

## FEATURE: UN Ocean Conference ‘dream come true’ for Caribbean nations such as Trinidad and Tobago

2 June 2017 – Protecting the oceans is among the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), the blueprint for a more just and equitable world adopted by the 193 Member States of the United Nations in September 2015.

[SDG 14](#) on conserving and sustainably using marine resources is the springboard for the [Ocean Conference](#), taking place at UN Headquarters in New York from 5 to 9 June.

The meeting is especially relevant to Caribbean countries, according to Juan Miguel Diez, Director of the UN Information Centre ([UNIC](#)) for the region.

“The Ocean Conference is a dream come true for us in the Caribbean,” he said. “It brings together [SDG 14](#), but also the rest of the [SDGs](#), and provides us with an amazing opportunity to continue to do our work to raise awareness about this particular goal, but also to bring stakeholders together.”

The UNIC is based in Trinidad and Tobago, home to nearly 1.4 million people whose existence is tied to the sea, as Neila Bobb Prescott of the Food and Agriculture Organization’s ([FAO](#)) field office in the capital, Port of Spain, explained.

“Trinidad and Tobago is blessed with a particular phenomenon in that in our authority or geographic area, the ocean is 15 times greater than the land. We have so many livelihoods impacted by the health of the marine system, so hence we need to pay attention to it,” she said.

“We may not be the conventional sun, sea and sand people, but the marine resource is where you will find our oil and gas fields as well where you will find the endangered and threatened species around the island.”



Trinidad and Tobago is the largest oil and natural gas producer in the Caribbean, with exploration taking place both on land and at sea. The country’s Government says the energy sector is integral to long-term economic growth and development. Photo: UN News/Lulu Gao

Although the twin island nation moves to the beat of calypso, soca and other pulsating rhythms, it is oil and natural gas exports which power the economy. The University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) estimates they account for as much as 60 per cent of gross domestic product.

The country’s Director of Maritime Services, Ronald Alfred, pointed out that

the sector is closely aligned with shipping.

“Trinidad and Tobago is a member of the [International Maritime Organization](#) and we do abide by all the conventions they have put forward; for example, the [International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships \(MARPOL\)](#). It is actually in our national legislation, and we do have our personnel that go to ships that come to our shores and check to make sure that the vessels are compliant with these legislations, thereby doing our small part to preserve the oceans for a long time.”



Shipping is another important sector for the Caribbean island nation. Ronald Alfred, Director of Maritime Services, explained that while in the past vessels carried sugar from Trinidad and Tobago, today they transport oil and gas. Seen here are ships in the capital, Port of Spain. Photo: UN News/Lulu Gao

However, sometimes the ship steering the economy collides with another important industry: fishing.

For the past 20 years, the group Fishermen and Friends of the Sea has locked horns with the Government over “everything that has to do with the sea and all the negative aspects,” according to its president, Terrance Beddoe, a former agronomist with [FAO](#).

“Two Sundays ago, there was a tank which held 150,000 barrels of oil. It sprung a leak at the bottom,” he told *UN News* in late May. “The policy makers or the people concerned said it’s only 300 barrels, but we have seen this oil stretch a mile long and five miles wide in the gulf (*Gulf of Paria, on Trinidad’s west coast*). It must have an effect on the fish.”

Navigating future maritime conflicts like this will partly be up to the young people currently studying marine sciences at the UTT campus in Chaguaramas.

**VIDEO:** In Trinidad and Tobago, UN agencies promote a co-management approach to marine resources conservation which aims to drive the participation of those living in protected areas, with the goal of creating sustainable livelihoods for the local community.

Dr. Reia Guppy, assistant professor of marine sciences at the University, believes that all major activity in the country – whether in the energy sector, or fisheries and agriculture – is linked to the marine and coastal environments.

“Shipping across the globe is the largest growing industry in the world, and with the recent opening of the Panama Canal there’s even more efforts for Trinidad and Tobago to be part of that hub, which means, of course, that besides user conflict with fishermen, there is also the potential for invasive species coming into our waters,” she said. “So there’s a host of

research and interest from our Department and other environmental units within the University of Trinidad and Tobago to study the marine environment to ensure sustainable development for the country.”

