

UN Assembly calls on Member States to 'accelerate progress' on goal of universal health coverage

12 December 2017 – The United Nations on Tuesday called for greater efforts on the part of its Member States to ensure universal health coverage, and designated 12 December as International Universal Health Coverage Day.

In one of the two resolutions adopted today, the UN General Assembly – composed of all 193 UN Member States – called for efforts ensure that all people have equal access, without discrimination of any kind, to quality promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative basic health services.

It also encouraged all Member States to promote the effective, full and meaningful participation of all – in particular those who are vulnerable or in vulnerable situations – in the design, implementation and monitoring of law, policies and programmes relevant to realizing the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and to implementing the health-related Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), including strategies for universal health coverage.

Also in the resolution, the General Assembly called for reinforcing the protection of medical and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their means of transport and equipment, and hospitals and other medical facilities, especially in armed conflict, consistent with their specific obligations under international humanitarian law.

Further, the Assembly also announced that it would hold a high-level meeting in 2019 on universal health coverage.

Acting on a related text, the Assembly proclaimed 12 December as International Universal Health Coverage Day and invited all Member States, entities of the UN system and all other relevant stakeholders, including the civil society and the private sector to observe the International Day annually “in an appropriate manner and in accordance with national priorities, through education and activities, in order to raise awareness of the need for strong and resilient health systems and universal health coverage.”

SEE ALSO: [WHO Factsheet on Universal Health Coverage](#)

New compact to improve refugee response ‘a chance to chart a different course’ – UN agency chief

12 December 2017 – The head of the United Nations refugee agency on Tuesday kicked off in Geneva a dialogue on protection challenges with a stark warning: the tragedy of forced displacement has deepened – one year after the world pledged to improve its response to refugee situations.

“Our mission is [more urgent than ever](#),” said Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, opening the High Commissioner’s [10th Dialogue on Protection Challenges](#), which focused on the proposed [Global Compact for Refugees](#).

“The exodus from Myanmar into Bangladesh is the most visible, but innocent civilians still flee for their lives in CAR [Central African Republic], the DRC [Democratic Republic of the Congo], Iraq, South Sudan, Syria and elsewhere,” he continued.

The meeting, which takes place from 12-13 December, is taking stock of the results of the 2016 [New York Declaration](#) – a global deal that committed the UN’s 193 Member States to share responsibility for the world’s refugees and hosting communities, including by drawing up a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF).

The High Commissioner noted that throughout the world people are still fleeing their homes – victims of a collective failure by the international community to prevent and resolve conflicts.

The global compact should be the instrument to transform [...] commitment into action, so that refugees have a fighting chance to rebuild productive and meaningful lives UN refugee agency chief Filippo Grandi

“The global attention on refugees may wax and wane amidst the vagaries of international politics, but the New York Declaration remains as a high-level political commitment to change the way we respond to refugee crises,” he said.

“The global compact should be the instrument to transform that commitment into action, so that refugees have a fighting chance to rebuild productive and meaningful lives, and contribute to the communities that host them and to their own futures,” stressed Mr. Grandi.

He called for the compact to change how the international community engages with refugee issues, maintaining that “refugees pay the price” of failure, “as do the handful of countries who bear the brunt of hosting refugees

without reliable support from others with greater means,” citing closed borders, restricted access and the politicization of refugee movements.

“At a time when multilateralism is faltering in other spheres, the global compact on refugees is our chance to chart a different course through practical engagement and cooperation based on humanitarian values,” he underscored.

Global compact will build on existing framework for refugee protection

Mr. Grandi described the New York Declaration as a milestone, giving refugee situations high political visibility and commitment and an important reaffirmation of fundamental humanitarian values.

He praised the 13 countries that have already started the CRRF rollout, and those who have participated in reviewing key lessons learned, along with experiences from other large-scale refugee situations and welcomed the results of recent pledging conferences.

Some 500 representatives – including from governments, international organisations, local authorities and civil society – from around the world are expected to attend the talks.

The global compact will build on existing international framework for refugee protection, including the [1951 Refugee Convention](#), and aims to share more equitably the responsibility for hosting the world’s refugees and helping them to rebuild their lives.

It will set out concrete steps for governments and others to ensure that refugee-hosting communities get the support they need and that solutions to their plight are sought from the start of a refugee situation.

In February, UNHCR will begin with governments and other stakeholders, [formal consultations](#) on the compact, which the High Commissioner will propose to the UN General Assembly towards the end of 2018.

‘Invest in the future, not the past;’ green business key to winning war on climate change – UN chief

12 December 2017 – Those who fail to bet on a green economy will be living in a grey future, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres warned Tuesday, calling for greater ambition by governments, civil society, the private sector and finance partners to help tackle the global climate challenge.

[“Green business is good business,”](#) the UN chief said, speaking at the opening of the One Planet Summit, in Paris, alongside French President Emmanuel Macron and Jim Yong Kim, the President of World Bank.

“Renewables are now cheaper than coal-powered energy in dozens of developed and developing countries [...] we need to invest in the future, not the past,” he added.

The Summit, taking place on 12 December, the anniversary of the adoption of the historic [Paris Agreement](#), is providing an opportunity to fast-forward action on climate change.

