

'Enough is enough; stop attacks on children' underscores UNICEF

With children increasingly targeted in conflicts as well as having to suffer the worst impacts of hostilities, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has called on all parties to conflicts around the globe to ensure that they are kept safe from harm.

In the first four months of 2018 alone, hundreds of children lost their lives and many more wounded in countries ranging from the Central African Republic to South Sudan, and from Syria to Afghanistan.

"With little remorse and even less accountability, parties to conflict continue to blatantly disregard one of [the most basic rules in war: the protection of children](#)," said Henrietta H. Fore, the Executive Director of UNICEF in a statement on Tuesday.

"The rules of war prohibit the unlawful targeting of civilians, attacks on schools or hospitals, the use, recruitment and unlawful detention of children, and the denial of humanitarian assistance. When conflicts break out, these rules need to be respected and those who break them need to be held to account," she stressed.

Humanitarian aid alone is not enough. Children need peace and protection at all times – *Henrietta H. Fore, UNICEF Executive Director*

In addition to the children caught in fighting, [millions more](#) are at the risk of starvation, abduction, child recruitment, abuse and displacement. Many are also losing their lives to deadly diseases that could have been prevented.

In Yemen, for instance, almost 4.3 million children are severely food insecure. In Syria, over 5.3 million children are internally displaced or refugees outside its borders, and nearly 850,000 children continue to live in besieged or hard-to-reach areas.

The situation is equally worrying in South Sudan, where in addition to displaced and acutely malnourished children, some 19,000 children continue to be used as fighters, messengers, porters, cooks and even sex slaves by warring parties.



UNICEF/Nybo

A group of Rohingya refugee children gather at sunset on a bamboo bridge in Kutupalong refugee camp in southern Bangladesh. In all, over 400,000 Rohingya refugee children fled atrocities in Myanmar depend on humanitarian assistance; with the approaching monsoons, the risk of cholera and other waterborne diseases is higher than ever.

In the statement, Ms. Fore said that in these crises and many more, UNICEF and partners are “doing all they can” to alleviate the suffering of children and their families.

“Despite funding shortfalls we are resolutely committed to serving the most vulnerable. We are vaccinating children, treating them for malnutrition, sending them to school, providing them with protection services, and trying to meet their basic needs,” she said.

Only 16 per cent of UNICEF’s funding needs for 2018 has been received.

Brutal attack claims 11 children in Burundi

In a separate statement, UNICEF denounced an attack in north-west Burundi, which according to several reports, [deliberately targeted children](#).

The attack that took place in the Cibitoke province on 11 May, claimed the lives of 25 people, including 11 children and came ahead of polls this week in a referendum.

Leila Pakkala, the Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa at UNICEF, reiterated the need to protect children.

“Children need peace and protection, always [...] UNICEF calls on all parties to immediately ensure full respect of children’s right to safety, and their protection from violence,” she said.

[Key UN forum in Asia-Pacific sets its sights on combatting inequality](#)

With concern growing that the divide between rich and poor is continuing to widen – especially in the Asia-Pacific region – top United Nations officials are calling for greater emphasis on growth that leads to fairer societies and a healthier planet.

In a video message to the opening of the 74th session of the [Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific](#) (ESCAP), UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) highlighted the potential offered by the region.

“The [Asia-Pacific region is an engine of global growth](#), trade and investment and the creation of jobs all over the world,” he said, “but profound transformation is underway, driven by technological innovation and the challenge is to ensure that this transformation is for the better and takes everyone in the Asia-Pacific region with it,” he added.

“The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) is our blueprint for success and the Asia-Pacific region can lead from the front.”

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– Secretary-General António Guterres

Also speaking at the opening, Miroslav Lajčák, the President of the UN General Assembly underscored that [addressing inequalities](#) is the core of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“Not only does inequality have a whole goal dedicated to it, but it is also a driving force behind the entire 2030 Agenda,” he said.

Convened under the overarching theme of “Inequality in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” the Commission meets against the backdrop of increased global uncertainty over the benefits of globalization and rising economic protectionism – coupled with concern over climate change.

An opportunity to be seized together

According to ESCAP, the UN development arm in the Asia-Pacific region, in spite of progress across the region in improving access to basic services – inequality remains a major impediment.

Shamshad Akhtar, the Executive Secretary of ESCAP, said that overcoming the challenges would a profound impact.

[“Collectively we have an opportunity](#) to shape policies to reduce inequality, exploit frontier technologies and strengthen multilateralism for the benefit of all citizens across Asia and the Pacific,” she said.

“That is an opportunity, which together, we should seize.”

On its part, ESCAP has been working with Member States to promote balanced growth; strengthen social protection; reduce vulnerability to environmental shocks, and close the so called “digital divide” she added.



ESCAP Photo

Shamshad Akhtar, the Executive Secretary of ESCAP, speaks at the 74th session of the Commission, held in Bangkok in May 2018.

Cooperation vital for ambitious 2030 Agenda

President of the Marshall Islands, Hilda C. Heine, who was elected chairperson of the 74th session of the Commission, underscored the [importance of multilateral cooperation](#) to translate the 2030 Agenda into success on the ground.

“As small island developing States we rely on our closest development partners, including ESCAP to support our efforts to translate the ambitious 2030 Agenda into tangible outcomes and actions, recognizing our unique challenges and vulnerabilities,” she said.

ESCAP is the largest of the UN regional commissions. Spanning a geographic area stretching from Russia to New Zealand and from Turkey to the tiny Pacific island of Kiribati, the region is home to almost two-thirds of the world’s population.

