

'Progress under threat,' warns UN chief on twentieth anniversary of chemical weapons convention

26 April 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today warned that progress made in eliminating the world's declared stockpiles of chemical weapons is threatened by belligerents in the Middle East.

"The recent attack in Syria was a horrific reminder of the stakes," [said](#) Mr. Guterres in a video message to the commemorative ceremony for the 20th anniversary of the [Chemical Weapons Convention](#) and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons ([OPCW](#)) held in The Hague, Netherlands.

The OPCW is the implementing body of the Convention, which entered into force in 1997. As of today OPCW has 192 member States, who are working together to achieve a world free of chemical weapons.

"Nearly all countries are party to the Convention – and the Organization has helped eliminate most of the world's declared stockpiles," Mr. Guterres noted.

"But progress is under threat. In the Middle East, belligerents are breaking the norm against chemical weapons," he added.

The UN chief expressed hope that all States will support the OPCW's critical fact-finding mission, as well as its joint investigative mechanism with the United Nations.

Noting that the Convention and the implementing body celebrate two decades of success, Mr. Guterres urged: "Now, let us renew our resolve to consign these diabolical weapons to the pages of history."

The OPCW Member States share the collective goal of preventing chemistry from ever again being used for warfare, thereby strengthening international security. To this end, the Convention contains four key provisions:

- destroying all existing chemical weapons under international verification by the OPCW;
 - monitoring chemical industry to prevent new weapons from re-emerging;
 - providing assistance and protection to States Parties against chemical threats; and
 - fostering international cooperation to strengthen implementation of the Convention and promote the peaceful use of chemistry.
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Turning problems into progress: UN celebrates 'risk-takers' on World Intellectual Property Day

26 April 2017 – On [World Intellectual Property Day](#), the United Nations is spotlighting innovation – “future-shapers and risk-takers” – exploring how it is making our lives healthier, safer, and more comfortable, turning problems into progress.

Marking the Day at World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) headquarters in Geneva, UN [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres [noted](#) that while the world is facing enormous changes and challenges, including new technologies and shifting labour markets that will impact people’s lives, WIPO has an essential role to play.

“Your organization can be a central tool of the UN to be able to cope with these challenges, to provide us with the knowledge about what is happening, to give us the ideas, the suggestions of how we can organize ourselves at different levels to be able to cope with these challenges,” he said.

WIPO is the global forum for intellectual property services, policy, information and cooperation. We are a self-funding agency of the United Nations, with 189 member States. The agency’s mission is to lead the development of a balanced and effective international intellectual property (IP) system that enables innovation and creativity for the benefit of all.

Mr. Guterres continued: “Your organization has an extremely important role, because you are in the frontier of knowledge and the frontier of knowledge is in the end what will determine the future of our international community.”

For his part, WIPO Director General Francis Gurry [said](#), this year’s campaign celebrates all those risk takers, those ‘future shapers,’ those innovators who develop a new technology, product or service that spurs us onward and makes us better.”

“On World Intellectual Property Day, let us reflect on and appreciate the energy, drive and dedication required to translate an idea into reality. And let us renew our commitment to building a global IP framework that makes innovation work for everyone, everywhere,” he said.

He noted that innovation – and the technological progress it represents – makes a significant contribution to economic growth and creates opportunities for new and better jobs.

“We often do not take enough time to think about the many ways in which innovation improves the quality of our lives. One only has to compare the way we live today with the way we lived 100 years ago,” he continued.

Over the past century, he said, the world had seen an extraordinary

transformation in the quality of “our material lives, thanks to the introduction of countless new and improved technologies and products.”

Mr. Gurry went on to explain that intellectual property, such as patents, trademarks, industrial designs and copyright are a crucial part of a successful innovation system.

“It provides a return for those who take the risk to introduce the ‘new’ – in terms of products and services – into the economy. It provides a framework for the rather difficult and challenging journey that any idea has to undertake before becoming a commercially available product or service,” he stated.

Mr. Gurry concluded by inviting everyone to take advantage of this year’s campaign as “an opportunity for us all to think about what it actually takes to invent something and the challenges associated with that process. It is also a chance for us to consider how we can make innovation really work for the benefit of the whole of society.”

[Inequalities between rich and poor temper broad success of immunization – UNICEF](#)

26 April 2017 – Even though billions of doses of vaccines for children across 100 countries around the world were supplied in 2016, millions of children – especially those in conflict zones – still miss out on life-saving inoculations, the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has warned.

