

Now is a 'pivotal time for climate action' says UN chief, looking to ozone layer gains

With record-breaking heat once again enveloping the earth this year, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said it was also “a pivotal time for climate action”, marking the International Day for the [Preservation of the Ozone Layer](#), on Sunday.

When scientist revealed that chlorofluorocarbons, found mainly in refrigerants and aerosol sprays, were tearing a hole in the ozone layer – a fragile shield of gas that protects the earth and helps preserves life – the world responded with the Montreal Protocol. The landmark 1987 global agreement, heralded the phasing out of the production of ozone-depleting substances.

“We can draw inspiration from the [Montreal Protocol](#), a shining example of how the world can come together for people and planet,” added the UN chief.

Phasing out ozone-depleting substances has not only helped protect the ozone layer but also contributed significantly to global efforts to address climate change.

Moreover, it has protected human health and ecosystems by preventing some harmful ultraviolet radiation from reaching the earth. “Thanks to this global commitment,” Mr. Guterres stated, “the ozone layer is expected to return to its 1980 levels by mid-century.”

“However,” he continued, “this work is not yet done.”

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He explained that the landmark [Kigali Amendment](#), which enters into force on 1 January 2019, sets its sights on hydrofluorocarbons; powerful climate-warming gases, still being used in cooling systems throughout the world.

“So far,” Mr. Guterres said, “46 countries have ratified this new instrument,” as he called on all others to show their commitment to a healthier planet and “follow suit.”

“I expect countries to demonstrate significant progress in implementing the Kigali Amendment at the Climate Summit I am convening in September 2019,” the Secretary-General stressed.

For over three decades, the Montreal Protocol has done much more than helped repair the ozone layer.

“It has shown us how environmental governance can respond to science, and how countries can come together to address a shared vulnerability,” said Mr. Guterres.

“I call for that same spirit of common cause and, especially, greater leadership as we strive to implement the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change and mobilize the ambitious climate action we so urgently need at this time,” he concluded.

Keep Cool and Carry On

The theme for this year’s Ozone Day, commemorated annually on 16 September, is a “motivational rallying call” urging everyone to protect the ozone layer and climate under the Montreal Protocol.

“The theme has two connotations – that our work of protecting the ozone layer also protects climate, and that the Montreal Protocol is a “cool” treaty, as exemplified by its outstanding success”, says the UN’s official webpage marking the day.

[South Sudanese government must bring soldiers under control, urges UN mission chief, as peacekeeper is shot and injured](#)

A “lack of command and control” on the part of South Sudan’s government, just days after signing a new peace agreement to end years of brutal civil conflict, lies behind the shooting of a United Nations peacekeeper on Saturday, said the UN mission chief in the country.

Special Representative David Shearer, who heads UNMISS, said in a statement that a Nepalese peacekeeper had been shot and wounded by a government soldier early in the day, who was part of a convoy travelling near the town of Yei, in Central Equatoria.

A government SPLA soldier had begun shooting in the air near the UNMISS convoy of four vehicles, including two water tankers.

“The soldier then shot directly at one of the vehicles, hitting the Nepalese peacekeeper in the leg, and ran off into a crowd. The troops were unable to

return fire as they did not want to risk injuring civilians,” said UNMISS.

This situation is evidence of a lack of command and control of armed forces which has resulted in unruly elements who continue to commit human rights abuses in the area – *UNMISS chief, David Shearer*

“The peacekeeper was evacuated to the UN base before being airlifted to Juba for further medical treatment.”

Mr. Shearer said that “this direct attack on UN peacekeepers here to help the people of South Sudan is unacceptable. The perpetrator must be found and held accountable by Government authorities.”

The New Zealander added that “this situation is evidence of a lack of command and control of armed forces which has resulted in unruly elements who continue to commit human rights abuses in the area. It is beholden on the Government to bring their forces under control.”

This morning’s attack follows reports of fresh clashes between government and opposition forces in the area surrounding Kajo-Keji in Central Equatoria. The Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism (CTSAMM) has confirmed that it is investigating alleged violations of the ceasefire agreement in the Yei area.

