

UN chief welcomes new Government in Lebanon, after eight-month impasse

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres welcomed, on Friday, the announcement of a new Government in Lebanon; the result of eight months of negotiation, following general elections last May.

He congratulated Prime Minister Saad Hariri and Lebanon's political leadership, saying that he looks forward "to working closely with the new Government to continue to address urgent political, security, humanitarian and economic challenges, including in the follow-up to the international conferences of support to Lebanon, held last year".

Lebanon is governed by a complex power-sharing system aimed at representing all its religious and political communities. The new 30-member cabinet has four women, including the interior minister, which is a first for Lebanon.

According to news reports, Mr. Hariri's new government is a balanced composition of Lebanon's rival factions. The most pressing challenge for the cabinet is to revive the country's economy and cut the national debt, which stands at about 150 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Mr. Guterres reiterated the UN's commitment to "support Lebanon in strengthening its sovereignty, stability and political independence in accordance with the [Taif Accord](#) and the Baabda Declaration", and its effective implementation of Security Council resolutions [1701](#) (2006), [1559](#) (2004) and other relevant resolutions that remain essential "to the stability of Lebanon and the region".

World in grip of 'high impact weather' as US freezes, Australia sizzles, parts of South America deluged

"High impact weather" has gripped much of the world so far this year, the UN weather agency, [WMO](#), reported on Friday, with "dangerous and extreme cold in North America, record high heat and wildfires in Australia, heavy rains in parts of South America, and heavy snow on the Alps and Himalayas.

The WMO assessment of January's weather, published on Friday, describes it as "a month of extremes", with large parts of North America gripped by bitterly

cold temperatures, caused by the influence of the [Polar Vortex](#).

In southern Minnesota, reports the UN weather agency, the wind chill factor pushed readings down to minus 65°F (-53.9°C) on 30 January. The national low temperature record was measured at minus 56 °F (-48.9°C).

“Disturbances in the jet stream and the intrusion of warmer mid-latitude air masses can alter the structure and the dynamics of the Polar Vortex, sending Arctic air south into middle latitudes and bringing warmer air into the Arctic. This is not a new phenomenon, although there is [increasing research into how it is being impacted by climate change](#)”, the agency said.

But climate sceptics should be careful before equating the frigid conditions, with a rejection of the inexorable rise in global temperatures due to global warming, or rising carbon dioxide emissions: “The cold weather in the eastern United States certainly does not disprove climate change”, said WMO Secretary-General [Petteri Taalas](#).

“In general, and at global level, there has been a decline in new cold temperature records as a result of global warming. But frigid temperatures and snow will continue to be part of our typical weather patterns in the northern hemisphere winter. We need to distinguish between short-term daily weather and long-term climate’, he added.

While The eastern US and parts of Canada are seeing record-breaking cold temperatures, Alaska and large parts of the Arctic have been warmer than average.

During January, severe winter storms also hit the eastern Mediterranean and parts of the Middle East, severely affecting vulnerable populations lacking adequate shelter, including refugees.

A cold front in the third week of January that swept south through the Arabian Peninsula, bringing a widespread dust storm from Egypt to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Iran and the United Arab Emirates, also brought heavy rain and precipitation to Pakistan and northwest India, reports WMO.

Record Alpine snow

[Parts of the European Alps saw record snowfalls earlier in January](#). In Hochfilzen in the Tirol region of Austria, more than 451 centimetres of snow fell in the first 15 days, an event statistically only expected once a century. On Friday, staff at the UN Office in Geneva were advised to leave early due to major whiteout conditions.

The German weather service or Deutscher Wetterdienst, DWD, also issued a number of top-level snow and winter weather warnings. Climate projections show that winter precipitation in Germany is expected to be more intense this winter.

The Indian Meteorological Department issued warnings on 21 January of heavy or very heavy rain and snow for Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh, prompting warnings of avalanches amid an intense cold front.

Australia, warmest January on record

Meanwhile, down under, [Australia had its warmest January on record](#), according to its Bureau of Meteorology. The month saw a new series of heatwaves unprecedented in their scale and duration, said the UN weather agency. Overall rainfall was 38% below average for January.

Australia saw an unusual extended period of heatwaves which began in early December 2018 and continued into January 2019. The city of Adelaide reached a new record high of 46.6°C on 24 January.

Australia's annual mean temperature has warmed by just over 1 °C since 1910, and summer has warmed by a similar amount. Australia's annual warming trend is consistent with that observed for the globe, according to the Bureau of Meteorology.

Heatwaves are becoming more intense, extended and frequent as a result of climate change and this trend is expected to continue.

South America: more record heat, rain, flooding

Elsewhere in the southern hemisphere, heat records tumbled in Chile. A weather station in the capital Santiago set a new record of 38.3°C on 26 January. In other parts of central Chile, temperatures topped 40°C.

