

Achieving targets on energy helps meet other Global Goals, UN forum told

Energy is central to nearly every major challenge and opportunity the world faces today, including poverty eradication, gender equality, adaptation to climate change, food security, health, education, sustainable cities, jobs and transport, speakers told a key United Nations forum on sustainable development on Tuesday.

“We believe that what we need going forward is to strengthen ambition, strengthen action and strengthen cooperation,” said Adnan Amin, Director-General of the International Renewable Energy Agency, on the second day of the UN [High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development](#) (HLPF).

The Forum, which will run through 18 July, aims to examine progress already made by dozens of countries towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – adopted by 193 Member States in 2015 – and discuss the remaining challenges and the best way forward.

Mr. Amin moderated an afternoon session that focused on Goal 7 – ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, highlighting how the increasing use of sustainable energy has become a tangible reality in many countries, including Portugal, where the whole country can now be powered through renewable resources.

The Forum featured a statistical presentation by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), whose representative said that despite improved access to electricity globally, nearly one billion people continue to live without electricity while about 3 billion people lack access to clean-cooking solutions and are exposed to dangerous levels of indoor air pollution.

Panellists discussed how achieving SDG 7 will galvanize actions to meet the Paris Agreement on climate change, and how women are disproportionately affected by indoor air pollution caused by the use of fuels such as coal and wood indoors.

The Forum meets annually under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council, ECOSOC, including a three-day ministerial segment, and is due to meet once every four years at the level of Heads of State and Government, under the auspices of the UN General Assembly.

Under the theme “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies”, this year’s Forum focuses on six of the 17 goals:

Goal 6: To ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Goal 7: To provide access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern

energy for all.

Goal 11: To make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Goal 12: To ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Goal 15. To protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss.

Goal 17. To strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, that will be considered each year.

South Sudan: 'Horrific acts' by government may constitute 'war crimes' says UN, demanding justice

Multiple killings and a campaign of sexual violence that may amount to war crimes have been documented by United Nations rights monitors in South Sudan's Unity state, prompting a call for government and opposition forces to be held to account.

The UN human rights office, [OHCHR](#), issued a report on Tuesday, noting the "deliberate...and brutally violent" targeting of civilians, particularly women and children, in April and May.

According to the report, at least 120 women and girls were raped and those unable to flee were killed as part of a deliberate "scorched earth" policy that has displaced thousands of people.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, called on the Government to halt all attacks against civilians, launch investigations and hold the perpetrators accountable, including those who bear the responsibility of commanding fighters.

"The perpetrators of these [revolting acts](#) against defenceless civilians, including those bearing command responsibility, must not be allowed to get away with it," High Commissioner Zeid said.

OHCHR spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani told journalists in Geneva that at least 232 people were killed in the attacks on villages in opposition-controlled areas, in Mayendit and Leer.

Additionally, the report highlighted that opposition armed groups also

carried out retaliatory attacks on civilians; its findings coming amid reported progress in peace talks between rival factions in the country, who have been embroiled in brutal civil conflict since late 2013.

The elderly, people with disabilities and very young children, were killed in horrific acts of violence – some hung from trees and others burned alive in their homes, the investigation found.

“There must be consequences for the men who reportedly gang-raped a six-year-old child, who slit the throats of elderly villagers, who hanged women for resisting looting, and shot fleeing civilians in the swamps where they hid,” Zeid said.

“Those who ordered and facilitated these horrific crimes must be brought to account. The Government of South Sudan and the international community have the obligation to ensure justice,” he added.

Ms. Shamdasani said that the investigation had identified three individuals with the “greatest responsibility” for the violence.

Zeid called on the Transitional Government of National Unity in South Sudan and the African Union to move quickly towards establishing the proposed Hybrid Court for South Sudan, to ensure accountability for gross human rights violations.

The [UN Mission in South Sudan](#), UNMISS, and humanitarian actors have stepped up action, such as increasing the presence of peacekeepers; providing aid to those in need; continuing to monitor and report on rights violations; and engaging with Government officials, commanders of both forces, as well as civil society.

[Women vital for ‘new paradigm’ in Africa’s Sahel region, Security Council hears](#)

Women across Africa’s Sahel region can be agents for a “new paradigm” for peacebuilding and development that benefits all people there, the United Nations [Security Council](#) heard on Tuesday.

Making the case was [UN Deputy Secretary-General](#) Amina Mohammed, fresh from a mission to South Sudan, Chad and Niger; all countries where women and children are paying what she called the “stark cost” of conflict.

“With today’s conflicts greater in both number and complexity, it is more

important than ever to find the path to peacebuilding and sustainable development for all," she told the Council.

"Across the three countries we visited, it is evident that women can be the agents of a new and necessary approach: a new narrative, a new paradigm."

The joint UN-African Union (AU) delegation to the Sahel was comprised of senior leaders from the international community, mostly women.

For Bineta Diop, the AU Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security, the mission highlighted the "heart-rending and poignant realities" of women and girls in places such as the Lake Chad Basin region, where the activities of the militant group Boko Haram have displaced millions.

While the delegation met women terrorized by the extremists, or who had been married off while still girls, they encountered others who had stepped in to maintain livelihoods in the absence of men, as well as women religious leaders who are working to end child marriage and prevent radicalization via extremist ideology.

"Women are of course undeniably victims of violence," she stated. "But that said, women are not just victims. They are also agents of change. They are intelligent and smart and have initiatives that they wish to share to respond to the challenges they are faced with."

