[Piracy and high seas crime growing, becoming more sophisticated, UN Security Council told](#)

"Two-thirds of the world's surface is ocean. Nearly all of that is beyond any State's territorial waters and largely not subject to a single state criminal jurisdiction," Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the [UN Office on Drugs and Crime](#) (UNODC) [said as he briefed](#) the Council's [first-ever debate](#) targeting the [global challenge of transnational maritime crime](#).

Speaking via video conference from UNODC headquarters in Vienna, he spotlighted the root causes of transnational organized crime at sea and the linkages between terrorism, piracy and illegal trafficking.

"The high seas are open for vessels of all countries, both coastal and landlocked, to support international trade and economic cooperation, contact among peoples and the responsible use of natural resources" he maintained. "However, in recent years the freedom of navigation is being exploited by criminal groups."

"Maritime crime by its nature involves vessels, cargoes, crews, victims and illicit money flows from many regions", he explained, adding that UNODC's counter-piracy programme grew from its success [off the coast of Somalia](#), which has been plagued by high-seas crimes such as piracy, robbery and smuggling.

UNODC [continues to support](#) trials in Kenya and Seychelles, as well as the humane and secure imprisonment of convicted pirates and has completed the first phase of the Mogadishu Prison and Court Complex, which will be handed over to the Somali Government shortly.

He said that through public/private cooperation, UNODC has made advancements through the Indian Ocean Forum on Maritime Crime, which coordinates the response to heroin and charcoal smuggling that is funding terrorist groups and the Contact Group on Maritime Crime in the Sulu and Celebes Sea.

The agency also supports inter-regional cooperation against criminal activities at sea; is working to secure the container trade supply chain; and is combatting terrorism, human trafficking and migrant smuggling, wildlife and fisheries crime, firearms trafficking and emerging crimes.

"All our work at sea, where jurisdiction is complex – crime is often committed unseen and enforcement is difficult – builds on UNODC s long experience and research expertise in addressing all forms of organized crime, terrorism and corruption", stated the UNODC chief.

Mr. Fedotov emphasized the importance that countries ratify and implementing international commitments, including [UN Convention against Transnational](#)

[Organized Crime](#) and its protocols, and provide technical assistance.

High seas criminality 'a threat to Gulf of Guinea and the world'

For his part, Simeon Oyono Esono Angue, Foreign Minister of Equatorial Guinea, which presides over the Council for the month of February, pointed out that in the last decade, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea accounted for 30 per cent of attacks in African waters.

"What is happening in the Gulf of Guinea is important for all of us here", he spelled out.

Although a security threat, the Gulf also provides the resources that sustain Equatorial Guinea's economy.

"This area is of vital importance for my country's subsistence", he argued, asking "the African Union Commission, the United Nations and strategic partners represented in this room" to support efforts to ensure peace and marine security, the fight against terrorism and piracy, and the sustainable development of the countries in the region.

Speaking via teleconference from the capital of Angola, Luanda, Florentina Adenike Ukonga, Executive Secretary, Gulf of Guinea Commission, also briefed the Council and focused on crime in the region "as a threat to world peace and security".

Comprised of countries from Liberia to Angola, the Gulf of Guinea area encompasses a 6,000 km coastline, which Ms. Ukonga called "a wide expanse of water that no country in the region can successfully patrol".

However, she did make some recommendations, saying: "Transnational organized crime at sea in the Gulf of Guinea region can be reduced with a better and more coordinated intervention at national, regional and international levels,".

UNODC support to countries in countering maritime crime:

- attacks on shipping in the Gulf of Aden.
- cocaine trafficking in the Atlantic.
- heroin trafficking in the Indian Ocean.
- piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea.
- kidnap for ransom in the Sulu and Celebes Seas.
- illegal fishing in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific oceans.
- migrant smuggling in the Mediterranean and Gulf of Aden

[Libya: $202 million needed to bring life-saving aid to half a million people hit by humanitarian crisis](#)

The United Nations and its aid partners, together with the interim Government of [Libya](#), launched on Tuesday a [humanitarian response plan](#) (HRP), appealing for $202 million to bring urgent life-saving assistance to some 550,000 women, children and men affected by the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

The protracted political crisis that started in 2011 with demonstrations leading to the fall of long-time Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi has developed into an armed conflict, forcing tens of thousands of families into displacement, and driving over a million people to depend on aid to survive as they are unable to afford the most basic things.

