

Universal health coverage key to safer, fairer world, says WHO chief on eve of World Health Day

World Health Day 2018 coincides with the 70th anniversary of the United Nations health agency, which, since its establishment, has seen an increase in life expectancy by nearly 25 years.

“Health is a human right. No one should get sick and die just because they are poor, or because they cannot access the health service they need,” said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), in his message prior to the Day, which is marked annually on 7 April.

According to WHO, at least half the world’s population do not have coverage for full essential health services, with about 100 million people living on [\\$1.90 or less a day](#) because they have to pay for health care.

“Universal health coverage is a political choice. It takes vision, courage and long-term thinking,” said Mr. Tedros, adding “But the payoff is a safer, fairer and healthier world for everyone.”

[Secretary-General](#) António Guterres recalled that WHO was founded on the principle that “the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being.”

“Since then, average global life expectancy has expanded by 23 years,” he continued, noting the eradication of smallpox and the dissipation of polio.

Mr. Guterres stressed that although millions more children live to celebrate their fifth birthday, people around the world still lacked vital health services.

“Today, we join WHO in recommitting to ensure that everyone, everywhere, gets the health services they need,” Mr. Guterres said.

“Join me in calling for Health for All,” concluded the Secretary-General.

Universal coverage

As part of the landmark [2030 Agenda](#) and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), all UN Member States agreed to try to achieve universal health coverage by 2030.

When people have to pay most health service costs themselves, often the poor cannot obtain what they need and even the rich may fall victim to financial hardship from long-term illness.

Universal health coverage requires strengthening health systems in all countries – with robust financing structures being key. It emphasizes not only what services are covered, but also how they are funded, managed, and delivered.

WHO maintains that pooling resources from compulsory funding sources, such as mandatory insurance contributions, can improve health service coverage by spreading the financial risks of illness across a population.

Health services, including traditional and complementary medicine services, organized around the comprehensive needs and expectations of people and communities will help empower them to take a more active role in their health and health system.

70 years of progress

Over the past seven decades, WHO has spearheaded efforts to rid the world of killer diseases and fight against deadly habits, like tobacco use.

“[Good health](#) is the most precious thing anyone can have,” Mr. Tedros said in a separate message. “When people are healthy, they can learn, work, and support themselves and their families.”

“When they are sick, nothing else matters. Families and communities fall behind. That’s why WHO is so committed to ensuring good health for all,” he underscored

Many countries have successfully eliminated measles, malaria and debilitating tropical diseases, as well as mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis.

New WHO recommendations for earlier treatment, efforts to access cheaper generic medicines and innovative partnerships have produced vaccines against meningitis, Ebola and the world’s first for malaria.

UN Headquarters in New York celebrated World Health Day, WHO’s 70th Birthday and Universal Health Coverage with a special event on shaping future health systems that leave no one behind.

It also launched a set of six stamps commemorative UN World Health Day stamps to promote worldwide awareness and action to achieve health for everyone around the world.

[On Rwandan genocide anniversary, UN](#)

Leaders ask: Can world muster the will to prevent new atrocities?

As the world officially remembers the genocidal murder of 800,000 Rwandans in 1994, United Nations leaders warn that ethnic cleansing and mass atrocities continue to blight humanity and call for sharper action to prevent such wholesale violations.

Twenty-four years ago, on 7 April, ethnic Hutus in Rwanda began the frenzied slaughter of Tutsis, moderate Hutus and others in what is widely regarded as one of the darkest episodes in recent history.

In memory of the Rwandan victims – and as a sombre reminder of the international community’s failure to intervene – the UN observes 7 April every year as an “[international day of reflection](#).”

“Today we remember all those who were murdered and reflect on the suffering of the survivors, who have shown that reconciliation is possible, even after a tragedy of such monumental proportions,” said Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in a [message](#) for the grim anniversary.

“Rwanda has learned from its tragedy; so must the international community,” Mr. Guterres said, expressing concern about “the rise of racism, hate speech and xenophobia around the world.”

“These base manifestations of human cruelty provide the breeding ground for far more evil acts,” the Secretary-General said, adding that he was particularly troubled by the systematic killings, torture, rape and humiliation of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar.

The brutal persecution of the Rohingya, which has caused more than one million members of the ethnic and religious minority to flee to Bangladesh, was also first in the mind of Adama Dieng, the [UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide](#), in an interview with [UN News](#).

The horrific acts committed against the Rohingya will one day be brought before an international court, Mr. Dieng said, “and I have no doubt that they will be determined as crimes against humanity, as ethnic cleansing” and possibly as genocide.



