

UN launches new global data collection tool to help reduce disaster, losses taking 'a huge toll'

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) kick-offed on Thursday a historic new effort to collect comprehensive global data on disaster losses.

“It is impossible to prevent disasters and to manage risk if a country is not measuring its disaster losses, particularly at the local level, for both small-scale and large-scale events,” said the Secretary-General’s newly appointed Special Representative of the for Disaster Risk Reduction, Mami Mizutori.

“Such losses are a great setback for efforts to eradicate poverty,” she added.

The [Sendai Framework](#) for Disaster Risk Reduction – the first major agreement of the post-2015 development agenda – launched its online tool: The [Sendai Framework Monitor](#).

This tool captures data on the achievement of the Framework’s five targets of reducing mortality from disasters; the numbers of disaster affected people; economic losses; and reducing damage to critical infrastructure; along with recording the number of countries with national and local strategies for disaster risk reduction.

“The Sendai Framework Monitor will provide inputs to the first report on achieving progress on implementing the Sustainable Development Goals[SDGs] in July,” Ms. Mizutori said in a statement marking the launch.

In a world where climate change and extreme weather events contribute to pushing 26 million people into poverty every year, she underscored “improving how we manage risk is vital and this requires a deeper understanding of where these losses are occurring and not just for major internationally recorded events.”

“The silent, small-recurring events, such as floods and droughts can take a huge toll on communities which lack essential health services and other coping capacities,” she concluded.

Ukraine crisis 'forgotten by the world,' senior UN relief official says, urging greater global support

With 4.4 million people in Ukraine soon to enter a fifth year of conflict, the international community has an important role to play in supporting conflict resolution and bringing about lasting peace – the only durable humanitarian solution for the affected population, a senior United Nations official has said.

“This crisis is happening in [Europe’s backyard](#), yet it is largely forgotten by the world,” UN Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Ursula Mueller told a European conference on the humanitarian crisis in eastern Ukraine and the way forward, held on Wednesday in Brussels, Belgium.

“We must do better at communicating the daily violence and intensifying deprivation in eastern Ukraine affecting millions of people,” added Ms. Mueller, who is also Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator.

She noted that the human toll of the armed conflict is appalling, with over 2,530 civilians killed and 9,000 injured. Thousands of homes, hundreds of hospitals, schools, and water and electricity facilities have been damaged due to the hostilities.

“Countless ceasefire agreements have failed to stick, and it is this political failure to bring about a definitive end to the conflict that continues to force 4.4 million conflict-affected Ukrainians to endure daily suffering and to make impossible choices,” she warned.

Hostilities aside, hundreds of lives have been lost due to mines and explosive remnants. eastern Ukraine is rapidly becoming “one of the most mined areas in the world,” which, if not addressed, will stall reconstruction and development for many years to come, she said, noting that mine clearance and risk education is urgently needed in all conflict-affected areas, particularly along the “contact line,” including the checkpoints.

With one million crossings each month across the 457-km “contact line,” thousands of people face delays and obstacles in accessing basic services, pensions, social benefits, and markets every day.

Last December, humanitarians in Ukraine consolidated a comprehensive and prioritized \$187 million Humanitarian Response Plan that sets out the urgent need to reach vulnerable Ukrainians with assistance and protection throughout 2018.

“It is sobering to note that four years ago, Ukraine had no need of a humanitarian appeal,” Ms. Mueller said.

It is clear from a 2018 assessment that needs across all sectors continue to rise, particularly in non-Government controlled areas and across the “contact line,” she said, urging the de facto authorities to facilitate the resumption of the activities of all humanitarian actors’ programmes, and appealing to the Government of Ukraine to do all it can to ensure freedom of movement of civilians, and to end the commercial ban across the contact line.

Governments should place more emphasis on drug treatment and rehabilitation, says UN-backed narcotics control board

Governments are being urged to invest more in drug treatment and rehabilitation rather than just focusing solely on prevention, the latest report by the [International Narcotics Control Board](#) (INCB) recommends.

The study, published on Thursday, reveals that only one in six people globally who needs treatment has access to these services.

Further, even where treatment is available, the quality often is poor or not in line with international standards.

“Our report shows that treatment of drug dependence is highly cost-effective and, most importantly, treatment of drug dependence should be seen as part of the ‘right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health,’ and as such, an element of the right to health,” INCB president Viroj Sumyai said in a message included in the report.

The INCB is an independent quasi-judicial body which monitors implementation of three United Nations [international drug control conventions](#).

In addition to pressing for more government action in the areas of treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration, it is calling for attention to be paid to “special populations” such as women, migrants and refugees.

The [report](#) also highlights the need for the global community to support Afghanistan, where illicit opium production and opium poppy cultivation hit a record high last year.

