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Marking UN Day in Central African Republic, Secretary-General honours peacekeepers



Secretary-General António Guterres visits wounded peacekeepers serving with the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

24 October – Commemorating United Nations Day alongside UN peacekeepers in the Central African Republic, Secretary-General António Guterres on Tuesday paid tribute to the sacrifices made by uniformed personnel in the service of peace.

“I want to say that we need to make sure that the world fully appreciates the heroic contributions of peacekeepers protecting civilians, sometimes in extremely difficult circumstances, like the ones we face in the Central African Republic,” said Mr. Guterres at a wreath-laying ceremony for peacekeepers in the country's capital, Bangui.

He said these 'blue helmets,' as UN peacekeepers are informally known, work where sometimes the peace is elusive, which means that they die, are wounded, and sacrifice their lives to protect civilians.

Noting that women and men of the UN police and military forces are the UN brand in the world, he said “your sacrifice is something that the UN will always honour.”

The 24th of October, the day in 1945 when the Charter of the United Nations entered into force, is celebrated annually as UN Day. In 1971, the General Assembly recommended that the day be observed by UN Member States as a public holiday.



At UN Headquarters in New York, the Organization's Department of Public Information will organize a concert featuring the Slovak National Folklore Ballet, Lúčenica.

The theme of the concert is 'Potential in Diversity' and is sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Slovakia to the UN.

Also, Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed, on behalf of the Secretary-General, will present the 2017 Secretary-General Awards in categories, including innovation and creativity; implementing efficiencies; gender equality and parity; and champion of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Mr. Guterres, in his first UN Day message, called on people around the world to overcome their differences to address global challenges that go beyond national borders.

“Our world faces many grave challenges. Widening conflicts and inequality, extreme weather and deadly intolerance, [and] security threats – including nuclear weapons,” said Mr. Guterres in a video message.

“We have the tools and wealth to overcome these challenges. All we need is the will.”

In his message, the UN chief stated that the challenges faced by the world transcend borders and, therefore, everyone needs to transcend their differences to transform our future.

“When we achieve human rights and human dignity for all people – they will build a peaceful, sustainable and just world,” he added, urging humanity – noted in the UN Charter as ‘We the Peoples’ – to make this vision a reality.

UN urged to help countries devastated by recent natural disasters to 'build back better'



Jojutla, in Morelos state, is near the epicentre of the earthquake and was among the hardest-hit places in Mexico. Almost half of the small one- and two-story structures in the town's centre were destroyed.
Photo UNICEF/Zehbrauskas

24 October – Hurricanes Irma, Harvey and Maria may be over, but the devastating impact they had on the countries in their path continues, likewise the effects of successive earthquakes in Mexico, said senior United Nations officials Tuesday, calling for more action at all levels to manage disaster and climate risk and to prepare for future extreme weather events.

As the UN and the international community step up efforts to assist countries affected by hurricanes and earthquakes, on Tuesday the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) organized a **Special Meeting** on the 'Aftermath of recent hurricanes: Achieving a risk-informed and resilient 2030 Agenda,' to discuss the current situation along with the economic, social and environmental impacts on those affected.

“These disasters led to tragic loss of lives, displaced people, damaged infrastructure and homes, and disrupted livelihoods in both developed and developing countries,” said Marie Chatardová, ECOSOC President in her opening remarks.

“We have seen how inequalities exacerbated people's exposure to the impact of disaster,” she continued, noting how easily development gains can be erased if a risk-informed, resilient 2030 Agenda is not pursued.

Saying that the impending cost of recovery and reconstruction in affected communities raises concerns over long-term sustainable development, Ms. Chatardová underscored, “We must help affected States get back on the path towards sustainable development.”

Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed said “the international community has a responsibility to support affected countries to become more resilient; to promote a risk-informed approach to reconstruction; and to strengthen their financial systems so that they can cope with such large-scale shocks.”

She recalled Secretary-General António Guterres' visit to the hurricane-devastated Caribbean earlier this month and his strong appeal not only for humanitarian aid, but also for new mechanisms for building resilience.

“Investing in disaster-resilient infrastructure and housing pays off over the long term by reducing economic losses and loss of life. We must harness the power of technology, innovation and partnerships to move towards a green, clean, sustainable energy future,” she argued.