UNHCR/Roger Arnold

Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar flee to Bangladesh after facing brutal persecution that UN officials have said may amount to crimes against humanity.

Judicial punishment for such crimes is a start, but for more attention must be devoted to preventing them, said Mr. Dieng, a native of Senegal and leading international jurist.

“We said at the end of the Second World War ‘Never Again,’ but we witnessed the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda; we witnessed the genocide of the Muslims in Srebrenica,” he said, referring to the Bosnian Serb army’s slaughter in 1995 of thousands of Muslims who were rounded up in the town of Srebrenica, even though it had been declared a “safe area” by the UN.

An international framework of law and tribunals has evolved for holding accountable those who commit crimes against humanity.

In 1948, following the horrors of the Second World War, the fledgling UN adopted [The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#). Genocide was defined as certain acts committed “with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.”

At the UN World Summit in 2005, all Member States formally accepted the responsibility to protect their populations from “genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.” They also agreed that when countries fail to do so, the international community has an obligation to

intervene, through action by the Security Council and in accordance with the [UN Charter](#).

But enforcing that international “Responsibility to Protect” victimized populations has often been hamstrung, Mr. Dieng said, as key countries invoke the principle of “non-interference in internal affairs.” He expressed frustration that the Security Council has not taken stronger action to prevent atrocities against civilians in Syria and South Sudan as well as Myanmar.

Genocides do not take place “all of a sudden,” Mr. Dieng said, highlighting the importance and possibility of prevention.

“Genocide is a process,” he said. “The [Holocaust](#) did not start with the gas chambers. It started with hate speech.”

In Rwanda and Bosnia, too, mass killings followed escalating hate speech and dehumanization. “That is why I should say that the world failed the Rwandan people, the world failed the Bosnian people, and I hope that the world will not fail the Rohingya population,” he said.

The UN’s annual day of reflection on the Rwandan genocide is important, Mr. Dieng said, “as a way first to honour those who fell to those crimes, but also as a lesson for the future.”

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“By remembering what happened in Rwanda, we are also sending a strong message to whoever around the world is inclined to commit such a crime,” he said.

Secretary-General Guterres, in his statement, stressed that “states have a fundamental responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.”

“It is imperative,” he said, “that we unite to prevent such atrocities from occurring, and that the international community sends a strong message to perpetrators that they will be held accountable.”

“To save people at risk, we must go beyond words,” he said.

The UN will hold a commemorative ceremony on the Rwandan genocide at its New York Headquarters on 13 April on the theme “Remember, Unite, Renew.”

Nearly 800 Venezuelans arriving in Brazil each day, many seeking asylum, UN refugee agency says

The United Nations refugee agency is scaling up its assistance to the rapidly growing number of Venezuelans arriving in Brazil, with daily arrivals averaging 800 in recent days amid the worsening political and socio-economic situation in their country.

“As the complex political and socio-economic situation in their country continues to worsen, [arriving Venezuelans are in more desperate need](#) of food, shelter and health care. Many also need international protection,” William Spindler, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), told reporters in Geneva, Switzerland.

More than 52,000 Venezuelans have arrived in Brazil since the beginning of 2017. Of those, 25,000 are asylum seekers, 10,000 hold temporary resident visas, while the rest are working to regularizing their status, according to UNHCR. The Government’s latest estimates show that more than 800 Venezuelans are entering Brazil each day.

An estimated 40,000 have entered through the isolated northern state of Roraima and are living in Boa Vista, the state capital, Mr. Spindler added.

“With numbers growing, public services such as health care and sanitation are becoming stretched,” Mr. Spindler said.

Authorities recently declared a state of emergency and have allocated about \$58 million for emergency humanitarian assistance for people coming from Venezuela.

For its part, UNHCR has been working closely with the Brazilian Government to register Venezuelans and ensure all arrivals have proper documentation.

Once documented, Venezuelan asylum-seekers, as well as those with special stay permits, have the right to work, and access health, education and other basic services.

Venezuelans who are living on the streets are facing growing risks, including sexual exploitation and violence.

To mitigate those risks, two new shelters have been opened in Boa Vista over the last two weeks. UNHCR is managing the new shelters, which are each nearly at its capacity of 500 people. Priority is given to families with children, pregnant women, elderly people and others with specific needs.

UNHCR is also helping the Government identify Venezuelans willing to relocate voluntarily from Roraima to other parts of Brazil as relocation will provide

longer-term solutions and ease the strain on local communities in Roraima.

Two flights, operated by the Brazilian Air Force, are leaving Boa Vista this week. One left yesterday, flying 104 Venezuelans to Sao Paulo. The second is expected today to Sao Paulo and Cuiabá, the capital of the Mato Grosso state located in the centre of the country.

