

[FEATURE: UN's mission to keep plastics out of oceans and marine life](#)

27 April 2017 – There will be more plastic than fish in the world's oceans by 2050 unless people stop using single-use plastic items such as plastic bags and plastic bottles, according to figures cited by the United Nations.

“Plastic pollution is surfing onto Indonesian beaches, settling onto the ocean floor at the North Pole, and rising through the food chain onto our dinner tables,” the agency known as UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) has said.

In 1950, the world's population of 2.5 billion produced 1.5 million tons of plastic; in 2016, a global population of more than 7 billion people produced over 300 million tons of plastic – with severe consequences for marine plants and animals.

“According to one estimate, 99 per cent of all seabirds will have ingested plastic by mid-century,” Petter Malvik, UN Environment Programme's Communications Officer, told *UN News*.

Earlier this year, the UN declared war on ocean plastic. Launched at the Economist World Ocean Summit in Bali, the #CleanSeas campaign urges governments to pass plastic reduction policies, targets industries to minimize plastic packaging and redesign products, and urges people to change their own habits.

VIDEO: United Nations Environment Programme warns for the consequences of polluting our ocean with plastic and says that over 8 million tons of plastic end up in oceans each year. The UN will convene the Ocean Conference in June to spur international action to safeguard oceans, seas and marine resources. Credit: *UN News*

Indonesia has committed to slashing its marine litter by 70 per cent by 2025; Uruguay will tax single-use plastic bags this year; and Kenya has agreed to eliminate them entirely.

Click on image for large. Graphic: UNEP

“The Clean Seas campaign has already achieved important wins for our oceans, but the job is far from done. By 2022, we aim to achieve a global ban on microbeads in personal care and cosmetic products and a drastic reduction in the production and use of single-use plastic,” said Mr. Malvik.

Microbeads are tiny pieces of plastic used in, among other things, some exfoliating products and toothpaste. They are listed in the ingredients as polyethylene or polypropylene.

Given the amount of plastic found today in oceans, much of marine life carries plastic that either entered them directly or by eating smaller marine creatures.

“These microplastics often carry toxic contaminants and pose a real risk to food security and human health if they enter the human food chain via the fish that we eat,” Petri Suuronen, Fishery Industry Officer at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)), told UN News.

“With an estimated 9.7 billion people to be fed by 2050, the threat of fish stocks contaminated with microplastics and their associated toxins is clear,” Mr. Suuronen added.

In addition to dangers to humans, microplastics are a threat for fish and birds that mistake them as food and starve to death.

Microplastics are made one of two ways. Either they are manufactured – not only as microbeads, but even as microfibers that wash out of synthetic clothes during laundry – or they are created when waves and sunlight break down larger plastic pieces.

One of the biggest sources of this second type of microplastics is fishermen, who abandon, lose or discard fishing gear into seas and oceans.

A [2009 FAO report](#) estimated there are 640,000 tons of abandoned fishing nets on the ocean floor throughout the world. Much of it continuing to trap marine animals in a practice referred to as “ghost fishing.”



UNEP Patron for Oceans, Lewis Pugh, is swimming the Seven Seas to urge policy makers to protect at least 10 per cent of the world’s seas. In the Arabian Sea off Oman, the seabed was a rubbish dump. No fish. No coral. Just tyres, plastic packets, bottles, cans. Photo: UNEP

“Fishing gear can persist for decades in the oceans, entangling wildlife and polluting marine ecosystems as it breaks down into smaller and smaller particles,” said Mr. Suuronen.

Aside from its harmful effects, discarded plastic has economic drawbacks. Plastic packaging material with a value of at least [\\$80 billion](#) is lost each year, according to a report by the World Economic Forum and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, cited by the UN.

Click on image for large. Graphic: UNEP

The report also notes that if this trend continues, by 2050, oceans will contain more plastic than fish by weight.

Solving the issue of plastic pollution will require international agreements.

During the week of 5 June, Member States and civil society representatives will gather at UN Headquarters in New York for the Ocean Conference. Among its expected outcomes is a Call to Action – a global declaration that will set the course toward a more sustainable future for the world’s oceans and seas.