Ms. Mohammed outlined a three-fold aim to meet immediate needs, put new concessionary financing arrangements into place and design and implement a framework for long-term financing resilience, saying “the Secretary-General looks forward to determined follow-up action by the Council to ensure strong progress on the ground.”

In his introductory remarks, General Assembly President Miroslav Lajcak said that the response must “match the magnitude and urgency of the situation.”

He stressed the significance of preparedness, by increasing resilience and reducing risks – particularly in the lead-up to next month's 23rd UN climate change conference, which offers “an excellent opportunity to reiterate our commitment towards the implementation of the Paris Agreement [...] the 2030 Agenda and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.”

“More must be done to respond quicker and more coherently, especially to restore basic and emergency services,” he elaborated, calling vulnerability an obstacle to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Vulnerability through climate change, conflict, instability and economic weakness, “will be a significant set-back” in the affected countries, maintained Mr. Lajčák.

Asserting that “we must 'build back better' amidst recovery efforts,” he encouraged all key stakeholders to support the recovery and rebuilding efforts in all the affected countries.

Drawing on lessons from previous disasters, participants shared country response measures and practices to manage natural disasters, and examined how the UN system and its partners can better work together at all levels to help countries effectively reduce risk.

Delivering the final statement on behalf of the President of ECOSOC, Ambassador Inga Rhonda King, Vice President of ECOSOC said that all Member States have committed to developing and implementing holistic disaster risk management at all levels in line with the Sendai Framework, emphasizing, “It is now time for action to turn these commitments into reality for all.”

Eradication of polio 'once and for all' within reach – UN health agency



Health workers vaccinating children against polio in Nigeria. Photo: IRIN/Aminu Abubakar

24 October – Despite progress towards global eradication of polio, sustained commitment is needed to overcome the final hurdle and stamp out the disease once and for all, the United Nations health agency said today, the World Polio Day.

“So far in 2017, a total of 12 cases of polio had been reported, in two countries, fewer cases than ever before [and] innovative methods have put eradication within reach,” Christian Lindmeier, a spokesperson for the World Health Organization told journalists at the regular news briefing at the UN Office in Geneva.

Today, only three endemic countries remained affected by the disease Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan.

“Challenges remain, especially in these polio-endemic countries [and] sustained commitment is needed to overcome those challenges and eradicate polio once and for all,” added Mr. Lindmeier.

Polio – a debilitating disease which mainly affects young children – is caused by a virus that is transmitted by person-to-person spread mainly through the faecal-oral route or, less frequently, by a common vehicle (such as contaminated water or food) and multiplies in the intestine, from where it can invade the nervous system and can cause paralysis.

The disease has no cure, but can be prevented by immunization.

In the past year, over 400 million children around the world received the polio vaccination, giving them vital protection against the disease.

UN migration agency delivers hygiene kits to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

24 October – Soap, toothbrushes, water containers and liquid antiseptic are among the items the United Nations migration agency is distributing to the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees that have settled in sprawling camps that cover the Cox's Bazar district of southern Bangladesh.

“These kits ensure that Rohingya families – particularly women and children – can at least meet their personal care and hygiene needs as they face the harsh reality of life in the makeshift settlements,” Sarat Dash, International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Bangladesh Chief of Mission said on Tuesday.

The kits, which also include hygienic cloths, menstrual hygiene products, undergarments, and other small personal items, are funded by the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).



A woman collects hygiene kits for her family in Cox's Bazar temporary settlement camps. Photo: Muse Mohammed/IOM

To date, IOM has distributed 6,626 hygiene kits to the most vulnerable families, reaching an estimated 33,130 people among those that have arrived in Bangladesh after fleeing violence in Myanmar's Northern Rakhine state.

The kits are part of a \$5 million CERF contribution to fund IOM shelter, health, water, sanitation and hygiene operations in Cox's Bazar.

“CERF funding has been critical to saving lives in this humanitarian crisis. It has allowed us to scale up and respond to the escalating needs of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar in a very short timeframe,” Mr. Dash stressed.

