

[FROM THE FIELD: Liberia boosts efforts to guard against rising seas](#)

With rising sea levels due to climate change already affecting coastal communities in Liberia, there are fears that densely populated parts of the capital Monrovia could be submerged, unless action is taken.

It's projected that a one-metre sea level rise could permanently inundate 95 square kilometres of land in Liberia's coastal zone, which is already under threat of heavy seasonal rains and continuing erosion.

What's more, eroding infrastructure is causing massive repercussions for housing, education and livelihoods, with fishing chief among them.

But the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)) has taken "28,000 steps in the right direction" during the second phase of its Coastal Defense Project to reduce vulnerabilities and build resilience. [Here's](#) the full story.

[UN refugee agency 'deeply shocked' at stabbing death of 'deeply courageous' Polish mayor](#)

The Mayor of the historic port city of Gdansk in Poland, has died in hospital after being stabbed at a televised charity event on Sunday, prompting the UN refugee agency, [UNHCR](#), to issue [a statement](#) on Monday praising him as "a deeply courageous, moral leader, who showed the way in helping refugees and migrants to integrate".

Pawel Adamowicz, had been mayor since 1998, and according to Montserrat Feixas Vihe, UNHCR Regional Representative for Central Europe, "he received hate mail for his pro-refugee stance, but did not weaken in his belief that integration – which brings with it new talents, new skills, new colours, new languages, and a new mentality – was a winning proposition for everyone in his city."

According to news reports, the alleged assailant, is a 27-year-old Gdansk native, with a track record of violence, who was released from prison only last month.

The UN Refugee Agency, is deeply shocked and saddened to hear that

the Mayor of Gdansk, Pawel Adamowicz, has died – *UNHCR statement*

After attacking Mr. Adamowicz on stage, in front of hundreds of onlookers, he told the crowd that he held a grudge against the mayor's former political party, after he was imprisoned in 2014 for violent offences. There is no evidence so far, that his attack on the mayor was politically motivated.

There has been an outpouring of grief across Poland following the assassination, with President Andrzej Duda, reportedly describing it as an "evil hard to imagine". He has declared the day of the mayor's funeral, a day of national mourning.

The UNHCR statement said that agency staff were "deeply shocked and saddened" at the news of the Mayor's death.

Mayor Adamowicz launched the Gdansk "Immigrant Integration Model" after meeting Pope Francis in 2016, a model that has inspired other Polish cities, said UNHCR, adding that "our thoughts are with his family, friends and colleagues."

In February last year, UNHCR [published this story](#) about Mr. Adamowicz's efforts to show "a new kind of solidarity" with migrants and refugees, building on the city's famous legacy as a birthplace of the struggle to throw off Communist dictatorship.

"For me, it is all about the moral arguments," he told the agency, adding that the integration model, which was subsequently taken up by other cities in Poland, needed to be established.

"Most important are our Christian values, the humanitarian obligation to help people. I felt it was up to us to take a lead," he said.

[Ahead of street protests, UN rights chief urges Guatemalan Government to respect democratic freedoms](#)

With demonstrations expected to take place in various Guatemalan cities on Monday and Tuesday, the [UN human rights chief](#), Michelle Bachelet, is urging the Guatemalan Government to guarantee freedom of expression and opinion, and the right to peaceful assembly and association.

"Freedom of expression, without fear of reprisals and intimidation, is the backbone of democracy," Ms. Bachelet said. "A culture of human rights and peace is strengthened when diverse social groups can express themselves in

the public space and freely exercise their rights.”

The demonstrations have been organized by various civil society groups to highlight several issues, including the [Government’s unilateral decision on 7 January](#) to terminate the work of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), a UN anti-corruption body set up 11 years ago in conjunction with the Guatemalan Government. CICIG’s mandate was initially due to run through 3 September this year.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights also expressed great concern about the ongoing erosion of various State institutions, including recent attacks on the independence of the Constitutional Court.

Freedom of expression, without fear of reprisals and intimidation, is the backbone of democracy – UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet

“I would also like to stress that it is essential to guarantee the rule of law, judicial independence and impartiality and respect for democratic institutions, particularly the Constitutional Court, the judiciary, the National Human Rights Institution, the Public Prosecutor’s Office and the Electoral Tribunal,” Ms. Bachelet said.

Noting the crucial role played by these institutions in respecting and guaranteeing human rights, the rule of law and democracy, she explained that “the proper exercise of their functions is fundamental in the current context and for the general elections to be held in the coming months”.

She added that “respect for their safety and their physical integrity, as well as that of their families, must be guaranteed by the State of Guatemala in compliance with its international human rights obligations.”

Ms. Bachelet said she and her Guatemala office stand ready to continue to support the State authorities in fulfilling their international human rights obligations and commitments.

[World ‘not yet on track’ to ensure children a better future: UN rights chief](#)

Some Member States have fallen short of offering a better future to children who continue to die prematurely or fall victim to poverty, trafficking and slavery, UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet said on Monday.

