

# Addressing Human Rights Council, UN rights chief decries some States' lack of cooperation

6 June 2017 – In a major address in Geneva, the United Nations human rights chief today stressed that denying access or not cooperating with UN bodies would not diminish scrutiny of a Government's human rights record.

Addressing the 35th session of the Human Rights Council, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, decried some Governments for cutting off or selectively choosing how they cooperate with his office and UN bodies.

"It would be intolerable if delegations were to conclude that by maintaining minimal engagement with the human rights mechanisms they can [evade or betray those commitments](#) to their own peoples, and to the peoples of the world," the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said in an oral update this morning to the Council.

He underscored that every Government is party to at least one of the nine [core human rights treaties](#) and has accepted that it "is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedom."

Whether or not individual leaders consider this truth convenient, it is nonetheless a fact that denial of human rights in one country concerns every State in the Organization

Mr. Zeid noted that the world sees increasingly the results of discrimination, deprivation and injustice – in the escalation of crises and suffering, and the outbreak of war. "Whether or not individual leaders consider this truth convenient, it is nonetheless a fact that denial of human rights in one country concerns every State in the Organization," he stressed.

With a mandate from the international community to promote and protect all human rights, his office ([OHCHR](#)) represents the world's commitment to universal ideals of human dignity. Its thematic priorities include strengthening international human rights mechanisms; enhancing equality and countering discrimination; and early warning and protection of human rights in situations of conflict, violence and insecurity. It also supports the work of UN human rights mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council.

Taking place at the UN Office in Geneva, the Council's session will last three weeks and tackle a range of human rights issues currently before the world.

### *Refusal to cooperate with UN bodies*

The senior UN official also spoke out against some Governments' decisions to keep UN rights experts out of their borders, and rallied against "absolutely unacceptable" incidents of threats and insults directed at UN Special Rapporteurs.

"I strongly contest the self-serving argument presented by some, that this Council should avoid addressing [country situations](#) – a view which is usually voiced by leaders of States that feature few independent institutions, and which sharply curtail fundamental freedoms," he stated.

He specified, for example, the Government of Burundi, which was elected to the Council in 2015, yet "continues to commit some of the most serious human rights violation dealt with by this Council" and has suspended all cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR).

"In September the Council's independent mission was declared persona non grata, and the current Commission of Inquiry has not been able to enter the country," Mr. Zeid added.

He noted a number of countries which are not members of the Council, which have not permitted any visits by Special Procedures representatives, such as Special Rapporteurs.

Included in this group is Syria, which has cut off access to OHCHR and the Syrian Commission of Inquiry.

"This is notwithstanding the continued horrific suffering of the Syrian people, particularly in besieged communities. I repeat my call for the release of all detainees wrongfully imprisoned in Syria," Mr. Zeid urged.

As for the already-dire situation in the Kasai provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which continues to deteriorate, spreading to other provinces and across the border with Angola, Mr. Zeid said that given the difficulties in accessing the areas where violations and abuses are occurring, he will be dispatching a team to the region next week to meet with people fleeing the attacks.

"Unless I receive appropriate responses from the Government regarding a joint investigation by 8 June, I will insist on the creation of an international investigative mechanism for the Kasais," he stated.



The Human Rights Council chamber in Geneva. UN Photo/Elma Okic

Turning to representatives of his office, Mr. Zeid expressed very serious concern about intimidation and reprisals brought on by State officials against people who engage with the UN on human rights. He specifically mentioned smear and hate campaigns against the Special Rapporteurs on Myanmar, Summary Executions in the context of discussions on the Philippines,

and on Iran.

“When Government or other officials intimidate, arrest or harm these individuals, they are attacking a fundamental element of the work of this Council and the UN, and it is our responsibility to do all we can to protect them,” Mr. Zeid said.

He noted also that the Council’s next annual report would focus on reprisals, and called for cooperation with Assistant Secretary-General Andrew Gilmour, who is leading UN action on that issue.

