

'We face a global emergency' over oceans: UN chief sounds the alarm at G7 Summit event

Unless there is a change of course, the amount of plastic waste in the world's oceans will outweigh the fish that live in them, by 2050, said the United Nations Secretary-General on Saturday, declaring that the world now faces a "global emergency" over the oceans.

"The facts are clear. Our oceans are a mess," said António Guterres at an outreach event, that was part of the Group of Seven – or G7 – Summit of industrialized nations, taking place over two days, in Charlevoix, Canada.

The G7 group of advanced economies, consists of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.

"Plastic waste is now found in the most remote areas of the planet. It kills marine life and is doing major harm to communities that depend on fishing and tourism," he added.

Pointing out that one mass of plastic in the Pacific is now bigger than France, Mr. Guterres welcomed the G7 Plastics Charter, agreed on Saturday, which is being seen by some observers as a Paris-style watershed moment for cleaning up ocean garbage, referencing the 2015 Agreement on climate change.

"But we all need to do so much more," Mr. Guterres underscored, "not just on plastic waste but on all ocean issues."

"Make no mistake, we are in a battle. And we are losing on every front," he stressed.

The UN chief painted a picture of fish stocks being crippled by overfishing, vast coastal dead zones from pollution and untreated waste being discharged into the sea.

"And, to compound these issues, we have the growing impacts of climate change," he asserted.

Ocean acidification is disrupting the marine food chain and record-level ocean temperatures are killing coral reefs and creating fiercer, more frequent storms.

Moreover, 40 per cent of the world's population lives within 100 kilometres of a coast – leaving them vulnerable to storms, sea level rise and coastal erosion.

Low-lying island nations and many coastal cities are in jeopardy of inundation, the Secretary-General spelled out.

“Thankfully,” continued Mr. Guterres “we have a battle plan.”

“Our guide is the Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs], and especially Goal 14 with its 10 targets from addressing marine pollution and acidification, to ending overfishing and protecting ecosystems,” he elaborated.

“Our legal framework is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea – the world’s ‘constitution for the oceans,’” he added.

Mr. Guterres noted that while last year’s Ocean Conference at UN Headquarters registered more than 1,300 commitments and partnerships, none of the initiatives and declarations are worth anything “unless we accept that we face a global emergency.”

“And that is why I am here today. To sound the alarm. To inject a sense of real urgency in your deliberations and decision-making,” he said.

“Your leadership is needed now, more than ever – on combatting land-based pollution; on creating marine protected areas; on reviving fisheries; on building the resilience of coastal ecosystems and communities, and, especially, on climate change,” he added.

He flagged that if our seas and oceans are not protected, and we lose the battle against climate change, all the assumptions on which our policy-making has been based “will be worthless”.

“Take seriously these threats to our global environment and understand that our collective future and security is at stake,” he concluded.

[India-UN fund gets 22 development projects off the ground in first year](#)

An India-United Nations fund aimed at supporting sustainable development for low-income nations marked its first anniversary on Friday, with 22 projects having already been approved in 25 partner countries.

“The Fund’s [focus on supporting people](#) in least developed countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing States reflects our ambition to reach those that are left furthest behind and to reach them first,” said UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#), in his remarks to an event marking the first anniversary of the India-UN Development Partnership Fund.

Managed by the UN Office for South-South Cooperation, the Fund seeks to assist projects for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in partner countries.

South-South cooperation in the UN context refers to the exchange of resources, technology, and knowledge between developing countries. India has committed \$100 million to the Fund.

Mr. Guterres said that even before the SGDs were crystallized, “India’s own development efforts and vision reflected many of the same priorities and aspirations.”

“India is, for all of us, a very important inspiration,” he said.

The projects approved by the Fund so far include a climate early-warning system being implemented in seven Pacific island countries, and governance projects in eSwatini, formerly known as Swaziland, and Uruguay.

But the UN chief stressed, however, that South-South cooperation should not be seen as an instrument to replace North-South cooperation, between developed and developing nations.

“South-South cooperation must be a stimulus for an intensified North-South cooperation,” he said.

[WHO reports “very strong progress” in battling DRC Ebola outbreak](#)

One month after the start of an Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), United Nations health experts on Friday reported “very strong progress” in the response to the disease.

Dr. Peter Salama of the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) told journalists in Geneva that the first phase—protecting urban centres and towns—“has gone well, and we can be cautiously optimistic.”

There have been 62 Ebola cases in the DRC during this latest outbreak, with 38 confirmations and 27 deaths.

The latest case, confirmed on Thursday, is in the remote Iboko health zone in the northwest: an indication that the outbreak is ongoing.

Dr. Salama, the UN health agency’s Deputy Director-General for Emergency Preparedness and Response, was fresh from a two-day visit to the DRC.

“There’s been very strong progress in the outbreak response, particularly in relation to two of the initial three sites: Mbandaka and Bikoro,” he said.

Mbandaka, in northwest DRC, has a population of around one million.

It is the capital of Equateur province, where the small town of Bikoro also is located.

“We’re cautiously optimistic but there’s a lot of very tough work to do in phase two before we say that we’re on the top of this outbreak,” said Dr. Salama. “And we’ve learned the hard way in the past never to underestimate Ebola.”

The focus now is on rural isolated communities in the Iboko health zone which will present logistical and other challenges.

Dr. Salama described it as among the most remote territory on Earth, mainly inhabited by indigenous populations. WHO currently has 80 staff in the area.

