

'Bold action' needed to end tuberculosis, AIDS – UN

Claiming more than 4,500 lives daily, tuberculosis (TB) continues to be the top infectious killer worldwide as well as the leading cause of death among people living with HIV, the United Nations said Friday, ahead of [World Tuberculosis Day](#).

“The world has the resources to [end the interlinked epidemics](#) of tuberculosis and HIV, but political commitment and country action are lacking,” said the Executive Director of UNAIDS – the Joint UN Programme on HIV and AIDS – Michel Sidibé.

“Political, religious and civil society leaders need to step up to guarantee everyone the right to breathe, to live free from tuberculosis and AIDS,” he added.

For his part, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) noted the “devastating” social and economic impacts of TB, including poverty, stigma and discrimination – adding that antibiotic resistance has caused many drugs to lose their efficacy in combatting the disease.

“While the world has committed to end the TB epidemic by 2030, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), actions and [investments do not match](#) the political reality,” he stressed in a video message.

The UN is calling on all partners to take unprecedented and bold action to advance efforts to end TB and AIDS by 2030.

“Now is the time to make commitments become actions, we need increased and sustained financing,” Mr. Tedros spelled out, calling World Tuberculosis Day an opportunity “to mobilize political and social commitment for accelerated progress to end TB.”

While preventable and curable, persistent challenges remain, many of which are shared by the HIV response, including unequal access to services.

Noting that both can be addressed effectively with integrated programmes, UNAIDS outlined five important actions for partners, beginning with impelling political, religious and civil society leaders to champion the universal right to live free from TB and HIV.

Secondly, communities must be empowered to call on governments to demand their right to health – improving living standards to reduce the burden of TB and HIV.

The third action endorses promoting non-discriminatory service delivery to protect all against catastrophic health expenditures in the context of

universal health coverage – extending care beyond health to include safe workplaces and places of detention.

Next, UNAIDS advocates that finance ministers be engaged to approach health as an investment, not an expenditure, in which returns demonstrate their long-term value to societies and economies.

Finally, the Joint UN Programme also recommends greater public-private sector partnerships to accelerate for innovative new medicines and vaccines.

Ending global TB and HIV epidemics is possible

In September 2018, world leaders will come together at UN Headquarters in New York for the first-ever UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting on Tuberculosis to adopt a progressive, visionary and actionable political declaration on the disease.

Both agency heads said that the High-Level Meeting could provide the political, social and financial momentum needed to end TB.

“This year could be the most important since Robert Koch discovered the cause of TB, 136 years ago, but only if we all show leadership,” said Mr Sidibé.

“I’m stepping forward for a TB-free world,” Mr. Tedros said, “please join me.”

No ‘fancy suits and long speeches’ at UN-backed sustainable development festival in Bonn

A United Nations forum showcasing the latest innovations, tools and approaches that will make sustainable development a reality wrapped up in Bonn, Germany, on Friday.

Some 1,500 participants from more than 100 countries attended the three-day [Global Festival of Action for Sustainable Development](#).

The gathering sought to inspire action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) aimed at ending extreme poverty and hunger while also ensuring a healthy environment for all people and the planet.

Billed as “a new type of UN conference” devoid of “fancy suits and long speeches,” the festival featured various immersive experiences such as a virtual reality zone showing the human stories behind development challenges, in addition to workshops, demo sessions and film screenings.

Those who could not travel to Bonn were encouraged to follow the activities on UN Web TV and social media, with more than 30,000 watching the livestream while #SDGglobalFest trended across the world.

Among the festival highlights was the presentation of the [UN SDG Action Awards](#), celebrating individuals and organizations from all regions who are working to implement the 17 goals, which have a deadline of 2030.

The awards covered seven categories, including mobilizer, storyteller and connector.

“I’m going to learn from these seven other people to create a movement and change the world,” said one of the winners, Foluke Michael of Nigeria, founder of Creative Youth Initiative Against Corruption, speaking at the closing ceremony.

His organization won the innovator category for its “Corruption Busters” campaign which targeted the general public and focused on corrupt practices associated with everyday life and how they have an impact on individuals and society.

This was the second edition of the Global Festival of Action for Sustainable Development which was hosted by the [UN SDG Action Campaign](#) with the support of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Discussions revolved around five main key themes: innovative approaches, citizen engagement, communicating the SDGs, mobilizing action, and multi-stakeholder engagement.

“The world is facing tremendous challenges, and for the first time there is an innovative plan to solve them,” said Mitchell Toomey, the Global Director of the UN SDG Action Campaign.

“But we can’t do this alone, we need everyone to be part of it. We are very excited to once more bring together different key players from governments, civil society, UN agencies, cities, business, and academia in this dynamic, inclusive and innovative festival.”

[Liberia prepares to turn a page as UN mission exits](#)

As the United Nations peacekeeping mission warps up in Liberia and the West African country looks to secure a stable future, the UN deputy chief on Friday cautioned the Government that while it has made great strides, the road ahead will be challenging.

At the launch of the country's new National Development Plan in the capital, Monrovia, Amina Mohammed, the UN Deputy Secretary-General, congratulated all Liberians on a hard-won peace after 15 conflict-torn years and the progress made during the subsequent post-war period.

She, however, outlined that along with opportunities, serious challenges lie ahead.

"When I look at the young women and men, and the initiatives for peace that they have courageously carried forward, sometimes even risking their lives, [I am filled with pride and hope but also with fear](#)," said Ms. Mohammed, noting severe economic constricts in the country and high unemployment among its youth.

"We cannot fail them. We must [...] empower them, [...] meet their needs and expectations, and help them to fulfil their dreams," she added.

