

To beat hunger and combat climate change, world must 'scale-up' soil health – UN

On Sunday, more than 2,000 scientists gathered in Rio de Janeiro under the theme “Soil Science: Beyond food and fuel,” for a week of exploring the increasingly complex, diverse role of soils; grappling with resilient agriculture practices to address environmental and climatic changes; and confronting threats to food security and sovereignty.

“Soil degradation affects food production, causing hunger and malnutrition, amplifying food-price volatility, forcing land abandonment and involuntary migration-leading millions into poverty,” [said](#) José Graziano da Silva, the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in a video message noting that approximately one-third of the Earth’s soil is degraded

The FAO [The Status of the World’s Soil Resources](#) report had identified 10 major threats to soil functions, including soil erosion, nutrient imbalance, acidification and contamination.

Mr. Graziano da Silva stressed the importance of sustainable soil management as an “essential part of the Zero Hunger equation” in a world where more than 815 million people are suffering from hunger and malnutrition.

Soils and climate change

“Although soils are hidden and frequently forgotten, we rely on them for our daily activities and for the future of the planet,” the FAO chief said, underscoring the important support role they play in mitigating or adapting to a changing climate.

Mr. Graziano da Silva specifically pointed to the potential of soils for carbon sequestration and storage – documented in FAO’s [global soil organic carbon map](#).

“Maintaining and increasing soil carbon stock should become a priority,” asserted the UN agriculture chief.

He also noted how soils act as filters for contaminants, preventing their entry into the food chain and reaching water bodies such as rivers, lakes and oceans, flagging that this potential becomes limited when contamination exceeds the soils’ capacity to cope with pollution.

In his message, Mr. Graziano da Silva noted the [Global Soil Partnership](#) in which FAO works with governments and other partners to build technical capacity and exchange knowledge on sustainable soil management through the [Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management](#).

“Let us make soils a vehicle of prosperity and peace, and show the contribution of soils to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals,” concluded the FAO Director-General said.

[Free and secure access needed in DR Congo conflict zone to tackle Ebola – WHO](#)

After seeing first-hand the complexities of the Ebola response in the conflict-affected region of North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Head of the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) [called for](#) “free and secure” access to the disease-affected people.

“All of those participating in the response must be able to move freely and safely in conflict areas to do the work that is needed to bring the outbreak under control,” said Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus, WHO’s Director-General. “The population must also have access to treatment centers that save lives and stop the spread of disease.”

While this is the country’s 10th Ebola outbreak, it is the first time that the disease has struck a densely populated active conflict zone. As was done in the recent outbreak in the west of the country, WHO is supporting the Ministry of Health in key aspects of the response.

A little more than a week since the government declared the new Ebola outbreak, Dr. Tedros, Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa and Dr. Peter Salama, WHO Deputy Director-General for Emergency Preparedness and Response, went on a two-day mission to the city of Beni as well as to Mangina, the epicentre of the epidemic where most of the confirmed cases have been reported so far.

A range of armed groups are active in the area and, according to WHO, this insecurity is creating a challenge for health teams attempting to reach communities for active case finding and monitoring, often requiring armed escorts. The violence can also discourage members of the community from coming forward for treatment.

“WHO has vast experience with delivering health services in conflict zones in Africa,” said Dr. Moeti. “We will build on this experience to ensure that our staff and partners can do their work and save the lives of the people we are here to help.”

On Wednesday, health responders in DRC launched a vaccination campaign to mitigate the risk of spread of the disease.

FROM THE FIELD: Sailing a traditional and sustainable path in Fiji's tropical waters

Young people in Fiji are helping to revive indigenous cultural practices of the Pacific Ocean island while learning about sustainable transport thanks to an initiative supported by the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)).



Uto ni Yalo Trust/Samuella Ulacake

They are sailing the traditional 72-foot long Fijian boat, Uto ni Yalo, which translates as 'Heart of the Spirit' and which is navigating along ancient Pacific trade and migratory routes to help re-establish historical ties. It's also reviving significant cultural links between people all over the region.

The boat is ferrying relief supplies to islands in the wake of tropical cyclones – demonstrating how low carbon sea transport can offset Fiji's fossil fuel reliance and become a viable option for cargo transfer between remote maritime islands.

Ahead of [International Youth Day](#) marked annually on 12 August, [read more here](#) about how young people are engaging with Fiji's spiritual heart.