*Condemning terrorism in all forms*

Mr. Zeid began his address with a strong condemnation of terrorism throughout the world.

“The brutality of Da’esh [also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL] and other terrorist groups seemingly knows no bounds,” he said.

“Yesterday, my staff reported to me that bodies of murdered Iraqi men, women and children are still lying on the streets of the al-Shira neighbourhood of western Mosul, after at least 163 people were shot and killed by Da’esh on 1 June to prevent them from fleeing.”

After condemning the attacks, he called for Governments to eradicate the threat, but he cautioned against trampling on people’s rights.

“Please remember this: for every citizen wrongfully detained under a vague anti-terrorism law, and humiliated, abused, or tortured, it is not simply one individual who then nurses a grievance against the authorities, but most of their family too. Send one innocent person to prison, and you may deliver six or seven family members into the hands of those who oppose the government, with a few who may even go further than that.”

The UN Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the UN system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and make recommendations on them. It was setup by the UN General Assembly in March 2006, and replaced the Commission on Human Rights.

The Council is made up of 47 UN Member States which are elected by the General Assembly.

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**[Sri Lanka: UN assists storm victims,](#)**

## seeks to contain diseases ‘spiralling out of control’

6 June 2017 – In the aftermath of a devastating tropical storm in Sri Lanka, United Nations agencies are working to provide shelters and other emergency kits while seeking to contain a mosquito-borne disease that is starting to “spiral out of control.”

Heavy flooding, landslides and flash floods caused by Tropical Cyclone Mora in Myanmar and Bangladesh, and torrential monsoon rains have affected some 684,000 people in south and central Sri Lanka. The flooding, which is believed to be the worst in over a decade, has left at least 212 people dead and 79 missing.

Sri Lanka’s Disaster Management Centre (DMC) estimates that over 2,500 houses were destroyed and nearly 15,900 damaged. These numbers could rise as data from damage assessments is compiled in the coming weeks.

The International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) plans to provide 3,700 shelter repair kits, 5,000 non-food relief item kits and 250 temporary shelters, with funding sought from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund ([CERF](#)), said the UN migration agency in a [press release](#). The intervention will help an estimated 74,750 people.

Nearly 22,000 people are still sheltering in over 200 overcrowded sites, including schools, temples and churches, the agency said.

In flood-affected areas people are expected to return to their homes as water levels recede. But in landslide-affected areas, people currently staying in evacuation centres or with relatives and friends are unlikely to be able to return to their homes in the short term.

“There will likely be a need to track displacement, return, and site closure. People will need shelter and other non-food relief items (when they leave the sites) and we will need to ensure that aid is distributed at the location most useful and appropriate for each affected family,” said IOM Sri Lanka Chief of Mission Giuseppe Crocetti.

On Friday, the UN Humanitarian Country Team launched an emergency response plan seeking \$22.7 million to address the critical life-saving and protection needs of 374,000 people in seven districts, targeting four priority sectors, including shelter, food, health and water and sanitation.

IOM will co-lead the emergency shelter and non-food item sector, which is appealing for \$6.5 million.

Meanwhile, the UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) is calling for \$3.5 million to keep vulnerable children safe.

“So far we have delivered water and sanitation supplies, we are working

on education supplies, strengthening health systems and rehabilitating basic health services and working on disease control for both diarrhoea and dengue which is starting to spiral out of control," said UNICEF country representative Tim Sutton.

He said flood waters have not receded in the southern district of Matara, raising fears of mosquito-borne disease transmission. He noted that so far this year there have already been more than 53,000 cases of dengue, a mosquito-borne tropical disease, which causes severe flu-like symptoms. It is a leading cause of death among children and adults in Sri Lanka.

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## Falling aid for education putting global goals at risk, warns UN agency

6 June 2017 – Against the backdrop of aid allocations to education falling for the sixth year in a row, the United Nations agency mandated with promoting education globally has called on the donor community to focus more attention on the vital sector, especially in countries where needs are the greatest.