At times, those stakeholder conflicts can be personal or internal.

Welldon Mapp works for the Environmental Research Institute Charlotteville (ERIC), a UN-supported NGO which fosters natural resource awareness among the residents of his fishing village in north-east Tobago.

He has wrestled with the dichotomy of being a fisherman and an advocate for the sustainable management of marine resources.

“The entire thing about conservation is that when you’ve grown up in a family of hunters and you now realize that you have to protect what you used to use as a livelihood source, whether for food or income, and you realize that you’re creating harm to it and still you depend on it,” he said.

“I think it was the right time in my life for me to take a stand: to really understand what I’m taking from the natural environment, understand how it could be protected, and to fall in place where I could create a balance for myself to make me feel comfortable as a person within my community and not really creating harm but doing what I’m doing every day but creating a better benefit in the long run.”

When world leaders signed off on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, they agreed to implement a plan of action for people, prosperity and the planet, that supports the needs of both present and future generations.



Businessman Gary Aboud is secretary of the group Fishermen and Friends of the Sea, established in the mid-1990s. A recreational fisher who was always close to nature, he was sensitized to the need for ocean conservation by veteran fishermen who were complaining about shrimp trawlers destroying the marine habitat. He said the problem still exists today. Photo: UN News/Lulu Gao

Businessman Gary Aboud is another Trinidadian who is looking at the long term.

The secretary of Fishermen and Friends of the Sea is not one to mince words, whether railing against the industry, or local politicians, or the UN.

But when asked to reflect on the ocean’s importance, the firebrand turns philosophical.

“The sea is part of the planet, and I don’t think the sea is more important than the land or the air. All of the eco-systems—the marine and the terrestrial—correlate and implicate each other in a homogenous mix,” he stated.

“So, I think the sea is as important as the blood that beats in your mother’s

heart. The sea is as important as the air that we require to breathe. We think that the sea is an abstract thing because it's 'over there.' But I think maybe a planetary consciousness needs to shift and we need to start thinking that the things that are not apparently within our realm of influence are in fact in our realm of influence."

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## [UN agencies urge aid for cyclone-hit communities in Bangladesh, Myanmar](#)

2 June 2017 – United Nations agencies are calling for urgent aid to help hundreds of thousands of people affected by Cyclone Mora, which swept across the Bay of Bengal earlier this week.

"There is an [urgent need](#) for shelter materials," the spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), Andrej Mahecic, told journalists in Geneva.

"Food rations, drinking water and latrines are some of the other needs identified so far in the cyclone-affected areas," Mr. Mahecic said, adding that more needs are likely to be identified as governments in Bangladesh and Myanmar complete their ongoing assessments of the damage.

The Rohingya community displaced in Myanmar and living in settlements in Bangladesh has been particularly hard hit. In Bangladesh, there are more than 33,000 Rohingya refugees registered in the official camps of Kutupalong and Nayapara. Outside the camps, more than 200,000 undocumented Rohingya are living in makeshift sites and local villages in the south-eastern part of the country.

In Myanmar, some 120,500 internally displaced people have been living in central Rakhine since 2012, when inter-communal violence forced them to flee, according to UNHCR.

The International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) today launched an appeal for \$3.7 million to help the Rohingya in Bangladesh. The funds aim to help up to 80,000 people between now and the end of the year, and "will target health, water, sanitation, shelter and protection."

The cyclone, which pounded Bangladesh with 117 km/hour winds and heavy rain, tore through the settlement houses which offered little resistance to the storm's strength.

"The [storm destroyed](#) 25 per cent of shelters and left as many as 80 per cent damaged," IOM said. "Food and fuel supplies were destroyed, electricity lines were cut, and health and sanitation infrastructure was also badly damaged."

Some 1.3 million children are estimated to be in urgent need of aid as a result of the storm.