Applauding the country's new development framework, dubbed the *Liberia Moment*, Ms. Mohammed underlined five principles that must underpin the Plan.

These include national ownership; eliminating poverty; improve tax and revenue collection, strengthen rule of law, and end dependency on aid; enhance transparency; and ensure predictable and sustainable means for development financing.

When I look at the [courageous] young women and men, I am filled with pride and hope but also with fear – *UN deputy chief Mohammed*

She also underscored the need to consolidate peace and avoid a relapse into conflict, and in doing so reiterated the importance of implementing the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

"The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the best tools we have to prevent conflict and we should make every effort to achieve them without delay," she said, noting that the UN stands ready to provide the Government with advice, expertise and support needed.

"We will be with you every step of the way. This is our commitment," said the Deputy Secretary-General.

Liberia, went through two civil wars spanning over 14 years between 1989 and 2003. Civil war in Liberia claimed the lives of almost 250,000 people and led to a complete breakdown of law and order.

The UN mission, known as UNMIL, was established by the UN Security Council in 2003 after a peace agreement was signed to end the fighting. The mission created a security environment that enabled more than a million refugees and displaced persons return to their homes; supported the holding of three presidential elections, and helped the government establish its authority throughout the whole country following years of fighting and instability.

ECOWAS Radio to take over UNMIL Radio

Meanwhile, as part of the closure of the UN Mission in Liberia ([UNMIL](#)), its official radio station, [UNMIL Radio](#) – which had been broadcasting since October 2003 to over 80 per cent of the country's population – will transfer to Radio ECOWAS, the radio station operated by the Economic Community of West African States.

Use of chemical weapons, under any circumstances, unjustifiable and abhorrent – UN

Alarmed at persistent reports of chemical weapons use in Syria, the United Nations Secretary-General has called on the Security Council to demonstrate unity and resolve in response to bringing to justice those who use.

In a statement [attributable](#) to his spokesperson, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) expressed that the use of chemical weapons, under any circumstances, is unjustifiable and abhorrent.

“Equally unjustifiable is a lack of response to such use, if and when it occurs. Impunity cannot prevail with respect to such serious crimes,” he added.

The statement follows a meeting on 20 March, between Mr. Guterres and Ahmet Üzümcü, the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons ([OPCW](#)).

During the meeting UN chief reiterated his support for OPCW's work in investigating allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria as well as his confidence in its integrity and expertise as well as in that of its Fact-Finding Mission and its conclusions.

The OPCW is an international organization which works closely with the UN to implement the Convention against Chemical Weapons Convention ([CWC](#)), and eliminate the use of chemical weapons as well as the threat of their use.

UN mission will leave Liberia with great potential for lasting stability, democracy – UN deputy chief

As part of her visit to Liberia Amina Mohammed, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, celebrated the successful closure of the UN mission there, which she said set the stage for sustained peace in the months and years ahead.

“Liberia has made enormous progress in the past 15 years,” said Ms. Mohammed at an event in the capital, Monrovia, commemorating the completion of the work of the UN peacekeeping mission, known as [UNMIL](#), acknowledging its support for Liberians in restoring their country and building sustainable peace.

“In 2003, when UNMIL was created, Liberia was torn apart by conflict, with a traumatized population and no hope for its young people, especially our women and girls,” she continued.

She noted that 14 years of civil war left more than a quarter of a million Liberians dead, nearly one-third of the population displaced, and an estimated 80 per cent of women and girls injured by sexual violence.

Highlighting the important role of Liberian women, Ms. Mohammed commend their “leadership, courage and integrity” in pursuing peace.

She thanked the Special Representatives, civilian and military personnel and troop-contributing countries and paid special tribute to the 200 peacekeepers who lost their lives in pursuit of peace in Liberia.”

“Today, we remember their sacrifice, we remember their families,” she stressed.

At an “important turning point,” she noted Liberia’s progress and acknowledged that challenges lie ahead.

“Peace will not last without sustainable development; and development gains will be at risk without sustained peace and respect for human rights,” she warned.

“We need to give Liberians back their dignity, dreams and faith in a better future,” Ms. Mohammed cited the UN [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and the African Union’s Agenda 2063 as the best roadmaps to achieve this.

She noted that a generation ago, Liberia and Sierra Leone were in freefall, and Cote d’Ivoire was embroiled in crisis. Yet, 20 years later, “the closure of UNMIL marks the transition of all three countries to peace and democracy.”

“This sub-region has a bright future,” she stated.

Speaking to the press afterwards, she referred to UNMIL as another successful peacekeeping mission in West Africa.

It was deployed in 2003 when State institutions in ruins, a non-existent economy and a disintegrated national police and army. Today, the State has been rebuilt and more than 100,000 former combatants disarmed, demobilized and reintegrated. Justice and security institutions were restored.

Ms. Mohammed said that today Liberians enjoy peace and UNMIL leaves behind a country that has great potential to achieve lasting stability, democracy and prosperity.

To President George Manneh Weah, she underlined the UN’s support to him in sustaining peace and advancing sustainable development – assuring him that the UN would remain committed beyond UNMIL’s 30 March mandate.

Although the mission is leaving, 17 UN funds and agencies will remain in Liberia to focus on development and improving the lives of Liberian people.

Meanwhile, yesterday, at the National Peace and Reconciliation Conference, she recognized that while the country had suffered so much, for so long, the people persevered with great determination.

She noted that UNMIL had supported the country “[every step of the way](#),” explaining that long-lasting peace requires wide-ranging confidence-building measures for solid foundations.

“This will only be possible if we ensure full and true reconciliation,” she asserted.