

In Cuba, UN chief stresses Latin America's courageous 'development vision'

The United Nations chief on Tuesday highlighted the central role he hopes Latin America and the Caribbean region will play in ensuring “fair globalization” that leaves no one behind.

Addressing a session of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), which opened in Cuba on Monday, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) said the forum “is central to supporting the countries of the region in the implementation of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).”

The meeting brings together representatives from ECLAC's 46 member States and 13 associate members to debate the main challenges for implementing the 2030 Agenda in the region.

Mr. Guterres noted that globalization has brought many benefits, but it has left too many behind.

Women are still far less likely to participate in the labour market – and the gender pay gap remains a global concern. Youth unemployment is alarmingly high in many countries across the world, he said.

The UN chief commended ECLAC for having been “a progressive and authoritative champion” for social justice in the global economy and “a pioneer” in integrating the economic, social and environmental development.

ECLAC has also “consistently and courageously put forward a development vision with equality as a driver of growth” he said, and focused on what he called the “deeper meaning” of equality: looking beyond income as a measure of well-being and the main litmus test for development cooperation.



ECLAC

UN Secretary-General António Guterres at the wreath-laying ceremony at the Jose Marti memorial.

“Seventy years after its founding, ECLAC continues to be where it has always been – on the frontlines pushing for a fair globalization by producing evidence-based policies, technical analysis and knowledge to help forge structural progressive economic transformation,” Mr. Guterres said.

A study, entitled [The Inefficiency of Inequality](#), was unveiled at the session, which emphasizes that pro-equality policies make positive contributions to social well-being and help create a fairer economic system, conducive to better learning and concern for the environment.

In it, ECLAC insists on the need to move toward a new development pattern that allows for achieving a virtuous circle between growth, equality and sustainability for present and future generations.



ECLAC

UN chief António Guterres getting a tour of Old Havana during a visit to Cuba in May 2018.

While in the Cuban capital, Havana, the Secretary-General toured the historic centre of Old Havana, and met the newly-appointed Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel as well as his predecessor, former President Raúl Castro, who stepped down last month.

Upon arrival at Havana airport on Monday, Mr. Guterres said he had last visited Cuba almost 20 years ago, when he was Prime Minister of Portugal to attend an Ibero-American summit.

[Smugglers see thousands of migrants in Yemen as 'a commodity', UN agency warns](#)

With an estimated 7,000 migrants entering Yemen each month, most of them seeking to reach Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, the United Nations migration agency on Tuesday called for greater efforts to protect them from smugglers and other criminals.

“I met [teenagers in utter distress](#) from what they had experienced already in their young lives,” said Mohammed Abdiker, Director of Operations and Emergencies at the [International Organization for Migration](#) (IOM), following a visit to Yemen this past week.

“They are just [a commodity to smugglers](#),” he added, “something to make quick and easy money from and, if they die, the smugglers do not care as there are thousands of other people willing to pay for their services and risk their lives to simply build their parents a house, put their brother through school, or for any opportunity at all.”

The total number of migrants currently in Yemen is unknown, but nearly 100,000 arrived in 2017.

Migrants often leave their homes on foot and walk through Djibouti. From there, they take boats across the Gulf of Aden to the Aden, Lahj, Shabwah, and Hadramout Governorates in Yemen and then attempt to head north to the border with Saudi Arabia.

Yemen is experiencing the worst humanitarian crisis in the world;

it is obviously not a safe route for migrants – UN migration agency

Some take irregular work in Yemen to make money to fund the rest of their journey while others get caught up in the on-going conflict between the Saudi-led coalition and Houthi rebels, sustaining injuries – or dying in crossfire.

Some also end up in detention centres.

At various stages of their journey, these migrants face the risk of being exploited by ruthless smugglers and other criminals, including enduring physical and sexual abuse; torture for ransom; arbitrary detention for long periods of time; or grueling forced labour, without wages.

Last August, scores of Ethiopian and Somali teenagers dreaming of a better life were forced into the sea by smugglers off the coast of Yemen and drowned.

Mr. Abdiker believes without prosecuting those criminals, any humanitarian assistance would be just “a Band Aid.”

In 2017, IOM helped some 2,900 migrants and refugees return home from Yemen: 73 per cent of them were Somalis, 25 per cent Ethiopians, and 2 per cent other nationalities.

This year so far, IOM has helped 197 Ethiopians – together with 939 Somali migrants and refugees – return home voluntarily.

“Yemen is experiencing the worst humanitarian crisis in the world; it is obviously not a safe route for migrants, nor is it safe for Yemenis themselves in many areas,” said Mr. Abdiker.

He said that more and more Yemenis who have fled, are returning from Saudi Arabia due to tightening regulations there.

Both migrants coming to Yemen, and Yemenis returning home, are in desperate need of greater support from the international community, and “neither group should feel forced to transit through or return to a conflict zone,” he added.

