

Food safety critical to development and ending poverty: FAO deputy chief

Ensuring that people everywhere can trust the safety and quality of the food they eat is the focus of a UN meeting taking place this week in Rome.

The international food standards body known as the Codex Alimentarius Commission ([CAC](#)) is expected to adopt a text on the maximum level of mercury in fish, among other matters, during its annual session, which opened on Monday.

“One of the greatest challenges the world faces is how to ensure that a growing global population has enough safe food,” Maria Helena Semedo, Deputy Director-General of the UN [Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO\)](#), told the gathering.

“Food safety is a critical enabler for market access, which promotes economic development and alleviates poverty.”

The Codex Alimentarius Commission was established more than 50 years ago by FAO and the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#).

It coordinates input from nearly 190 countries and the European Union, and addresses themes such as contaminants, pesticides, health claims and nutrition labelling.

The Commission meets every year for one week to adopt the standards, guidelines, codes of practice and other recommendations that make up the Codex Alimentarius—Latin for “food code”—aimed at protecting consumer health and ensuring fair practices in the food trade.

Tom Heilandt, CAC secretary, told UN News that mercury in fish and other seafood can be harmful or even deadly to people of all ages.

“We are particularly concerned about the contamination of fish because of contamination of the seas with this heavy metal. It is partially because of natural contamination, meaning that the mercury was in the environment already and then dissolved in the oceans, and partly also because of emissions from industry,” he explained.

“It can also enter into the body, even through the hair, and it is also possible to enter the foetus in a pregnant woman. And that can be really bad for the baby.”

Representatives from nearly 120 countries and 70 organizations are attending this year’s CAC meeting, which concludes on Friday.

Guilherme da Costa, the chairperson, called on delegates to build consensus in setting standards.

“It is essential we do our best to further develop and disseminate Codex standards in order to ensure food safety and quality for everyone everywhere,” he said.

[Ben Stiller's new role, more about hope than humour, as he's named Goodwill Ambassador for UNHCR](#)

The United Nations refugee agency ([UNHCR](#)), announced on Monday that the actor, director, producer and philanthropist Ben Stiller, is to become its latest [Goodwill Ambassador](#), as he issued an appeal for action on behalf of those forced to flee their homes around the world.

“With over 68 million displaced people around the world today, there has never been a more [compelling reason](#) or greater urgency to show solidarity and support for refugees,” said the Hollywood star, who is best known for high profile comedy and satirical blockbusters such as the Meet the Parents trilogy, and Zoolander.

In underscoring UNHCR's tireless work in helping those fleeing war, terror and persecution globally, Mr. Stiller expressed his enormous pride in taking on this latest role.

“I for one will do what I can as a Goodwill Ambassador for UNHCR, to advocate for refugees and encourage others to join me,” he said.

The announcement came as Mr. Stiller concluded a trip with UNHCR to Guatemala, where he met some of the people from northern Central America who have been forced from their homes because of violence.

In recent years a growing number of people across El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras have fled extraordinary, unchecked violence at the hands of organized criminal groups – including murder, rape, abduction and forcible recruitment of children into gangs.

The majority of those parents who have endured forced separation at the border of the United States from their children in recent weeks, hail from these three countries, said UN human rights experts in June.

Mr. Stiller spent time in Guatemala meeting refugees including unaccompanied children and seeing how UNHCR, with the Government and its partners, is working to support and protect them.

I for one will do what I can [...] to advocate for refugees and

encourage others to join me – *Ben Stiller*

“Here in Guatemala, the families, including children, that I met experienced fear and violence back home that is beyond imagination. They are vulnerable and have suffered immensely,” he observed, adding that “they need help.”

Filippo Grandi, [UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#), commented: “Ben will be a great Goodwill Ambassador. I have witnessed personally his commitment to the world’s refugees and his extraordinary capacity to talk about the complicated issue of displacement in a manner that is clear, passionate and convincing.”

The role of Goodwill Ambassadors is to raise awareness, generate support and give a voice to those who have been forced to leave their homes.

UNHCR works with governments and partners on the ground in locations all over the world to support, protect and help refugees build better futures. UN agencies have coordinated a comprehensive regional response, including working across Guatemala.

Mr. Stiller has been supporting UNHCR since early 2016, having met with refugees in Germany and Jordan, and plays a key role in UNHCR projects, including the [#withrefugees](#) campaign, said the agency.

Most recently, he marked World Refugee Day in a film entitled “Homemade Chicken Shawarma, As Made By Ben Stiller and Ahmed Badr”.

[Afghanistan: Bring ‘architects’ of latest ‘appalling’ suicide bombing to justice, says deputy UN mission chief](#)

In the wake of dozens of civilian deaths – the most recent, a suicide attack in Jalalabad on Sunday – a high-level United Nations representative on the ground called for “the architects of this appalling crime” to be brought to justice.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)) condemned the suicide attack that left at least 19 civilians dead, and expressed concern over a recent spate of incidents targeting schools and medical centres. More than 20 others, including children, were injured in the blast.