The UN Humanitarian/Resident Coordinator for Libya, Maria Ribeiro and Dr. Milad Al Taher, Minister of Local Governance, launched the plan at an event in the Libyan capital, Tripoli, alongside Fayez al-Sarraj, President of the Presidency Council, and Dr. Ghassan Salame, head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).

"[Years of instability and insecurity](#) have taken a toll on the wellbeing of many children, women and men in Libya. Each passing year, people struggle to withstand the impact of a crisis that has destabilized the country, put them in harm's way, and ravaged the economy." said Ms. Ribeiro.

In the foreword to the HRP, Ms. Ribeiro stressed: "Libya is now producing well over one million barrels of oil a day. However, this has not yet translated into tangible benefits for people. "Many Libyans get poorer every year. Basic health and education services decay, and frustrated citizens cannot understand why oil production and increased government revenue does not lead to improved living standards, security and well-being for all in Libya".

According to the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) ([OCHA](#)), today, some 823,000 people, including around 248,000 children, are still in need of humanitarian assistance. This includes internally displaced persons and returnees, conflict-affected people, host communities and refugees and migrants who face grave human rights violations and abuse in the absence of rule of law.

The majority of people in need are in highly populated urban areas in the western and eastern regions of Libya. However, people with the most critical and severe needs are in the coastal area of Sirt and in the southern parts of the country (Murzuq, Sebha and Alkufra) where access is difficult due to violence and instability.

The funds required in the [2019 HRP](#) are meant to provide food, health care, protection especially from buried explosive hazards which threaten the lives of entire communities, water and sanitation services, shelter, basic household items, and emergency education support for the most vulnerable.

In terms of food, the plan aims to provide immediate life-saving food supplies, but also support longer term recovery with the distribution of seeds, tools and other inputs for farming and fishing communities.

If adequately funded, humanitarian agencies will set up emergency medical teams and dispatch mobile teams to areas where medical staff is limited, to reinforce disease surveillance and control.

Water and sanitation is a high priority in detention centres which are crowded and unsanitary, schools in marginalized areas and camps for internally displaced people and refugees. Families in need of shelter will receive construction materials but also cash assistance – in the form of emergency grants, rental subsidies and actual cash.

"Ultimately, the future of Libya is very much in the hands of the Libyans… and many efforts are ongoing in this regard," said Ms. do Valle Ribeiro. "But right now, while people are suffering, it is absolutely critical that the international community work together with national partners to make sure vulnerable people are supported and protected."

North-east Nigeria displacement crisis continues amid 'increased sophistication' of attackers, warns UN

An upsurge in violent attacks in crisis-riven north-east Nigeria has displaced nearly 60,000 people in the last three months, the UN migration agency, [IOM](#), said on Tuesday.

Armed extremists, notably Boko Haram militants, have contributed to a decade-long humanitarian crisis in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (BAY) states, that has spilled over into the [Lake Chad region](#).

"Since November we've seen 59,200 [displaced]," IOM Nigeria's Chief of Mission, Frantz Celestin, said in Geneva, noting that in the last two years, "we have not seen that many people on the move".

The last two months of 2018 were also marked by "an increased sophistication" of non-State armed groups, accompanied by "an increased number of attacks and success in taking towns", Mr. Celestin explained.

Decade-long crisis of displacement, abduction and killings

Civilians continue to bear the brunt of conflict that has led to widespread forced displacement and violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

Since the start of the crisis, more than 27,000 people have been killed in the three north-eastern BAY states, according to UN humanitarian coordinating office, OCHA, and thousands of women and girls have been abducted.

Government efforts to drive back the non-State armed groups that operate in the north-east of the vast country have been hindered by the Harmattan dust cloud — an annual phenomenon that sweeps across west Africa from approximately November to March.

Humanitarian hubs destroyed

In the town of Rann, which was attacked twice last month, "nobody was spared" in one assault, Mr. Celestin said.

"The MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières) clinic was burned down, (the) IOM hub was attacked, the UNICEF clinic was attacked, the WHO/ICRC's compounds were attacked," he added.