The [Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017](#), produced by the [UN Office on Drugs and Crime](#) (UNODC) and the country’s Ministry of Counter Narcotics, shows opium production reached 9,000 metric tonnes: a nearly 90 per cent increase over 2016 figures.

The INCB also emphasizes the need to address the global gap in access to

controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medicinal and scientific purposes.

This “global pain divide” disproportionately impacts low- and middle-income countries, according to the body.

The INCB notes that 2018 marks several anniversaries, including 70 years since the proclamation of [the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).

Considered a “milestone document” by the UN, the Declaration recognizes the inherent dignity of all human beings.

“In this context, INCB once again calls on countries to ensure that any drug control measures are in full compliance with international human rights standards and norms,” according to a press release from the organization.

“This includes protecting and guaranteeing the rights to health, the rights of alleged drug offenders, and drug users and ensuring proportional responses in dealing with drug offences, including abolishing the death penalty for drug-related offences. The Board also reiterates its strong condemnation of extrajudicial responses to drug-related criminality.”

[On ‘Zero Discrimination Day’ UN urges tackling everyday biases; ask yourself ‘what if...?’](#)

To mark Zero Discrimination Day, the United Nations agency coordinating the global effort to tackle HIV/AIDS is challenging people to recognize where everyday discrimination takes place and take action to stop it by asking themselves simple questions: ‘What if the person you bought your vegetables from was living with HIV? Would you buy tomatoes from him?’

“We will never guarantee the right to health and end the AIDS epidemic if we exclude people,” said the Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), Michel Sidibé. “However, [huge structural barriers](#) stand in the way of the health and well-being of millions.”

This year’s [Zero Discrimination Day campaign](#) invites people to ask themselves ‘what if’ questions to reflect upon their everyday actions, such as: What if the person you bought your vegetables from was living with HIV? Would you buy tomatoes from him? What if your neighbour had tuberculosis? Would you stop to chat?

UNAIDS says no one should ever be discriminated against because of their HIV

status, age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, race, ethnicity, language, geographical location or migrant status, or for any other reason.

Discrimination is often based on misinformation or fear of the unknown, the agency says, warning that allowing discrimination to continue is not only wrong, it is bad for communities, bad for the economy and bad for the future.

Ending discrimination requires action from everyone. Zero Discrimination Day is an opportunity to highlight how everyone can be a part of the transformation and take a stand towards a more fair and just society, UNAIDS says.

Zero Discrimination Day is annually observed on 1 March.

[UN condemns deadly attacks on 'blue helmets,' armed forces in Mali](#)

Secretary-General António Guterres and the United Nations Security Council have strongly condemned the attack in Mali that killed four Bangladeshi peacekeepers and seriously injured four others in Mopti region on Wednesday

“The Secretary-General recalls that attacks targeting United Nations peacekeepers may constitute [war crimes](#) under international law and that the perpetrators must be apprehended and prosecuted,” said UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric. Mr. Dujarric.

“The Secretary-General conveys his condolences to the Governments of Bangladesh and Mali and his profound sympathies to the families and loved ones of the victims,” he continued, adding that Mr. Guterres wished a swift recovery to the injured.

The Secretary-General pointed out that this incident came one day after six members of the Malian armed forces died from another improvised explosive device attack in central Mali.

“These cowardly acts will not deter [MINUSMA](#)'s [UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali] determination to support the Malian authorities in their efforts to protect civilians and accompany the Malian people in their quest for peace and stability,” the statement concluded.

At the same time, the Security Council issued a press statement condemning the attack against the MINUSMA convoy “in the strongest term,” detailing that it took place on the axis between Boni and Douentza.

The Council members also expressed their deepest condolences and sympathy to

the victims' families, Bangladeshi Government and MINUSMA and wished a speedy and full recovery to those who were injured.

Underlining that "attacks targeting peacekeepers may constitute war crimes under international law," they paid tribute to the peacekeepers who risk their lives and called on the Government to "swiftly investigate the attack and bring the perpetrators to justice."

They stressed that involvement in planning, directing, sponsoring or conducting attacks against MINUSMA peacekeepers constitute a basis for sanctions designations pursuant to Security Council resolutions.

They also stressed that those responsible for the killings should be held accountable, and urged all States, in accordance with their obligations under international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, to "cooperate actively with all relevant authorities" in this regard.

The members expressed their concern about Mali's security situation and the transnational dimension of the terrorist threat in the Sahel region, urging the Malian parties to implement the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation without further delay – noting that its full implementation and the intensification of efforts to overcome asymmetric threats can contribute to improving the security situation across the country.

Finally, the Council further spotlighted the importance that MINUSMA have the necessary capacities, including combat convoy companies, to fulfil its mandate and promote the safety and security of the UN peacekeepers.