

Climate-vulnerable islands in spotlight ahead of UN disaster risk reduction forum in Mexico

22 May 2017 – Hurricanes, cyclones and tsunamis are increasingly common threats to the world's most climate-vulnerable island nations, whose representatives are meeting today in Cancun, Mexico, ahead of a major United Nations conference on risk reduction.

Addressing dozens of delegates from small island developing States, Robert Glasser, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, said island nations read “like a roll call for [prevention, resilience and recovery](#) from recent disasters and near misses.”

He noted that disasters on small islands affect the whole population, undermining efforts to eradicate poverty and build resilient cities and communities.

“If a high percentage of the population is affected, injured or killed, this can have long lasting consequences for recovery and overall development and economic activity,” Mr. Glasser said yesterday, as the island nations gathered for the first of three days of discussions.

The talks are being held ahead of the formal sessions of the [Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction](#), whose preparatory meetings start today and formal sessions will start on Wednesday.

Held every two years since the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami to discuss disaster reduction, the 2017 Global Platform – the fifth such event to date – is expected to bring together more than 5,000 Heads of State, policy makers, disaster risk managers, civil society and other participants.

This will be the first international summit on disaster since the [Sendai Framework](#), which was adopted in 2015 in the northern Japanese city after which it was named, and consists of seven targets and four priorities for action that aim for the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries.

Last year, 445 million people were affected by disasters linked to natural hazards worldwide including floods, storms, earthquakes and drought, 8,000 people lost their lives and direct economic losses from major disaster events were estimated at \$138.8 billion.

The World Bank estimates that the real cost to the global economy from disasters is \$520 billion per year and that they push 24 million people into poverty annually.

In his opening comments, Mr. Glasser applauded the island nations for “rising

to the challenges and taking a leadership role in integrating action on disaster risk and climate risk in an era when extreme weather events have risen dramatically and trigger 90 per cent of all natural hazard related disasters.”

Calling these countries “on the frontline of solutions,” he noted their lead in calling for coherent implementation of the [2030 Agenda](#) and the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), as well as the Sendai Framework and the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change.

[On Day for Biological Diversity, UN says tourists must protect nature that draws them](#)

22 May 2017 – Tourism must not undermine the nature that attracts tourists in the first place, said the head of the United Nations-backed treaty on biological diversity, marking International Day for Biological Diversity.

“Tourism grows, so does the risk of harming the environment [...] It will be important therefore such developments do not undermine the very natural beauty that draws tourists in the first place,” said Cristiana Pasca Palmer, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity ([CBD](#)), in her message for the [Day](#), which this year is celebrated under the theme [Biodiversity and Sustainable Tourism](#).

Many natural areas with rich biodiversity, such as beaches, coasts and islands, mountains, rivers and lakes, are popular tourism destinations. Roughly half of the leisure trips taken globally are to natural areas, she noted.

It is therefore important to understand that the way tourism is managed will impact biodiversity and conversely, the way ecosystems are managed will impact the sustainability of tourism, as tourists will not come to polluted or degraded destinations.

The Convention was adopted on 22 May 1992 as the international legal instrument for “the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources” that has since been ratified by 196 nations.

In 2010, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 22 May as the International Day for Biological Diversity.

In his message for the Day, UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Secretary

General Taleb Rifai said: “Together we can make tourism an ally in fighting loss of biodiversity and achieving the Global Goals for a better world.”

In that regard, UNWTO is encouraging more destinations to set up sustainable tourism observatories, he said.

The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) has also been working with all its partners to explore pathways for ensuring the long-term sustainability of tourism while also ensuring that it contributes positively to biodiversity.

“Biodiversity is as necessary for nature and humankind as cultural diversity, to build stronger, more resilient societies, equipped with the tools they need to respond to the challenges of today and tomorrow,” [said](#) UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova in her message for the Day.