Argentina has also been gripped by a heatwave, prompting a number of alerts about high temperatures. Northeast Argentina, and the adjacent parts of Paraguay, Uruguay and Brazil have been hit with extensive flooding, with well above the long-term expected average rainfall.

On January 8, the Argentine city of Resistencia recorded 224mm of rainfall, setting a new 24-hour rainfall record, much higher than the previous highest of 206mm, recorded in January 1994, according to the national meteorological service, SMN Argentina.

'No other possibility but to leave': UN News special report from the Nigeria-Cameroon border as 35,000 newly-displaced seek safety

Small shelters, some covered in the ubiquitous white sheeting provided by the UN Refugee Agency ([UNHCR](#)), dot the dusty grey sun-bleached plain around the village of Goura, in the far north-east of Cameroon.

Hebibi Toudjum's shelter is so low to the ground she needs to crawl into it.

She arrived from the village of Rann 7km across the border in Nigeria six days ago after fleeing a killing spree perpetrated by the terrorist group Boko Haram.

"They came and killed many people and set the town alight," she told UN News, which has a team on assignment in the region. "Everyone was scared, so we came here where it is safe," she added.

Hebibi Toudjum is one of around 35,000 people who have fled Rann in the last two weeks after Boko Haram extremist fighters, repeatedly attacked the town.

Regional insurgency

The outlawed terrorist group has been active in this impoverished corner of north-east Nigeria for over a decade. Thousands of people not just in Nigeria but over the border in Cameroon and Chad, have been killed, many summarily executed. The livelihoods of tens of thousands of others have been destroyed in the insurgency, as regional governments struggle to put an end to the ongoing violence.

This is where they need to be now if they want to stay alive –
Allegra Baiocchi, UN Coordinator, Cameroon.

The refugees left Rann following the recent withdrawal of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) which came to secure the city after an attack on January 14. The MNJTF was set up by the affected countries – Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria, Niger and Benin – to counter Boko Haram, and other terrorist groups which are gaining ground across the Lake Chad region.

"When the military left," said Kellou Maloum Modu, "we had no other possibility but to leave. My own brother died. I pray that God will keep Boko Haram away from me and my family."

Fearful to return

For now, the 35,000 Nigerian refugees are safe in Cameroon, although many are once again putting themselves at risk by returning to Rann on foot, to collect a few personal possessions which were not looted or burnt.

Speaking to UN News on a visit to Goura on Friday, the [UN Resident Coordinator in Cameroon](#), Allegra Baiocchi said, "I have seen many fearful people here. whose lives have been destroyed by Boko Haram." The people who came here really had no choice. This is where they need to be now if they want to stay alive."

UN response needs more funding to scale up

The United Nations and its partners have responded to the sudden influx into Goura by providing basic services in what is now a makeshift refugee

settlement. Some 13,000 people have received food rations and each registered refugee is getting six litres of clean water a day, some way below the recommended 15 litre minimum.

“The response from humanitarian workers here has been impressive in what is an extremely challenging environment,” the UNHCR, or [UN refugee agency's](#) top official in Cameroon Geert Van de Castele said in Gaura. “We need to scale up the response keeping in mind the local population; that is the next step and I am hopeful we can achieve, with increased funding.”

In January, the UN, in coordination with the Government and aid partners, announced its 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan which focuses on the whole of the country, including areas affected by Boko Haram. Around 4.3 million Cameroonians, mostly women and children, are now in need of lifesaving assistance.

[Call to revitalize ‘language of the ancestors’ for survival of future generations: Indigenous chief](#)

Hundreds of ancestral languages have gone silent in recent generations, taking with them the culture, knowledge and traditions of the people who spoke them. To preserve and revitalize those that remain, the United Nations on Friday officially launched the International Year of Indigenous Languages, at UN Headquarters in New York.

Delivering inaugural remarks, Kanen'tó:kon Hemlock, a Mohawk community Bear Clan Chief from Kahnawà:ke, paid tribute to Mother Earth.

Kanen'tó:kon Hemlock, representative of the Mohawk Nation, at the high-level event to launch the International Year of Indigenous Languages, at UN Headquarters in New York., by UN Photo/Manuel Elias

“As indigenous people, our languages are those of the earth and it is those languages that we use to speak with our mother”, he said, saying “the health of our languages is connected to the health of the earth”, which is being abused.

“We lose our connection and our ancient ways of knowing of the earth when our languages fall silent”, he explained, stressing that “for the sake of future generations we must ensure they too can speak the language of our ancestors”.

UN General Assembly President María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés underscored the

close connection between indigenous languages and ancestral culture and knowledge, saying that “they are much more than tools for communication, they are channels for human legacies to be handed down”.

“Each indigenous language has an incalculable value for humankind”, she said, calling each “a treasure laden with history, values, literature, spirituality, perspectives and knowledge, developed and garnered over millennium”.