According to a [policy paper](#) by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Global Education Monitoring Report, total aid to education stands at \$12 billion – 4 per cent lower than the figure in 2010.

"Aid remains [far short of what is needed](#) to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4, putting our commitments at risk," said Irina Bokova, the Director-General of UNESCO, in a news release announcing the findings.

"[Resources] need to be multiplied by at least six to achieve our common education goals and must go to countries most in need," she cautioned, calling on donors not to shift their attention away from the poorest countries.

Based on newly released data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee, the study revealed that aid to basic education, such as support to pre-primary and primary education, as well as adult education and literacy programmes – stands at \$5.2 billion, 6 per cent lower than the amount in 2010.

It also noted that, while humanitarian aid to education reached a historic high – increasing almost 55 per cent from 2015 to 2016 – education received only 2.7 per cent of total aid available and less than half (48 per cent) of the amount needed.

In terms of national contributions, the United States and the United Kingdom

were the two largest donors to basic education, but their allocations fell by 11 per cent and 9 per cent respectively in 2014-2015.

In contrast, contributions from Norway and Germany increased by 50 per cent and 34 per cent respectively, noted the UN agency.

The UNESCO policy paper, [Aid to Education is Stagnating and Not Going to Countries Most in Need](#) also voiced concern over skewed allocations by donors leading to aid not reaching places it is most needed.

Sub-Saharan Africa, home to over half of the world's out-of-school children currently receives less than half the aid to basic education it used to in 2002, and only 26 per cent of the total aid to basic education globally.

This contrasts to the 22 per cent allocation to the northern Africa and western Asia region, where 9 per cent of children are out of school.

Calling for urgent action to rectify the problems, UNESCO urged donors to reverse the move away from education and focus their attention on campaigns such as the Global Partnership for Education Replenishment campaign which is seeking to raise \$3.1 billion between 2018-2020 and programmes such as the Education Cannot Wait fund (established in 2016) that aims to raise \$3.85 billion by 2020, with the potential to transform the delivery of education in emergencies.

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## [FEATURE: Climate change and the world's oceans](#)

5 June 2017 – The vital link between oceans and climate change is among the issues at the forefront of discussions at the United Nations Ocean Conference taking place in New York from 5 to 9 June.

SDG 14 is the only universally agreed road map for conserving and sustainably managing marine resources Peter Thomson, President of the UN General Assembly

The oceans, which cover three quarters of the Earth's surface, play a vital role in the global climate system, generating oxygen and absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Changes to the climate, brought about by increasing levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, will thus lead to changes in the oceans, including sea-level rise and ocean acidification, which will put marine ecosystems and coastal communities at risk.

World leaders acknowledged the importance of the oceans when they adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), the universal blueprint for ending

poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. SDG 14 sets out specific targets to be met in order to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

“SDG 14 is the only universally agreed road map for conserving and sustainably managing marine resources. Its faithful implementation is therefore our best hope for remedying the ocean’s woes,” [said](#) Peter Thomson, President of the 71st session of the UN General Assembly.



Pounding early winter surf from massive 15 foot ocean swells. Photo: [Irin News](#)/ Mike Baird/Flickr

### ***Rising ocean temperatures***

Although the ocean is the single largest habitat on the planet and is inextricably linked to human survival, climate change and the impact of increasing carbon dioxide emissions on the oceans have been largely overshadowed in the climate change debate, according to Isabella Lövin, Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden, one of the co-chairs of the Ocean Conference.

The oceans – which produce half of the world’s oxygen, regulate the earth’s climate and temperature, provide food and water, and are home to hundreds of thousands of species – have been a staunch ally in curbing climate change.