The Director of Emergency Programmes at the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)), Manuel Fontaine, warned that children from the Rohingya community, who were already displaced and living in precarious conditions before the Cyclone, is now "hit by double humanitarian crisis."

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## [Over 40 migrants die of thirst in the Sahara, signalling 'broadening death trap,' warns UN agency](#)

2 June 2017 – Warning that smugglers may now be "broadening" a death trap for migrants and refugees that could stretch from the Mediterranean to the vast Sahara Desert, the United Nations refugee agency has reiterated its call for safe pathways so that those in desperate need of international protection do not lose their lives.

The alarm has been raised by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) as some 44 migrants and refugees – including women and children – are [reported to have succumbed to extreme dehydration](#) when the truck they were travelling in (to Libya) broke down in the desert in northern Niger, exposing them to extreme heat and lack of drinking water.

Only six could be saved.

"It is quite clear that human smugglers will go to any extent to exploit desperate [refugees and migrants](#)," said the UN agency in a news release today.

"These shocking deaths are part of the bigger picture of exploitation as smugglers broaden the death trap from the Mediterranean to the Sahara Desert."

Further, according to the UN International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)), [the Niger to Libya route is the one most sub-Saharan African migrants take](#) when trying to reach Europe via the Mediterranean Sea.

Each week, thousands of desperate migrants are crammed into pick-up trucks for the days-long ride, often with only enough room for a few litres of water attempting to cross one of most inhospitable and deadliest places on the planet.

SEE ALSO: [Recent tragedies at sea highlight urgency for safe pathways to Europe](#)

“The migrants are often lied to and cheated on their way [and] smugglers usually run away with their money, [leaving them] in the middle of nowhere, in a country they don’t know, trying to gain enough money to either continue the route or go back home,” said Guisepe Loprete, the head of IOM operations in Niger.

Both IOM and UNHCR have been working to support refugees and migrants in the region, as well as warning them of the perils of the desert and sea journeys but operations remain constrained in the want of additional resources.

The UN refugee agency is currently in need of \$75.5 million to meet the increased humanitarian and protection needs of people in Libya – including those internally displaced, host communities, as well as refugees and asylum seekers.

The appeal includes protection monitoring and interventions, as well as advocacy on issues related to respect for human rights, access to basic services, asylum procedures and freedom of movement.

Additional resources are also required in Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali and Chad to help prevent and respond to risks associated with such deadly journeys.

According to estimates, so far this year, the perilous Mediterranean crossing has claimed more than 1,700 lives.

“This latest tragedy was a grim reminder that probably more migrants die in the Sahara desert than in the Mediterranean, but due to the inhospitable nature of the region, it was virtually impossible to know the exact number,” said Mr. Loprete.

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## [Cholera cases in Yemen may reach 130,000 in two weeks, UNICEF warns](#)

2 June 2017 – With about 70,000 cholera cases reported with nearly 600 fatalities in Yemen, the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) today warned that an already fire situation for children is turning into a disaster.

“Cholera doesn’t need a permit to cross a checkpoint or a border, nor does it differentiate between areas of political control,” [said](#) UNICEF Regional Director, Geert Cappelaere, following his visit to the war-torn country.

“Cholera is spreading incredibly fast in Yemen [...] The number of suspected cases is expected to reach 130,000 within the next two weeks,” he warned.

He said he witnessed harrowing scenes of children who were barely alive – tiny babies weighing less than two kilos – fighting for their lives at one of the few functioning hospitals he visited.

“But they are the lucky ones. Countless children around Yemen die every day in silence from causes that can easily be prevented or treated like cholera, diarrhoea or malnutrition,” he said.

He said health workers are racing against time to prevent cholera from killing more children. They are dedicated and committed, despite not receiving their salaries in almost nine months.

For its part, UNICEF has been working with partners to respond since the start of this outbreak four weeks ago, providing safe water to over 1 million people across Yemen and delivered over 40 tonnes of lifesaving medical equipment – including medicine, oral rehydration salts, intravenous fluids and diarrhoea disease kits.

