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Despite drop in under-five mortality rate, 7,000 newborns die every day – UN report

19 October – More must be done to stop babies from dying the day they are born, United Nations agencies said in a new report issued Thursday, which argued that life-saving know-how and technologies must be made readily available – particularly in Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa – where they are most needed.

Although the number of children dying before age five is at a new low – 5.6 million in 2016 compared with nearly 9.9 million in 2000 – the proportion of newborn deaths during that period has jumped from 41 to 46 per cent – or 7,000 babies.

This is according to the *Levels and Trends in Child Mortality 2017*, released today by the Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (IGME) – comprised of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank and the Population Division in the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs.

“The lives of 50 million children under-five have been saved since 2000, a testament to the serious commitment by governments and development partners to tackle preventable child deaths,” said Stefan Swartling Peterson, the UN Children's Fund's (UNICEF) Chief of Health, in a joint press statement.

But without a greater effort to stop babies from dying the day they are born, or days after their birth, this progress will remain incomplete. “We have the knowledge and technologies that are required – we just need to take them where they are



A nine-day-old baby boy is cradled by his mother (partially visible) in Bambaya Village in Fiama Chiefdom, Kono District, Sierra Leone.
Photo: UNICEF/Phelps

most needed,” he added.

Current trends suggest that between 2017 and 2030, 30 million newborns will die within first 28 days of life. As such, the agencies stress that measures must be taken to achieve universal health coverage and ensure that more newborns survive and thrive, including by serving marginalized families.

Universal health coverage and improving quality and availability of services

“To prevent illness, families require financial power, their voices to be heard and access to quality care,” says Dr. Flavia Bustreo, WHO’s Assistant Director-General for Family, Women’s and Children’s Health. “Improving quality of services and timely care during and after childbirth must be prioritized.”

Tim Evans, Senior Director of Health Nutrition and Population at the World Bank Group said that it is unconscionable that in 2017, pregnancy and child birth are still life-threatening conditions for women.

“The best measure of success for universal health coverage is that every mother should not only be able to access health care easily, but that it should be quality, affordable care that will ensure a healthy and productive life for her children and family. We are committed to scaling up our financing to support country demand in this area, including through innovative mechanisms like the Global Financing Facility,” he added, referring to the principle financing arm of the UN-backed Every Woman Every Child initiative.

Despite progress, large disparities in child survival still exist across regions and countries – especially in Southern Asia sub-Saharan Africa.

“This new report highlights the remarkable progress since 2000 in reducing mortality among children under age five,” said UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Liu Zhenmin.

Yet many deaths at these ages are easily preventable through simple, cost-effective interventions administered before, during and immediately after birth. “Reducing inequities and reaching the most vulnerable newborns, children and mothers are essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target on ending preventable childhood deaths and for ensuring that no one will be left behind.”

UN delivering coordinated humanitarian response in wake of Mogadishu bombings



Remains of a building damaged by the bomb attack on Mogadishu being torn down by a digger. UN Photo/Tobin Jones

19 October – The United Nations has mobilized its staff and resources to aid Somalis affected by last Saturday’s bomb blasts in the capital Mogadishu.

“We have called upon our colleagues in the UN family to donate blood. At the same time, the entire UN family is also mobilizing in support for the response by the Federal Government and the local administration,” said the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia, Raisedon Zenenga.

Since last Sunday, the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) has deployed technical advisors, medics and explosives-detecting dog teams at the main bomb blast site near the Safari Hotel. Fire unit personnel from the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) and the UN Support Office in Somalia have been using specialized life-

detection equipment to search for survivors.

On Monday, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) delivered 3.8 metric tonnes of medical supplies – donated by the United

Kingdom – to Mogadishu’s Medina Hospital and a newly established National Emergency Operations Centre. UNICEF also erected three large tents for personnel tracing patients’ relatives.

Earlier this week, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) also delivered tents, a generator and 1,000 non-food item kits to Medina Hospital and the operations centre.

The UN World Health Organization(WHO) contributed three tons of medicines and other emergency relief supplies on Tuesday to treat those wounded in the explosions.

