

Sierra Leone's President 'optimistic' about country's new direction as key reforms enacted

On Thursday, the newly-elected President of Sierra Leone, Julius Maada Bio, told the United Nations, that "with a strong belief in a shared vision and a common destiny, Sierra Leoneans stand with the [international community] in meeting the world's challenges."

Acknowledging the role that multilateralism and sustainability play in the establishment of a democratic Sierra Leone, he told world leaders gathered for the General Assembly's annual general debate that "we are a successful model of a stable democracy."

Mr. Maada Bio said that with this role established, "we should now endeavor to demonstrate the political will to particularly redress the historical injustice done to the African continent."

"Africa is the only region without representation in the permanent category of the [Security Council](#)," he told the assembled leaders. Pointing out that 70 per cent of the 15-member Council's resolutions affect some 1.2 billion Africans, he said "people simply want their voices to be fully represented [in that body]."

Spotlighting the necessity of democracy, Mr. Maada Bio stated that "guided by both our specific situation and Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), our governance initiative and policy actions involve strengthening our democratic institutions, opening up democratic spaces, promoting democratic dialogues, and creating a more just and equal society. We see these as precursors for the sustainable growth of our economy and our development as a nation."

By example, Mr. Maada Bio expressed Sierra Leone's "commitment to building a more secure world, as espoused in the United Nations Charter, as well as, our commitment to the implementation of Agenda 2030, the [Paris Agreement](#) on Climate Change, and ongoing reform processes of the United Nations."

Sierra Leone has undertaken reforms to increase healthcare, create resilient criminal justice institutions (in line with [SDG 16](#)), empower women, explore science, technology, and innovation, as well as "resolve mankind's common challenges from trade to climate change."

[Full statement available here.](#)

Chronic illnesses: UN stands up to stop 41 million avoidable deaths per year

“Heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, chronic Lyme disease, depression” – just some of the illnesses outlined by World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) chief Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus, who drove home the danger by asking delegates to stand up, when they heard the name of an illness that had killed someone they loved: One by one, every single person in the room, got to their feet.

That was the scene on Thursday, at UN Headquarters in New York, when around 500 people gathered to talk about the prevention and control of chronic illnesses – officially called non-communicable diseases, or NCDs.

Every year, 41 million people are killed prematurely by preventable chronic illnesses, which Dr. Ghebreyesus declared a “needless suffering, expense and death.” The figure represents 70 per cent of all deaths globally.

What’s more, NCDs affect mostly the poor. Of that 41 million total, 85 per cent are in developing countries.

“With an increasingly globalized world, longer life expectancy, a rapidly changing climate and increasing levels of urbanization, we are witnessing shifts – demographic and otherwise – that see the burden of NCDs rising in all nations,” said Deputy Secretary-General [Amina J. Mohammed](#), who was speaking on behalf of UN chief António Guterres.

In addition to explaining the importance of tackling climate change and pollution given their effects on public health, the Deputy Secretary-General insisted on the importance of tackling mental health disorders, including through suicide prevention; the harmful use of alcohol and drugs; as well as issues of under- and over-nutrition.

The issue has gained such importance that – while overlooked in the Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000 – it is now a major target of the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with Target 3.4, to “reduce by one-third pre-mature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment, and promote mental health and wellbeing,” by 2030.

“I am here to tell you that we are dangerously off course,” warned WHO’s chief. “At the current pace, less than half of the world’s countries will meet that target.”

“But we can change course,” he added. “We could prevent 10 million of these deaths by 2025,” he explained, referring to WHO’s “Best Buys”, a set of 16 practical interventions that are “cost-effective and feasible for all countries including low- and middle-income countries”. The list includes tobacco control measures, vaccination campaigns, and the production of food

that contains less sugar, salt and fat.

Stressing that the “benefits go beyond health,” Dr. Ghebreyesus noted that “every dollar invested in the Best Buys, will yield a return of at least seven dollars”.

He proposed the creation of a “coalition of champions” that would spearhead a three- to five-year commitment for the quick and intense implementation of the WHO interventions, and showcase their potential impact.

Closing his remarks, the head of WHO said that three key things are needed in every country to “win the fight against NCDs” and achieve SDG Target 3.4: political commitment, domestic investment and universal health coverage so everyone can benefit from health care “without worrying about whether they can afford them.”

To help advocate for the prevention and control of chronic illnesses worldwide, WHO also announced on Thursday that it had [renewed the appointment](#) of billionaire philanthropist and former New York Mayor, Michael Bloomberg, as WHO Global Ambassador for NCDs and injuries, for another two years.

[World leaders commit to continue UN fight against sexual exploitation and abuse](#)

World leaders joined with United Nations entities on Thursday to reaffirm their continued personal commitment to support efforts to combat sexual exploitation and abuse across the Organization.

In 2017, UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) launched a new strategy to prevent and end sexual exploitation and abuse by UN personnel. A major element of this new approach was the creation of a ‘Circle of Leadership’ for Heads of State and Government to demonstrate resolve and commitment, at the highest political level, to eradicate the scourge.