An estimated 603,000 refugees have arrived in the Cox's Bazar district of southern Bangladesh since August – joining some 200,000 others already sheltering in the settlements. Most of the new arrivals come with nothing but the clothes on their back, often having walked for days without food or water. Many have experienced devastating physical and emotional trauma.

Committing to help

On Monday, IOM, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) organized a pledging conference in Geneva co-hosted by the European Union and the Government of Kuwait. There, 35 international donors pledged \$345 million to ramp up, over the next six months, critical humanitarian assistance for the refugees and host communities in Bangladesh.

The pledges, which include money already committed, cover nearly 80 per cent of the \$434 million appealed for in the UN Joint Response Plan – aimed to meet the basic needs of 1.2 million newly arrived and existing refugees and their Bangladeshi hosts in Cox's Bazar through February 2018.

“Without these vital funds, humanitarian agencies will not be able to continue to provide protection and life-saving aid to one of the most vulnerable groups in the world,” said IOM Director General William Lacy Swing, after the pledging conference.

“We welcome these pledges, but I hope that the end of this conference does not mean the end of new funding commitments. We have not reached our target and each percentage point we are under means thousands are left without food, healthcare and shelter,” he added.

IOM is appealing for \$120 million to meet the needs of the most vulnerable Rohingya and the Bangladeshi communities hosting them over the next six months.

INTERVIEW: Health care is a human right, senior UN official says; urges protection for medical workers

24 October – Health is a human right and health care workers are human rights defenders, the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights has said, reminding Governments to provide healthcare for their citizens and to protect professionals who deliver these services.

“We see health not only as the absence of disease and not only a question of access to services, but in fact the right to be human is a manner that you have your physical and mental integrity upheld,” Kate Gilmore said in an interview with *UN News*.

Similarly, health care workers are part of the “machinery of human rights defence,” yet are increasingly being targeted for doing their jobs.

“In conflict settings, there has been a marked spike in the targeting of hospitals, of doctors, of ambulances and of nurses. And this is not only quite unconscionable,” the Deputy High



UNICEF representative in Syria Hanaa Singer (left) visits UNICEF health, water and sanitation partners at the Aleppo University Hospital on 29 September 2016. Photo: UNICEF/Khuder Al-Issa

Commissioner said, noting these attacks are also against international humanitarian law and the basic rules of war to which each Government has signed up by virtue of being a member of the United Nations.

“But in other settings, too,” she continued. “In non-conflict settings, health workers who work with communities that are subjected to terrible bigotry, those working with those suffering leprosy, historically health workers providing services to those living with HIV and AIDS, workers whose priority is sexual and reproductive health.”

Ms. Gilmore noted “a pattern across the globe of health workers being targeted for providing compassionate, humane care rooted in medical science.”

She denounced such attacks calling them “wrong, unfair and unjust.”

Ms. Gilmore, along with Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Andrew Gilmour, will participate at a dialogue today at the UN Headquarters in New York on how human rights, including the right to health, are reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Ending child marriage in West and Central Africa could take 100 years, warns UNICEF

24 October – Unless progress is accelerated, ending child marriage in West and Central Africa will take more than 100 years, with far-reaching, life-altering consequences for millions of child brides and crippling impact on the region's prosperity, the United Nations children's agency has said.

A new report released Monday from the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), *Achieving a future without child marriage: Focus on West and Central Africa*, reveals that, due to rapid population growth and high prevalence of child marriage, even if the current decline rate was doubled, it would not suffice to reduce the annual number of girls married.

“We cannot continue to let so many of our girls miss out on their health, education, and childhood,” said Fatoumata Ndiaye, UNICEF's Deputy Executive Director, in a press release, adding that “at current rates, our report shows, it will take over 100 years to eliminate child marriage in the region – how is this acceptable?”

The new projections, released during a UN-backed high-level meeting on ending child marriage in Dakar this week, aim to bring the spotlight on the region of the world where girls face the highest risk of marrying in childhood.

While the prevalence of child marriage in West and Central Africa has declined over the past two decades, progress has been uneven, and still four in 10 women are married before the age of 18 and, of these, one in three before the age of 15.

West and Central Africa includes six of the 10 countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world: Niger; the Central African Republic; Chad; Mali; Burkina Faso and Guinea.