In addition, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) has delivered radios to a local ambulance company and is planning to provide cash payments to hundreds of youth who have been participating in rubble-clearing operations at the main blast site.

For its part, the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is helping to synchronise the response of various UN humanitarian agencies and the massive donations of international partners supporting the recovery effort.

On behalf of UN family in Somalia – 137 of whom have donated blood – Mr. Zenenga expressed deep sadness over the attacks that killed more than 300 civilians and injured more than 500.

While noting that many city hospitals had been overwhelmed by the number of people wounded and were running short of supplies, he said that the UN is working closely with the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to ensure that they provide adequate support to federal and local government ministries and agencies.

“Our support as the UN family will partly go through AMISOM, including some equipment and medical supplies,” Mr. Zenenga said.

Alan Macdonald, Director of UNMAS Somalia, pointed out the important role played by the agency’s sniffer dogs in searching for secondary explosive devices around the perimeter area of the main blast site.

“In the second day, the response changed, we have explosive detection dogs but we’ve also augmented that with combat engineering support where we are helping the AMISOM soldiers with heavy equipment for removing rubble at the site,” Mr. Macdonald noted.

Africa's rapid urbanization can drive industrialization, says new UN report



Overlooking the central market at closing time in Kumasi, the largest and one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in Ghana. Photo: Jonathan Ernst/World Bank (file)

19 October – A United Nations report out Thursday makes concrete recommendations on how the right African policy framework can harness the continent’s rapid urban transition to drive industrial development.

“African urbanization has not been driven by improving agricultural productivity or increased industrial output, as has been the case elsewhere,” said Giovanie Biha, the Deputy Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) during the launch of the 2017 Economic Report on Africa by the ECA Sub-Regional Office for Eastern Africa in Kigali (SRO-EA).

“On the contrary,” she added, “it has been dominated by the expansion of the informal sector – often services. To foster enhanced growth and poverty eradication, African countries should put in place industrial policies that will generate the skilled jobs and productivity

gains needed for the structural transformation of their economies.”

Pointing out that by 2035, half of the continent's population will be urban, compared to just one third in 1990, 'Industrialization and Urbanization for Africa's Transformation' also provides an opportunity to discuss the challenges of industrialization and structural transformation on the continent and for Eastern Africa, in particular.

In most of the 14 countries covered by the Sub-Regional Office, the share of the manufacturing sector has been stagnant or declining over the past ten years while the services sector has expanded rapidly.

Despite a weak structural transformation process, the long-term growth outlook remains promising in Eastern Africa.

According to the ECA report, the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate in 2017 is estimated to remain at the 2016 level of 5.6 per cent – down from the exceptional performance of the past five years. Ethiopia's average annual growth rate is 9.5 per cent and Rwanda's 7.2 per cent between 2012 and 2016, remaining well above the African continent average of 3.1 per cent in 2017.

While Andrew Mold, Acting Director of the SRO-EA, highlighted some growth catalysts, such as massive investments in infrastructure or service sectors, increased investments have started to stretch budgets and weaken structural constraints, such as exchange rate volatility.

Governments endorse UN-backed plan to tackle cancer, diabetes and other deadly diseases



A close-up on hands as skilled health worker takes the blood pressure of a patient. Photo Aisha Faquir/World Bank

19 October – Global leaders have pledged to take bold action to reduce suffering from noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), which include the world's leading killers – heart and lung diseases, cancers and diabetes – the United Nations health agency has reported.

Governments on Wednesday endorsed the Montevideo Roadmap 2018-2030 on NCDs as a Sustainable Development Priority at the opening of the three-day global conference in the Uruguayan capital after which the strategy is named, hosted by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the country's Presidency.

“It is shocking to see the growing toll diseases like cancer and diabetes are taking on the people who can least afford healthcare,” said WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

The pledge follows world leaders' agreement to reduce by one-third “premature” NCDs deaths by 2030, as part of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Today, these diseases kill 40 million annually, more than any other cause of death, of which 15 million occur prematurely among people aged 30-70 years, and seven million in low- and low-middle income countries.