“When a language dies,” she spelled out “it takes with it all of the memory bound up inside it”.

Indigenous languages are symbols of their people’s identity, “vectors for values, ways of life and expressions of their connections with earth”, according to the Assembly president, who called them “crucial” for survival.

Indigenous languages also open the door to ancestral practices and knowledge, such as in agriculture, biology, astronomy, medicine and meteorology. Although there are still 4,000 in existence across the globe, many are on the brink of extinction.

“This International Year must serve as a platform from which we can reverse the alarming trend of the extinction of indigenous languages”, to recover and preserve them, including by implementing education systems that favor the use of a Mother tongue, Ms. Espinosa stated.

For his part, Evo Morales, President of Bolivia, addressed the survival of indigenous people and languages under the force of colonialization.

“Today we come here having survived the colonial era which has tried to bring our elders to their knees and squash them beneath the weight of injustice”, he said.

Mr. Morales called on those present to work together through dialogue to promote policies which help to preserve Indigenous lives, identities, values and cultures.

There are 770 million Indigenous people across 90 countries, constituting six per cent of the global population, living in many biodiverse regions, the President noted. And yet “capitalist greed” has left them among the poorest 15 per cent of the population, he stated.



UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Cultural performance by the Kwakwaka Dancers at the High-level Event to launch the International Year of Indigenous Languages.

Warning that greed was driving the move to annex yet more indigenous resources, he said that there was a “criminal silence” on the part of world leaders “when it comes to speaking out against these phenomena”, pointing out the hypocrisy of lecturing indigenous people about democracy and human rights, while quashing their community identities and suppressing languages at risk of dying out.

“Language is culture, language is an expression of a cosmovision and that is a way of seeing the world”, he said. “If languages disappear... the memories that they bear will disappear as well as the people that speak them”.

Encouraging everyone to “preserve the knowledge and wisdom of our ancestors”, Mr. Morales urged that a new paradigm be ushered in, one which is the fruit of indigenous peoples and “champions the Mother Earth”.

[Six months into DR Congo's deadliest Ebola outbreak, top UN official praises 'brave' response effort](#)

“Brave” UN teams and partners leading the fight against deadly Ebola disease in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) along with Government authorities and peacekeepers there, have been key in helping protect

communities, a top World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) official said on Friday, six months after the latest outbreak began.

Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, WHO [Regional Director for Africa](#), was speaking to journalists in Geneva, where she said that challenges persist in overcoming virus hotspots in the north-east of the country.

“We have some 500 staff on the ground at the moment, the great majority from the DRC, and also from WHO offices across the African region. Some of these people have been fighting Ebola since the first 2018 outbreak began in the west of the DRC in May. These brave people and colleagues really do make us all proud.”

To date, Ebola has claimed 461 lives in North Kivu and Ituri provinces, and 258 people have recovered from the illness, which attacks the immune system, causing internal-bleeding and major organ damage, if unchecked.

Dr. Moeti said that although there have been successes in bringing the disease under control in Beni and Mangina, the outbreak continues to affect a wide geographical area. There has also been a rise in the number of reported cases, including in Katwa health zone.

In addition to nine treatment centres, WHO has traced more than 45,000 people who have come into contact with suspected Ebola sufferers.

More than 69,000 people have been vaccinated in DRC to date, including 21,000 health-workers and 16,000 children.

More than 30 million people have been screened at the country’s borders and vaccinations have also begun in neighbouring South Sudan and Uganda.

Insecurity remains one of the biggest obstacles stopping health-workers from reaching those at risk in the vast country, in an area where more than 100 armed groups operate.

“The situation in North Kivu is actually relatively calm compared to the pre-election period, and obviously calm is a relative term in North Kivu and Ituri, there’s a constant threat of violence and attack from non-government forces,” said Dr. Mike Ryan, Assistant Director-General for Emergencies at WHO.

“But I would echo Dr. Moeti’s thanks to our colleagues in [MONUSCO](#) (the UN’s stabilization mission in DRC) and the Force Intervention Brigade who continue to provide active defence for Beni, Butembo and surrounding areas.”

An additional obstacle to healthworkers is suspicion among communities, Dr. Ryan added, noting that attacks on workers “are an almost daily occurrence because of the nature of the work we do”.

Despite the challenges, major advances are being made in tackling DRC’s worst Ebola outbreak, helped by a new therapy now being tested on patients with their consent.

"This is the first time we've managed to deliver so many therapeutics with the higher standard of care into an integrated system for managing patients in a safe and dignified way," he said.

"The results are encouraging in the sense anecdotally when you look at those results you are seeing on the face of it higher levels of survival", he said, adding that "we have to be extremely careful, there are lots of biases there regarding the condition of the patient when they arrive...but we are certainly encouraged by the data we're seeing."