“All children, no matter where they live or what their circumstances are, have the right to survive and thrive, safe from deadly diseases,” Robin Nandy, the Chief of Immunization at UNICEF, said in a [news release](#).

Access to immunization has led to a dramatic decrease in deaths of children under the age of five from vaccine-preventable diseases, and has brought the world closer to eradicating deadly scourges like polio and measles but despite this progress, 1.5 million children still die from diseases which can be prevented by vaccines.

According to estimates, 19.4 million children around the world still miss out on full vaccinations every year.

Around two thirds of all unvaccinated children live in conflict-affected countries. Weak health systems, poverty and social inequities also mean that one in five children under the age of five is still not reached with life-saving vaccines.

On top of this, persisting inequality between rich and poor children further exasperate the problem.

In countries where 80 per cent of the world's under-five child deaths occur, over half of the poorest children are not fully vaccinated. Globally, the poorest children are nearly twice as likely to die before the age of five as the richest.

"In addition to children living in rural communities where access to services is limited, more and more children living in overcrowded cities and slum dwellings are also missing out on vital vaccinations," said Dr. Nandy.

"Overcrowding, poverty, poor hygiene and sanitation, as well as inadequate nutrition and health care increase the risk of diseases such as pneumonia, diarrhoea and measles in these communities; diseases that are easily preventable with vaccines," he added.

Furthermore, given predictions that one in four people could be living in urban poor communities, mainly in Africa and Asia by 2030, the focus and investment of immunization services must be tailored to the specific needs of these communities and children, noted UNICEF.

This re-focusing of efforts is all the more important given that efforts in these communities would be crucial for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

[DR Congo: UN seeks \\$64 million to tackle humanitarian crisis in Kasai region](#)

26 April 2017 – The United Nations has appealed for \$64.5 million to respond to the urgent needs of 731,000 people over the next six months in the Kasai region, the latest humanitarian hotspot in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

The Kasai crisis is an acute crisis of massive proportions in a country that is already going through one of the world's most relentlessly acute humanitarian emergencies, the Humanitarian Coordinator in DRC, Mamadou Diallo, [said](#) in Kinshasa.

We are facing a new challenge that requires additional resources to respond to the needs of thousands of displaced people and host families as our current capacities are being outstripped, he added.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

([OCHA](#)), more than one million people are estimated to be currently displaced as the violence started in Kasai Central and rippled across neighboring Kasai, Kasai Oriental, Lomami and Sankuru provinces.

Currently some 40 national and international humanitarian organizations are working across the five provinces to respond to the crisis, which was borne out of armed clashes that erupted in August 2016 between the Congolese army and a local militia group.

The appeal launched today will provide water, food, medicines and health services, basic household items, and provide protection services, among others, to minors, women who have suffered sexual violence, and other civilians who have been victim of violence.

In Kasai Central province alone, the current humanitarian needs are 400 per cent above what humanitarian actors had planned for earlier this year.

“An effective response requires that new and fresh funding be allocated as humanitarian actors cannot afford to take away from their current operations in the eastern provinces to support the Kasai crisis,” Mr. Diallo said.

More than four months into the year, the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan only received \$66 million, or less than 10 per cent of the overall \$748 million appeal.

[Indigenous peoples are ‘moral compass of humanity,’ special UN General Assembly meeting told](#)

25 April 2017 – Endorsement of the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples does not equal implementation, speakers told the UN General Assembly today at a special meeting to celebrate the Declaration’s tenth anniversary and renew commitment to its tenets as a vital solution towards attaining a just and sustainable world.

Since the Declaration’s adoption, global awareness of indigenous peoples had grown. However, progress had been inconsistent within countries and uneven around the world, Durga Prasad Bhattarai, Vice-President of the General Assembly told the [High-level event](#) to mark the 10th anniversary of the landmark [UN Declaration](#).

“To fulfil the commitments made under the Declaration,” he said, “stronger partnerships – built on a foundation of trust – must be forged between among

Governments, indigenous peoples, the United Nations, civil society, the private sector and other key stakeholders.”

He invited the international community to renew its commitment to indigenous peoples, work collaboratively to achieve the Declaration’s aims and secure a world in which the rights of all indigenous peoples were promoted and protected.