“Governments must act on pledges to prevent these diseases in the first place, and to ensure that people can obtain services to treat them,” he added. “Failure do to this imposes massive costs on individuals and communities. It totally contradicts global commitments to sustainable development.”

The Montevideo Roadmap highlights the need for coordinated and coherent action from all sectors and the whole of society, as many of the main drivers of ill health lie beyond the control of health ministries, systems and professionals. Non-State actors, including civil society and industry, have important roles to play.

In addition to improved disease detection and treatment, the Roadmap also points out that the bulk of NCD deaths could have been prevented by action, such as against tobacco, unhealthy diets and harmful use of alcohol.

Among challenges identified in the Roadmap are uneven and insufficient progress to reduce premature deaths from NCDs; influence of the private sector on governments to prioritize trade over public health goals; and lack of high-level political leadership to ensure that health promotion and NCD prevention and control are part of all areas of government policy.

Mr. Tedros Adhanom, who last week announced the launch of a new WHO high-level commission on NCDs, added: “This conference is a critical opportunity to accelerate efforts to get ahead of noncommunicable diseases. We must be prepared to have some tough conversations, and to take brave action.”

“One vital step is for all countries to follow trailblazers, like Uruguay, that have ratified the protocol to eliminate the illicit trade in tobacco products,” he added. “Ensuring that this protocol can come into force next year is key to advancing the impact of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.”

The Montevideo Roadmap will guide global preparations for the UN General Assembly's third High-level Meeting on NCDs next year to assess progress in meeting the target of reducing premature NCD deaths by 25 per cent by 2025 and then by one-third by 2030.

Strong civil society can push back against 'major attack' on human rights, says senior UN rights official

19 October – A senior United Nations human rights official has praised civil society for its role in standing up to the “backlash” against human rights.

Speaking at a conference in Ireland, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Andrew Gilmour, said that following a period of “enormous progress” on human rights issues, leaders and other influential people are lashing out due to intolerance and their own insecurities.

“We are seeing a backlash, or the pendulum swinging in the other direction, with many influential people questioning, and trends going against the values of human rights, freedoms and tolerance” Mr. Gilmour told the 2017 Dublin Platform for Human Rights Defenders, hosted by Front Line Defenders.



Andrew Gilmour, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights addresses the audience during an event at UN Headquarters in New York. UN Photo/Manuel Elias (file)

He stressed that what is needed to push back against this backlash – whose many forms range from intimidation, to murder, rape, cutting off budgets or bans against non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – is a strong civil society “in the form of courageous NGOs and human rights defenders.”

Mr. Gilmour praised such human rights defenders for playing “a fundamental role in consistently standing up for human rights, tolerance and justice. You open space for debate, and help shape opinion. You are key in driving local decision-making processes for reform.”

Praising civil society actors for being at the frontline of progress delivered in the past few decades, he offered the support of the UN, particularly that of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Prioritized support for civil society includes legal advice, sharing lessons learned, and supporting legal frameworks and access to justice.

Last October, Secretary-General António Guterres asked Mr. Gilmour to lead efforts to strengthen UN-wide action for prevention of, protection against, investigation into and accountability for reprisals.

Referring to the response he has received since, Mr. Gilmour said many Governments were “very supportive” but cautioned also that more support is needed, particularly more information about what is happened and where.

Recounting a phrase from his speech to the UN Human Rights Council last month, Mr. Gilmour said human rights defenders should be seen “as the canary in the coalmine, bravely singing until they are silenced by this toxic backlash against people, rights and dignity – as a dark warning to us all.”

UN migration chief urges more support for Rohingyas fleeing Myanmar or 'thousands will suffer'

19 October – The United Nations migration agency and its partners are supporting Bangladesh in coordinating assistance for the influx of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees, including with clean water and sanitation, shelter, food and psychosocial care for the most vulnerable.

“The world has rarely witnessed a refugee crisis of such speed, with more than half a million crossing into Bangladesh in just over a month,” said William Lacy Swing, Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), on Wednesday, as he completed a three-day visit to Bangladesh.

