

UN agriculture agency chief calls on world's mayors to make 'global commitments local realities'

At a time of rapid urbanization, cities face challenges that are global in nature but require “the full engagement of local authorities” for multilateral solutions, the head of the United Nations agriculture agency told a special gathering of mayors on Tuesday.

It is important to make “global commitments local realities,” José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of the [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO), told the meeting and UN Headquarters, discussing common challenges to the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), such as climate change and food security.

The special event, [From Global Issues to Local Priorities](#) was co-hosted by María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, President of the UN General Assembly, alongside Mr. Graziano da Silva.

About 68 per cent of the world's population is expected to live in urban areas by 2050 – mostly in Africa and Southeast Asia, where hunger and poverty are highest.

He said that it is essential to engage local authorities to achieve [SDG 11](#) –promoting sustainable cities and communities – fundamental for achieving all the other goals.

Focusing on [SDG 2](#), which calls for the eradication of hunger and all forms of malnutrition, as well as the development of sustainable agriculture, he pointed out that the number of people suffering from both hunger and obesity has increased over the last three years, especially in urban areas where “people are more likely to eat cheaper processed food high in trans fats, sugar and salt.”

“We urgently need to transform our food systems,” he underscored. “We need to put in place food systems that offer healthy and nutritious food for everyone, while preserving our natural resources and biodiversity” by integrating actions “from the production to the consumption of food.”

City dwellers can no longer be considered food consumers and rural communities food producers.

“Sustainable development calls for the strengthening of rural-urban linkages based on a territorial approach,” he said, pushing for “a rural-urban continuum.”

Turning to the [New Urban Agenda](#), which was adopted at [Habitat III](#) in 2016 during the Quito Conference, Mr. Graziano da Silva said the FAO Framework for

the Urban Food Agenda would be launched in Rome on 7 March.

Sustainable development requires “a systems thinking, rather than granular responses,” he argued, adding that the Framework presents ideas to generate employment, strengthen local food value chains and reduce the high levels of food waste found in many cities.

Indicating that some 80 per cent of all food produced globally is now consumed in urban areas, he said that urban consumers would be “a very effective entry point in promoting the transformation to more sustainable agricultural production and value chain development.”

“Implementing the food systems approach may be challenging”, he concluded, “but it is fundamental to ensure healthy and nutritious food for all while safeguarding the planet for future generations.”

Also speaking at the meeting was UN Habitat Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif, who delivered her remarks through video message.

A host of mayors, former mayors, economists and urban development experts shared experiences of effective local practices, innovative strategies and lessons learned in addressing global challenges including climate change, food insecurity and malnutrition, food supply and consumption sustainability, and people’s wellbeing from a sustainable and resilient food system perspective.

Burundi: Inclusive dialogue ‘only viable option’ for resolving country’s political crisis says, UN envoy

An inter-Burundian, inclusive dialogue remains the only viable option for lasting settlement of the political crisis and the holding of elections in 2020 in a peaceful environment, the United Nations Special Envoy for the country, Michel Kafando, told the Security Council on Tuesday.

On the political front, Mr. Kafando noted that Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza reiterated on 22 December 2018 his decision not to seek a new mandate in 2020 and that the request for official recognition of the new opposition party, the National Congress for freedom, was finally approved on 14 February by the Government.

“I encourage the Government to continue in this direction and urge it to be more inclusive, particularly in the context of ongoing discussions on the adoption of a new Electoral Code,” he said, recalling that the general

elections, including the presidential election, were scheduled for sixteen months.

The Special Envoy also noted that the human rights situation remains a concern in Burundi according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

At the same time, he said the humanitarian situation had improved since 2017, except in some parts of the country, particularly in the eastern and north-eastern border provinces.

“About one and a half million people, however, remain threatened by food insecurity because of persistent socio-economic difficulties,” Mr. Kafando warned.

As of December 31, 2018, the UN estimated that 140,000 people were displaced and more than 347,000 were still Burundian refugees in neighboring countries (down from 380,000 refugees last November).

The Special Envoy traveled to Burundi from 20 to 29 January, with the intention of holding talks with President Nkurunziza and the Burundian authorities on the conclusions of the Security Council meeting of 21 November 2018, but also to reaffirm on the eve of the East African Community (EAC) Summit, United Nations support for the inter-Burundian process.

