

Four countries on track to graduate from UN list of least developed countries

Four countries could soon “graduate” from the ranks of the world’s poorest and most vulnerable nations, a United Nations expert committee [announced](#) on Thursday

Bhutan, Kiribati, Sao Tome and Principe and the Solomon Islands have increased national earning power and improved access to health care and education, making them eligible to exit the group of least developed countries ([LDCs](#)).

“This is an historic occasion,” said Jose Antonio Ocampo, chair of the Committee for Development Policy ([CDP](#)), noting that only five countries have graduated since the UN established the LDC category in 1971.

LDCs are assessed using three criteria: health and education targets; economic vulnerability and gross national income per capita.

Countries must meet two of the three criteria at two consecutive triennial reviews of the CDP to be considered for graduation.

The Committee will send its recommendations to the UN Economic and Social Council ([ECOSOC](#)) for endorsement, which will then refer its decision to the [UN General Assembly](#).

For CDP member Diane Elson, a professor at the University of Essex in the United Kingdom, Thursday’s announcement was good news for millions of women in rural areas.

She pointed out that the latest session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women ([CSW](#)), currently under way in New York, is discussing the challenges facing this population.

“The success of the countries that are graduating reflects things like the improvement of the health and the education of the population, which extends to rural women, and the increase in incomes in the country, which extends to rural women,” she said.

However, Ms. Elson stressed that the countries will need continued international support because they remain vulnerable to external shocks, including the impact of climate change.

Mr. Ocampo said this vulnerability is particularly evident in Pacific Island states such as Kiribati.



UN Photo/Mark Garten

José Antonio Ocampo (centre), Chair of the Committee for Development Policy (CDP), along with Committee member Diane Elson (right), briefs journalists as guests at the noon briefing. On the left is Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesperson for the Secretary-General.

Globally, there are [47 LDCs](#), according to the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

The majority, 33, are in Africa, while 13 can be found in the Asia-Pacific region, and one is in Latin America.

In the 47 years of the LDC category's existence, only five countries have graduated (Botswana, Cabo Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Maldives and Samoa)

The CDP said two more countries, Vanuatu and Angola, are scheduled for graduation over the next three years.

Nepal and Timor-Leste also met the criteria but were not recommended for graduation at this time, due to economic and political challenges.

That decision will be deferred to the next CDP triennial review in 2021, according to Mr. Ocampo.

Bangladesh, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar met the graduation criteria for the first time but would need to do so for a second time to be eligible for consideration.

[Security Council renews UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan](#)

The United Nations Security Council on Thursday renewed the mandate of UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan for another year and demanded that all parties immediately end the fighting countrywide.

With the unanimous adoption of a resolution on the mandate extension until 15 March 2019, the UN Mission in South Sudan ([UNMISS](#)) is charged with performing such tasks as protecting civilians, creating the conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, monitoring and investigating human rights violations, and supporting the peace process.

The Council decided to maintain the overall force levels of UNMISS with a troop ceiling of 17,000 troops, which includes a Regional Protection Force at levels to be set by the Secretary-General but not exceeding 4,000, and maintaining the ceiling of 2,101 police personnel, including individual police officers, formed police units and 78 corrections officers.

The 15-member body also demanded that all parties immediately end the fighting across the country, and further demanded that national leaders abide by the ceasefires agreed on 11 July 2016 and 22 May 2017, as well as the truce signed on 21 December 2017.

South Sudan attained independence from Sudan in July 2011 after a referendum, becoming the world's newest country. The Security Council established UNMISS to support the transition, having determined that the situation faced by South Sudan continued to constitute a threat to international peace and security in the region.

The country has since faced ongoing challenges due to a political face-off between two rival factions that erupted into full blown conflict in December 2013. The crisis has produced one of the world's worst displacement situations with immense suffering for civilians.

[Mexico: UN report points to torture, cover-ups in probe into disappearance of 43 students](#)

The United Nations human rights wing said Thursday that it has strong grounds to believe that the investigation into the disappearance of 43 students from

a rural Mexican college in 2014 was marred by torture and cover-ups.

By reviewing the cases of 63 individuals prosecuted in connection with the students' disappearance from Ayotzinapa Teachers' College in Guerrero, the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) shed light on some of the flaws of the early stages of the investigation, rather than addressing who were responsible for the crime.

In the report, titled *Double Injustice – Human rights violations in the investigation of the Ayotzinapa case*, OHCHR said it has solid grounds to conclude that at least 34 of these individuals were tortured, based on the judicial files, including medical records of multiple physical injuries, and on interviews with authorities, detainees and witnesses.

Ayotzinapa is a test case of the Mexican authorities' willingness and ability to tackle serious human rights violations.

"The [findings](#) of the report point to a pattern of committing, tolerating and covering up torture in the investigation of the Ayotzinapa case," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein.

"This not only violates the rights of the detainees, but also the right to justice and to truth for the victims of the events of September 2014, their families, and for society as a whole," he added.

The report highlights how people were arbitrarily detained and tortured to extract information or confessions, and the significant delays in bringing them before a public prosecutor, often placing them outside the protection of the law.

The report states that the internal oversight unit of the Office of the Attorney-General of the Republic (OAG) appeared to have made a genuine effort in 2016 to address some of alleged torture or other human rights violations, but this internal investigation was subsequently thwarted by the replacement of the officials in the unit. To date, there has been no prosecution and sanction for the acts of torture or other human rights violations, the report says.