“We at the United Nations are mobilizing to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse in our ranks and ensure that the rights and dignity of victims are front and centre,” Mr. Guterres said in a recent [video message](#) on the issue.

Nearly 100 countries have signed voluntary compacts with the UN to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse. The Secretary-General has appointed a UN Victims’ Rights Advocate and a Special Coordinator to align efforts across the system.

In addition, the UN has stepped up training for civilian, military and police personnel; improved and harmonized investigations; strengthened screening of personnel; and made sure that staff who are guilty of sexual exploitation and abuse can never find a job elsewhere in the system.

The Organization is also improving links with communities and civil society organizations, so that victims and survivors know how to respond, reporting these crimes and finding support.

“The era of silence and taboos is over. Everyone, including our own staff, must feel confident to report allegations of abuses,” said Mr. Guterres. “Above all, we must protect those we are mandated to serve.”

As of 26 September 2018, 69 sitting and former heads of State and Government are members of the Circle of Leadership.

On Thursday, 48 of them, along with 21 UN entities, joined the Secretary-General in issuing a “[Collective Statement](#)” to reaffirm their continued personal commitment as global leaders, to support efforts to combat sexual exploitation and abuse.

“We recognize the unique responsibility of the United Nations to set the standard for preventing, responding to, and eradicating sexual exploitation and abuse within the United Nations system, address its impact effectively and humanely, and safeguard and empower victims,” they said.

They also recognized the shared responsibility of the UN and its Member States to protect victims and whistle-blowers and take appropriate action against perpetrators.

[Haitian President at General Assembly calls for essential development aid as UN mission shifts away from peacekeeping](#)

Haitian President Jovenel Moïse on Thursday called on the international community to provide the necessary development aid as the Caribbean island nation prepares for the transition next year of the United Nations mission to a non-peacekeeping presence in the country.

“From this lofty tribune I would like to tell our technical and financial partners that we must together muster the necessary courage to rethink the development aid for Haiti,” he told world leaders on the third day of the

General Assembly's annual general debate.

"With Haiti's meager financial resources, we have begun to put the country on the track to progress. Today more than ever, we need this synergy to build our country's future."

In the latest iteration of UN missions that over the past two decades have been helping to restore stability following political conflict, a devastating earthquake and frequent hurricanes, the UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti ([MINUJUSTH](#)), is scheduled [transition to a non-peace-keeping presence](#) in October 2019.

Two years ago, MINUJUSTH was [mandated to assist](#) the Haitian Government to further develop the Haitian National Police (HNP); to strengthen Haiti's rule of law institutions, including the justice and prisons; and to promote and protect human rights – all with a view to improving the everyday lives of the Haitian people.

Earlier this month UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Bintou Keita [warned](#) the Security Council that several challenges remain, citing violent protests in July over fuel price increases that led to widespread looting in the capital, Port-au-Prince, as well as in other cities.

Mr. Moïse said the violent discontent must not be under-estimated. "It highlights with especial clarity the central question of the risks associated with extreme social-economic precariousness and the lack of economic perspectives."

Turning to health matters in the country, the Haitian President stressed that \$ 20 million is needed for the establishment of 122 health centers to meet the needs of the population at the commune level.

"I also take the opportunity to challenge the international community on the obligation to mobilize resources to eliminate cholera introduced by [the previous UN mission, a peacekeeping operation known by the French acronym MINUSTAH] into the country and to compensate the victims," he added.

[In August 2016, then-Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced the UN's [new approach to cholera in Haiti](#). Indicating that he deeply regretted the terrible suffering the people of Haiti endured as a result of the cholera epidemic, he said that the United Nations has a moral responsibility to the victims of the cholera epidemic and to support Haiti in overcoming the epidemic and building sound water, sanitation and health systems.]

[***Full statement \(in French\) available here.***](#)

'Jerusalem is not for sale' Palestinian President Abbas tells world leaders at UN Assembly

Taking the podium at the United Nations General Assembly, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas reiterated that peace in the Middle East cannot be realized without an independent Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Addressing world leaders at the Assembly's annual general debate, President Abbas underscored his commitment to peace and the two-state solution, and the path of negotiations to achieve them.

"We have always fully and positively engaged with the various initiatives of the international community aimed at achieving a peaceful solution between us and the Israelis, including the Arab Peace Initiative," he said, noting that the he also engaged with United States President Donald Trump and his administration from the start of his tenure.

However, the US administration's decision to close office of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Washington D.C., the proclamation of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and transferring of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, not only violate UN resolutions, they have also undermined the two-state solution, added President Abbas.

"The path to peace is enshrined in your [the UN] resolutions, including resolution 67/19 of 29 November 2012, which was adopted by an overwhelming majority and refers to the State of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 borders," he stressed, urging all countries to abide by those resolutions.

More to follow...