The focus of the conference is Sustainable Development Goal 14, which aims to alleviate poverty and inequality, while preserving the earth. ‘SDG 14’ calls for efforts to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources.

“Humanity is only just waking up to the extent to which it is harming itself and the planetary environment through the plague-proportions of plastic it is dumping into the ocean,” said Peter Thomson, President of the UN General Assembly.

“The Ocean Conference must take the first steps to reverse the growing curse of marine plastic pollution. We have all played a part in this problem; we must all work on the solutions.”

[Afghanistan: UN urges protection of civilians as casualties remain high in first quarter](#)

27 April 2017 – The United Nations mission in Afghanistan today urged all parties to the conflict to take immediate and concrete measures to better protect civilians from harm, as the latest data for 2017 shows continued high numbers of civilian casualties.

It is civilians, with increasing numbers of women and children, who far too often bear the brunt of the conflict, [said](#) Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and the head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)) in a press release. “With the so-called fighting season imminent, I appeal to all parties to take every measure possible to prevent unnecessary and unacceptable harm to Afghan civilians.”

In the first quarter of 2017, UNAMA documented 2,181 civilian casualties – 715 dead and 1,466 injured, a four per cent decrease compared to the same period in 2016. Civilian deaths decreased by two per cent while civilian injuries decreased by five per cent.

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Ground fighting remained the leading cause of civilian casualties, accounting for 35 per cent of all civilian casualties.

Anti-Government elements caused 62 per cent of civilian casualties, 447 dead and 906 injured for a combined 1,353, reflecting a five per cent increase compared to the same period in 2016.

UNAMA attributed 451, or 21 per cent of, civilian casualties – 165 dead and 286 injured – to pro-Government forces, a decrease of two per cent compared to the same period in 2016.

The mission documented 148 civilian casualties – 72 dead and 76 injured – from aerial operations, a disturbing increase compared to 29 civilian casualties – eight dead and 21 injured – in the first quarter of 2016.

Improvised explosive devices (all non-suicide switch types) remained the second leading cause of civilian casualties, responsible for 409 civilian casualties – 126 dead and 283 injured, a decrease of one per cent compared to the same period in 2016 and comprising 19 per cent of all civilian casualties.

Suicide and complex attacks continued to cause record levels of civilian harm. The Mission recorded a five percent increase in civilian casualties from these tactics – 374 civilian casualties, 108 dead and 266 injured, accounting for 17 per cent of all civilian casualties.

Pressure-plate improvised explosive devices caused 218 civilian casualties, 86 dead and 132 injured, a 12 per cent increase.

Civilian casualties from unexploded ordnance increased by one per cent to 203, 50 dead and 153 injured, of which children comprised 81 per cent.

UNAMA is extremely concerned by increases in both child and women civilian casualties, particularly deaths. The Mission recorded a 24 per cent increase to 273 women civilian casualties, 88 dead and 185 injured.

Also in the first quarter, the mission recorded 735 child casualties, 210 dead and 525 injured, a three per cent increase compared to the same period in 2016.

[Syria: UN aid officials urge an end to airstrikes on hospitals](#)



Destroyed health centre in Sakhour, east Aleppo, Syria, which, four years ago, provided 20,000 Iraqi refugees with health care. Today, the UN is

looking into its rehabilitation. Photo: OCHA/MB

26 April 2017 – Following reports of airstrikes that damaged hospitals in northern Syria, two senior United Nations humanitarian officials today called for an end to such attacks.

In a joint [statement](#), Kevin Kennedy, Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis, said that “it is completely unacceptable that facilities and people who are trying to save lives are being bombed.”

“The persistent and unceasing attacks on hospitals and medical facilities are one of the most egregious features of this war and have taken the lives of hundreds of medical personnel and deprived people in need of their most fundamental human right- the right to life. It must stop,” he added.

Ali Al-Za’tari, the Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria, called for “the parties to the conflict to abide by their obligation under international humanitarian and human rights law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure such as hospitals.”

The UN community is appalled by the ongoing damage and destruction of medical facilities in northern Syria depriving hundreds of thousands of people of basic health services, they said.