Safe spaces offer security and dignity for youth, and help make the world 'better for all': Guterres

The world's young people need safe spaces – both physical and digital – where they can “freely express their views” and “pursue their dreams” was the core message of United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres to mark this year's International Youth Day.

“The [hopes of the world](#) rest on young people,” said the UN chief on Friday, in advance of the official Day, which is celebrated annually on 12 August.

“Peace, economic dynamism, social justice, tolerance – all this and more, today and tomorrow, depends on tapping into the power of youth,” he added.

There are currently 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24 in the world – the largest youth population ever.

Political instability, labour market challenges and limited space for political and civic participation have led youth to becoming increasingly more isolated, raising the need for more safe spaces where they can meet, engage and express themselves.

We must invest so that young people have access to education, training and decent jobs to achieve their full potential --
Secretary-General Guterres

Mr. Guterres pointed out that more than 400 million young women and men live amidst armed conflict or are vulnerable to organized criminal violence.

Moreover, he elaborated that “millions face deprivation, harassment, bullying and other infringements of their rights.”

[Safe spaces](#) offer security and dignity while interacting. These include civic spaces to engage in governance issues; public spaces to take part in community activity such as sport digital spaces to interact virtually across borders; and well-planned physical spaces for diverse youth; especially those vulnerable to marginalization or violence.

The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), specifically [Goal 11](#), emphasizes the need for the provision of space towards inclusive and sustainable urbanization.

“We must invest so that young people have access to education, training and decent jobs to achieve their full potential,” underscored the Secretary-General.

“The United Nations is strongly committed to listening to the voices of young people – and opening pathways for meaningful participation in decisions that affect them,” he continued, announcing a new strategy to be launched in September “to step up our work with and for young people.”

“In making the world safe for young people, we make the world better for all,” concluded Mr. Guterres, “I wish all a happy International Youth Day!”

For her message for the day, Jayathma Wickramanayake, the UN Youth Envoy, stressed: “Young women and girls are particularly vulnerable, as are young refugees and migrants, youth living in conflict-prone or humanitarian settings, and LGBTQI young people,” referring to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex.

Events to celebrate International Youth Day 2018 will take place all over the world to promote youth engagement and empowerment.

[Central Africa: Security Council concerned by ‘grave security situation’, calls for better agency cooperation](#)

With Central African countries beset by ongoing terrorist activity, instability and the effects of climate change, the [Security Council](#) has asked the [United Nations Secretary-General](#) to review the work of the UN Regional Office for Central Africa ([UNOCA](#)), and recommend areas for improvement.

In a Presidential Statement released on Friday, the 15-member body acknowledged UNOCA’s role, in cooperation with other partners, in promoting inclusive dialogue in the region; its work with the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel ([UNOWAS](#)) to develop a strategy addressing the root causes of the security and humanitarian crisis in the Lake Chad Basin; and its support for regional anti-piracy efforts in the Gulf of Guinea.

However, the statement highlights grave concerns over the security situation and human rights abuses. Terrorist attacks by Boko Haram, ISIL (also known as Da’esh), the Lord’s Resistance Army and other armed groups, are ongoing. There is also continued maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea, and a pervasive threat of transnational organised crime, including the threat of mercenary activities.

The statement notes ongoing violence by armed groups against civilians and UN peacekeepers, human rights violations against children, and sexual violence.

Incitement to ethnic and other religious hatred is on the rise, as well as manipulated hostility towards the UN Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic ([MINUSCA](#)) and other international organisations.

In the report, the Security Council tasks UNOCA with consolidating peace and resolving tensions following the various elections that took place between 2015 and 2018, working to prevent election-related violence, improving maritime security in Gulf of Guinea, and combating Boko Haram.

UNOCA, says the Council, should take gender considerations into account (ensuring that women play a key role in conflict prevention, mediation and resolution), counter the illicit trade in weapons, and develop long-term strategies to build resilience in the face of climate change and natural disasters, which are having an adverse effect on regional stability.

In order to improve regional peace and security, the Security Council called on the Secretary-General to conduct a strategic review of UNOCA's activities, proposing ways to improve coordination between the various UN agencies operating in the region. These include UNOWAS, MINUSCA and the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo ([MONUSCO](#)).