Prior to the wounding of the peacekeeper today, Government soldiers had fired approximately 50 shots, about 500 meters from the UN base in Yei.

‘Trust’ still lacking, despite peace deal inked on Thursday

Earlier this week, President Salva Kiir shook the hand of his longtime rival and former Vice-President, Riek Machar, in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, as hopes rose that despite failed agreements in the past three years, lasting-peace across the world’s youngest country, may finally be possible.

“The signing of the revitalized peace agreement by all parties to the conflict three days ago heralded a time of optimism for the future. It is disheartening that, despite the new agreement, fighting is continuing in the Central Equatorial region,” said Mr. Shearer. “All forces must disengage as required by the peace agreement and end the violence. The parties must also work together to build trust between themselves and with the people of South Sudan who are suffering immensely from the ongoing conflict.”

Democracy ‘showing greater strain’ than at any time in decades, UN chief

Tackling economic and political inequality is at the root of strengthening democratic institutions at a time when they are under huge strain, said United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on Saturday, marking the official [International Day of Democracy](#).

“It means making our democracies more inclusive, by bringing the young and marginalized into the political system,” he continued. “It means making democracies more innovative and responsive to emerging challenges.”

The UN chief encouraged everyone to look for ways of invigorating democratic systems and values, calling on people everywhere to seek answers to the challenges facing democratic governments the world over.

Lamenting that democracy “is showing greater strain than at any time in decades,” he stressed that working for a future that leaves no one behind, requires everyone to consider essential questions, such as:

- What impact will migration or climate change have on democracy in the next generation?
- How do we best harness the potential of new technologies while avoiding the dangers?
- How do build better governance so that democracy delivers better lives and fully meets the public’s aspirations?

Democracy is particularly close to the current Secretary-General’s heart. In his 20s, Mr. Guterres was part of the Carnation Revolution of 1974, in which Portugal overthrew its authoritarian dictatorship. He went on to become Prime Minister of his country, between 1995, and 2002.

More recently, he said in a magazine interview, that a central fact in today’s world is that democratic advances that he and other democratic leaders secured in the late 20th century, are in jeopardy, as are, more profoundly, the very values of the Enlightenment – also known as the Age of Reason, when the notion was embraced that humanity could be improved, through rational change.

“On this International Day of Democracy, let us commit to joining forces for the future of democracy,” concluded the Secretary-General in his message.

The theme for this year’s observance is “Democracy under Strain: Solutions for a Changing World.” Coinciding with the [70th anniversary](#) of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), the Day is also an opportunity to highlight the values of freedom and respect for human rights as essential elements of democracy.

INTERVIEW: I've been listening, and problem-solving 'all my life' says new UN Ombudsman

With only eight days on the job so far, Shireen Dodson, the new United Nations [Ombudsman](#), brings with her a wealth of experience dealing with people from all walks of life, including setting up the first-ever Ombudsman office for the US State Department.

But her current career was not by design.

In an interview with UN News, she explained that after working for more than 20 years at the Washington-based cultural powerhouse, the Smithsonian Institution, she was about to retire when the State Department offered her a position as the Special Assistant to the Director of the Office of Civil Rights. In that role, each time someone called for an Ombudsman, it fell to her.

"It was in line with what I'd been doing all of my life, helping people and listening to people's problems" she said.

Ms. Dodson learned the fine art of mediation as a young child when she diplomatically negotiated between her divorced parents.

"Now mom, you have Thanksgiving dinner at two, and to my stepmom: Can you have Thanksgiving dinner at four?" she recounted to UN News with a smile, recalling two celebratory dinners that are all about the family.

During her time in the Civil Rights office, she went for training, got certified as a mediator and, four years later, was offered the job of Ombudsman.

We put our ear to the ground and we listen – *UN Ombudsman*

One of the things Ms. Dodson takes pride in from her years there, was that she "had as many managers coming, as I had staff," which illustrated that both staff and leadership saw the value of the office, and the way she handled the role.