Dangers persist for nearly a million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh: WHO

Renewed efforts are underway in Bangladesh to protect nearly one million Myanmar refugees from cholera, amid a warning from the UN health agency on Tuesday that “we’re not out of the woods yet”.

Dr. Richard Brennan, Director of Emergency Operations at the [World Health Organization](#), (WHO), issued the warning in Geneva, citing risks from other diseases, natural hazards and a serious funding shortage. "We're not out of the woods yet," he told journalists, adding that the majority of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh live in "overcrowded...unsanitary camps".

"We are looking down the barrel of the monsoon season with the inherent risk of flooding, landslides, as well as the cyclone season," he added.

The refugee crisis started at the end of August last year when more than 670,000 people fled a military campaign in Myanmar's Rakhine State over the ensuing months, seeking shelter in neighbouring Bangladesh.

There are now nearly 900,000 displaced individuals living in a dozen camps in and around the border town of Cox's Bazar, and WHO's Dr. Brennan said it was a "major achievement" that mortality rates had remained low.

The cholera vaccination campaign is a vital follow-up to an earlier inoculation drive in October and November last year.

The disease causes acute watery diarrhoea which can be fatal if left untreated.

Despite the threat, however, cholera is "only one health concern among a number of priorities", the WHO official said, stressing the need to focus on water and sanitation facilities as the most effective guarantee against other water-borne diseases.

"We are looking down the barrel of the monsoon season with the inherent risk of flooding, landslides, as well as the cyclone season," Dr. Richard Brennan (WHO)

The senior WHO medic also cited serious funding shortages which risked undermining efforts to protect already vulnerable Rohingya communities who had fled Myanmar with nothing, and suffered a litany of reported human rights abuses.

Some \$950 million is required to help the refugees, Dr. Brennan said, but only around 16 per cent of this amount has been provided.

Resources are even more scarce when it comes to healthcare, with only 6.3 per cent of funding needs met.

As refugees continue to arrive in Bangladesh from Myanmar, the WHO official repeated the core UN demand that any future return of mainly-Muslim Rohingya communities would have to be "safe, voluntary and dignified".

Concerns remain about the poor state of health services in Myanmar's Rakhine State where the UN health agency has limited access providing disease surveillance, training, mobile clinics and medical supplies.

[‘Robust’ economic growth in Asia-Pacific last year and ‘promising’ prospects ahead – UN report](#)

Economies in the Asia-Pacific region registered robust growth in 2017 and prospects for this year look promising, the United Nations development arm in the region said, urging countries to take advantage of positive conditions and address underlying vulnerabilities.

Recent strong growth can also provide resources critical to realizing the ambitious [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), said the UN [Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific](#) (ESCAP).

“The prospects for [mobilizing financing for development](#) purposes are promising,” said Shamshad Akhtar, the Executive Secretary of ESCAP, which is based in Thailand.

According to the [Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific](#) – ESCAP’s long-running flagship publication – developing economies are on track to record an overall growth rate of 5.8 per cent in 2017, compared with 5.4 per cent the previous year.

For 2018 and 2019, these economies are projected to grow by 5.5 per cent, with concern over debt levels in China offset by a recovery in India and steady performance in the rest of the region.

Strengthening resilience to mitigate future risks

Bolstering the fundamentals will be important as the medium-term outlook sees growth trending downward in several countries owing to ageing populations, slower capital accumulation and modest productivity gains.

At the same time, “rapid technological advancements, while promising immense opportunities are also posing considerable challenges in terms of job polarization and income and wealth inequalities,” said Ms. Akhtar.

The report also made the case for the use of so-called macroprudential measures (measures which look at the financial system as a whole) to mitigate risks and keep economies stable.

“Lifting productivity will require a ‘whole-of-Government approach’ for fostering science, technology and innovation and investments in relevant skills and infrastructure,” urged ESCAP, highlighting the need to strengthen social protection and efficient use of resources.

Tax reform and strengthening tax collection could also add as much as 8 per cent to the gross domestic product (GDP) of countries such as Myanmar or Tajikistan; and about 3 to 4 per cent in larger countries, like China, India or Indonesia, according to ESCAP.

[UN chief denounces attack on village in north-west Nigeria](#)

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has strongly condemned an attack this weekend on a village in the Nigerian province of Kaduna and underscored the need to hold the perpetrators to account.

“Those responsible” must be “swiftly brought to justice,” said the Secretary-General in [a statement](#) released by his Spokesperson’s office.

Mr. Guterres also expressed his continued concern over the persisting violence in the region and urged all actors to “work together to bring peace and stability to the country.”

The UN chief extended his condolences to the families of the victims as well as to the Government and people of Nigeria, and wished a speedy recovery to those injured.

According to media reports, at least 51 people – including children – were killed in Saturday’s attack on Gwaska village, located about 230 kilometres (140 miles) north-west of the capital, Abuja.

Last month, 14 miners were reportedly killed in an attack by gunmen in the same area.

The country’s north-east, meanwhile, has been facing a long-running Boko Haram insurgency that has claimed tens of thousands of lives and driven over two million people from their homes