“The architects of this appalling crime must be brought to justice,” said Ingrid Hayden on Monday, the deputy head of UNAMA, and Deputy Special Representative.

According to a statement from the mission, most of the suicide bomber's victims were from Afghanistan's small Sikh and Hindu community – part of a delegation on its way to meet President Ashraf Ghani, who was visiting the capital city of Nangarhar province, in the Khogyani district.

Media reports noted that among the dead in the overwhelmingly Muslim nation, was the only Sikh candidate who was standing in upcoming legislative elections.

Elsewhere in Nangarhar, two civilian night watchmen were beheaded, a third killed and a school torched on Saturday in an attack by a local affiliate of the ISIL terrorist group, known as the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), which has been carrying out a campaign against schools and educational workers in the region.

And on Monday, missiles were fired into Jalalabad – hitting the Najmuljihad high school, with other projectiles landing nearby. There were no reports of casualties.

UNAMA also expressed concern over recent incidents impacting health facilities. On 25 June, a mortar hit the Andar district hospital in Ghazni province killing a doctor and a vaccination worker, and on 1 July, in the northern province of Faryab, three civilians, including a woman and child, were killed. Several others, mainly women and children, were injured in an Afghan National Army helicopter attack in the Pashtun Kot district.

The attack allegedly targeted Taliban combatants at a health clinic where civilian patients were also receiving treatment, said UNAMA.

The UN stressed that all parties to the conflict must at all times uphold their obligations to protect civilians and reiterated its call to immediately cease targeting civilians and civilian objects, including schools and health facilities, in compliance with the international humanitarian law.

The UN in Afghanistan expressed its condolences to the loved-ones of all those killed and wished a full and speedy recovery to the injured.

Two shipwrecks add to 'alarming increase' in migrant deaths off Libya coast: IOM

More than 200 migrants have drowned in the Mediterranean in the past three days, bringing the overall death toll so far this year to more than 1,000, the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) reported on Monday.

The tragic weekend began on [Friday](#) with the deaths of an estimated 103 people, including three babies, when the rubber dinghy they were on sank off the coast of Libya.

The Libyan Coast Guard rescued 16 survivors: young men from the Gambia, Sudan, Yemen, Niger and Guinea.

The incident was followed on Sunday by the capsizing of a small rubber boat off the Libyan port city of Al Khums, east of the capital, Tripoli. The vessel was packed with migrants and while 41 people survived, 100 are reported missing.

During this same time period, the Libyan Coast Guard intercepted several small vessels heading towards the open sea, returning nearly 1,000 migrants to shore.

The people were provided with food, water and health care, as well as other emergency assistance, and were interviewed by IOM staff. They were later transferred to detention centres, where IOM continues to provide humanitarian assistance.

The Libyan Coast Guard has returned some 10,000 people to shore so far this year, according to IOM. Othman Belbeisi, its Libya Chief of Mission, reported an “alarming increase” in deaths at sea.

“Smugglers are exploiting the desperation of migrants to leave before there are further crackdowns on Mediterranean crossings by Europe,” he said.

IOM Director General William Lacy Swing will travel to Tripoli this week to see first-hand the conditions rescued migrants face and those returned to shore by the coast guard.

He said the UN agency “is determined to ensure that the human rights of all migrants are respected as together we all make efforts to stop the people-smuggling trade, which is so exploitative of migrants.”

[UN chief hears ‘heartbreaking accounts’ of suffering from Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh; urges international community to ‘step up support’](#)

United Nations chief António Guterres visited Rohingya refugee camps in

Bangladesh on Monday, declaring that “nothing could have prepared me for the scale of the crisis and extent of suffering” he witnessed there.

The [UN Secretary-General](#) was in Cox’s Bazar, where close to one million mainly Muslim-minority Rohingya have sought refuge – the majority fleeing across the border from homes in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, since late last August.

In a message on Twitter, Mr. Guterres said that he had heard “heartbreaking accounts from Rohingya refugees that will stay with me forever.”

Following attacks on police outposts by Rohingya militants last year, Myanmar government and military forces carried out brutal reprisals which the UN described as tantamount to ethnic cleansing.

The UN chief said during his visit to the vast Kutapalong Camp, that their safety during the monsoon season was “priority one. We cannot allow the monsoons to wash away the hopes of the Rohingya refugees I met today in Bangladesh.”

Mr Guterres was accompanied by the [World Bank](#) President, Jim Yong Kim, which on Friday announced nearly \$500m in grant-based support to help Bangladesh address the needs of refugees. The head of the UN Refugee Agency ([UNHCR](#)) Filippo Grandi was also there, along with the Executive Director of the UN Population Fund, [UNFPA](#), Natalia Kanem.

We’ll have more on this story soon.