Nearly two decades ago, the UN Security Council adopted a landmark resolution that has placed the issue of women, peace and security on the global agenda. Resolution 1325 (2000) turns 20 in two years' time and Sweden's Foreign Minister issued a challenge to the international community to mark the anniversary.

Margot Wallström called on the Council to ensure UN peacekeeping and political missions fully deliver on its promises. This, she said, will include making sure women are at the negotiation table, and that mission mandates include a perspective relating to women, peace and security, among other points.

"Missions like the one undertaken last week should become annual events, and every Security Council meeting should consider the women, peace and security perspective as an essential part of our work to end conflicts," she said.

"I have no doubt that, if we were to do so, our motto of more women, more peace would become a reality."

[North Korea: 'Time to talk human](#)

rights', says UN expert

A United Nations human rights expert on Tuesday urged North Korea to open a dialogue with him in parallel to the ongoing diplomatic efforts being undertaken on peace and denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula.

“As recently as just several months ago, the world was fearing a prospect of a nuclear war”, said the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) – commonly referred to as North Korea – Tomás Ojea Quintana.

“While still in its infancy, the world is now witnessing a peace process that may bring real results”, he added, commending the governments of the north and south, for their resolve that there will be no more war and that there will be a new era of peace between the two Koreas.

He said, however, that North Korea has so far refused to engage with him, calling on the Government to begin a dialogue “as a concrete sign of their commitment, which will only serve to reinforce the ongoing process”.

Mr. Ojea Quintana’s appeal followed his eight-day visit to Seoul, the capital of South Korea, where he conducted interviews with people who have recently left the DPRK.

The expert said the worsening humanitarian crisis in the North underlined the importance of putting the lives of all North Koreans on the agenda, expressing concern that human rights terminology had failed to appear in any documents following talks between the two Koreas, and the US-DPRK summit in Singapore on 12 June.

He said it was not the first time that human rights concerns had been “seen as an inconvenience at a delicate moment. However, our experience as the UN has shown that there can be no genuine, peaceful and sustainable transition without it.”

The Special Rapporteur said that “while the difficulties that the recent arrivals from the DPRK alluded to were mostly economic and social, they all displayed a fear of expressing any opinion that could be considered as political, or a criticism of the Government or the leader”.

“Although none of them had a first-hand experience of detention, they all cited knowing someone, or some family, who were reportedly sent to political prison camps (kwanliso), and there is widespread fear of being sent to them,” Mr. Ojea Quintana added.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

Thai cave boys spared thundershower forecasts, highlights extreme climate disruption: UN weather agency

Thundershowers that have been forecast in northern Thailand luckily did not materialize, easing the extraordinary rescue of a boys' football team and their coach, who spent well over two weeks trapped in a cave complex there, UN weather experts said on Tuesday.

Clare Nullis, spokesperson for the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), was speaking in Geneva amid reports indicating that all 12 boys and their coach had been freed in a daring rescue operation by a team of specialist divers.

"It is the start of the monsoon season in Thailand," she said. "I've been looking at the weather forecast there for Chiang-Rai, for the region, every day for the past week. Every day it has consistently shown the risk of thundershowers; now they haven't, fortunately, materialized."

Commenting on several other extreme weather events around the world, Ms. Nullis noted that in Japan, flash floods across the country had claimed at least 150 lives, according to authorities, and that the toll "is likely to rise" in coming days.

The situation is significant given Japan's high level of preparedness against natural catastrophes, the WMO spokesperson said, noting that around 10,000 houses have been inundated or destroyed by the worst flooding in decades.

"Japan is one of the best prepared countries in the world when it comes to disaster risk reduction, disaster response – they are supremely well prepared," said Ms. Nullis. "So, the magnitude of the casualties, of the destruction we are seeing now, really is an indication of just how big and how extreme this was and how heavy the rainfall was in such a short period of time."

Among the areas affected between 28 June and 8 July, West Japan and Hokkaido experienced record rainfall, the WMO spokesperson said, citing the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA).

This was caused by huge amount of water vapour from a stationary rainy front, in addition to damp air left over from Typhoon Prapiroon, JMA said.

Elsewhere in Japan, a different weather system, Typhoon Maria, has hit the south-west Ryukyu islands.

The storm has put nearby Taiwan, Province of China, on “lockdown”, the WMO spokesperson said, noting that at its peak in recent days, Maria had developed into a category 5 storm.

Although it has weakened to a category 3 event, Ms. Nullis said that it is still capable of sustained winds of 175 kilometres per hour and gusts of up to 250 kilometres per hour.

“Taiwan is basically in lockdown today and Taiwan is expecting really to take the brunt of this. The China Meteorological Administration has issued a red alert and is ... mobilizing all its emergency response teams.”

The west coast of the United States is also in the grip of “high-impact weather” systems, Ms. Nullis continued, noting record temperatures in downtown Los Angeles:

“Los Angeles area just set a whole new string of temperature records last week,” she said. “Just for an example, 48.9° (Celsius), which is 120° Fahrenheit, in Chino, which is a suburb of Los Angeles; 47.8° in San Bernardino.”

Turning to Europe, the WMO spokesperson told journalists that the agency’s Regional Climate Centre on Climate Monitoring, located in Germany, had predicted “a continuation of the drought situation and above-normal temperatures” of between 3° and 6° Celsius, above average.

“Almost daily warnings about forest fires” had been issued, Ms. Nullis said, noting that it was “very unusual” for this to happen so early in the year.

No specific event can be associated with climate change but current weather patterns are “consistent” with it, the WMO official said, citing “extreme heat, consistent heat, persistent heat and heavy precipitation”.