

# UN's Guterres on climate change: 'We need to do more and we need to do it quicker'

As governments prepare to meet later this year for the next round of climate talks, Secretary-General António Guterres today underscored the need to speed up action on an issue that is “the absolute priority” for the United Nations.

“Climate change is the defining issue of our time – and we are at a defining moment,” the Secretary-General [said](#) at the Informal Leaders Dialogue on Climate Change, held on the margins of the annual high-level debate of the General Assembly.

“[...] we have many priorities in the UN – peace and security, human rights, and development – but I would say that this is the absolute priority.”

Mr. Guterres recalled that when world leaders signed the [Paris Agreement on Climate Change](#) three years ago, they pledged to keep global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to work to keep the increase as close as possible to 1.5 degrees.

These objectives were agreed, he noted, as the “bare minimum” to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

“The commitment was universal – but we are nowhere close to where we need to be to meet these minimum targets,” he stated, adding that a UN study found that the commitments made so far by Parties to the Paris Agreement represent just one-third of what is needed.

“We need to do more and we need to do it quicker: we need more ambition and accelerated action by 2020.”

Today's meeting takes place amid what is known as “New York Climate Week” and comes on the heels of the Global Climate Action Summit, held in San Francisco earlier this month.

It also follows a landmark speech delivered by the Secretary-General this month in which he warned that the world risks “crossing the point of no return” on climate change and highlighted the need to speed up action to tackle this global threat.

To mobilize greater action and finance, the Secretary-General will convene a Climate Summit in September 2019 to “focus on the heart of the problem.”

“Only a significantly higher level of ambition will do – and the Summit will be an opportunity for leaders and partners to showcase their ambition.”

A key moment on the road to next year's Summit will be the 24th Session of

the Conference of the Parties to the [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) (UNFCCC) – known informally as COP24 – that will be held in December in Katowice, Poland.

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## [Fight against ‘vicious’ tuberculosis epidemic drastically underfunded: UN deputy chief](#)

The fight against tuberculosis (TB) is drastically under-funded, with a gap of around \$13 billion per year, said Deputy Secretary-General [Amina Mohammed](#) at the first-ever [High-Level TB Meeting](#), held at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

The High-Level Meeting has been described by the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) as an unprecedented step forward by governments and all partners engaged in the fight against TB.

It comes one year on from a [Ministerial Conference on Ending TB](#) held in Moscow last November, which resulted in high-level commitments from ministers and other leaders from 120 countries to accelerate progress to end the disease.

Ms. Mohammed described TB as a “vicious epidemic,” which infects some 10.4 million people across the world, and is fuelled by poverty, inequality, migration and conflict.

The disease, she added, exists in a “vicious cycle that will require an all-systems approach that accounts for the social drivers that perpetuate its spread.”

Better health and social welfare systems, and more investment, are needed to stop this global health crisis, and better tools are needed to overcome anti-microbial resistance: some 60,000 drug-resistant cases of TB are reported every year.

The Deputy Secretary-General called for an approach to ending TB that takes a system-wide approach, promoting the broader health and well-being of entire communities and breaking out of “disease-specific silos and single goals.”

Whilst TB affects all countries and continents, more than half of all new cases occur in just five countries: in some countries – including Mozambique, the Philippines and South Africa – there are 500 cases per 100,000 people, whilst in high-income countries there are fewer than 10 per 100,000. Ms. Mohammed said that much more progress is needed if the UN is to follow

through on its promise to leave no one behind.

However, progress, she added, is possible if efforts to end the epidemic are based on the best data and science, informed decisions, empowered communities, and strategic and well-financed action.

Ms. Mohammed said that WHO will lead cross-UN efforts to support governments, working together with civil society and all partners to drive a faster response to TB.

Just one week ago, on 18 September, the WHO released its latest [Global Tuberculosis Report](#), which showed that countries are not doing enough to end TB, and that funding is the most urgent stumbling block.

The meeting concluded with the adoption of an ambitious [Political Declaration on TB](#), endorsed by Heads of State, which is intended to strengthen action and investments for ending of TB, and save millions of lives.

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## [Debt-fuelled 'economic sugar-rush' in US spells danger, despite world growth: UN trade report](#)

The world's economy remains on "shaky ground", overshadowed by escalating trade tariffs and an unpredictable financial climate dominated by debt-fuelled growth, UN experts said on Wednesday.

According to this year's Trade and Development report from UNCTAD, the [UN Conference on Trade and Development](#), global debt has risen sharply to \$250 trillion – three times the total world income.

A decade ago – when the global financial crisis hit – the deficit was \$140 trillion.

"The excessive reliance on debt in the current global economy will not end well for many economies," said Richard Kozul-Wright, UNCTAD Director of its Globalization and Development Strategy division.

Despite these potentially worrying indicators, by the end of 2018, global output is forecast to remain unchanged from last year, at 3.1 per cent, UNCTAD says.

And while the global economy has "picked up" overall since 2017, regionally, economic growth has been sporadic, according to the UNCTAD report.

"The world economy is walking a tightrope between debt-fuelled growth and

financial instability,” Mr. Kozul-Wright said. “There’s certainly been a recovery in the United States. The question is whether that’s an economic sugar-rush driven by tax cuts and military spending, or whether there’s a sustainable growth parked behind that. We tend to think it’s the former.”