“Unfortunately, these talks could not take place,” Mr. Kafando reported.

[Moving from a promise made in Sweden to hope for peace in Yemen](#)

[Briefing](#) the [Security Council](#) via video conference on Tuesday from Amman, Jordan, Mr. Griffiths confirmed that under the “strong leadership” of the head of the [UN operation monitoring a cease-fire](#) in Yemen’s key port of Hudaydah, Lt. Gen. Michael Anker Lollsgaard, the parties have agreed that the first step of the Hudaydah Redeployment Plan would be from the ports of Saleef and Ras Isa.

Step two will be from Hudaydah port, which remains the humanitarian lifeline for Yemenis on the edge of famine.

“This will facilitate humanitarian access to the Red Sea Mills,” which he explained “holds enough food to feed 3.7 million people for a month.”

He called the [Stockholm agreement](#) “a breakthrough,” saying it was “a major shift” that showed the Yemeni people that something was “indeed happening.”

Mr. Griffiths expressed his gratitude to the concessions made by both sides

to allow this and called upon them to “immediately” start implementing the arrangement and agree on the details of the second phase of the redeployments.

Noting that Phase I of the Hodeidah redeployment plan signaled the parties’ commitment, he spelled out: “There is momentum on Yemen.”

“There have,” he told the Council, “been signs of increased civilian activity in Hudaydah and the people of the city are already, at this very early, very early stage seeing some tangible benefits from the significant and consistent decrease in hostilities in that area as a result of the Stockholm agreement.”

According to Mr. Griffiths, the agreement on Phase I demonstrates that the parties can to turn their words into tangible progress on the ground while it “reinforces trust” and “most importantly,” shows political will.

Conflict in Yemen escalated over the last three years, following a Saudi-led military intervention against the Houthi rebel insurgency, at the request of Yemeni leadership.

By implementing the Hodeidah Agreement, the UN envoy said that we have the opportunity “to move from the promise made in Sweden to hope now for Yemen,” he stated.

There is momentum on Yemen – *UN Special Envoy*

He indicated that it was time now to focus on finding a political solution “to bring this conflict to a close.”

Turning to the prisoner exchange agreement, he thanked the dedicated Supervisory Committee – including the Yemen Government and the forces affiliated with the Houthi movement, or Ansar Allah – for stepping up efforts to release and exchange all detainees and forcibly disappeared and missing persons.

“All for all...is the watchword for this process” he said, referring to the release of all prisoners from all sides.

Although he’s often called Hudaydah “the center of gravity of the conflict,” he said that in truth, “the real center of gravity for us, has to be moving towards a political solution.”

While tangible progress is needed before moving forward, he said that we can now we can begin to “focus our minds on finding that political solution.”

For his part, Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock [updated](#) the Council on the [2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview for Yemen](#), which shows numbers that he called “considerably worse than last year.”

He painted a grim picture of some 24 million people, or 80 per cent of the population, in need of humanitarian assistance; about 20 million need help

securing food, 10 million of whom are a step away from famine; almost 20 million lack healthcare; and nearly 18 million do not have enough clean water or sanitation.

“More than three million people – including two million children – are acutely malnourished,” he told the Council. “Some 3.3 million remain displaced from their homes, including 685,000 who have fled fighting along the west coast since June 2018.”

He cited conflict, disregard for international humanitarian law and the 2018 economic collapse as the driving forces behind the deterioration.

“Violence has declined in Hudaydah following the Stockholm Agreement, but it has continued elsewhere and escalated in some front-line areas – particularly in Hajjah,” he continued. “Amidst the conflict the economy continues to unravel.”

The Yemeni rial is losing value and aid agencies are running out of money.

“In short,” he said, “things are very bad.”

Pointing out that the UN-coordinated humanitarian relief operation in Yemen is the world’s largest, Mr. Lowcock, noted its “impressive results” in assisting nearly eight million people across the country every month last year, despite numerous hindrances.

Obstacles in delivering life-saving assistance went beyond funding to include visa delays, movement restrictions, import delays, bureaucratic impediments, and restrictions on monitoring or interference with humanitarian action.

“We are particularly concerned that the operating environment is becoming ever more restrictive in northern Yemen,” he stated.