Of her many challenges, the most difficult she said was "letting people know what an Ombudsman does," adding that her office was "the first place to start" with a problem.

"We put our ear to the ground and we listen, and we help people deal with

workplace conflict,” she said, noting that the Ombudsman helps people see what the issues are, so they can return to the workplace having come to some understanding and resolution.

Operating under the four basic principles of confidentiality, informality, neutrality and independence, Ms. Dodson expressed the hope that her office would be an integral part of the Secretary-General’s reform efforts, commenting that she had arrived at “a perfect time, [during] lots of change,” saying “I think I can really assist.”

While many may wonder why ombudsman is an acceptable term for a woman, Ms. Dodson explained that it’s a question of language: it’s a Swedish term.

“It’s hard enough for someone to understand what an ombudsman is, versus an ombudsperson and an ombudswoman,” she argued, saying that in her view, it is a gender-neutral title.

Although a “take charge” sort of person, Ms. Dodson stressed that she is not “a bull in a china closet,” and that for the first 100 days she planned to “listen and learn” and to then see what she can add to the Organization’s existing tools.

The Ombudsman concluded with this message to the thousands of UN staff members around the world: “We are here, open for business, come early, don’t wait until the problem festers.”

[‘Shadow’ of persistent inequality is growing, key UN human development report reveals](#)

While health, education, and income levels have improved overall across the globe, “wide inequalities” both among and within countries, are casting a shadow on sustained human development, a new United Nations report shows.

Looking at the widening gap in real terms, a child born in Norway today – the country with the highest human development index (HDI) – can expect to live beyond the age of 82, and spend almost 18 years in school. But the same child, if born in Niger – the lowest HDI – can expect only to live to 60, with just five years of formal education.

“While these statistics present a stark picture in themselves, they also speak to the [tragedy of millions of individuals whose lives are affected](#) by inequity and lost opportunities, neither of which are inevitable,” said Achim Steiner, the Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), which

released the [report](#) today.

Inequality occurs in many countries, including in some of the wealthiest ones, but it ends up taking a much bigger toll on countries with lower HDI levels; with low HDI countries losing almost a third of their human development capacity. For countries with a high HDI, the average loss is 11 per cent.

The striking differences both within and among countries, are stifling progress and the trend can be seen again and again, according to UNDP.

“Inequality in all its forms and dimensions, between and within countries, limits people’s choices and opportunities, withholding progress,” explained Selim Jahan, Director of the Human Development Report Office at UNDP.

Women’s empowerment remains a particular challenge

A key sources of inequality within countries is the gap in opportunities, achievements and empowerment between women and men. On average, the HDI for women is 6 per cent lower than that for men, notes the report.

Furthermore, while there has been “laudable progress” in the number of girls attending school, there remain big differences in other key aspects of men and women’s lives – for instance labour force participation rates for women globally are lower than for men – 49 per cent, versus 75 per cent.

And when women are working, their unemployment rates are 24 per cent higher than their male counterparts. Women globally also do much more unpaid domestic and care work than men.

“Women’s empowerment remains a particular challenge,” underscored UNDP.

Data tells a part of the story, quality of growth matters

The Human Development Report 2018 update also shows [“tremendous” variation](#) between countries in quality of education, healthcare and many other key aspects of life.

This quality-difference can be illustrated by looking at the number of students per teacher, in primary schools. Sub-Saharan Africa has, on average, 39 pupils per teacher while in developed regions, there is an average of one teacher for every 16-18 primary school pupils.

Similar difference exists in terms of health care: OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries and East Asia and the Pacific have, on average, 29 and 28 physicians for every 10,000 people respectively. In South Asia overall, there are only eight per 10,000, falling to less than two, in Sub-Saharan Africa.

“Much of the world’s attention is on data that tells only a part of the story about people’s lives,” said Mr. Jahan, highlighting that it is clearly not enough simply to count how many children are in the classroom. The important dimension is to know whether they are learning anything.

“Focusing on quality is essential to foster sustainable and sustained human development progress.”