

Heatwaves, hurricanes, floods: 2017 costliest year ever for extreme weather and climate events, says UN

Hurricanes, monsoon floods and continuing severe drought made 2017 the costliest year ever for severe weather and climate events, according to a new report by the United Nations weather agency launched on the eve of [World Meteorological Day](#).

“The start of 2018 has continued where 2017 left off – with extreme weather claiming lives and destroying livelihoods,” said Petteri Taalas, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization ([WMO](#)) said Thursday.

Now in its 25th year, the [WMO Statement on the State of the Global Climate in 2017](#) drew attention to the high impact that extreme weather had on economic development, food security, health and migration, pointing to estimates showing disaster losses from weather and climate-related events at \$320 billion – the largest annual total on record.

The statement confirmed that last year was one of the three warmest on record, and the warmest not influenced by an El Niño event. It also examined other long-term indicators of climate change, such as increasing carbon dioxide concentrations, sea level rise, shrinking sea ice and ocean heat.

“The Arctic experienced unusually high temperatures, whilst densely populated areas in the northern hemisphere were gripped by bitter cold and damaging winter storms. Australia and Argentina suffered extreme heatwaves, whilst drought continued in Kenya and Somalia, and the South African city of Cape Town struggled with acute water shortages,” Mr. Taalas reflected on 2017.

According to the report, the North Atlantic hurricane season was not only the costliest ever for the United States, but it also eradicated decades of small Caribbean islands’ development gains.

“Since the inaugural Statement on the State of the Global Climate, in 1993, scientific understanding of our complex climate system has progressed rapidly,” Mr. Taalas stated.

“This includes our ability to document the occurrence of extreme weather and climate events, the degree to which they can be attributed to human influences, and the correlation of climate change with epidemics and vector-borne diseases,” he continued.

Compiled by WMO with input from national meteorological services and UN partners, the statement details that 2017 global mean temperatures were about 1.1 °C above pre-industrial temperatures.

The report also provided detailed information to support the international

agenda on disaster risk reduction, sustainable development and climate change.



Source: WMO

State of the Global Climate in 2017

“In the past quarter of a century, atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide have risen from 360 parts per million to more than 400 ppm. They will remain above that level for generations to come, committing our planet to a warmer future, with more weather, climate and water extremes,” Mr. Taalas asserted.

The report revealed that the overall risk of heat-related illness or death has climbed steadily since 1980, with around 30 per cent of the world’s population now living in climatic conditions that deliver potentially deadly temperatures at least 20 days a year.

Additionally, from November 2016 to December 2017, 892,000 drought-related displacements were recorded.

“Now more than ever, we need to be weather-ready, climate-smart and water-wise,” concluded Mr. Taalas.

[Drought and conflict leave millions more hungry in 2017 – UN-backed report](#)

Driven largely by climate disasters and conflict, levels of acute hunger surged in 2017, leaving some 124 million people across 51 countries facing hunger crises –11 million more than the previous year, according to a new United Nations report.

“Reports such as this give us the vital data and analysis to better understand the challenge. It is now up to us to take action to meet the needs of those facing the daily [scourge of hunger](#) and to tackle its root causes,” said [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) in a video message on the report.

Presented by the UN [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO), the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and the European Union at a [briefing](#) Thursday, the [Global Report on Food Crises](#) finds that food emergencies are increasingly determined by complex causes such as conflict, extreme climatic shocks and high prices of staple food – often acting at the same time.

“We must acknowledge and address the link between hunger and conflict if we are to achieve zero hunger,” said José Graziano da Silva, FAO Director-General.

The report points out that conflict continued to be the main driver of acute food insecurity in 18 countries – 15 in Africa or the Middle East – accounting for 60 per cent of the global total.

The increase is largely attributable to new or intensified conflict and insecurity in Myanmar, north-east Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Yemen.

“The fighting must stop now and the world must come together to avert these crises often happening right in front of our eyes,” underscored David Beasley, WFP Executive Director.

Mr. da Silva stated: “Investing in food security and livelihood in conflict situations saves lives, strengthens resilience and can also contribute to sustaining peace.”

The report finds that food crises are increasingly determined by other complex causes as well, such as extreme climatic shocks and high prices of staple food – often acting at the same time.

For instance, prolonged drought conditions resulted in consecutive poor harvests in countries already facing high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition in eastern and southern Africa.

“The consequences of conflict and climate change are stark: millions of more people severely, even desperately, hungry,” maintained Mr. Beasley.

The report also flags that entire communities and more children and women are in need of nutritional support compared to last year, indicating the need for long-lasting solutions to revert the trend.

Moreover, it highlights the urgent need for simultaneous action to save lives, livelihoods and to address the root causes of food crises.

The report, which brings together regional and national data and analysis from multiple sources, demonstrates that in addition to critically needed humanitarian aid, development action needs to engage much earlier so as to tackle the root causes of extreme vulnerability, therefore, building resilience.

“This Global Report on Food Crises shows the magnitude of today’s crises but also shows us that if we bring together political will and today’s technology, we can have a world that’s more peaceful, more stable and where hunger becomes a thing of the past,” Mr. Beasley concluded.

Maps with interactive data from the report can be found [here](#).