Noting that the US economy’s performance has been “far better” than most of Europe, where growth is “softening” across the continent, the UNCTAD senior economist said that Japan had also shown “rather weak performance” that has been echoed in a significant number of larger emerging economies threatened by recession.

The world economy is walking a tightrope between debt-fuelled growth and financial instability – *Richard Kozul-Wright, UNCTAD*

According to the UNCTAD report, bigger emerging economies which rely on commodity exports – Russia and the four BRICS countries: Brazil, India, China and South Africa – can expect some improvement “while prices remain firm”.

But this is not the case for many other developing economies where “economic storm clouds” are gathering, UNCTAD says, pointing to the fact that their share of global debt rose from 7 per cent in 2007, to 26 per cent this year.

Private and corporate debt is behind this surge in borrowing, but it has not been used to invest in businesses, such that “growing indebtedness observed globally is closely linked to rising inequality”, Mr. Kozul-Wright said.

On trade tensions, the UNCTAD report suggests that any serious escalation of tariff hikes imposed by the US, China and the Eurozone could threaten much-needed investment in vulnerable economies.

The fact that, in the top 1 per cent of countries, big firms account for well over half of exports is also linked to falling returns for emerging countries – with the exception of newly industrialized economies in Asia and China.

“Trade is a big-firm game,” Mr. Kozul-Wright explained. “Over 50 per cent of world trade is run through 1 per cent of corporations. Big firms have been a major source of inequalities. It’s about the growing power of monopolies and concentrated markets.”

A sign of China’s prolific growth is its growing share of exports in the BRICS group of nations, which rose from 5 per cent in 1990, to more than 20 per cent by 2016, UNCTAD says.

The UN report also notes that among developing economies, it is only those in East Asia that house the headquarters of leading transnational firms to any significant degree.

This has led to East Asia seeing its share of profits generated by the world’s top 2,000 transnationals, rising from 7 per cent in 1995 to more than 26 per cent in 2015.

“The world economy is again under stress,” said Mukhisa Kituyi, UNCTAD Secretary-General. “The immediate pressures are building around escalating tariffs and volatile financial flows, but behind these threats to global stability is a wider failure – since 2008 – to address the inequities and imbalances of our hyperglobalized world.”

Despite the probability of economic stability this year, the report warns of potential economic decline in the near future.

There’s urgent need for Governments to work together on global policy coordination to better manage the multilateral trading system, UNCTAD’s Kozul-Wright said.

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## [‘We all need to see the bigger picture;’ cooperation is the key to making the world better for all, Estonia tells UN Assembly](#)

Empathy, equality, and efficiency should be the hallmarks of the work of the United Nations, Kersti Kaljulaid, the President of Estonia, told the General Assembly today as she set out her country’s vision for addressing global challenges such as migration, climate change and the shrinking space for free trade.

“Being connected and dependent of each other more than ever, we simply cannot afford to be self-centered and ignorant. We all need to see the bigger picture,” Ms. Kaljulaid told leaders gathered for the second day of the Assembly’s annual general debate.

She said that empathy can easily be translated into efficiency “if we really wish to get things done. Words are important, but they are not sufficient if not followed by concrete action,” and that all nations have an equal responsibility to be more pro-active in preventing and solving global challenges.

By example, she said the recent agreement on [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#), set to be adopted at an international meeting in Marrakech in December, will be hollow without implementation; “as hollow as the days ahead for those not knowing where they should lay their head for the night.”

The same could be said for the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change. “In order to tackle the global challenge of climate change that is affecting billions

we must implement the commitments we have collectively taken,” she said, also calling for joint action to leverage the benefits of the ICT revolution for all and to bolder free trade systems so that all countries and regions, particularly in Africa, can ensure long-term growth and development.

“We see solution in liberal thinking that progress is possible not through polarization, fragmentation or tribalism. Progress is the force born out of debate and seeking common solution,” she said.

“I wish to demonstrate how many good ideas globally there are,” Kalijulad went on to say, “already found, already tried but only on the small scale. Ideas which help someone somewhere, waiting to be discovered and upscaled in order to help as many in the world as possible.”

Finally, spotlighting the necessity of multilateralism and international legal standards, President Kaljulaid stated: “The role of the UN is to provide this equality, as a guarantor of the rules-based global system. We depend on each other, whether we like it or not.”

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

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## **At UN Security Council, world leaders debate Iran, North Korea sanctions and non-proliferation**

President Donald Trump told the UN Security Council on Wednesday that the United States would impose sanctions on Iran that would be “tougher than ever before” in the coming months, following its unilateral withdrawal earlier this year from the international deal brokered to restrict Iran’s nuclear programme, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Mr. Trump is chairing the ministerial-level meeting of the 15-member Council, initiated by the US to discuss ways that the body overseeing global peace and security can better enforce its resolutions concerning the non-proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction.

Many world leaders are present in the Council chamber and due to speak throughout the morning at UN Headquarters.

[The JCPOA – reached by Iran, China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, the US and the European Union – sets out [rigorous mechanisms for monitoring restrictions](#) placed on Iran’s nuclear programme, while paving the way for the lifting of UN sanctions against the country.]

***More to come on this important story soon.***