UNHCR has recently requested from donors an initial \$46 million to implement its regional response plan for Venezuelans in the main host countries, including Brazil. So far, this plan is only four per cent funded.

[UN condemns attack that kills two 'Blue Helmets' in Mali](#)

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres and the Security Council have strongly condemned an attack on UN peacekeepers in Mali and underscored that such attacks may amount to war crimes under international law.

In a [statement](#) attribute to his spokesperson, Secretary-General Guterres stressed that such acts “only reinforce the commitment of the United Nations to support the people and the Government of Mali in their quest for peace.”

Two Chadian peacekeepers were killed and at least ten others injured when a camp of UN mission in Mali (known by its French acronym, MINUSMA) in Aguelhok, Kidal region, came under mortar attack at about 18:45 (local time) on 5 April.

[According](#) to the UN mission, immediate medical evacuations were organized and the security of the camp strengthened.

In a separate statement, the Security Council also denounced the attack and called on the Government of Mali to swiftly investigate the incident and bring the perpetrators to justice.

“Those responsible for these killings should be held accountable,” said the 15-member Security Council, urging all UN Member States, in accordance with their obligations under international law and relevant Council resolutions, “to cooperate actively with all relevant authorities in this regard.”

They also stressed that involvement in planning, directing, sponsoring or conducting attacks against MINUSMA peacekeepers constitutes a basis for sanctions designations pursuant to Security Council resolutions.

The UN mission in Mali is one of the most dangerous, with over 160 peacekeepers having [lost their lives](#) in the country. In late February, [four peacekeepers were killed](#) when their convoy came under attack in Mopti,

central Mali.

[As Security Council debates Salisbury chemical attack, Russia calls accusation absurd; UK stands by charge](#)

During a [heated debate](#) in the United Nations Security Council on Thursday, Russia again rejected allegations levelled by the United Kingdom that Moscow was behind a deadly nerve-agent attack in the English city of Salisbury on 4 March.

Russia “is not responsible” for the attack in Salisbury, that country’s Ambassador to the UN, Vassily Nebenzia, said, stressing that the origin of the substance used in the incident has not been confirmed.

Today’s meeting, requested by Russia, took place amid expectations that the results of tests of samples collected from individuals exposed to a nerve agent in Salisbury will be known by early next week.

The United Kingdom sent the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons ([OPCW](#)) samples of the nerve agent within days of the incident, which left Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, hospitalized.

After the incident, the UK wrote a letter to the UN Security Council, stating that it was “highly likely” that Russia was behind the incident using deadly nerve-agent Novichok. At the Security Council meeting requested by the UK on 14 March, Russia – a State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention ([CWC](#)) – firmly denied the allegations.

The Convention, which came into force in 1997, outlaws the production, stockpiling, and use of [chemical weapons](#) and their [precursors](#).

At today’s meeting, Mr. Nebenzia accused the UK of engaging in a “theatre of the absurd,” and wondered why Russia would want to wage such an attack, eight years after Mr. Skripal was granted amnesty, and before the Russian presidential elections and the 2018 World Cup soccer event.

Further, the Russian delegate said that Russia does not have a copyright on Novichok and that line of toxic substances has been developed in many countries, including the United States and the UK.

“Yet people are demanding that the Russian Federation acknowledged its guilt,” he said.

His delegation has prepared a draft statement for the Council that will be a

litmus test as to whether the UK and its allies are true to their words; rejecting that test will be a confirmation of their “dirty games,” he added.

At an OPCW Executive Council special meeting on Wednesday, Russia proposed a joint investigation with the UK, which was rejected by the UK and its allies.



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Karen Pierce, Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, addressing the Security Council meeting to consider a letter dated 13 March 2018 from the United Kingdom to the Council regarding the 4 March chemical attack in Salisbury.

Speaking after Mr. Nebenzia was UK Ambassador to UN, Karen Pierce, who said that her Government’s investigations into the use of chemical weapons involved 250 police detectives interviewing more than 500 witnesses, supported by a range of experts and partners that have gone through more than 5,000 hours of video footage.

A military-grade nerve agent – a weapon of mass destruction – has been used in an attempt to kill civilians on British soil in a reckless fashion, she said.

Telling the meeting that she would “take no lectures” from Moscow, Ms. Pierce said: “There is one country, Russia, which is playing a fast and loose with our collective security and the international institutions that protect us.”

Noting that Yulia is now able to communicate and is getting better, Ms. Pierce said that the UK Government received a request from the Russian consulate for access to Yulia, which was already conveyed to her.