

UN ready to discuss 'possible forms of support' to further inter-Korean peace efforts

Secretary-General António Guterres has said that the United Nations stands ready to discuss "possible forms of support" to further inter-Korean talks over denuclearizing the Peninsula, and working towards a lasting peace.

That call for support includes UN assistance in verifying the imminent closure of a nuclear test site in the north, and transforming the buffer zone separating the two nations into a "peace zone."

The UN [confirmed](#) Tuesday evening that Mr. Guterres and the Republic of Korea's President Moon Jae-in spoke by phone on Monday, in which the latter sought "the support of the United Nations" to verify the shutting down of the nuclear test site in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Mr. Moon also asked the UN to help implement the recent agreement by the two nations to transform the demilitarized zone.

In response, the Secretary-General "reiterated the full support of the United Nations to furthering the inter-Korean dialogue and in this regard pledged that the United Nations stands ready to discuss possible forms of support," according to a [read-out](#) issued by the world body.

On 27 April, the leaders of the two nations agreed on a number of measures, including realizing the common goal of "complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," and pursuing talks to declare an official end to the Korean War, which devastated the Peninsula, beginning in June 1950.

An armistice brought about a ceasefire in 1953, but the conflict never officially ended because the parties failed to reach agreement over a formal peace treaty.

Prior to last week's historic inter-Korean summit, DPRK leader Kim Jong Un had announced his intention to suspend nuclear tests and intercontinental ballistic missile launches, and on Sunday said this would include the closure of the country's nuclear test site next month, according to news reports.

The DPRK has conducted six nuclear tests since 2006, and in recent years launched numerous test missiles, in violation of UN Security Council resolutions. The 15-member body has regularly reacted to these violations through punitive measures.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitors the DPRK nuclear programme, including through the use of satellite imagery, but its inspectors have not had access to the country's nuclear facilities since April 2009.

90 per cent of the planet is breathing in polluted air – World Health Organization

Air pollution claims seven million lives a year, UN health experts said on Wednesday, amid new data showing that the problem affects nine out of ten people worldwide.

In a [call](#) for Member States to take action urgently, [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) Director-General, Tedros Adhanom Gebreyesus, warned that air pollution “threatens us all, but the poorest and most marginalized people bear the brunt of the burden.”

According to WHO’s [ambient air quality database](#), despite some improvements, pollution levels are “still dangerously high” in most parts of the world.

This includes “many of the world’s megacities”, according to Dr Maria Neira, WHO’s Director of the Department of Public Health, Social and Environmental Determinants of Health, who added that air quality levels in those urban centres, exceed WHO guidelines “by more than five times”.

Covering more than 4,300 cities in 108 countries, the data points to an estimated 4.2 million deaths each year caused by outdoor air pollution, with 3.8 million fatalities overall, owing to household pollutants, linked to cooking.

More than 90 per cent of victims come from low- and middle-income countries in Asia and Africa, followed by others in the Eastern Mediterranean region, Europe and the Americas.

The threat to human health comes from exposure to near-invisible toxins that are present in polluted air as fine particles.

These pollutants – some of the most dangerous being sulfates, nitrates and black carbon – penetrate deep into the lungs and bloodstream and cause a range of diseases including stroke, heart disease, lung cancer and other respiratory infections.

According to WHO, global air pollution is linked to inefficient energy use in every sector of human activity: coal-fired power plants, industry, agriculture and transport.

Waste burning and deforestation are additional sources of air pollution, as are sand and desert dust, the agency says.

Inside people’s houses, the main source of air pollution stems from lack of

access to clean cooking fuels.

It's a problem that affects more than 40 per cent of the world's population – some three billion people – a situation that the WHO Director-General described as “unacceptable”.

Although there are major gaps on air pollution data from regions including the Western Pacific and Africa – where information was available in only eight out of 47 countries on the continent – the WHO chief noted that the international community was “starting to pay attention and take action” on air pollution, recognizing it as a threat to sustainable development.

“The good news is that we are seeing more and more governments increasing commitments to monitor and reduce air pollution as well as more global action from the health sector and other sectors like transport, housing and energy,” he said.

WHO's Dr Neira echoed that message, highlighting “an acceleration of political interest in this global public health challenge”. But she noted that the increased commitment to recording air pollution data to date, had come mostly from high-income countries.

Countries that are taking measures to reduce air pollution include India, WHO says, where one new scheme has provided free gas connections for more than 37 million women, to help them make the switch to clean energy use in the home.

The publication of WHO's findings comes ahead of the first [Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health](#), which is due to run from 30 October to 1 November in Geneva, where the UN agency aims to push for improved air quality and combat the harmful effects of climate change.

[Amid a 'crisis of solidarity,' seek inspiration from the Buddha's message of empathy, urges UN chief](#)

At an event commemorating the Day of Vesak, United Nations Secretary-General urged the global community to draw inspiration from the Buddha's teachings and message of tolerance, empathy and humanism.

“The world faces numerous challenges, from conflict to climate change, from prejudice to growing inequality. We see people turning inwards and we see a crisis of solidarity,” said the Secretary-General in his address.

“[The Buddha's teachings can inspire us to become global citizens](#) [...] the

Buddhist world view teaches us to see ourselves as a part of this world and not as its masters.”