“We’re talking about an enormous logistical effort required to reach every alert of a case. And then if there is a confirmation of a case, every contact of those cases,” he explained.

[ICC Appeals Chamber acquits former Congolese Vice President Bemba from war crimes charges](#)

The Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Court (ICC), on Friday, decided to acquit Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, former Vice President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and head of a rebel group in the country, on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

According to a [news release](#) issued by the ICC, the Appeals Chamber found, by majority, that the Court’s Trial Chamber III – which delivered the original sentence – had “erred on two important issues”, including the wrongful conviction of Mr. Bemba “for specific criminal acts that were outside the scope of the charges as confirmed.”

It added that the Trial Chamber made serious errors in its assessment of whether Mr. Bemba took all necessary and reasonable measures to prevent, repress or punish the commission by his subordinates of the other crimes within the scope of the case.

“More specifically, the Trial Chamber erred in its evaluation of Mr. Bemba’s motivation and the measures that he could have taken in light of the limitations he faced in investigating and prosecuting crimes as a remote commander sending troops to a foreign country; in whether he made efforts to refer the allegations of crimes to the Central African Republic (CAR) authorities; and in whether he intentionally limited the mandate of

commissions and inquiries that he established,” added the news release.

Furthermore, in the view of the Appeals Chamber majority, there was an apparent discrepancy between the limited number of crimes within the case’s scope for which Mr. Bemba was held responsible and the Trial Chamber’s assessment of which measures he should have taken.

Mr. Bemba will, however, remain in detention on account of a different case in which he has been convicted of offences against the administration of justice, pending a decision of Trial Chamber VII, within the ICC.

In 2016, Mr. Bemba was [originally sentenced](#) to 18 years in prison, after the Chamber found him “guilty beyond reasonable doubt” as a military commander responsible for two counts of crimes against humanity (murder and rape) and three counts of war crimes (murder, rape, and pillaging) committed in the Central African Republic between October 2002 and March 2003.

[As Security Council imposes sanctions on 6 human traffickers in Libya, UN chief calls for more accountability](#)

The [United Nations Secretary-General](#), António Guterres, has called for more accountability for human traffickers in Libya, after the UN Security Council on Thursday added six individuals accused of leading smuggling and trafficking networks in the country, to its [Sanctions List](#).

Those now subject to asset freezes, and a travel ban, under Council [sanctions resolutions and measures relating to Libya](#), include the head of a regional coast guard unit in Libya, according to reports, as well as two Eritrean nationals.

The unprecedented sanctions against the leaders of trafficking networks, follow widespread international outrage at the end of last year, when the CNN television network broadcast pictures of migrants being auctioned off in a modern-day slave market, in the suburbs of the Libyan capital.

In a tweet on Friday, Mr. Guterres said that “we were all horrified by pictures of human beings for sale in Libya last year. I welcome the Security Council’s decision to sanction six traffickers and smugglers.”

“There must be accountability for exploitation and human rights abuses,” he added.

Libya has become a major conduit for human trafficking, especially from sub-

Saharan Africa, since the overthrow of former leader, Muammar Gaddafi, in 2011, which saw the country descend into factional conflict, widespread instability and a humanitarian and economic crisis.

Figures from the African Union suggest that between 400,000 and 700,000 migrants were being held in often inhumane conditions, and subject to human rights abuses, in more than 40 detention camps across the country, as of last December.

Six smugglers and human traffickers

The six men now subject to Security Council sanctions, are:

Mus'ab Abu-Quarin, [described by the sanctions committee](#) on Libya as “a central actor in human trafficking and migrant smuggling activities”, whose network covers “Libya, European destinations, (and) sub-Saharan countries for the recruitment of migrants and Arab countries for the financial sector.”

Mohammed Kachlaf, described as being head of a militia in the north-western coastal city of Zawiya, that controls an oil refinery there which is a “central hub of migrant smuggling operations.”

Abd Al Rahman Al-Milad, described as head of the regional coastguard unit in Zawiya “that is consistently linked with violence against migrants and other human smugglers.”

Ermias Ghermay, described as “one of the most important sub-Saharan actors in trafficking”, who is “leader of a transnational network responsible for trafficking and smuggling tens of thousands of migrants.”

Fitiwi Abdelrazak, who also leads a network responsible for trafficking and smuggling tens of thousands, according to the committee, identified sources in criminal investigations as “one of the top-level actors responsible for the exploitation and abuse of a large number of migrants in Libya.” He is also said to have accumulated “immense wealth” through people trafficking.

Ahmad Oumar Al-Dabbashi, described as commander of the Anas al-Dabbashi militia, currently active around Zawiya, who is a “significant leader in illicit activities related to the trafficking of migrants. The al-Dabbashi clan and militia also cultivate relationships with terrorist and violent extremist groups.”



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Wide view of the Security Council meeting on the situation in Libya. 06 June 2018.

How do Security Council sanctions work?

[Sanctions](#) are meant to be a last resort when it comes to addressing massive human rights violations, curbing illegal smuggling or curbing extremism groups. Increasingly, sanctions are also being used to support peace efforts, to ensure that elections are held, or to demobilize armed groups.

This ability stems from the [UN Charter](#). Under Article 41 of [Chapter VII](#), the Council can use enforcement measures not including weapons, such as “complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations.”

Sanctions Committees are [subsidiary organs](#) of the Security Council and are composed of all 15 of the Council’s members. Their role is to implement, monitor and provide recommendations to the Council on particular sanctions regimes. They meet regularly to consider reports from expert panels and to hold meetings with Member States, UN actors and international organizations.