusive societies for all.

In fact, young people played a key part in shaping the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and they, as agents of change, are expected to lead efforts to translate this vision into reality.

With this in mind, UNIC Tokyo and Sophia University put their heads together and came up with a student photo contest with special cooperation from Getty Images Japan.

“This partnership-driven photo contest encouraged young students to think hard about SDGs at their doorstep, visualize their perspective through their creativity, and have fun,” Ms. Nemoto told *UN News*.

Titled “My View on SDGs,” the contest encouraged students to reflect on the Goals, communicate their feelings in a photograph and share it with other people.

Over 600 submissions were received from students from 47 countries on five continents.

First prize went to a photo portraying a volunteer removing a tire from a beach in Lima, Peru, taken by a local university student, Nicolas Monteverde Bustamante.

“I was shocked and saddened by the number of tires strewn across the beach in a conservation area in Callao, near Lima,” said the 23 year old.

“The pollution of the ocean is one of the worst problems humanity faces at this time. Our culture of consuming and throwing away indiscriminately is poisoning our cities, our lands, our ocean, and finally, ourselves. It is in our hands to make our ocean a better place for all, without tires and trash.”

“In the town of Shwe Kyin, in Myanmar, households have no electricity,” said 25-year-old Pang Yunian, from China, who was among the contest winners. “Yet, the villagers decided to prioritize education and used limited resources to build a primary school a few years ago.”

“My photo is simply a snapshot of a normal landscape in Japan,” said 20-year-old Karin Imai, Japan, whose entry also won a prize. “Yet for some reason, this tiny plant growing in the midst of tall trees caught my eye.”

She said its relative size seemed to emphasize, rather than diminish, its strength and willpower to grow.

“I also wanted to convey the importance of small discoveries as the same philosophy applies to the furthering of the SDGs... The accumulation of these small discoveries and actions will carry us towards a brighter and more sustainable future.”

The exhibition is on view through 10 August at UN Headquarters.

Ms. Nemoto said that the exhibition coincides with the convening of the High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development – a mechanism UN Member States have mandated to carry out regular voluntary reviews of implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

“These prize-winning photos have been brought to UN Headquarters with an aim to encourage viewers to take ownership of SDGs as change makers,” she said.

UNIC Tokyo and Sophia University are co-sponsoring a second SDGs Student Photo Contest and are calling for entries by the 31 August deadline.

Syria talks end with 'incremental progress' but 'no breakthrough' – UN envoy



Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura. UN Photo/Violaine Martin (file)

15 July – Speaking to reporters in the early hours of Saturday in Geneva, United Nations Special Envoy said that the latest round of the intra-Syrian talks ended with “incremental progress.”

“We made, as we were expecting and hoping, incremental progress. No breakthrough, no breakdown, no one walking out, incremental progress,” Staffan de Mistura said at a press conference, following the conclusion of the 10-15 July round of the UN-facilitated talks aimed at ending six years of war in the Middle East country.

Referring to a technical consultative mechanism agreed on in the previous round, he said that “in addition to this technical agreement... there has been a generous effort among them (the opposition) to build something they didn't have before, trust, mutual trust.”

“I would not have imagined two months ago that they would have been sitting in such an intensive and constructive way together in confidence,” the envoy said.

He said he intends to reconvene the intra-Syrian talks in early September.

“I have asked the parties to be ready to offer clear, substantive positions on issues across all four baskets, and we hope that we will be at least pushing them to sit in the same room.”

The “four baskets” are: a credible non-sectarian transitional government; a future constitution; early and free parliamentary elections within 18 months; and a united war against terrorism within Syria.

YouTube star Lilly Singh named UNICEF goodwill envoy



On 14 July 2017, Lilly Singh met with a children's group, Bal Commando, supporting the sanitation movement in a village close to the city of Harda in Madhya Pradesh State, India. UNICEF supported the rural parts of the district to become open defecation free. Photo/UNICEF/UN071747/Brown

15 July – The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has appointed Indian-origin Canadian YouTube star and actress Lilly Singh as its newest Goodwill Ambassador.

In this role, Ms. Singh, known by her digital alias Superwoman, will use her unique cyber presence to engage children and young people and empower them to speak out about the challenges they face.

“I am honoured to join UNICEF as a Goodwill Ambassador, and to use my voice to support its mission of reaching every child,” she said at a special event today in New Delhi. “The children I have met here are overcoming so many challenges – and they are living proof of what a child can achieve, if given a chance,” she added.

According to a press release on her appointment, the 28-year-old has gained a huge fan base of over 11 million YouTube subscribers. This year, she released her international and New York Times bestselling

book *How To Be A Bawse*, and was recently cast in HBO's film adaptation of “Fahrenheit 451.” Additionally, she was ranked 1st on the Forbes Magazine Top Influencers List in the entertainment category.

“Lilly Singh is already a Superwoman, helping empower girls around the world – and we are delighted that she will lend her passion and her powerful voice to speak up on behalf of the most vulnerable children,” said UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Justin Forsyth.

“Lilly is a role model to so many young people, especially girls, and we look forward to the role she will play in generating greater discussion – and greater action – around the value of girls in India and everywhere,” said Yasmin Haque, UNICEF's Representative in India.

More than 50 per cent of India's population are below the age of 25 and India is already the second largest market for YouTube, Facebook, and many other video platforms.

Ms. Singh joins a list of other UNICEF Goodwill Ambassadors that includes David Beckham, Orlando Bloom, Jackie Chan, Muzoon Almellehan, Danny Glover, Liam Neeson, Priyanka Chopra, Ricky Martin and Shakira.

Two years on, UN chief stresses 'sustained commitment essential' for Iran nuclear deal



Secretary-General António Guterres. UN Photo/Violaine Martin (file)

15 July – Marking the second anniversary of the historic agreement aimed at ensuring the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has commended the Gulf country for implementing its nuclear-related commitments.

Two years ago, Iran and the so-called 'E3+3' or 'P5+1' – composed of China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States – reached an agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which was endorsed by the Security Council.

“The JCPOA was a major achievement in the area of nuclear non-proliferation,” said Mr. Guterres in his statement issued overnight.

“It gives us all hope that the most complex issues in this domain can be addressed through dialogue, understanding and cooperation,” he added.

He welcomed the recent recommitment expressed by the JCPOA stakeholders on 25 April to the full and effective implementation of the Plan, and called on them to continue to work together in good faith and reciprocity.

“Their sustained commitment is essential for the long-term viability and success of the agreement,” he said, also calling on all Member States to support further pursuit of this historic agreement and pledging that he will do the same.

“It is in the interest of the international community that this achievement of multilateral diplomacy endures transitions and implementation challenges cementing our collective commitment to diplomacy and dialogue,” he stressed.