

Space science now a 'fundamental pillar' of 21st century human development: top UN space official

After “relentless” progress in space technology, the focus for the international community must now shift to ensuring that the benefits of space science are available to everyone, everywhere, a senior United Nations official told a major conference on Monday.

Speaking at the opening of UNISPACE+50 symposium in Vienna, Simonetta Di Pippo, the Director of the [UN Office for Outer Space Affairs](#), said that space technology had become a “fundamental pillar” of 21st century society, driving development worldwide.

The forum commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the [ground-breaking](#) 1968 UN Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, or UNISPACE for short.

“What remains to be seen, however, is how we can work collectively to organize our efforts across the board to deliver the full potential of space for sustainable development,” she said.

In her remarks, Ms. Di Pippo said that space is the vital enabler to realize the ambitions set by global goals, including the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), as well as the [Paris Agreement on Climate Change](#) and the [Sendai Framework](#) to reduce the risk and impact of disasters across the world.

The impact of global cooperation in using space for sustainable development cannot be overstated, she added.

“From city halls to the UN General Assembly, when policy makers need to see the big picture to make well-informed policy decisions, they are turning to space,” said Ms. Di Pippo.

“The challenge is to ensure the tools and information space can provide are helping to make effective policy in all corners of the world.”

These are the precise issues which will be explored further in the coming days at the conference, she added.

‘New’ directions and thinking needed – Committee Chair

Also on Monday, David Kendall, the chairperson of the UN [Committee on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space](#) said that the increasing involvement of UN Member States in the Committee, was a reflection of the increasing importance that countries around the world attach to the frontier science.

“Member States are now realizing more and more that space is an essential

element in delivering their programmes to their citizens,” he said.

The need, therefore, is to develop “new directions and thinking” in relation to the governance of outer space, he added.

Mauritius Research Council selected for third round of KiboCUBE

Further on Monday, UNOOSA and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) announced the selection of a team from the Mauritius Research Council for the third round of their joint KiboCUBE programme.

Launched by UNOOSA and JAXA in 2015, the KiboCUBE initiative offers educational and research institutions from developing countries the chance to develop “cube satellites” (CubeSats) for deployment from the International Space Station.

Through KiboCUBE, the small Indian Ocean island’s research body will deploy the first ever Mauritian satellite, MIR-SAT1, that will include a longwave infrared thermal camera, allowing the collection of thermal images of Mauritius and areas around it. The team also aims to test the onboard communication capabilities of the CubeSat by studying the satellite’s capacity to transfer information using satellite radio waves.

UNOOSA head Simonetta Di Pippo highlighted the importance of the programme, especially for developing countries.

“The third round of the KiboCUBE programme is yet another exciting step towards increasing the space capabilities of countries and ensuring we close the ‘space divide’ between those that have access to space and its benefits, and those that do not.”

In the first round of the KiboCUBE initiative, the University of Nairobi in Kenya launched Kenya’s first satellite. This was also the first space hardware deployed under the auspices of the UN. The second round selected Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, which is expected to deploy its satellite in 2018, subject to the ISS operational requirements and progress of the CubeSat development.

Coming up

Monday and Tuesday feature the UNISPACE+50 [symposium](#), focusing on debate and discussion involving a wide range of stakeholders on the future of international space cooperation and the peaceful uses of outer space. The symposium will be followed by the [high-level segment](#) of the forum (Wednesday-Thursday).

Alongside the main events, an [exhibition](#) featuring more than 40 participants will be held in the Rotunda of the Vienna International Centre from 18-23 June. The exhibition will be open to the public from 9 a.m. until 12.30 p.m. (local time) on Saturday, 23 June.

UN News is on location in Vienna covering UNISPACE+50 and its associated

events. Follow us at [@UN_News_Centre](#) for news and highlights.

UN chief condemns suspected Boko Haram attacks targeting Eid al-Fitr celebrations in Nigeria

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has condemned Saturday's attacks in northeastern Nigeria by suspected Boko Haram insurgents targeting Eid al-Fitr celebrations.

According to media reports, blasts killed dozens of people in the Damboa Local Government area of Borno State.

"The Secretary-General stresses that [attacks targeting civilians violate international humanitarian law](#), and he calls for those responsible for this attack to be swiftly brought to justice," said a statement released on Sunday by his Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric.

In the statement, the Secretary-General expressed his condolences to the affected families and to the Government and people of Nigeria and wished those injured a swift recovery. Further, he reiterated the United Nations' solidarity with the countries fighting against terrorism and violent extremism across Africa's Lake Chad Basin and Greater Sahel region.

On World Day to Combat Desertification, UN shines spotlight on 'true value' of land

Land is not a limitless resource and ignoring its role in our everyday lives threatens food and water supplies, biodiversity and the security of us all, the United Nations agency that fights desertification worldwide has said.

In a statement marking the [World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought](#), the head of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification ([UNCCD](#)) said that everyone needed to recognize the true value of land.