He called for stepping up global support, as UNICEF urgently requires \$16 million to prevent the outbreak from spreading further.

“But most importantly, it is time for parties to the conflict to prioritise the boys and girls of Yemen and put an end to the fighting through a peaceful political agreement. This is the ultimate way to save the lives of children in Yemen, and to help them thrive,” he said.

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## [Local solutions, people-centred health systems key to ending AIDS epidemic – UN deputy chief](#)

1 June 2017 – While global optimism has fuelled a major push to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030 – the highest ambition within the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development – the United Nations today warned that the pandemic is far from over, and with more than 36 million people living with HIV, tackling it will require a life-cycle approach based on community-level solutions.

“Achieving our aims on AIDS is interlinked and embedded within the broader 2030 Agenda. Both are grounded in equity, human rights and a promise to leave no one behind,” Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed [told](#) delegations gathered for the General Assembly’s [annual review](#) of the Secretary-General’s [report](#), this year calling for a reinvigorated global response to HIV/AIDS.

In 2016, The UN political declaration on ending AIDS set the world on a fast-track to stamp out the epidemic by 2030. In the first phase, countries agreed



to reduce new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths to fewer than 500,000 by 2020. They also agreed to eliminate HIV-related stigma and discrimination by then.

However, according to the report, with less than four years to go, progress on reducing new HIV infections among adults has stalled, financing for the global response has dried up and more importantly, women and girls continue to bear the brunt of the AIDS epidemic.



Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed (left), addresses the Assembly's annual review on progress in the global response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

Briefing Member States alongside Assembly President Peter Thomson and UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé, Ms. Mohammed warned that the pandemic is far from over. UNAIDS estimates that more than 36.7 million people are living with HIV globally.

"While more than 18 million are now on life-saving treatment, this is just half of those who need it, and there is no decline in the number of new infections each year. People living with HIV who are on treatment can now expect the same life expectancy as someone who is not infected," she said.

#### ***UN deputy chief spotlights 'life-cycle' approach to HIV***

That is why a life-cycle approach to HIV is so important, she continued, to ensure that people have access to the services they need at every stage of life. Echoing the report's concern, she cited other challenges, noting that key populations, including sex workers, people who inject drugs, transgender people, and men who have sex with men, remain at much higher risk of HIV infection. More than 10 million additional people living with HIV must access treatment by 2020; most of them are unaware of their HIV status.

"Now we need to do a better job of reaching young women and adolescent girls. This is true of Sub-Saharan Africa where adolescent girls account for three out of four new HIV infections among the 15 to 19 year olds. Women and girls' heightened vulnerability of women and girls to HIV is intimately linked to "entrenched gender-based inequalities and harmful social attitudes," she said, adding: "We also need to ensure a more integrated approach to HIV delivery. In particular, we need to integrate HIV, sexual and reproductive health programmes, including family planning."

#### ***A blunt assessment would say that to date, our achievements have been mixed***

For his part, Mr. Thomson said that while major advancements have been made, the scale of shortcomings remained deeply concerning. HIV prevention rates among adults around the world had largely stalled, with the number of new infections actually increasing in some regions. Some 1,800 young people a day were being newly infected with the virus, with young women at particular risk.





Peter Thomson (centre), President of the 71st session of the General Assembly, addresses the Assembly's annual review on progress in the global response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

"A blunt assessment would say that to date our achievements have been mixed," said the Assembly President, stressing that [ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030](#) requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach that also targets education, information and services to people living with HIV and to those at risk.

"We must build on the tremendous advances we have already seen in science, technology and innovation to better support people living with HIV, and to find a path towards a vaccine or cure," he said, adding that it is important to leverage the integrated nature of the [SDGs](#) by building on the synergies between the global AIDS response and efforts to achieve universal health coverage.

Adequate funding remains critical to meet the objectives, he added, emphasizing the need to close the \$7 billion funding gap for the global AIDS response.