Amid ongoing insecurity, humanitarian access is limited, hampering the ability of aid agencies to assess needs comprehensively.

Tens of thousands of civilians have fled into already overcrowded camps, mainly in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state.

Overcrowding in protection camps 'one of our biggest problems'

"One of our biggest issues in north-east Nigeria in addition to the security issues is the land, access to land," Mr. Celestin said. "We have a number of camps that are overcrowded, in fact, if we were to take all of the camps together, we would have more than 249,000 people in camps that are completely congested, with Monguno (Borno) being the largest one of them."

Rumours of imminent attack are enough to convince communities to flee, the IOM official explained, noting that people had sought refuge in neighbouring countries of the Lake Chad region.

"There were a number of people who moved across a number of villages in Cameroon," Mr. Celestin said. "Some of them were returned…they crossed the border and they were turned back. And for the recent (displacement) one, I don't have the specific numbers; I've heard 30,000, but I have not been able to prove it."

In 2018, according to the UN humanitarian wing, OCHA, 7.7 million people in Nigeria were in need of humanitarian assistance, and 1.7 million people were classified as "food insecure" between October and December.

[Confidence-building measures continue in new Yemen prisoner-swap talks](#)

According to a statement from the Office of the UN Special Envoy, Martin Griffiths, representatives from the Government of Yemen and the Houthi opposition, Ansar Allah, will attend at a meeting in Amman, Jordan, on Tuesday.

A prisoner exchange agreement was signed in Sweden last December and represents the first accord between the two parties since the downward spiraling conflict began in Yemen nearly four years ago – sparking the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The UN Special Envoy's office describes this round of meetings as "technical", adding that those present will discuss steps to finalize the lists of prisoners to be released, "to advance the implementation of the [[Stockholm](#)] agreement".

The development follows a meeting on Sunday between the UN Mission to support the HudaydahAgreement ([UNMHA](#)), and Yemen's belligerents in the embattled Red Sea port of Hudaydah.

A statement by the mission noted that the head of the taskforce, retired Dutch General Patrick Cammaert, underlined the importance of the ceasefire agreement, which came into effect on 18 December.

The General also warned the parties about the fragility of the ceasefire and urged them to instruct their commanders on the ground "to refrain from any further violations that would jeopardize … the broader peace process for Yemen".

In what are described as "cordial and constructive" talks, both the Yemeni Government and Houthi delegations also reiterated their "commitment" to open up the Hudaydah to Sana'a road to allow humanitarian access to the Red Sea Mills.

Progress towards political agreement 'vital'

Meanwhile, the Security Council stressed the "vital importance" of making progress towards a political agreement to end the conflict and "relieve the humanitarian suffering of the Yemeni people".

The Council welcomed that the Hudaydah ceasefire remains in place and commended the parties' continued political commitment to uphold the Stockholm Agreement but expressed concern over alleged ceasefire violations, strongly condemning any actions that jeopardize the progress achieved through the

Stockholm Agreement.

"Military escalation and hostilities could damage trust between the parties and risk undermining the prospects for peace", they argued.

The Council recalled its request that the Secretary-General report on any non-compliance and called on all parties to exercise restraint, de-escalate tensions, honour the Stockholm Agreement and move forward "with swift implementation".

UN Security Council re-endorsed the 2018 agreements between the Yemen Government and the Houthis on:

- the city and governorate of Hudaydah and the ports of Hudaydah, Salif and Ras Issa.
- an executive mechanism on the prisoner exchange agreement.
- a statement of understanding on Taiz, as set out in the Stockholm Agreement.

Welcoming the release of both parties' prisoners, the Council called on each side to work "urgently" with the UN Chair of the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC), and the UNMHA to implement "without further delays" the agreed-upon plan to mutually redeploy forces from Hudaydah city and the ports of Hudaydah, Salif and Ras Issa.

They also called on the parties, particularly the Houthis controlling the ports, to ensure the security and safety of UNMHA personnel and unhindered movement of personnel, equipment, provisions and supplies into and within the country.

Progress must be made towards "a comprehensive political settlement to the conflict" with the full participation of women and youth, they stressed.

They reiterated their "grave concern at the continued deterioration of the humanitarian situation" and called for the rapid, safe flow of supplies and personnel into and across the country.