“I would ask you: when you choose what to eat, what to wear or what to drive, think about how your choice impacts the land – for better or for worse,” said Monique Barbut, UNCCD Executive Secretary, in her message for the day, marked on 17 June.

Land-grabbing, unplanned urban sprawl, unsustainable agriculture and over-consumption can yield quick economic gains, but such short-sightedness eventually causes degradation and loss of critical ecosystem services due to unsustainable land use.

As a result, a third of the world’s usable land has already severely degraded over the last 30 years, with 75 billion tons of soil from arable land lost annually, said UNCCD.

However, the UNCCD says everyone can contribute to, and benefit from, investing in sustainable land management – as consumers, producers, corporations or governments. Farmers can invest in smart agriculture with higher yields but reduced pesticides. Policymakers and land managers can invest in sustainable land management while consumers can choose to spend on organic and fair-trade products that avoid ruining the land.

The UN General Assembly established the World Day in 1994 to promote public awareness of land degradation and to draw attention to the implementation of the UNCCD – the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management. The World Day is observed annually on 17 June, the date the UNCCD was adopted.

This year’s theme for the Day is “Land has true value – invest in it.” The campaign hopes to promote changes in behaviour and adoption of more efficient planning and practices, to ensure there are sufficient land resources for the world’s long-term sustainability and economic prosperity.

[Afghanistan extends ceasefire with Taliban; UN urges both sides to work towards lasting peace](#)

United Nations [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) and the UN mission in Afghanistan welcomed on Saturday the Afghan Government’s extension of the unilateral ceasefire with the Taliban, amid an outpouring of support for the truce from war-weary people all across the country.

“The Secretary-General urges the Taliban to heed the call for peace from the Afghan people and also extend the ceasefire,” according to a [statement](#) issued by a UN spokesperson.

Following an initial truce announced by both sides that was to run through the Eid-ul-Fitr festival period, which began this past Friday, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on Saturday announced that the Government would extend indefinitely its ceasefire, which had been due to end on Tuesday.

"[Mr. Guterres] believes that the only solution to the conflict in Afghanistan is through an inclusive political process," said the UN spokesperson's statement, adding that the world body stands ready to work with the Afghan people and Government, and all stakeholders to achieve lasting peace in the country.

Reportedly, celebrations in support of the announcement continued in the country even as a deadly bombing in the eastern Afghan province of Nangahar targeting Eid celebrations claimed more than two dozen lives. That attack was reportedly carried out by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Through the statement, the UN chief condemned the attack in Nangahar and urged the Afghan Government and the Taliban "not to allow those who try to derail peace efforts to prevail."

Mr. Guterres extended his condolences to the families of the victims and wished those injured a swift recovery.

In a separate statement, Tadamichi Yamamoto, the top UN official in Afghanistan and head of the UN Assistance Mission there known as UNAMA, commended the Government and the Taliban for honoring the ceasefires.

"The Government's extension of the ceasefire provides a clear opportunity for initiating a negotiated solution to the conflict," he said, adding: "This opportunity cannot be missed."

Mr. Yamamoto noted the outpouring support for the ceasefires and peace on the part of the Afghan people.

"UNAMA highly appreciates the decision of President Ghani responding to the overwhelming voice of the people of Afghanistan to extend the ceasefire," he said, adding that the Mission called upon the Taliban to respond positively to the "desire and yearning of the Afghan people for an end to the conflict."

"I have repeatedly stated that a negotiated settlement to the conflict is possible. Now I believe it can be imminent," he stressed, calling for concrete steps to initiate direct talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban.

[Much more than a 'lifeline' for](#)

millions, remittances can spur global growth, says UN agency

Not only are remittances a “critical lifeline” for millions globally, the direct benefits of money sent home by migrant workers touch the lives of one in every seven persons on the planet – over one billion people, the United Nations rural development agency has said.

“[Remittances are vital](#) for millions of families, helping them to address their own development goals, but we can help them do more and build their longer-term future,” said Gilbert Hougbo, the President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development ([IFAD](#)).

Last year, 200 million migrants sent \$481 billion to remittances-reliant countries. Of this amount, \$466 billion went to developing countries and there are estimates that between 2015 and 2030, remittances sent to developing countries could cross \$6.5 trillion.

According to IFAD, after spending remittances on basic needs such as food, housing, education and health, a sizable amount – over \$100 billion, still remains – presenting a large pool of resources, which can then be invested in financial and tangible assets such as savings or small business development that help families build their future.

These productive activities can also create jobs and transform economies, in particular in rural areas, added IFAD.

“Given appropriate investment options, customized to their circumstances and goals, remittance families will invest more and become agents of change in their communities,” urged Mr. Hougbo.

The IFAD President’s call comes against the backdrop of the recent designation, by the UN General Assembly, of 16 June as the [International Day of Family Remittances](#), originally created by the IFAD Governing Council.

Proclaiming the International Day, the General Assembly [also recognized](#) the “transformative impact” of remittances, including those from migrants, for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and in supporting long term development strategies.