According to the statement, on 25 April at dawn, the Shahid Wasim Hussein hospital in Kafr Takharim city was reportedly hit by airstrikes, putting it out of service. On 22 April, airstrikes in the area of Abdin in Idleb Governorate reportedly hit an underground field hospital and reportedly killed four civilians.

Four other airstrikes impacting medical facilities were reported in April alone in this region, including a hospital specializing in maternal and child care. Almost all facilities were rendered out of service as a result.

Strong partnerships key to unleash full potential of industrialization, highlights senior UN official

26 April 2017 – Speaking at the conclusion of a global meeting on importance of agriculture and agro-industries for sustainable and resilient food systems, the President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) today urged for greater partnerships to ensure that global development agenda brings prosperity to all.

“[We have] to go beyond past and current models, beyond individual areas of expertise, beyond separate locations and beyond institutional frontiers,” said the [ECOSOC](#) President, Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava, at the close of the meeting held at Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.

“In doing so, we can unleash the full potential of infrastructure development and sustainable industrialization, including agro-industries, to generate growth and employment while preserving planetary boundaries,” he emphasized.

Such partnerships, Mr. Shava underscored, would also be crucial to mitigate the challenges of climate change and natural disasters as well as to address the impact of increasing global population and migration on global food security.

The three-day meeting discussed a wide range of topics, including the particular development context of developing countries and countries in special situation (including least developed and landlocked developing countries), holistic approaches and integrated approach to climate change and other challenges that agriculture confronts, public-private-partnerships of inclusive agro-industry development, and the role of public sector and donor organizations in mitigating financial risks in agriculture and agro-industry.

The [meeting in Victoria Falls](#) follows an earlier [meeting in Dakar](#), Senegal, that discussed the role of infrastructure development in promoting sustainable industrialization.

These two events were organized to prepare for a special ECOSOC meeting on [innovations in infrastructure development](#) and promoting sustainable industrialization, convened by President Shava, at the UN Headquarters in New York on 31 May.

The ECOSOC – one of the six principal organs of the UN – is responsible for coordinating the economic, social, and related work of UN agencies, functional and regional. Furthermore, the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development ([HLPF](#)), the main platform dealing with sustainable development, meets every year under the auspices of the Council.

Promoting sustainable and inclusive industrialization is the [Goal 9](#) (SDG9) of the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

[**Chernobyl disaster, 31 years on: International cooperation still needed to address consequences, says UN**](#)

26 April 2017 – The United Nations today commemorated the International

Chernobyl Disaster Remembrance Day recalling the devastating explosion of 1986 at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant which spewed radioactive material to an area stretching 155,000 square kilometres across Belarus, Russia and Ukraine.

Underscoring the need to strengthen international cooperation to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the disaster, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution in December last year in which it designated 26 April as the [International Chernobyl Disaster Remembrance Day](#).

In the [resolution](#), the Assembly recognized that “three decades after the Chernobyl disaster, the still-persistent serious long-term consequences thereof, as well as the continuing related needs of the affected communities and territories.”

It also acknowledged “the need for continuing international cooperation on Chernobyl under the auspices of the UN that can contribute to the implementation of the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development and the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#) 2015-2030.”

About 8.4 million people across four countries were exposed to radiation, including some 600,000 “liquidators,” who were involved in fire-fighting and clean-up operations.

Also, agricultural areas covering nearly 52,000 square kilometres were contaminated with Cesium-137 and Strontium-90, with 30-year and 28-year half-lives respectively. Nearly 404,000 people were resettled, but millions continued to live in an environment where continued residual exposure created a range of adverse effects.

As any radioactive decay is on an exponential scale, it can take many decades and even centuries for the material to become inert fully.

UN efforts to aid the recovery from the disaster started in 1990 when the global Organization’s General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for international cooperation to address and mitigate the consequences of the explosion.

Since the disaster, UN programmes and agencies have, together with non-governmental organizations have launched more than 230 different research and assistance projects in the fields of health, nuclear safety, rehabilitation, environment, production of clean foods and information.

Also today, at the UN Headquarters in New York, the Permanent Mission of Belarus together with partners organized a roundtable discussion on identifying and mitigating the long-term consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster entitled ‘Building the Case for Continued International Cooperation’.