The report also highlights that progress is possible when the right mix of strategies is in place, such as empowering girls, mobilizing families and communities to change attitudes and behaviours, providing adequate services to girls at risk and to married girls and putting in place consistent laws and policies to protect and promote the rights of girls.

In five countries in the region – Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Togo, Ghana and Rwanda, declines ranged from 40 to 60 per cent over the past 25 years.



Dada, 15, holds her 18-month-old daughter Husseina where she lives in a host community in Maiduguri, Borno State, northeast Nigeria. Photo: UNICEF/UN0118457/

The longer a girl stays in school, the less likely she is to be married before the age of 18 and have children during her teenage years.

“Getting girls to schools should be our top priority,” said Ms. Ndiaye. “Not only because it equips girls for life, but it also helps to lift their families, their communities, their countries out of poverty.”

Widespread militia activity, political unrest drive millions from their homes in DR Congo, UN warns



A family flee violence in Kamonia, Kasai province, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photo: UNHCR/John Wessels

24 October – Some 3.9 million people across several regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have been displaced from their homes, and amid growing violence and unrest, the United Nations refugee agency warned on Tuesday that the number could rise even further.

According to a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over the last three months alone, more than 428,000 people have been displaced.

“With widespread militia activities, and unrest and violence fuelled by ethnic and political conflict affecting many areas, the risk of further displacement is high,” UNHCR spokesperson Adrian Edwards told journalists at a regular briefing in Geneva today.

“The challenges of getting aid to people in need are growing fast,” he added.

In particular, the regions of Tanganyika, North and South Kivu, and Kasai are the worst affected due to intercommunal clashes, fighting between armed groups and increasing number of armed militia.

Complicating the matters is the onset of the rainy season, that has necessitated the need to beef up public health, sanitation and water supplies to prevent the outbreak of disease. Psychosocial support as well as care for people with specific needs is also urgently required.

In light of the worsening conditions, the UN agency and humanitarian partners have declared the situation in DRC to 'level 3' – the highest level of emergency.

In addition to the people displaced within DRC, over 620,000 Congolese refugees are sheltering in more than 11 African nations – about 100,000 of them within the past one year.

And at the same time, the number of refugees from neighbouring countries seeking refuge inside the DRC has grown by a third since early 2016 and now stands at 526,000 people.

“We continue to see new arrivals from Burundi, the Central African Republic and South Sudan,” said Mr. Edwards, noting that funding is urgently needed for the response.

Bettina Luescher, for the World Food Programme (WFP), said the agency is scaling up capacities in the provinces of Kasai (proper) and Kasai Central – the hardest-hit of Greater Kasai's five provinces, with a threefold increase in the number of severely hungry people over the past 18 months. Two thirds of the severely hungry are in Kasai province alone, she added.

Of the \$236.2 million required for the needs of refugees, IDPs and other people of concern in the DRC, only \$49.7 million has been received so far – a fifth of the amount required.

Security Council fails to extend mandate of panel investigating chemical attacks in Syria

24 October – The Security Council on Tuesday failed to adopt a resolution extending the mandate of a joint United Nations-Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapon (OPCW) body to identify the perpetrators of chemical-weapons attacks in Syria due to a 'no' vote by permanent member Russia.

Eleven of the Council's 15 members voted in favour, while Russia and non-permanent member Bolivia voted against the text. Permanent member China, and non-permanent Kazakhstan abstained.

A negative vote – or veto – from one of the Council's five permanent members means a resolution cannot be adopted.

Had the United States-proposed text been adopted, it would have extended the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism's mandate – established unanimously by the Council in 2015 and set to expire on 17 November – for a further one year.

In an earlier procedural action, the Security Council defeated Russia's proposal to adjourn the meeting by four votes in favour of the adjournment to eight opposed, with three abstentions.



A wide view of the Security Council. UN Photo/JC McIlwaine (file)

Brazilian student wins Tokyo photo contest on UN Global Goals



This photo, which won the SDGs Student Photo Contest, jointly held by UNIC Tokyo and Sophia University in Japan, depicts a woman collecting recyclables to earn income as part of a programme, which cooperates with the city of Assis in São Paulo, Brazil. Photo/Luis Gustavo Cavalheiro Silva

24 October – A Brazilian university student has won the top prize of the United Nations-backed photo contest that puts the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the spotlight.