“The arc of misery that exists between Northern Rakhine state and Cox's Bazar is deeply upsetting – too many people suffering desperately with too little support,” he said, adding that just two days ago, some 1,500 more Rohingya refugees waded through a river as monsoon rains drenched the country.



A reception point for Rohingya refugees at Haria Khali Primary School in Sabrang Union of Teknaf Upazila, in Bangladesh. OCHA/Anthony Burke

The Bangladesh Government has confirmed that it will move an estimated 15,000 people currently stranded in a so-called “no man's land” near the Anjuman Para border crossing point in Cox's Bazar's Ukhia District, into more appropriate settlement areas.

Director General Swing began his visit with a day-long tour of the makeshift settlements in Ukhia and Teknaf sub-districts, where an estimated 800,000 refugees are now living, to observe the scale of the crisis and the sheer enormity of needs.

“I saw women carrying small babies, only a few days old, sometimes born while their young mothers were fleeing deadly violence in torrential rains. I saw young children, who had lost not just their parents, but any remnants of hope,” Mr. Swing stated.

He called for global commitment to these women and children, who are among the most vulnerable in the world, to do everything possible to ensure that their suffering stops here. “If adequate resources are not mobilized by the international community, we cannot make that commitment. Thousands will suffer without food, shelter, health care and protection,” he emphasized.

Based on the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State established by Myanmar's Office of the State Counsellor and the Kofi Annan Foundation, the Director General highlighted the critical importance of a peaceful resolution to the crisis.

“Humanitarian aid alone is not a solution. The root causes of this crisis are in Myanmar and there can be no lasting peace in Rakhine without inclusive development,” he said, pointing to the recommendations as a roadmap to peaceful co-existence and welcoming the Myanmar Government's commitment to implementing the Commission's findings.

“The first step in that implementation process will be to urgently allow UN agencies to resume their work in Rakhine state,” Mr. Swing said.

Since late August, IOM has scaled up quickly, providing: shelter to 379,000 people; health consultations to

47,000 individuals; over 11,000 dignity kits; 678,000 litres of water; and 200 staff to assist the Health Ministry in vaccinating 679,000 people against cholera. IOM staffing has also been boosted with 443 staff and in-country volunteers.

#MeToo movement stems from impunity and culture of silence, senior UN official writes

19 October – Casual indifference to sexual harassment is unacceptable, the head of the United Nations entity mandated to promote gender equality today said, urging women and men to change their response to acts of sexual aggression.

In an opinion piece, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, pointed to the “pain and anger” of more than a million people who posted #MeToo in the past week on social media.

“What we are seeing currently, as women build and reinforce each other's accounts, and as men join in to acknowledge their role, is a validation of the rightness of speaking out,” Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka said in the piece posted on the UN Women website.

She added that “we are seeing also the strength in numbers that comes from accumulated individual experiences that are characteristically undeclared.”

The #MeToo hashtag started with Tarana Burke, a New York community organizer serving women of colour, and reached fame when actress Alyssa Milano picked up the message, with people around the world writing #MeToo if they also have been sexually victimized.

The critical mass shows “how much goes wrong when people can act with impunity in a culture of silence” and calls on “good men” to speak out and not be quiet spectators.

Watchful of the situation in Raqqa, Syria, UN chief urges need to revive political process

19 October – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres is urging all sides involved in the fight for Raqqa, Syria, to protect civilians, abide with international law, and allow humanitarian access to those in need.

In a statement from his Spokesperson, the Secretary-General also said the latest developments in Syria “point once again to the urgent need to reinstate the political process.”

The Spokesperson said that Mr. Guterres had directed his Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, to intensify efforts, in consultation with all concerned, to reconvene the next round of the intra-Syrian talks on the basis of the Geneva communique and relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2254 (2015).

The next round is expected to be held at the end of this month or in early November, according to comments Mr. de Mistura made at the Security Council in September.



Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, briefs journalists. UN Photo/Mark Garten



Displaced children and adults are seen after fleeing from ISIL-controlled areas in rural Raqqa, Syria, to Ain Issa, the main staging point for displaced families, some 50 Km north of Raqqa city. Photo: UNICEF/Soulaiman (file)

The 10-15 July round of the UN-facilitated talks, ended with incremental progress but no breakthrough.