Reaffirming their "full support" of the RCC Chair and Special Envoy, the Council called on all parties to engage with them, asking Mr. Griffiths to "keep them closely informed of developments so that they may consider further action as necessary in support of a political settlement".

As inequality grows, the UN fights for

a fairer world

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — the UN's blueprint for a better and more sustainable future for all — calls for a reduction in inequality between and within countries. Nevertheless, global inequality is increasing. So what can be done?

Inequality is an "entrenched imbalance"

This question was raised several times by the UN in January: speaking at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos, UN chief António Guterres pointed out that, while technological progress and globalization have led to "fantastic improvements" in many areas, they have also increased inequality and marginalized millions.

And, in her annual letter, Lise Kingo, CEO of the UN Global Compact, which supports private sector efforts to do business responsibly, noted that, in 2018, we saw "a small group of individuals are getting exponentially richer as billions are left behind in poverty."

Inequality is not only rising, it is also an "entrenched imbalance," according to Richard Kozul-Wright, a globalization expert and Director with the Trade and Development agency UNCTAD.

In an interview with UN News, which you can listen to here, Mr. Kozul-Wright said that notionally high employment rates in many economies mask the fact that wages and working conditions are not improving, and that whilst wages have been stagnant for a decade, dividends on shareholdings have been recovering, benefiting financial asset holders. His remarks came in the wake of the January launch of the 2019 World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) report which showed uneven growth (both between and within countries) that is often failing to reach where it is most needed.

Will AI take away our jobs, or transform them?

The beginning of 2019 saw a focus on the role of technology on the world of work, and the impact it is having on inequality. The International Labour Organization (ILO) launched a landmark report in January: the Global Commission on the Future of Work. This study concluded that technological innovations provide "countless opportunities" for workers, but warned that, if these technologies are not deployed as part of a human-centred agenda based on investing in people, work institutions and decent, sustainable employment, we run the risk of "sleepwalking into a world that widens existing inequalities and uncertainties."

One of the key technological innovations mentioned in the report, one that garners significant media attention, is artificial intelligence (AI). A report from the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), published at the tail-end of January, noted a "quantum leap" in AI-related patents,

suggesting that AI could soon "revolutionize all areas of daily life beyond the tech world."

AI inspires as much fear as excitement, evoking a dystopian world in which more and more work is carried out by machines, with society split between a tiny super-rich elite and the rest, an unemployable mass of people with no prospect of finding work.

Kriti Sharma doesn't see things that way. She has been recognized by the UN as a Young Leader For Sustainable Development Goals, in recognition of her work to ensure that AI helps to create a better, fairer world, through her AI For Good organization, and her role in the Sage Future Makers Lab, which was set up to equip young people around the world with hands-on learning for entering a career in Artificial Intelligence.

Speaking to UN News, Ms. Sharma acknowledged that people who live in countries which are on the wrong side of the digital divide (with less access to data) will be at a disadvantage, and pointed to studies that show a gender divide is looming, with women twice as likely to lose their jobs to automation, because of the kind of work they are involved in: "We need to make sure that we give people enough opportunities to reskill themselves, otherwise we end up creating more inequality that we had before."

However, she believes that one of the biggest risks is failing to embrace this technology, and not equipping people with the skills to use it to solve global problems. Ms. Sharma laid out three ways to help ensure that AI brings about a fairer world.

First of all, it is important that a diverse group of people from many backgrounds are creating this technology, people who "understand society, policy-makers." The second point is to ensure that AI is being used to solve the "right problems," such as accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals, by diverting energy, research and funding into this area. And, lastly, international standards must be agreed upon, to make sure that the technology we create is used in a way that is safe and ethical for the world.

No progress without international cooperation

So, what is the way out of the "entrenched imbalance" of inequality? For the UN, a greater emphasis on international cooperation is an important part of the solution. The 2019 World Economic Situation and Prospects report concludes that, at a global level, a "cooperative and long-term strategy for global policy" is the way towards progress in reducing income inequality, and warns that a "withdrawal from multilateralism will pose further setbacks for those already being left behind."

As the Secretary-General told the audience in Davos, a coordinated and global response is the only way to fight inequality, because "we need to work together. There is no way we can do isolated responses to the problems we face, they are all interlinked."