More than 93 per cent of all the heat people have added to the planet since the 1950s has been absorbed by the oceans – but at a price, Ms. Lövin [stressed](#). Rising ocean temperatures and increased acidification are now becoming apparent in melting Arctic sea ice and coral bleaching. Immediate mitigation, protection, restoration and adaptation actions are needed.

### ***Healthy oceans, stable climate***

“Whether on the coast or in the high seas far away from all, safeguarding biodiverse marine sites is vital for ensuring the sustainable long-term use of precious natural resources,” says Irina Bokova, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)).



Fishermen in the Bay of Bengal, India. Photo: UN Photo/John Isaac

The importance of the ocean to global climate cannot be underestimated, according to UNESCO. It absorbs a significant portion of carbon and an overwhelming amount of excess heat. Still, warmer atmospheric temperatures and increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases exert an enormous pressure on the ocean’s ability to regulate the climate.

UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) helps in developing

ocean sciences, observations and capacity-building to monitor the ocean's major role in the climate system and predict ocean changes.

Laying the ground for efficient climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, IOC focuses on the most damaging impacts, such as temperature increase, sea-level rise, storm variations and changes in marine biodiversity. Its scientifically-founded services help countries, particularly coastal and small island developing States, become more resilient to present and future climate impacts.

### ***Impact of sea-level rise***

The oceans are experiencing "major stress" from climate change, according to Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed. "Globally, the sea level has risen by 20 centimetres since the start of the 20th century, due mostly to thermal expansion of the oceans and melting of glaciers and ice caps. Some regions are experiencing even greater sea level rise.

"General warming trends, massive episodes of coral bleaching, acidification and the sea level rise are affecting ecosystems in all regions, threatening fisheries, food chains and the oceans' ability to act as efficient carbon sinks.



Rising sea levels pose a threat to low-lying atoll islands. Photo: OCHA/D.Parry

"Warmer temperatures are causing more extreme weather events, and a projected two-metre rise in sea levels by the end of the century would be catastrophic for coastal habitats and economies. Hundreds of millions of people are at risk," she [warns](#).

Particularly at risk are the inhabitants of small island States, with hurricanes, cyclones and tsunamis becoming increasingly more common threats.

### ***Ocean health and economic prosperity***

"Trouble for the oceans means trouble for people. Human well-being and health, economic prosperity, and a stable climate depend on healthy oceans," [says](#) Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and Secretary-General of the Ocean Conference.

According to the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction ([UNISDR](#)), losses due to disasters from natural and man-made hazards including floods, storms and the impacts of climate change are mounting, costing governments over \$300 billion globally each year.

UNISDR recently aligned its Disaster Resilience Scorecard, which provides a set of overarching assessments on disaster resilience, with the Sendai Framework – boosting the number of cities and towns capable of reducing their disaster losses by 2020





On 24 February 2016, Makereta Nasiki, 13, sits in her room, showing damage caused by Tropical Cyclone Winston in the town of Ba on Viti Levu Island of Fiji. Photo: OCHA/ www.vladsokhin.com

### ***Global warming and the Polar Region***

The effects of worldwide greenhouse gas emissions, one of the leading causes of global warming, are felt most intensely in the Polar Region.

According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), both the Arctic and Antarctica are warming twice as fast as the rest of the world. Glaciers and ice shelves are melting and sea ice and snow coverage are shrinking.

Polar wildlife ecosystems and indigenous population are already feeling the impact of climate change as polar conditions impact weather across the globe.

“Because of teleconnections, the poles influence weather and climate conditions in lower latitudes where hundreds of millions of people live,” [warns](#) Petteri Taalas, WMO’s Secretary-General. “Warming Arctic air masses and declining sea ice are believed to affect ocean circulation and the jet stream, and are potentially linked to extreme phenomena such as cold spells, heat waves and droughts in the northern hemisphere.”

With relatively little data available on the Earth’s Polar Regions, the UN weatheragency kicked off of a two-year international effort to close gaps in polar forecasting capacity and improve future environmental safety.