Hailing African free trade agreement, Guterres says UN ready to support continent’s ‘leap into history’

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has welcomed the signing of a continental free trade agreement in Africa that has created one of the world’s largest trading blocs with over 50 countries.

“I congratulate African leaders for taking the leap into history by signing the African Continental Free Trade Area,” said Mr. Guterres in a [statement](#) on Thursday.

“This is an important step towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and delivering on the African agenda of peace and prosperity.”

In the statement, Secretary-General Guterres also underscored that the entire UN system stands ready to support the continent as it moves towards the entry into force of the Free Trade Area in the coming months.

He also applauded the leadership of President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, President Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, who led the process for the agreement.

[According](#) to the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Organization's development arm in the region, the agreement has the potential both to boost intra-African trade by 52.3 per cent by eliminating import duties, and to double this trade if non-tariff barriers are also reduced.

It is expected that the key beneficiaries from the Free Trade Area will be Africa's small and medium sized enterprises, which account for 80 per cent of the region's businesses; women, who represent 70 per cent of the informal cross-border traders; and the youth, who will be able to find new employment opportunities.

[Nowruz promotes sense of fresh possibility, 'a chance to renew our commitment to peace' – UN chief](#)

The world needs the spirit of Nowruz to bring all populations together in the most noble values of peace, justice and understanding, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said commemorating [International Nowruz Day](#).

"I think we all recognize that [nothing in our world is more important](#) than the spirit of Nowruz," he underscored, pointing to the world's conflicts, the plight of [refugees and migrants](#), and the rise of xenophobia and racism in so many parts of the world.

For more than 300 million people, Nowruz is about new beginnings. The beginning of a new year. The arrival of spring. The renewal of nature.

It is an ancestral festivity that promotes values of peace and solidarity between generations and within families as well as reconciliation and neighbourliness – thus contributing to cultural diversity and friendship among peoples and different communities.

"Nowruz unites communities beyond borders," Mr. Guterres told a special event held at UN Headquarters on Tuesday, on the eve of the international celebration of the Day. "Its values echo those that we together promote at the United Nations every day and everywhere. The beginning of a new year brings with it a sense of fresh possibility," he stated.

According to the Secretary-General, Nowruz provides a chance to renew our commitment to peace, sustainable development and human rights.

"It is an opportunity to renew our pledge to human dignity and our promise to leave no one behind. It is an occasion to strengthen our new resolve to our

path towards building a prosperous future for all while living in harmony with nature,” he stressed, echoing the pledge of the landmark UN [2030 Agenda](#) and its Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#))

Nowruz is a reminder of commonalities and our rich diversity.

Mr. Guterres concluded his message wishing “a prosperous, happy, healthy and peaceful Nowruz,” to everyone, adding “And may its spirit of friendship, harmony and respect for nature serve as an inspiration to us all.”

People with Down syndrome can drive positive changes in their workplaces, communities and beyond

People with Down syndrome, their advocates and supporters gathered at UN Headquarters in New York on Wednesday to rally employers and make sure they saw the benefits of enabling people with Down syndrome and disabilities to make meaningful contributions in the workplace.

The event, marking the 2018 edition of [World Down Syndrome Day](#) under the theme ‘What I bring to the Workplace,’ was a chance to show everyone people with Down syndrome can and should contribute and live valued working lives, and to be fully included in their communities.

“Inclusion within the normative and valued pathways of family and community life is one of the primary means to a life of meaning, belonging and possibilities,” said Bruce Uditsky, Chief Executive Officer of Inclusion Alberta Canada.

In the afternoon, a range of employers engaged in an open dialogue on the benefits and challenges companies face in employing people with disabilities.

One speaker, Debra Ruh, CEO of Unites States-based CEO of Ruh Global Communications, told the event that she refused to listen when experts said that her daughter Sara, born with Down syndrome, ‘would be lucky just to be able to push shopping carts at the local grocery store.’

With such comments ringing in her ears, Ms. Ruh left the banking industry and created TecAccess, a company with the core mission of making information and communication technologies (ICT) more accessible, notably to those with disabilities. Some 80 per cent of her employees are technologists with disabilities.

“Employees with disabilities in most sectors stay on the job longer,

resulting in up to a 6 per cent turnover rate improvement,” she noted in her [presentation](#), adding: “People with disabilities who are employed have less overall absenteeism and the number of compensation claims are no different.”

A parallel event was held at the [Palais des Nations](#), the home of the UN Human Rights Office in Geneva, where people with Down syndrome spoke up on “What I bring to my community.”

The hashtag #WhatIBringToMyCommunity encompasses how people with Down syndrome can and make meaningful contributions throughout their lives – whether in schools, workplaces, the community, culture, media, and sports.

Among other things, the campaign also draws from the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs); Goal [10](#) sets out to reduce inequalities within and among countries, Goal 10.2 aims by 2030 to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

All the SDGs that ensure the opportunity of persons with Down syndrome to participate and contribute fully in society by 2030, including for quality education ([SDG 4](#)) and decent work and economic growth ([SDG 8](#)) are relevant to the campaign.

Down syndrome is a naturally occurring chromosomal arrangement that has always been a part of the human condition, exists in all regions across the globe and commonly results in variable effects on learning styles, physical characteristics or health.

World Down Syndrome Day is commemorated annually on 21 March.