[INTERVIEW: ‘Our peacekeepers are saving lives every day’ – new UN peacekeeping chief](#)

22 May 2017 – With United Nations peace operations being carried out in highly complex environments and facing multiple challenges, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres recently stressed the need to adapt peacekeeping to “our changing world.”

“Peace operations are at a crossroads. Our task is to keep them relevant with clear and achievable mandates, and the right strategies and support,” the Secretary-General told a Security Council meeting last month on the subject of peacekeeping. He also called on the 193-member General Assembly for political support and on the troop- and police-contributing countries for professional and committed personnel.

It is in this context that Jean-Pierre Lacroix took up his post as the new [Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations](#) at the beginning of April. The French national, who has more than 25 years of political and diplomatic experience, currently oversees 16 [UN peacekeeping operations](#) deployed on four continents.

UN peacekeeping missions are called on not only to maintain peace and security, but also to facilitate the political process, protect civilians, assist in disarmament, support the holding of elections, protect and promote human rights, and assist in restoring the rule of law.

UN peacekeepers go to the most physically and politically difficult environments, some making the ultimate sacrifice – as evidenced by the more

than 3,500 peacekeepers who have lost their lives in the service of peace since UN deployments began in 1948.

Mr. Lacroix witnessed this first-hand when he recently visited the UN's operations in the Central African Republic and Mali, which lost seven peacekeepers between them this month alone. In an interview with *UN News*, the peacekeeping chief discusses a number of issues, including the challenges facing peace operations, his plans to make them more efficient and tackling sexual exploitation and abuse. *The interview has been edited for content and clarity.*

Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix talks to UN News on his new role.

UN News: UN Secretary-General António Guterres said recently that UN peace operations were at a crossroads and facing multiple challenges. Could you tell us more about these challenges?

Jean-Pierre Lacroix: Yes, we are facing challenges in our operations. At the same time, we should not forget that our peacekeepers – civilian, police, men and women, military personnel – are saving lives every day. They are protecting civilians and they are helping peace processes be implemented... It is [also] important to recognize the added value of peacekeeping and what we bring to the societies and nations that are destabilized. I think this has been recognized by the members of the Security Council when we had the debate on peacekeeping on the 6th of April.

Challenges, yes, we do have many of them. I think the most important challenges are when we have operations on the ground doing their best but the political processes are not there for us to support ... and to support our operation... We need everyone – the UN, the Secretary-General, who is very much committed to supporting these political processes – to be very determined to try to make them move forward. We need the support of the Security Council as well to basically make sure that we get the right kind of support and that these political processes get the right kind of support.

In some cases, we don't have the kind of support we would be expecting from host governments. Our operations are quite often operating and deployed in very challenging security environments. Therefore, we need to make sure we can cope with these challenging security environments. It's a question of posture; it's a question of equipment; it's a question of organizing ourselves so that we can both protect our peacekeepers better, civilian as well as uniformed, and better protect the populations we are serving.

UN News: The Secretary-General mentioned nine areas of reform for UN peacekeeping. What are your plans in the coming months to make peacekeeping operations more efficient?

Jean-Pierre Lacroix: One of the things that the Secretary-General said, and beyond the importance of pursuing political solutions which is really key, is that we have to make sure that we always have on the ground the right kind of

deployment, that we optimize our resources and that the mandates are at any given moment the most adequate for the situation which we are dealing with on the ground.

We have to make sure that our mandates are evolving consistent with the needs on the ground.

We have to make sure that our mandates are evolving consistent with the needs on the ground. They have to be prioritized. We have to make sure that whenever we can we terminate peacekeeping operations or we downsize them and this is what we have been doing, and what we will be doing in some cases. And we have to make sure we continue this ongoing process of modernizing the peacekeeping operations. It has to do with a lot of things on which we are working. It has to do with training. It has to do with making sure that we have more contributions from troop-contributing countries and also those countries who contribute civilian personnel and police, more contributions that are ready to deploy. It has to do with modernizing equipment, resorting to new technologies.