The [Year of Polar Prediction](#) was launched in May to close the gaps in polar forecasting capacity and improve predictions of weather, climate and ice conditions in the farthest reaches of the planet. The global campaign aims to minimize environmental risks and maximize opportunities associated with climate change in polar regions.

Social scientists will examine how polar forecasts can be factored into socio-economic decision making while stakeholders in transport, shipping and tourism will provide input on community needs.

### ***Coral reefs under threat from climate change***



“Oceans are continuing to warm, acidify and lose oxygen,” said IPCC chair Hoesung Lee. “Warm water coral reefs are already under pressure and 90 per cent would suffer significant risk from global warming of 1.5 degree Celsius.” Photo: UNEP/Jerker Tamelander



Above-normal ocean temperatures have contributed to coral bleaching and disruption of ecosystems, including in the Great Barrier Reef, which has seen up to 50 per cent of its coral die in certain parts. Photo: UNEP/Paul

Marshall.



The UN backs the International Coral Reef Initiative – an informal partnership between nations and organizations to preserve coral reefs and their ecosystems by reducing pollution from plastic microbeads and sunscreen, and financing projects that help protect and restore coral reefs, mangroves and seagrasses. Photo: UNEP/Jerker Tamelander



Corals that have shown some resistance to rising temperatures are being grown on coral farms in Marine Protected Areas. Photo: Reef Explorer Fiji.



Tropical coral reefs cover a mere 1 per cent of the ocean but are among the most bio-diverse systems on the planet, supporting one quarter of all marine species.

According to the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)), coral reefs exist in over 100 nations, including more than 80 developing countries. They sustain human society through a range of ecosystem services, such as livelihoods and food security from fisheries; revenue from tourism; erosion prevention; and protection from extreme weather events through dissipation of wave energy. They also help to lessen inundation and damage during storms.

Among the planet's natural ecosystems, mangroves, sea-grass beds and coral reefs return the highest value in terms of ecosystem services. A square kilometre of healthy, well-managed coral reef can yield a catch of over 15 tons of fish and other seafood every year. Some 850 million people live within 100 km of coral reefs, deriving some benefits –with at least 275 million depending directly on reefs for livelihoods and sustenance.

#### ***Climate change and water supply***

According to the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)), the planet's freshwater and oceans are inextricably linked through the earth's water cycle. The agency notes that 97 per cent of the world's water is in the ocean and the ocean supplies almost all the water that falls on land as rain and snow. Of the small portion that is fresh water; about a third is in in the ground and a mere .3 per cent in accessible surface waters.

Climate change scenarios project that discrepancies between water supply and demand will heighten. The frequency and severity of floods and droughts will likely change many river basins worldwide – with droughts causing significant socio-economic and environmental consequences.

The UNEP estimates the cumulative economic impact of poor ocean management practices at minimally \$200 billion per year. In the absence of mitigation

measures, climate change will increase the cost of damage to the ocean by an additional \$322 billion annually by 2050.



Local fishermen in Mozambique. Photo: Andrea Borgarello/ World Bank

“In a world where demands for freshwater are ever growing, and where limited water resources are increasingly stressed by over-abstraction, pollution and climate change, neglecting the opportunities arising from improved wastewater management is nothing less than unthinkable in the context of a circular economy,” according to the UN World Water Development Report 2017, *Wastewater: The Untapped Resource*

Weighing the linkages and significant socio-economic benefits of the earth’s freshwater and marine systems, UNDP underscores the need to take adaptive, integrated, ecosystem-based approaches to manage freshwater and ocean resources.

As such, UNDP is assisting countries in equitably allocating water resources and implementing integrated management through adaptive water governance, which helps to reduce poverty and vulnerability, sustain and enhance livelihoods and protect environmental resources.

#### ***Oceans are part of the solution***

Humanity owes much to the oceans in many aspects of life: providing invaluable ecosystems, climate regulation and cultural support to the millions of people who live near the sea, according to José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)).