[UN global education envoy urges new funding for ‘lost generation’ of children forced out of classrooms by conflict](#)

A child’s “real passport” to the future – education – should be stamped in the classroom, not at a border checkpoint, [UN Special Envoy for Global Education](#) Gordon Brown said on Tuesday.

Ensuring that the world’s children have a place in school classroom is essential to achieve the [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) 4](#), which calls

for quality education for all by 2030.

Speaking to journalists at UN Headquarters in New York, Mr. Brown warned that “99 per cent of the world’s young refugees who are now becoming the invisible generation will never get a place in college or higher education; and only 20 per cent will get a secondary education”.

“It’s time the world woke up to the horror of so many children devoid of hope,” he stated.

Highlighting the urgency of the situation, Mr. Brown said there are perhaps 75 million children caught in conflict. “[They] are broken by the absence of hope, the soul crushing certainty that there’s nothing ahead for which to plan or prepare, not even a place in a school classroom.”

He lamented the desolation of a “lost generation” and made an urgent appeal for new funding for more than 30 million displaced and refugee young people.

Recounting the situation of the Maria refugee camp in Greece, where “no formal education is on offer to any of the hundreds of children who are there”, Mr. Brown told journalists the story of two young boys – one only 10 years old – who attempted suicide in the camp.

Mr. Brown said that “at that age, their lives should be full of hope and excitement at every new dawn – but instead young people are so devoid of hope, that they attempted to take their own lives”.

“A lost generation is not only identified by empty class rooms and silent playgrounds and short unmarked graves; a lost generation is one where hope dies in those who live”, he added.

Noting that the Security Council was currently on the difficult circumstances in Yemen affecting millions of children, Mr. Brown, the former British Prime Minister, also highlighted the escalating crisis in Venezuela, the half a million out of school children alone in Central African Republic (CAR), the need to reopen a 1,000 schools in Afghanistan – where there are still 3.7 million out of school children – and the ongoing refugee challenge being driven by situations in, among others, Myanmar, Sudan and Syria.

On a positive note, Mr. Brown announced that the Education Cannot Wait Fund (ECW) – which was set up in 2016 to provide opportunities for displaced children in crisis – will launch on Thursday a programme for safe and reliable education for half a million children in Afghanistan, including more than 320,000 girls.

On 27 February, in CAR, the Government, ECW, and a coalition of partners, will also launch a new three-year education programme to reach an estimated 900,000 thousand children – half of whom are girls – to address the violence and displacement that had left nearly half a million children out of schools.

Both initiatives follow a programme that was launched in Uganda in September last year to help with the influx of South Sudanese refugees.

Responding to questions from journalists, Mr. Brown noted the success of double-shift schools in Lebanon, highlighting the fact that from the 400,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon who are now in school, almost 300,000 are in the double-shifts schools.

“They get their education in the afternoon, in Arabic, after the Lebanese children get their education in the morning in English and French, in the same class-room. It just proves that it is possible to use the existent education system already in place to provide schooling for children”, he explained.

Discussing the pressing funding requirements to address the needs of children trapped in humanitarian crises, the Special Envoy announced the launch of the International Finance Facility for Education (IFFEd) which will serve 700 million children living in low- and middle-income countries, where the majority of out-of-school and displaced children reside.

“The facility is advancing rapidly with a high-level event scheduled in April where prospective donors are expected to agree to constitute the new \$10 billion fund this year,” Mr. Brown concluded.

[UN rights chief ‘strongly condemns’ attack on Indian security forces in Kashmir](#)

The top United Nations human rights official has strongly condemned the suicide bomb attack against Indian security forces in Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir on 14 February and has called on authorities to bring those responsible to justice.

In Geneva on Tuesday, Rupert Colville, Spokesperson for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said the UN was also saddened by the further loss of life reported from subsequent gun battles in Pulwama yesterday, 18 February, which is reported to have claimed 9 more lives.

“We hope escalating tensions between the two nuclear-armed neighbours will not add further to the insecurity in the region,” he said.

Mr. Colville said the High Commissioner, Michelle Bachelet, is also concerned by reports from India that some elements are using the Pulwama attack as justification for threats and potential acts of violence targeting Kashmiri and Muslim communities living in different parts of India.

“We acknowledge actions taken by the Indian authorities to tackle these

incidents and we hope that the Government will continue to take steps to protect people from all forms of harm that may be directed at them on account of their ethnicity or identity," he stressed.