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UN labour agency launches global panel to address rapid transformations in the world of work

21 August – The United Nations labour agency has launched a high-level international body that will chart the course towards a future of decent and sustainable work opportunities for all, and to tackle the challenges of delivering social justice in today's rapidly transforming world of work.

“It is fundamentally important that we confront these challenges from the conviction that the future of work is not decided for us in advance,” said Guy Ryder, Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO) at the launch of the Global Commission on the Future of Work.

According to ILO, the global body is expected to undertake an in-depth examination of the future of work that can provide the analytical basis for the delivery of social justice in the 21st century. It will in particular on the relationship between work and society, the challenge of creating decent jobs for all, the organization of work and production, and the governance of work.

Mr. Ryder reminded the audience attending the launch ceremony in Geneva that these are key issues of our time, which increasingly occupy political life and define hopes, and sometimes fears, of families across the world.

“It is a future that we must make according to the values and preferences that we choose and through policies that we design and implement,” he added.

Co-chairs Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, the President of Mauritius, and Stefan Löfven, the Prime Minister of Sweden, announced the 20 members of the Commission, as the ILO chief underscored that the membership “reflects a balance of geographical regions, of different disciplines. There is gender balance and there is representation of workers and employers.”

The Commission was set up under the ILO's Future of Work Centenary Initiative launched in 2013 by Mr. Ryder.



Photo: World Bank/Simone D. McCourtie

Over the past 18 months, in the run-up to the launch of the Global Commission, the ILO's tripartite constituents – governments, employer and worker organizations – have held national dialogues in over 110 countries. Their outcome will feed into the independent report that will be submitted to the Centenary Conference of the ILO in 2019.

UN health agency rushes to prevent malaria, cholera outbreaks in flood-hit Sierra Leone



Teams of response partners at the disaster site in Sierra Leone. WHO/S. Gborie

21 August – The United Nations health agency is working closely with the Government of Sierra Leone to prevent the spread of infectious diseases such as malaria and cholera in the wake of last week's mudslides and flooding in the country's capital, Freetown.

“The mudslides have caused extreme suffering and loss of life, and we must do all we can to protect the population from additional health risks,” said Alexander Chimbaru, Officer in Charge of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Sierra Leone, in a press release.

With damage to water and sanitation facilities, residents of affected areas are particularly vulnerable to outbreaks of pre-existing infectious diseases including malaria and diarrheal conditions such as typhoid and cholera. The most recent cholera outbreak in the country occurred in 2012.

Cholera response kits, including rapid testing tools, are being distributed to areas at risk, while health and community workers are being trained to recognize the signs of priority diseases.

“While the Government and WHO are working hard to strengthen health services in the affected areas, we also urge the population to take the following precautions to help avoid a possible outbreak: hand washing, drinking only water that has been properly boiled or treated, use of latrines for sanitation, and adherence to good food hygiene practices,” added Dr. Chimbaru.

Around 500 people are known to have died as a result of the flooding and mudslides that devastated whole communities in and around Freetown, and hundreds more are still missing.

Following El Salvador visit, UN right expert urges authorities to protect people from gangs



A 71-year-old Salvadorian refugee living in Mexico shows a picture of her daughter, who was murdered by a gang at the age of 27, before the family fled. Photo: UNHCR/Daniele Volpe

21 August – El Salvador is suffering a 'hidden tragedy' due to gang-related violence, an independent United Nations human rights expert today said, urging national authorities to intensify efforts to help and protect people affected by gangs.

“El Salvador is suffering a hidden tragedy of people who have had to leave their homes because of the high levels of gang-related violence,” said Special Rapporteur Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, who examines the human rights of internally displaced persons, after visiting violence-hit areas including Mejicanos in San Salvador.

“The problem is more significant and widespread than the Government is currently accepting,” she added. “The Government needs to acknowledge the full extent of internal displacement and act

to tackle it and the gang violence which is driving it.”

The UN expert noted that gangs dominate people through threats, intimidation and “a culture of violence” that infects entire communities and every day interactions.

“Killings are commonplace and extortion is widespread. If people are under threat from gangs, they and their families leave their homes to seek safety elsewhere,” she said.

Young people, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to such violence, including also rape, as are members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex communities.

“Young people are particularly affected by violence,” said Ms. Jimenez-Damary who visited El Salvador at the invitation of the Government.

“One young woman told me: ‘It is a crime and dangerous to be a young person in El Salvador today’. This situation is due not only to the gang violence, but in some cases is the result of oppressive police and military operations.”

