

[Air pollution, the 'silent killer' that claims seven million lives a year: rights council hears](#)

Shifting to renewable energy could save up to 150 million lives by the end of the century amid concerns that six billion people regularly inhale air “so polluted that it puts their life, health and well-being at risk”, a UN-appointed independent rights expert said on Monday.

At the [Human Rights Council](#) in Geneva, David Boyd, [Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment](#), insisted that air pollution is a “silent, sometimes invisible, prolific killer” which affected women and girls more than men.

This is despite the fact that the right to a healthy environment is legally recognised by 155 States, Dr. Boyd explained. “Air pollutants are everywhere, largely caused by burning fossil fuels for electricity, transportation and heating, as well as from industrial activities, poor waste management and agricultural practices,” he said.

Air pollution is present both inside homes and outside and is responsible for the premature death of seven million people each year, including 600,000 children, according to the Special Rapporteur’s [report](#).

“Every hour, 800 people are dying, many after years of suffering, from cancer, respiratory illnesses or heart disease directly caused by breathing polluted air,” he said, before highlighting that these deaths were preventable.

Cleaner cooking fuel switch cuts indoor pollution

Some States, such as Indonesia have begun to address the problem of indoor air pollution linked to cooking by helping millions of poor families switch to cleaner cooking technologies.

In India, a Government-funded programme provides women with funds to buy natural gas stoves, the goal being to equip 95 per cent of all target households by 2022.

According to the Special Rapporteur, the number of households using solid fuels for cooking and heating is also decreasing in Latin America, parts of Asia, Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean.

In the US and China, strong laws and policies promoting cleaner air have improved air quality too.

In California, children’s lung function has improved, the Special Rapporteur said, while in Shenzhen, the level of particulate matter in the air has

decreased by 33 per cent in the past five years.

Among the Special Rapporteur's key recommendations are a ban on new fossil energy power plants and the replacement of existing ones by 2030, along with support for the growth of distributed renewable energy generation systems.

Pollution and emissions fight gaining speed: UN environment report

In a related development, the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) welcomed "accelerating" steps taken around the world to fight pollution on land and at sea, and reduce emissions.

The agency also highlighted the significance of India's pledge last year to phase out single-use plastics by 2022. That move was linked to action on plastic pollution, one of the themes of World Environment Day 2018, UNEP said in its [Annual Report](#).

To date, 127 countries have adopted legislation to regulate plastic bags, 27 now tax producers and eight States have banned microbeads, which are commonly found in cosmetics.

Another "huge win for the planet" is the UN-led effort to protect a massive African peatland area in the Congo basin, UNEP said.

Known as Cuvette Centrale and straddling the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of the Congo, this biodiversity treasure trove contains around 30 gigatonnes of carbon, which is equivalent to 15 years of emissions from the United States.