In his remarks, Mr. Guterres pointed to the large under-utilized global financial resources and called for ensuring that financing – which by its nature is forward-looking – is used for the future of people and the planet in addition to being used for profit.

“It is a fact that fossil fuels remain heavily subsidized – meaning we are investing in our own doom,” he emphasized, noting cities, regions, states and territories across the globe along with thousands of private enterprises – including major oil and gas companies – are already taking climate action, resulting in new industries and markets as well as in healthier environments and more jobs.

“I have heard it said that the stone age did not end because we ran out of stones. We don’t have to wait to run out of coal and oil to end the age of fossil fuels,” he stated, adding: “The message is simple: those who fail to bet on a green economy will be living in a grey future.”

The UN chief stressed that it is not funds but trust that is lacking. “We need to fix it. This means, first and foremost, ensuring that rich countries honor their commitment and provide \$100 billion a year through 2020 for developing countries.”

It also means that the [Green Climate Fund](#) must become an effective and flexible instrument, especially for the most vulnerable countries such as small island States and least developed countries. “These two conditions are essential for trust between developed and developing countries,” he emphasized.

“We need to build trust and reduce risk, make the best use of available resources, and find innovative ways of financing, such as green bonds whose viability and success are already realities,” the Secretary-General said.

Also at the summit, Jim Yong Kim, the President of the World Bank Group, [announced](#) that the Group will no longer finance upstream oil and gas after 2019 and that it would be mobilizing finance for climate change impact mitigation and resilience.

The International Finance Corporation (IFC) a subsidiary of the World Bank Group will invest up to \$325 million in the Green Cornerstone Bond Fund, a partnership with the asset management company, Amundi, to create the largest ever green-bond fund dedicated to emerging markets.

“This is a \$2 billion initiative aiming to deepen local capital markets, and expand and unlock private funding for climate-related projects. The fund is already subscribed at over \$1 billion,” read the announcement.

[New Year could bring more misery to children in DR Congo’s restive Kasai region, warns UNICEF](#)

12 December 2017 – New Year could bring more misery to children in DR Congo’s restive Kasai region, warns UNICEF. In the coming year, severe acute malnutrition could claim the lives of more than 400,000 children under the age of five in the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s volatile Kasai region, the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) warned Tuesday.

“This [nutrition crisis and food insecurity](#) in the Kasai region follows the displacement of thousands of families who have been living for months in very harsh conditions,” said Tajudeen Oyewale, the acting head of UNICEF in the African nation, in a news release underlining the scale of the catastrophe.

“The true scale of the problem is becoming clear as people are returning home in some areas where the security situation has improved and health services have started functioning again.”

According to estimates, at least 750,000 children across the Kasai region are acutely malnourished and some 25 health zones are in a situation of nutritional crisis – a state when the severely has exceeded emergency thresholds.

The dire situation is primarily the result of over 18 months of insecurity and violence that has resulted in displacement of over 1.4 million and has severely reduced agricultural production with some two-thirds of households not to work their land to grow crops.

The level of food insecurity is not expected to improve before June next year as the planting seasons for crops which would have been harvested by then has already been lost.

Making matters much worse is the “devastation” of health facilities, according to UNICEF.

Approximately 220 health centres have been destroyed, looted or damaged, access to treatment for communicable diseases as well as care for the children severely malnourished extremely difficult.

“Guaranteeing access to basic health and nutrition services to returning

populations is essential to help malnourished children survive and thrive,” said Mr. Oyewale.

In response to the crisis, UNICEF and partners provided therapeutic nutritional care to more than 50,000 children aged between 6-59 months in the region this year. However, lack of resources has severely impacted aid delivery.

With just days remaining in the year, the UN agency has received a mere 15 per cent of the funds it required for 2017.

[UN and partners launch \\$4.4 billion regional appeal for more than five million Syrian refugees](#)

12 December 2017 – A more than \$4 billion appeal has been launched to support what one senior United Nations official called on Tuesday “a lost generation” of Syrian refugees caught up in the ongoing conflict.

Well over five million Syrians need help, according to Amin Awad, the Director for the Middle East and North Africa of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)).

He added that nearly four million people in countries neighbouring Syria including Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq also need relief after years spent supporting those displaced since fighting began in 2011.

Syria remains the [biggest humanitarian crisis of our time](#). Seven million inside plus 5.3 million outside; 12.3 million people. Another 10 million who stayed put in Syria did not leave their homes but they are cut off. They’re cut off (from) livelihoods, services in education, health, separated from relatives, friends and they are in need also of humanitarian assistance. The whole nation is in need of humanitarian assistance,” Mr. Awad explained.

The UNHCR official said that the situation of 1.7 million Syrian refugee children was particularly worrying, as more than four in 10 are out of school.

More on the 2018 Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) [here](#)

Supplying the 5.3 million refugees with enough food to eat is also critical, Mr. Awad added, given that insufficient funding in 2015 coincided with one million Syrians risking their lives as they went in search of shelter in western Europe.

“We are urging the international community and the donors in particular for many reasons: one, the vast number of refugees that we have in the region, the geopolitical status of that region, the risk that 5.3 million people can bring to an area, a small region already as volatile as it is if there is no assistance. We have had the experience of 2015 and we should not repeat that. I think we should meet the needs of these refugees in a timely manner as quickly as possible,” said Mr. Awad.