Number of UN civilian casualties falls despite spike in direct attacks against the Organization – new report



The United Nations flag flies at UN Headquarters in New York. (file)
UN Photo/Mark Garten

19 October – Despite an increasingly complex global security environment and an unprecedented increase in direct attacks against the United Nations, the number of casualties among UN civilian personnel has declined, Secretary-General António Guterres has said.

In his report transmitted Thursday to the General Assembly on the Security and Protection of Humanitarian Personnel and Protection of United Nations Personnel, the Secretary-General stresses that the global security environment is unlikely to improve in the future as long as the social, political and economic stakes underlying the insecurity persist.

Moreover, Mr. Guterres notes that even as millions of people have been lifted out of poverty, tempering the socio-economic conditions in which instability thrives, the number of conflicts is on the rise and

they are lasting longer, with devastating consequences for civilian populations.

Against this backdrop, the report analyzes the overall security and security incidents involving United Nations personnel and premises, as well as non-governmental organization (NGO) staff, during the year 2016 and the first half of 2017.

“The world's insecurity does not seem to be diminishing,” Mr. Guterres underscores, even as the international community continues to ask the UN to be present in the most dangerous places in the world.

The report indicates that direct attacks on UN premises increased from 35 in 2015 to 56 in 2016, making it the worst year recorded for such incidents. It also notes that, locally recruited and female personnel were particularly vulnerable to certain types of security and safety incidents.

“The steady rise in the number of reported gender-based incidents against United Nations female personnel merits particular attention,” said the UN chief, stressing that the Organization has a duty to support those most exposed to security risks, and a special responsibility towards locally recruited personnel.

According to information provided by relief agencies, more than 51 NGO personnel were killed in 2016 and the first half of 2017. An alarming increase in attacks on NGO vehicles seems to continue. In addition, the level of violence that affects medical staff and facilities is of particular concern.

Relatedly, 28 UN personnel lost their lives in 2016 and in the first half of 2017 because of acts of violence and security incidents. This includes the two members of a group of experts deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

The report indicates that the UN civilian casualty rate has fallen to one of its lowest levels in the past five years, largely due to the strengthening of the Organization's security capabilities, while highlighting the difficulties which are faced by UN programmes and personnel in today's uncertain security environment.

Also, the report notes with concern the propaganda of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, or Da'esh), which has recently focused on personnel and international diplomatic institutions, including the United Nations.

According to the Secretary-General: “Protection of United Nations and humanitarian personnel is the collective responsibility of the international community.” As such he calls on host governments to bring to justice those who have committed crimes against the United Nations.



In Balustein lecture, UN rights chief rebukes notion that multilateralism is a 'threat' in today's world



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

19 October – The United Nations human rights chief today called for spreading greater knowledge about human rights to its skeptics, rebuking perspectives that see global organizations and their international legal frameworks as part of a problem and not the solution.

“Time and again, the denial of human rights considerations by national leaders, diplomats and international actors alike has in the longer term proven itself to be absolutely disastrous in terms of preventing terrorism, conflict and violence. And yet it still happens,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein told a lecture at the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights in New York.

“To compound our difficulties, the multilateral framework itself is now accused of being a threat to States, or portrayed as the object of manipulation by States,” Mr. Zeid added.

He chided what he called a “growing belief” that human rights are inconsistent with today's world – “a world which demands of us a steelier, more Machiavellian orientation” – referring to a political ideology where the end justifies the means.

“It is a worldview which contrasts the excitement of political combat, the thrill of military action, with the tediousness of principle, of law, of human rights – a view that some, who have turned away from the lessons of history, are inclined to embrace,” Mr. Zeid said.

He said: “Because we are now in a world being thrown off balance by lies and deceit, we need the certainty and security of its universal laws. We need the anchor of principle, steeped in the lessons of human experience. Ultimately, this is not only about people's intrinsic rights, it could well be about their lives.”

The Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights is named in memory of past President of the American Jewish Committee and consultant to the United States delegation to the 1945 founding conference of the UN in San Francisco.