In her opening address to the 80th Session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in Geneva – which reviews the records of Member States according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child – the [High Commissioner](#) noted that 2019 marked the pact's 30th anniversary, and that it was “by far the most widely ratified human rights treaty”.

Despite this almost universal recognition, and the fact that it had “driven significant progress in many countries” with laws passed to protect youngsters in “virtually every State party”, Ms Bachelet insisted that “not all States Parties ensure, to the maximum extent, the survival and development of all children everywhere”.

And in an appeal to listen to youngsters’ “ideas, innovations and solutions”, she insisted: “In almost every context, children are still viewed as passive recipients of care, their voices dismissed or ignored.”

This week, the UN panel of 18 independent experts is set to review the reports of Bahrain, Belgium, Guinea, Italy, Japan and Syria, in exchanges with representatives from the countries involved.

Tragically, there is still much to be done before we realise the four core principles of the Convention: non-discrimination, the child's best interests; right to life, survival and development and right to be heard – *Michelle Bachelet, UN Rights Chief*

Turning to another powerful human rights platform – the 2030 Agenda, with its 17 [Sustainable Development Goals](#), which world leaders adopted in September 2015 – “we are not yet on track” to deliver on its promises, the High Commissioner insisted.

“Based on current trends, more than 60 countries will miss the SDG neo-natal mortality target,” Ms. Bachelet said, citing a [UN Children's Fund](#) (UNICEF) estimate that 60 million children under five, will die between 2017 and 2030 from preventable causes.

On trafficking and slavery, the High Commissioner explained that children were “particularly vulnerable” to its worst manifestations: forced labour – involving some 5.5 million youngsters – domestic slavery, sexual slavery and forced marriage.

Testimonies collected by the staff and other UN bodies “clearly indicate that child migrants and internally displaced children, in every region, are at heightened risk”, she said, “and as you know, these populations are growing sharply”.

Quoting from a recent study by a UN Special Rapporteur – or independent rights expert – Ms Bachelet noted that the share of children trafficked for the purpose of forced labour “is increasing, and the share of children involved in forced labour is particularly high”.

The High Commissioner also cited data from the United Nations Office on Drugs

and Crime ([UNODC](#)), indicating that [one in three](#) detected victims of trafficking was a child.

Victims included almost double the number of girls than boys, she continued, while the trafficking of children for sexual exploitation “greatly facilitated by digital technologies, which create new marketplaces and streamline the organisation of trafficking networks”.

And on the “millions of girls” who become mothers while they are still children, Ms Bachelet underlined that the practice damaged their health and entrenched a destructive cycle of poverty.

Armed conflict had also “traumatized and harmed millions more, she continued, adding that in 2016, UN monitors had verified more than 20,000 boys and girls who had been forcibly recruited by armed groups “as fighters or, in effect, as slaves”.

“These numbers are a calamity,” the UN rights chief said. “Each of them stands for a precious individual, whose hopes and dreams are being dashed. Tragically, there is still much to be done before we realise the four core principles of the Convention: non-discrimination, the child’s best interests; right to life, survival and development and right to be heard.”

The number of ratifications of the Convention on the Rights of the Child remains unchanged at 196, although South Sudan recently ratified the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, bringing the total number of ratifications to 168.

South Sudan also ratified the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, which now has 175 States parties.

Recalling a special event at the UN in Geneva in December to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), Ms Bachelet noted the appeal by 16-year-old Nayeli Quiroz, from Ecuador, who said more youngsters should be able to participate in decisions that directly affect them.

“We need the power, the clarity, the foresight and the good sense of these children and adolescents to help us overturn many current trends”, the High Commissioner said. “Empowering them, respecting their dignity and upholding their rights benefits everyone.”

[UN welcomes progress in former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia naming](#)

dispute

The Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for the naming dispute between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Matthew Nimetz, has welcomed the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia parliament's decision to ratify an agreement on a new name for the latter country, following a dispute that has lasted some 28 years.

In a statement released on Friday, Mr. Nimetz congratulated the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia parliament and the country's citizens – who approved the name change in a referendum held in September 2018 – for the move, and the democratic manner in which the process was undertaken: “this historic Agreement between two neighbours opens the door to a new relationship between them and to a firmer basis for peace and security in the Balkans. I look forward to completion of the process as outlined in the Agreement,” said Mr. Nimetz, adding that the United Nations remains “committed to working with the two Parties in finally resolving the difference between them.”

However, in order for the country to be renamed the Republic of North Macedonia, the Greek parliament must also vote to ratify the deal. On Sunday, it was reported that the issue has led to a Greek government crisis, with the governing coalition split over the name change: Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras is reportedly planning to call a confidence vote, which is expected to be held on Wednesday.

The dispute stretches back to 1991, when the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia declared its independence from Yugoslavia, and announced its intention to be named “Macedonia.” Neighbouring Greece refused to recognise the name, insisting that only the northern Greek region of the same name should be called Macedonia, and arguing that the former Yugoslav Republic's use of the name was a challenge to Greek sovereignty.