During her five-day visit, from 14 to 18 August, the expert met senior State and Government officials, United Nations and other humanitarian partners, representatives of civil society organizations, and people who had fled their homes.

Her full findings and recommendations will be included in a report to the Human Rights Council in June 2018.

UN Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based 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.

Thousands flee as Iraqi forces advance on ISIL-held Tal Afar – UN

21 August – The top United Nations humanitarian official in Iraq has warned against the consequences of displacement as thousands of civilians are expected to flee from Tal Afar and surrounding communities during the Iraqi military operation to retake these areas from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) terrorist group.

“Thousands of people are fleeing Tal Afar for safety,” said Lise Grande, the Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, in a press release issued yesterday. “Families are trekking for 10 to 20 hours in extreme heat to reach mustering points. They are arriving exhausted and dehydrated.”

More than 30,000 people have already fled the district, said Ms. Grande, noting that it is not known how many civilians are still in the areas where fighting is occurring, but preparation is under way for thousands more to flee in coming days and weeks.

“Food and water are running out, and people lack the basic necessities to survive,” she said, stressing that nothing is more important than protecting civilians during the conflict while urging the parties to the conflict to avoid civilian casualties.

“The Government is leading the humanitarian operation, providing transport and aid. Humanitarian partners are helping to cover gaps by providing life-saving assistance at mustering points and supporting families when they reach emergency sites and camps,” said Ms. Grande.



Iraqi refugee children who fled from Tal Afar and found shelter in schools, mosques and unfinished buildings in the area of Sinjar, in Ninawa governorate. Photo: Iraqi Red Crescent/UNOCHA

As of 20 August, less than 50 percent of the funding requested in the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan for Iraq has been received, she said, underscoring the need for additional resources.

UN Assembly President rings Nasdaq bell; sounds alarm on behalf of world's endangered ocean



Peter Thomson, President of the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly (at podium), rings the Nasdaq Opening Bell. Photo: Christopher Galluzzo/Nasdaq, Inc.

21 August – The President of the United Nations General Assembly opened the trading day in New York this morning to send the message that the world's ocean health is in distress.

“The ocean is in trouble,” said Peter Thomson prior to ringing the Opening Bell of the Nasdaq Stock Market in its Times Square headquarters.

Outlining the perils that lie ahead for the world's oceans – including warming, acidification, declining fish stocks and a growing hypoxic zone where no life exists – Mr. Thomson noted that as for marine pollution, “there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish by 2050, if we continue on these current trends.”

He highlighted The Ocean Conference in June, citing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a programme “to reverse the cycle of decline in which the ocean has been caught.”

Hailing from the island State of Fiji, Mr. Thomson has throughout the Assembly's Seventy-First session raised global awareness of the SDGs – with a particular spotlight on Goal 14, conservation and sustainable use of the ocean's resource.

Turning to the general sustainability of the earth's resources, he stressed that “from the elimination of poverty to the protection of our environment,” the 17 SDGs encapsulated the way to “secure place on this planet for humanity.”

'No sign of positive evolution' in Burundi, says head of independent UN rights probe

21 August – Ahead of next month's presentation to the United Nations Human Rights Council, an independent panel today said that the human rights situation in Burundi has not improved.

Fatsah Ouguerouz, the head of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi, told *UN News* that based on more than 470 testimonies with people inside Burundi and in exile, alleged human rights abuses in the Great Lakes state are continuing.

“Since last June, where the Commission made its oral declaration at the Human Rights Council, we received no sign of a positive evolution of the situation in Burundi, in particular as far as the restriction to certain freedoms are concerned,” Mr. Ouguerouz said. “On the contrary, we have received some testimonies since June showing that there's a kind of tendency that what we have underlined in June is persisting.”



A girl walks past a pile of firewood in Mahama refugee camp, Eastern Province, Rwanda, which is hosting thousands of refugees from Burundi. Photo: UNICEF/Mike Pflanz

The Commission is following up on reports of horrific abuse including extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances, and sexual violence.

“The signal that we have received through those testimonies are for us clear evidence that the situation is not improving since June,” the senior official said.

He noted that “there is no cooperation with the Government” on these findings, and that the Commission was not allowed into the territory. The nearly 500 interviews were done outside of Burundi or through third-parties with people in Burundi.

The findings will be presented to the Human Rights Council in Geneva in September.