One very important issue is to increase the number of female personnel – civilian, police and military. It is a question of gender parity, although parity has a long way to go, especially when we talk about military and police. But it is especially a question of efficiency because as peacekeepers we have to engage with the population and we are in a much better place to do that when we can rely on female personnel. So this is something we will be pursuing with very strong determination.



Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix visits a peacekeeper injured in an attack on a UN convoy on 8 May 2017 in south-east Central African Republic. Photo: MINUSCA

I should also say a few words on partnership. This is an area which the Secretary-General has been pushing with very strong determination. We had a summit recently in April with the AU leadership and there is a lot more that we can do with both the African Union, the sub-regional organizations, and I will add the European Union as well, to basically make sure we go hand in hand when we try to find solutions to the many crises which we are dealing with.

And there are important areas where we can develop our cooperation, especially in the area of trying to find political solutions in a very concerted way, which is the right thing to do, especially when we try to deal with crises in Africa. But also, how can we support operations that are deployed by either the African Union or sub-regional organizations? We intend to very supportive of these operations.

UN News: What support do you expect from Member States to help UN peacekeeping operations deliver on the ground?

Jean-Pierre Lacroix: First of all, we need their political support... their continuous political support to peacekeeping operations – from them individually, from the Security Council, from the General Assembly. This is absolutely key if we want to succeed.

And obviously, we need their support in terms of resources. We need the finances from Member States and we need to have the right kind of resources for our operations, even though we are making a very strong and determined effort to optimize our resources, as well as to downsize and terminate peacekeeping operations whenever it is possible.

We also need the contributions of Member States. We depend on Member States' contributions of troops, equipment, and so on and so forth. And here, a lot has been done. We have had since 2015 more contributions forthcoming, more contributions that will be deployable in less time, so we need to continue this effort. We still have some shortfalls in critical capabilities in some of our operations. We are working very hard to convince Member States, and especially those who can come up with some sort of specific capabilities, to help us.

UN News: The UN has a new system-wide strategy to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse. What is UN peacekeeping doing for its part to prevent this kind of abuse?

Jean-Pierre Lacroix: We have to be extremely firm and well organized. The Secretary-General has made the fight against sexual abuse one of his top priorities and the policies and the decisions that have been made are very clear in the sense that we will really do our best to both prevent and also deal with allegations in a way that makes it clear that this determination is there. We have to be organized as well... with the help of the Special Coordinator [on improving the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse], Jane Holl Lute, and with the participation of not only DPKO but other departments.



Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Mahamat Saleh Annadif, the head of the UN mission in Mali, visit UN personnel in the Timbuktu Super Camp, which was targeted by rocket attacks. Photo: MINUSMA/Sylvain Liechti

We have organized ourselves in a way that we are more responsive and troop-contributing countries also are more responsive and much more aware of the importance of dealing with sexual abuse and exploitation. I can really see that the determination of troop-contributing countries is much stronger. So we have to make sure that we have the right kind of response on the ground. We also need to make sure we address the plight of victims and we have put in place mechanisms whereby in the field victims have within our operations someone who will be in charge of making sure that their concerns will be properly addressed.

UN News: The United Nations will celebrate the International Day of UN Peacekeepers on 29 May. What is your message to peacekeepers who sacrifice so

much?

Jean-Pierre Lacroix: It's a message of immense gratitude. They are doing a work that is extremely difficult and yet indispensable for the population they are protecting and they are serving. And they do it at immense risk.

Many of our peacekeepers have paid the highest price for that. We have had in 2016, 99 of our peacekeepers who lost their lives as the result of their courageous engagement in serving the populations. We have had recently the murder of four peacekeepers in the Central African Republic [the number later rose to six], and 10 peacekeepers wounded. And that comes after a number of other incidents. I would also mention one recent [death] in Mali, in Timbuktu.

It's gratitude, and not only gratitude but we owe them all the support that we can give them. I think there is a sense of responsibility that we all have within the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. I can feel that very vividly. The team is very much committed, is very much aware of the conditions in which our people, our colleagues, operate on the ground and very dedicated to do their best to serve them and this is also my approach to that.