"Ayotzinapa is a test case of the Mexican authorities' willingness and ability to tackle serious human rights violations," Mr. Zeid said, urging the Mexican authorities to ensure that the search for truth and justice continues, and those responsible for torture and other human rights violations during the investigation are held accountable.

Click here for the report's [executive summary](#).

UN envoy urges hold-out armed groups to sign accord for durable peace in Sudan's Darfur

While the security situation in Sudan's Darfur region remained stable, the causes of the conflict – and their related consequences – have been largely unaddressed, the head of the African Union-United Nations peacekeeping mission said Wednesday, calling on holdout armed groups to sign the foundational 2011 peace agreement without delay.

“That would be the only way the people of Darfur, and indeed the international community, could have any realistic hope for the achievement of durable peace in Darfur,” Jeremiah Mamabolo, the Joint Special Representative and the head of the AU-UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur ([UNAMID](#)), told the Security Council.

In particular, he urged the Council to use its leverage to have Abdul Wahid al Nur, who leads a faction of the Sudanese Liberation Army, join the peace process.

[Addressing](#) the 15-member body via video-conference from El Fasher, Mr. Mamabolo said conditions in Darfur are not the same as in 2003, when the conflict began.

Aside from sporadic fighting in Jebel Marra, there is a general absence of war, a reality reflected in UNAMID's adjusted mandate and posture, now in its second phase of reconfiguration.

Since January, he said, some military, police, and civilian personnel have been redeployed to strengthen Jebel Marra Task Force operations.

He said the Force is organized in two sectors: The Jebel Marra Task Force, with headquarters in Zalingei, and the State Stabilization Assistance Force, covering areas outside the former's operation area. Phase II reconfiguration also entails reduction in the number of military personnel, from 11,305 to 8,735; police from 2,888 to 2,500; and civilian staff from 2,918 to 2,760.

While it is too early to assess the impact on the overall security and civilian protection situation in areas where UNAMID has withdrawn under its phase I reconfiguration, he said UNAMID continued to engage with the Government to overcome access restrictions.

In some areas of Darfur, intra and inter-communal clashes persisted, albeit at a reduced scale, and instability persisted in internally displaced person camps in Kalma, Hassa Hissa and Hamadiya, where clashes are mainly fuelled by longstanding unresolved socioeconomic and political issues at the root of Darfur's conflict landscape over the years.

He said that significant resources are needed for post-conflict reconstruction, urging the Council to ensure they are mobilized apace with the mission's drawdown.

[UN-World Bank panel report calls for 'fundamental shift' in water management](#)

With 700 million people worldwide at risk of being displaced by intense water scarcity by 2030, water infrastructure investment must be at least doubled over the next five years, a panel set up by the United Nations and the World Bank recommended on Wednesday.

Making Every Drop Count: An Agenda for Water Action, released by a [panel](#) of 11 Heads of State and a Special Advisor, calls for a fundamental shift in the way the world manages water so that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly [Goal 6](#) on ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, can be achieved.

According to the report, 40 per cent of the world's people are being affected by water scarcity. If not addressed, as many as 700 million could be displaced by 2030 in search for water. More than two billion people are compelled to drink unsafe water and more than 4.5 billion do not have safely managed sanitation services.

The report says women and girls suffer disproportionately when water and sanitation are lacking, affecting health and often restricting work and education opportunities. Some 80 per cent of wastewater is discharged untreated into the environment and water-related disasters account for 90 per cent of the 1,000 most devastating natural disasters since 1990.

"It is my deep belief that water is a matter of life and death," UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) commented upon receiving the report on Wednesday, noting that 60 per cent of human body is water.

He said that water-related natural disasters are occurring more frequently and becoming more and more dangerous everywhere, which means "water is indeed a matter of life and death" and "must be an absolute priority in everything we do."

In a press release, World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim stressed that Heads of State and Government make up the panel "because the world can no longer afford to take water for granted."

“The ecosystems on which life itself is based – our food security, energy sustainability, public health, jobs, cities – are all at risk because of how water is managed today,” he warned.

The panel, created in 2016 for an initial period of two years, is advocating for evidence-based policies and innovative approaches at the global, national and local level to make water management as well as water and sanitation services attractive for investment and more disaster-resilient.

The panel calls for policies that will allow for at least a doubling of investment in water infrastructure in the next five years.



UN Photo/UNAMA

A view of Bamiyan National Park in September 2016. Afghanistan is characterized by rugged mountains, with more than half of the land area above 2,000 metres. There are also lakes and rivers, with most new water supply coming from rain and snow melt.

The report also highlights the essential need for partnerships between Governments, communities, the private sector and researchers.

The members of the panel are Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, Mauritius' President (Co-Chair); Enrique Peña Nieto, Mexico's President (Co-Chair); Malcolm Turnbull, Australia's Prime Minister; Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh's Prime Minister; János Áder, Hungary's President; Hani Mulki, Jordan's Prime Minister; Mark Rutte, Netherlands' Prime Minister; Pedro Pablo Kuczynski Godard, Peru's President; Jacob Zuma, South Africa's President; Macky Sall, Senegal's President; Emomali Rahmon, Tajikistan's President; and Han Seung-soo, Special Advisor and former Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea.

In an open letter, they conclude: “Whoever you are, whatever you do, wherever you live, we urge you get involved, and contribute to meeting this great challenge: safe water and sanitation for all, and our water resources managed sustainably. Make every drop count. It's time for action.”