[Vesak, the Day of the Full Moon](#), generally in the month of May, is the most sacred day to millions of Buddhists around the world.

It was on the Day of Vesak two and a half millennia ago, in the year 623 B.C., that the Buddha was born. It was also on the Day of Vesak that the Buddha attained enlightenment, and it was on this Day that the Buddha in his eightieth year passed away.

In his message, the Secretary-General highlighted Buddhism’s emphasis on non-violence as a powerful call for peace and said that the teachings of the Buddha remain very relevant in the work of the UN.

“The focus in Buddhism on the inherent dignity of life finds resonance today in our [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#),” he said, urging everyone commit to overcome differences, care for the most vulnerable and “truly leave no one behind as we navigate the path to a better future for all.”

Speaking alongside Mr. Guterres, Miroslav Lajčák, the President of the General Assembly also underscored the importance of the “[timeless principles](#)” of Buddhism to the work of the UN.

“They offer insights and ideals on improving the condition of the planet; they show us the way to a more sustainable future. They remind us to recognise the inherent dignity of all people. They shine a light on the path to peace – peace among nations, and peace within people,” he said.

In 1999, the UN General Assembly [adopted a resolution](#) in which it recognized the International Day of Vesak to acknowledge the contribution that Buddhism, one of the oldest religions in the world, has made for over two and a half millennia and continues to make to the spirituality of humanity.

[Can science and technology really help solve global problems? A UN forum debates vital question](#)

Science and technology offer part of the solution to climate change, inequality and other global issues, a United Nations official said on Tuesday, spotlighting the enormous potential these fields hold for achieving humanity’s common goal, of a poverty and hunger-free world by 2030.

“New advances in science and technology hold immense promises for achieving

the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#),” said UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Liu Zhenmin, in his opening remarks to a session of the intergovernmental body overseeing the UN’s development work.

The 2018 Integration Segment of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), being held from Tuesday to Thursday at UN Headquarters, brings together key stakeholders to review policies that support an integrated approach to achieving sustainable development and poverty eradication – with a focus this year on increasing resilience.

“To truly leverage the benefits of science and technology for sustainable development, we need to prioritize solutions that are pro-poor and equitable,” Mr. Liu said. “Only in this way can we ensure that no one is left behind.”

He stated that a rapidly warming planet was one of the greatest threats today, but a wide array of technological measures for climate change adaptation and mitigation can help the transition from carbon-intensive growth, towards more sustainable and resilient development.

Technologies can also help provide jobs to disadvantaged groups in society, and can help make cities smarter and more sustainable, by facilitating new transport systems and improving the management of natural resources.

To truly leverage the benefits of science and technology for sustainable development, we need to prioritize solutions that are pro-poor and equitable – Liu Zhenmin, head of DESA

Threatened by unsustainable consumption and production patterns, the ocean is also suffering, he added. Numerous technologies have been shown to help mitigate and address these effects, such as innovations in sustainable fishing; enhanced surveillance of ocean acidification, and environmentally-sensitive forms of pollution prevention and clean-up, he added.

To make new technology and innovation work in support of communities, any efforts must be driven on a local level, and be inclusive.

Taking integrated approaches and working to break down barriers is of utmost urgency, too, as crises and shocks are increasingly complex and span the economic, social and environmental spheres.

“And, finally, we need to build capacities and institutions for anticipating risk, and for planning and strategic foresight to effectively leverage technologies,” Mr. Liu said.

Also addressing the opening segment was Marc Pecsteen, Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council, who said that technology and innovation have been identified as “two key enablers, whose appropriate, efficient, equitable and sustainable use can support our efforts to build and maintain resilient societies.”

Combating 'scourge' of sexual abuse allegations remains 'key' UN priority, as 54 new allegations emerge

More than 50 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving personnel serving with the United Nations and its partners in the field were received in the first three months of this year, the global organization said on Tuesday.

The allegations have not all been verified and many are in the preliminary assessment phase.

They involve 66 victims, including 13 girls under the age of 18, and 16 victims whose age remains unknown.

Farhan Haq, UN Deputy Spokesperson, provided journalists with an [update](#) on cases.

Overall, he said that 54 allegations had been reported between 1 January and 31 March 2018.

Fourteen cases related to on-going peacekeeping operations; 18 from UN agencies, funds and programmes; while 21 relate to implementing partners, and one to a member of a non-UN international force.

Two of the allegations have been substantiated by an investigation, while two were not substantiated.

Mr. Haq said that with over 95,000 civilians and 90,000 uniformed personnel working for the UN, sexual exploitation and abuse are not reflective of the conduct of the majority of those who serve the organization.

"But every allegation involving our personnel undermines our values and principles and the sacrifice of those who serve with pride and professionalism in some of the most dangerous places in the world," he told journalists at UN Headquarters.

"For this reason, combating this scourge, and helping and empowering those who have been scarred by these egregious acts, continue to be key priorities for the Secretary-General in 2018."

UN chief António Guterres has committed to a "[zero tolerance](#)" policy for sexual exploitation and abuse.

His initiatives to prevent and respond to the issue include appointing a [Victims' Rights Advocate](#) and establishing a [Circle of Leadership](#) consisting

of Heads of State or Government who have agreed to hold perpetrators to account.