We will continue to do everything we can to help the communities, the civilian populations, whom we are there to help and to serve.

UN News: And what is your message to the communities?

Jean-Pierre Lacroix: We will continue to do everything we can to help the communities, the civilian populations whom we are there to help and to serve. Sometimes, it is extremely difficult and sometimes we don't have enough resources to do everything we would like to do. But they can rest assured that our commitment, our determination is very strong, even when we are facing the kinds of challenges that make it difficult and sometimes it's very challenging to protect the populations. Protection of civilians, protection of the communities in the areas where we are deployed is really our central mission. We never forget that.

[UN agency works to fill humanitarian vacuum in north DR Congo after aid groups' departure](#)

22 May 2017 – The United Nations migration agency is responding to the urgent humanitarian needs of more than 27,000 displaced people in the Democratic

Republic of the Congo's (DRC) eastern province of North Kivu, after many relief aid organizations left camps.

Sweden's development agency has provided 1.6 million SEK, valued at \$183,000, to the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)).

These funds have come at a time when most humanitarian actors have pulled out of many displacement sites in eastern DRC due to security and funding issues, leaving thousands of displaced people even more vulnerable," [said](#) Boubacar Seybou, Head of IOM's Office in Goma, in a press release.

The funding has been crucial to enable IOM to construct and rehabilitate basic water and sanitation infrastructure and provide 4,000 households with shelter kits. In the first three months of 2017, IOM constructed 324 latrines with hand wash stations, 120 showers and 35 rubbish pits in four targeted displacement sites.

Over the next 12 months, IOM will continue to provide life-saving assistance and protection to vulnerable people in displacement sites in North Kivu, thanks to additional financing from Sweden.

For decades, DRC has experienced conflict and instability, triggering mass displacements and abuses of human rights at the hands of warring factions against innocent civilian populations.

By the end of April 2017, there were 3.7 million internally displaced persons in the DRC, making it the African country most affected by internal displacement. North Kivu remains the province with the most population movement. Unlike in other provinces, armed violence represents the sole cause of displacement.

[On World Day, UN agencies urge countering threats to cultural diversity](#)

21 May 2017 – Cultural diversity "the driving force of change and development" is increasingly under threat, United Nations agencies today said, reaffirming support for the cultural diversity that stems from migration.

Across the world, violent extremists have targeted cultural minorities and destroyed our shared heritage, to [weaken the essential links](#) between people and their history," [said](#) Irina Bokova, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)).

Marking the [World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development](#), Ms. Bokova called for a new humanism for the 21st century, to renew the fundamental aspirations to justice, mutual understanding and dignity that guide all women and men.

She quoted Martin Luther King Jr., saying: 'injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.'

By embracing cultural diversity, the international community can more easily achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) which draw upon the strength and creative potential of humanity's diversity of cultures.

Similarly, the Director-General of the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)), William Lacy Swing, urged Governments and their citizens to embrace migration, despite its challenges, and help to develop common understandings, values and perspectives.

It is sometimes asked whether the West's multiculturalism, its diversity, has reached its limits? Can a society only cope with so much diversity? [The answer is no](#). There has never been a city or a country brought down by too much 'diversity,' said Mr. Swing.

IOM has compiled stories from some of the migrants with whom it has worked, highlighting their lives and journey, and how they are making their families and their new community better. The ['I am a migrant'](#) collection is available online.

In today's statement, Mr. Swing noted that all societies are so-called multi-ethnic because no single State lives with a single culture: 'Even States averse to permitting entry to more 'foreigners' must acknowledge the multiple 'cultures' within their own borders. All countries have them: religious, ethnic, social, societal, sexual, occupational, educational, dietary specificities.'

The World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in December 2002 and celebrated annually on 21 May, is meant to be an opportunity for mobilization on the part of governments, policy makers, civil society organizations, communities and cultural professionals to promote culture in its diversity and in all its forms.