Indigenous peoples ‘can make their own future,’ Bolivian President says

Delivering the keynote address, Evo Morales Ayma, the President of Bolivia, described how the indigenous movement in his country had brought together other sectors of society, including transport workers and the middle class, to build a new Bolivia.

“There are no issues in which indigenous peoples could not or should not be involved,” he said, explaining that for centuries, they had resisted invaders who sought to extinguish their identity, he said, emphasizing that indigenous people around the world shared the same history.

Describing war as the direct product of capitalism, he pointed out that, for the rich, there is no crisis as they continued to accumulate wealth on the backs of the poor. “Humanity is in danger,” but that is a challenge, not destiny. Indigenous peoples had shown that they could resist, “and they must.”

And indeed, indigenous peoples can make their own future. What had been achieved in Bolivia – a country that had gone from a colonial State to a sovereign and plurinational one – demonstrates what could be done at a global level. “Indigenous peoples are the moral compass of humanity, with their own ways of organization and production,” he stressed, adding that their responsibility is to organize a global fight “to save humanity and the world.”



Mariam Walleet Aboubakrine, Chairperson of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, addresses High-level meeting on the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. UN Photo/Manuel Elias



Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, addresses High-level meeting on the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. UN Photo/Manuel Elias



Andrew Gilmour, Assistant-Secretary-General of the New York Office of Human Rights, addresses High-level meeting on the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. UN Photo/Manuel

Elias



Kyung-wha Kang, the Secretary-General's Special Advisor on Policy, addresses High-level meeting on the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. UN Photo/Manuel Elias

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Kyung-wha Kang, the UN Secretary-General's Senior Adviser on Policy, said to ameliorate progress on the rights of Indigenous peoples, several tools should be used, including the three relevant United Nations mechanisms – the Permanent Forum, the Special Rapporteur and the Expert Mechanism. In addition, the UN system-wide action plan and ongoing consultations could also be used to help to amplify indigenous voices in the Organization's processes.

While hailing the progress made this far, Andrew Gilmour, the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights said: "The struggle is far from over. Although the Declaration was approved 10 years ago, many of the obstacles that led to its enactment are still present today. Endorsement of its fine principles, alas, does not equal implementation."

So once again, the indigenous movement – with its diverse voices, including those of indigenous women, youth, and persons with disabilities – is "rising to meet the challenge of making the Declaration a reality," he said pointing, to the 'water protectors' in Standing Rock, South Dakota, in the United States, as well as those speaking up for their rights, from Nepal to Mexico, who are insisting that their informed consent must be sought.

Yet, extractive industries continued to destroy their land, seeing the indigenous populations on them not as a vital element, but as an obstacle. Human rights defenders were being killed. The Office for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) has called for follow up on enforcing indigenous peoples' rights.

The private sector must be aware of the Declaration's principles, he stressed, adding that information about the rights of indigenous peoples should be part of the business schools' curriculums. To foster progress at the country level, his Office is working towards building national action plans.

Also addressing the meeting, Mariam Wallei Aboubakrine, Chair of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, said the Declaration reflects a global consensus, with some countries such as Canada taking leadership positions after having had initially voted against the instrument in the General Assembly.

"The Declaration outlines a range of rights," including with regard to land, education, health and to freely determine political status, she said, adding that the principles of free, prior and informed consent are a critical factor

in the Declaration. However, while implementation progress continued, the situation on the ground is “grim,” with indigenous peoples living shorter lives and having limited political participation.

The most fitting way to mark the Declaration’s anniversary is to honestly identify and confront the obstacles it faces for effective implementation at all levels

Advocating for the Declaration’s principles to be realized on the ground, she said political will is needed. More than 200 frontline defenders, half of whom had been defending land, had been killed in 2016. Those and other situations must be addressed and remedied.

For her part, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, said her first report had pointed to two challenges to implementing the Declaration: a lack of awareness and understanding about the human rights instruments; and States’ difficulties for States to translating them into practical steps.

On promoting awareness and understanding, the results of her predecessor’s work had seen the reversal of position by the four countries – Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States –that which had originally voted against the Declaration in the Assembly.

“The Declaration is an essential tool for reconciliation, a much much-needed process in countries where indigenous peoples continue to suffer gross human rights violations,” she stated, but stressed: “The most fitting way to mark the Declaration’s anniversary is to honestly identify and confront the obstacles it faces for effective implementation at all levels.”