Step up humanitarian support to 7.1 million people and invest in Sudan's development: UN relief chief

The United Nations humanitarian chief urged the international community to step up life-saving humanitarian support to 7.1 million vulnerable Sudanese on Monday, and invest more in the country's social-economic development.

"Millions of people face serious and [growing humanitarian needs](#)," said UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock, at the end of a three-day visit to Sudan, stressing the importance of unimpeded, sustained humanitarian access.

"Many have suffered for the past 15 years, but we cannot let them slide back into a situation where they become completely dependent on humanitarian assistance," he added, underlining the need to scale up longer-term development aid to help the country make itself more resilient.

During his mission, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs met Government officials, welcoming their efforts to improve humanitarian access to remote areas, including those controlled by non-State armed groups.

Mr. Lowcock also spoke with humanitarian partners and visited settlements for those internally-displaced in Murta and Kulba, in South Kordofan.

While unilateral ceasefires have improved security across Darfur, South Kordofan and the Blue Nile, recent skirmishes between armed groups in pockets of Darfur's Jebel Marra region have caused a wave of internal displacement, said the relief chief.

"It is critical to strengthen social protection mechanisms for the most vulnerable, including returnees, internally displaced people and host communities," he said, highlighting his particular concern for the protection of women and children who are vulnerable to sexual violence.

Mr. Lowcock commended the Sudanese Government and people in hosting some 1.2 million refugees this year, including over 770,000 from war-torn South Sudan. Price increases mean that many cannot afford to buy food, while recent fuel shortages have impacted the ability of aid convoys to reach many in need.

He urged the international community to provide more support to the 2018 UN-coordinated Humanitarian Response Plan, which is appealing for \$1.4 billion. So far this year, donors have provided some \$229 million.

'Much work to do and no time to waste' in cybercrime fight, says UN chief

The UN body focussing on crime prevention and criminal justice, opened its annual session in Vienna on Monday, calling for a more integrated global response to continuing and emerging challenges, including cybercrime.

Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) highlighted the importance of cooperation for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and countering the rising threat of crime online:

An international effort "to improve law enforcement capacities in all countries, to prevent and [counter cybercrime](#), are vitally necessary," he said.

"I am proud to say that the Commission and UNODC have pursued effective and pragmatic partnerships to strengthen practical efforts in these areas," he added, highlighting training for police officers, prosecutors and judges to "educate communities and protect people, most of all children," he added.

United Nations [Secretary-General António Guterres](#), on his first official visit to Vienna leading the organization, also addressed the Commission.

"Cybercrime is an area in which there is much work to do and [no time to waste](#)," Mr. Guterres said.

"New technologies, including big data and analytics, artificial intelligence and automation, are ushering in a transformative era, sometimes called the fourth industrial revolution," he added, explaining that despite the benefits such progress brings, it also enables new forms of crime.

"Cybercrime is estimated to generate some \$1.5 trillion in revenue per year. And as with most crime, it targets the most vulnerable," he said, stressing the need for a major collective effort to ensure that these technologies are used for everyone's benefit.

Over the coming days, the session will discuss resolutions addressing crime prevention and criminal justice in the context of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#); preventing and countering human trafficking; access to legal aid and restorative justice, among other challenges.

UN health agency aims to save millions of lives by 'elimination' of trans-fatty acids from global food chain

Industrially-produced trans-fats may give food a longer shelf life, but each year they also lead to the death of more than 500,000 people from cardiovascular and heart disease, according to the United Nations health agency.

Now, the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) has released guidance which is hopes will help make it possible to eliminate these harmful compounds altogether, by 2023.

On Monday, the agency called on all governments to adopt the REPLACE guidelines, which is a step-by-step guide to “eliminate industrially-produced trans-fatty acids from the food supply,” according to WHO Director-General, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

REPLACE calls on health departments to

- **Review** dietary sources of industrially-produced trans-fats and how they can be substituted.
- **Promote** the replacement of industrially-produced trans fats with healthier fats and oils.
- **Legislate**, or change regulations to eliminate industrially-produced trans-fats.
- **Assess** and monitor trans-fats content in the food supply and changes in how people consume trans-fats.
- **Create** heightened awareness of the negative health impact of trans-fats among policy makers, producers, suppliers, and the public.
- **Enforce** compliance of policies and regulations.

Industrially-produced trans fats are commonly-found in hardened vegetable fats, such as margarine and ghee, and often in snack, baked and fried foods.

While manufacturers have sought to increase the shelf-life of foods by using them, healthier alternatives that would not affect taste or cost are available, says WHO.

“Implementing the six strategic actions in the REPLACE package will [help achieve the elimination of trans fat](#), and represent a major victory in the global fight against cardiovascular disease,” said the WHO chief.

Michael Bloomberg, WHO’s Global Ambassador for Noncommunicable Diseases and former New York City Mayor, recalled that a comprehensive approach to tobacco control over the past decade, had produced enormous health benefits, adding that a “similar approach to trans-fat can help us make that kind of progress against cardiovascular disease, another of the world’s leading causes of

preventable death.”

Elimination of industrially-produced trans fats has been a priority target of WHO’s strategic [plan](#), which will guide WHO’s work over the next five years.

The global elimination of industrially-produced trans fats will also contribute to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal of reducing premature death from noncommunicable diseases by a third, said the agency. “Why should our children have such an unsafe ingredient in their foods?” Mr. Tedros said in conclusion.