Water of the Congo River is used in the absence of wells. Photo: OCHA/J-L. Mbalivoto

As 3 billion people ultimately depend on marine and coastal biodiversity, all nations agree on the need to step up efforts to protect oceans and seas, especially in the era of climate change, when transformational interventions are becoming even more urgent and encompassing.

The oceans cover almost three quarters of the Earth’s surface, storing one third of all the carbon emissions stemming from human activity. They are part of the solution, and they must be a key focus of global efforts to cope with and mitigate climate change, he [stresses](#).

“Oceans play a crucial role in the achievement of global food security, as well as human health and well-being,” [says](#) Miguel de Serpa Soares, UN Legal Counsel and Special Adviser to the Presidents of the Ocean Conference on oceans and legal matters.

“They are the primary regulator of the global climate, function as an

important sink for greenhouse gases, serve as the host for huge reservoirs of biodiversity and play a major role in producing the oxygen we breathe.”

He adds that oceans, seas and marine resources are increasingly threatened by human activities, including increased CO2 emissions, climate change, marine pollution, unsustainable extraction of marine resources, and physical alterations and destruction of marine and coastal habitats.

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## [UN Ocean Conference opens with calls for united action to reverse human damage](#)

5 June 2017 – Opening a “game-changing” international conference on the health of the world’s oceans and seas, top United Nations officials today urged coordinated global action to protect the planet.

Speaking in the UN General Assembly Hall, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres cautioned Governments that unless they overcome short-term territorial and resource interests, the state of the oceans will continue to deteriorate.

“Improving the health of our oceans is a [test for multilateralism](#), and we cannot afford to fail,” the Secretary-General said addressing his first major UN conference since taking on his post.

“We must jointly address the problems of governance that have held us back,” he said, calling for a new strategic vision of how to govern the oceans and marine resources.

One of the main challenges, he said, is to end “the artificial dichotomy” between jobs and healthy oceans: “The conservation and sustainable use of marine resources are two sides of the same coin.”

He called for strong political leadership and new partnerships, based on the existing legal framework, and concrete steps, such as expanding marine protected areas and reducing plastic waste pollution.

Among other specific actions, Mr. Guterres urged Governments to allocate the promised funding for the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change and the [Addis Ababa Action Agenda](#), as well as improving data collection and sharing their best experiences.

These works are supported by the UN, he added, which among its work, is building partnerships with Governments, the private sector, civil society and others, and working with international financial institutions to allocate resources.

Also addressing the thousands of participants – including heads of State and Government, civil society representatives, business people, as well as actors, and ocean and marine life advocates – was the President of the General Assembly, Peter Thomson.

“The time has come for us to [correct our wrongful ways](#),” said Mr. Thomson, who hails from the island of Fiji, which is co-hosting the event alongside Sweden.

He spoke out against “inexcusable” actions, such as dumping the equivalent of one large garbage truck of plastic into the oceans every minute of every day, driving fish stocks to the points of collapse, and destroying marine life through acidification and deoxygenation.

“We are here on behalf of humanity to restore sustainability, balance and respect to our relationship with our primal mother, the source of life, the Ocean,” he noted.

Also speaking at the opening was Wu Hongo, the Secretary-General of The Ocean Conference, who pointed out that without oceans and seas, there would be [no life on the planet](#).

Mr. Wu, who is also the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, noted that everyone must work together – not in silos – to achieve the goals of the Conference.

[The Ocean Conference](#), which runs through Friday, focuses on the targets outlined in the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development, adopted by Governments in 2015. In particular among the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), [Goal 14](#) highlights the need to conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources to benefit present and future generations.

The main areas of work at The Ocean Conference will be a political call to action, a segment on partnership dialogues and [voluntary commitments](#). Hundreds of commitments were already registered by the time the conference opened earlier today.

Additional discussions with high-level officials, actors and activists will take place in the [SDG Media Zone](#).