“The contest has encouraged students from all over the world to capture a moment that reflects their own ideas and views on SDGs,” said Kaoru Nemoto, Director of UN Information Centre in Tokyo at the opening of the award ceremony held Tuesday, the United Nations Day.

“In their photos, we find the power to communicate humanity's urgent issues to everybody,” Ms. Nemoto added.

The winning entry, from Luis Gustavo Cavalheiro Silva, a student at Universidade Estadual Paulista in São Paulo, Brazil, depicts a woman who earns her income to support her children by collecting recyclables.

“Thanks to the community's support, the woman can support her family and at the same time contributes to keeping the community environmentally sustainable. I saw in her work the valuable message that the SDGs are conveying, and I thereby wanted to share my feelings with others,” the contest winner states in his comment attached to the photo.

The SDGs Student Photo Contest, jointly held by UNIC Tokyo and Sophia University in Japan, drew more than 1,000 entries, up 60 per cent from last year, from 73 countries.

“I was surprised by quality photos submitted by the students,” stated Leslie Kee, a photographer who headed the judging panel. “We have selected photos to best reflect the young generation's enthusiasm to achieve the SDGs.”



Other award winners include students from Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Japan, Peru, Russia, and Viet Nam.

Other judges were Akira Ono, Photo and Multimedia Editor, The Asahi Shimbun; Yuichi Kimura, Comedian, Yoshimoto Creative Agency Co., LTD.; Hiroaki Mizushima, Professor, Department of Journalism, Sophia University; and Mark Garten, Chief of the UN Photo Unit, Audio-Visual Services Section, UN Department of Public Information (DPI).

Don't just blame teachers when system is at fault, says UNESCO



Students sit in front of new textbooks in one of 12 tented classrooms at Al Takiya Al Kasnazaniya camp for internally displaced persons in Karkh District, Baghdad Governorate, Iraq. Photo: UNICEF/Wathiq Khuzaie

24 October – Blaming just the teacher or the school for systemic educational problems can have serious negative side effects, warns a new report from the United Nations educational agency.

“Education is a shared responsibility between us all – governments, schools, teachers, parents and private actors,” said Irina Bokova, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in a press release.

“Accountability for these responsibilities defines the way teachers teach, students learn, and governments act. It must be designed with care and with the principles of equity, inclusion and quality in mind,” she added.

The report, titled *Accountability in education: meeting our commitments*, looks at the different ways people and institutions can be held accountable for reaching the internationally agreed Sustainable Development Goal for Education (SDG4).

The report, the second in the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) series, shows that blaming teachers for poor test scores and absenteeism is often both unjust and unconstructive.

The report, the second in the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) series, shows that blaming teachers for poor test scores and absenteeism is often both unjust and unconstructive.

“Using student test scores to sanction teachers and schools makes it more likely they will adjust their behaviour to protect themselves, which may mean leaving the weakest learners behind,” explained Manos Antoninis, Director of the GEM Report.

“Accountability must start with governments. If a government is too quick to apportion blame to others, it is deflecting attention away from its own responsibility for creating a strong, supportive education system,”

For example, that nearly half of teacher absenteeism in Indonesia in 2013/14 was due to excused time for study for which replacements should have been provided.

In Senegal, only 12 of the 80 missed school days in 2014 were due to teachers avoiding their responsibilities.

In the European Union in 2009-2014, 38 per cent of education and training tenders only had one bidder, compared to 16 per cent of tenders in the construction sector, indicating that the risk of corruption is higher in education than in the building industry.

The report says that whereas transparency would help identify problems, only one in six governments publish annual education monitoring reports.

The report calls on governments to:

- design accountability mechanisms for schools and teachers that is supportive and avoid punitive mechanisms, especially those based on narrow performance measures;
- allow for democratic participation, respect media freedom to scrutinize education and set up independent institutions to handle complaints;

- develop credible and efficient regulations with associated sanctions for all education providers, public and private, that ensure non-discrimination and the quality of education;
- make the right to education justiciable, which is not the case in 45 per cent of countries.