Established for a period of a year at the Council's 33rd session last year, the Commission has also been mandated to identify the alleged perpetrators of violations and abuses, since April 2015, with a view to ensuring full accountability.

'UN stands in solidarity with Finland in its fight against terrorism,' says Guterres



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

19 August – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today condemned the terrorist attack in south-western Finland which killed at least two people.

“The United Nations stands in solidarity with the Government of Finland in its fight against terrorism and violent extremism,” the Secretary-General said in a statement from his spokesperson.

He extended his heartfelt condolences to the Government and people of Finland, and wished a speedy recovery to the injured.

According to media reports, an assailant killed at least two people and wounded a half-dozen others on 18 August in an attack in Turku, Finland.

'Civilians are Not a Target,' says UN chief on World Humanitarian Day



Boxes containing medication are unloaded from a helicopter. In hard to reach areas of Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, helicopters play a pivotal role in getting assistance to internally displaced persons and returnees. Photo: OCHA/Naomi Frerotte

19 August – On World Humanitarian Day, the United Nations and its partners are calling on all global leaders to do everything in their power to protect people caught up in conflict, and to stand with the health and aid workers who risk their lives to help them.

“Let the world know: Civilians are Not A Target,” underscored Secretary-General António Guterres in his message on the Day.

“On this day, we also take a moment to honour the brave health and aid workers who are targeted or obstructed as they set out to help people in need, and pay tribute to the government employees, and representatives of international organizations and agencies who risk their daily lives to provide humanitarian aid,” he added.

Despite broad efforts, civilians – including medial and humanitarian workers – continue to bear the brunt of intense conflicts around the

world.

“They are attacked and their access obstructed, while humanitarian supplies and hospitals are looted by fighting parties. In addition, in cities like Juba and Aleppo, housing, markets, schools and vital civilian infrastructure are destroyed,” Mr



Guterres elaborated.

“No one is winning these wars. We are all losing,” stressed the UN chief.

The Secretary-General invited everyone “to stand with us in solidarity with civilians in conflict, and with the health and aid workers who risk their lives to help them. Get involved with our online campaign at #NotATarget.”

“On World Humanitarian Day, let us commit to doing everything in our power to protect women, girls, men and boys in the line of fire, and to give them hope of a better future,” he concluded.

Meanwhile, the World Food Programme (WFP) commended the dedication and courage of its colleagues working on the frontlines of hunger, often at great risk to their own personal safety, to ensure that children and their families have enough to eat.

“Humanitarian workers go where the need is, and far too often that is where conflict is as well,” said David Beasley, WFP Executive Director, in his message commemorating the Day.

“Fighting and violence drive 80 per cent of all humanitarian needs, and 10 of WFP's 13 largest food assistance operations are driven primarily by conflict,” he continued, noting that in Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, more than 20 million people are on the brink of famine.

“Increasingly, those involved in the conflicts in these areas are targeting aid workers,” he added.

“On World Humanitarian Day, we come together to reaffirm that civilians caught in conflict and those who care for them are #NotATarget. We appeal to world leaders to take action to protect them and to deliver on the promise of our mutual, shared humanity,” concluded Mr. Beasley.

Gender-based violence shatters lives

For its part, the UN gender empowerment entity offered full support to the UN's #NotATarget campaign, pointing out that violations of international humanitarian law have generated a global protection crisis.

“Every day, young girls are increasingly exposed to early and forced marriage and young boys are forcibly recruited into armed groups,” said UN Women in a statement marking the Day.

“Sexual and gender-based violence continue to shatter lives and undermine community cohesion,” it added.

According to UN Women, some 60 per cent of preventable maternal deaths take place in conflict, displacement or natural disaster settings; girls are two and a half times more likely to be out of school in conflict countries; and a reported one in five refugee or displaced women experience sexual violence, with the actual numbers potentially much higher.

“Women are the leaders in their families, communities and societies who drive effective responses to crisis. And it is women and girls who have insights into what is needed and what works, which must inform effective humanitarian response,” said UN Women.

“On World Humanitarian Day, we must come together to change the status quo – for women and girls, and for all civilians caught up in crises,” concluded the statement.

During a special event yesterday at UN Headquarters in New York, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien spoke of the challenges faced by aid workers around the world.

“Last year, 288 aid workers were targeted in 158 attacks. In the past three months alone, relief workers have been shelled and shot at, kidnapped and killed in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo,



Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and Syria,” he said. “This is blatantly unacceptable.”