

[Boat made of recycled plastic and flip-flops inspires fight for cleaner seas along African coast](#)

After completing a historic 500km journey from the Kenyan island of Lamu to the Tanzanian island of Zanzibar, the world's first ever traditional "dhow" sailing boat made entirely from recycled plastic, known as the [Flipflopi](#), has successfully raised awareness of the need to overcome one of the world's biggest environmental challenges: plastic pollution.

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The Flipflopi Project was co-founded by Kenyan tour operator Ben Morison in 2016, and the ground-breaking dhow was built by master craftsmen Ali Skanda, and a team of volunteers using 10,000 tonnes of recycled plastic.

The boat gets its name from the 30,000 recycled flip-flops used to decorate its multi-coloured hull.

Plastics make up 80 per cent of all ocean litter

The UN Environment agency's (UNEP) [Clean Seas Campaign](#) joined forces with Flipflopi for the journey down the East African coast, which began on 23 January, ending on 7 February, with the aim of inspiring citizens from Africa and around the world to become more aware of the dangers of plastic pollution.

The Clean Seas campaign was launched in 2017 to urge governments, businesses and citizens to eliminate major sources of marine litter – microplastics in cosmetics and the excessive, wasteful usage of single-use plastic – by the year 2022. Each year, more than 8 million tonnes of plastic ends up in the oceans, wreaking havoc on marine wildlife, fisheries and tourism, and costing at least \$8 billion in damage to marine ecosystems. Up to 80 per cent of all litter in the oceans is made of plastic.



UN Environment

A close up view of the FlipFlopi dhow, a 9-metre traditional sailing boat made from 10 tonnes of discarded plastic.

Historic pollution commitments along Flipflopi route

Flipflopi made several stops during the journey, letting local people know what they can do to halt the spread of toxic plastic waste, including the Kenyan coastal towns of Kipini, Malindi and Mombasa.

Workshops were conducted to give community members a better understanding of the consequences of dumping plastic waste into the ocean and show children how they can create useful new objects out of dumped plastic bottles.

During the Flipflopi voyage, every port of call announced historic commitments to fight pollution. One of the most significant was the pledge to close the Kibarani landfill site in Mombasa, which allows toxic water to drain directly into the ocean. Kibarani is now being restored and planted with trees, while waste will reportedly be disposed of at a new site in a more environmentally responsible manner.

Another positive outcome of the campaign has been the decision of 29 businesses, including 22 hotels, to minimize their plastic waste through measures such as banning the use of plastic bottles and straws.

UN Environment's Clean Seas – Flipflopi expedition, is the latest chapter in Kenya's push to become a global pioneer in tackling plastic pollution. In August 2017, the country introduced the world's toughest ban on plastic bags with anyone producing, selling or using a plastic bag, risking imprisonment of up to four years or fines of \$40,000.

The next step for Flipflopi will be a journey to the Kenyan capital of Nairobi, where Heads of State, environment ministers, environmental activists, innovators, NGOs, and CEOs of multinational companies will gather

for the fourth [United Nations Environment Assembly](#) – the world’s highest-level environmental forum – from 11-15 March 2019.

[Protests, violence in Haiti prompts international call for ‘realistic and lasting solutions’ to crisis](#)

Opposition-led protests in Haiti calling for the president to step down, which sparked violence last week, have prompted a group of senior diplomats, including the top UN official there, to issue [a statement](#) deploring the loss of life and calling for dialogue to end the crisis.

The so-called Core Group is made up of the head of UN Mission [MINUJUSTH](#), Helen Meagher La Lime; and the UN ambassadors of Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Spain, the European Union, the United States, and the Special Representative of the Organization of American States.

They took note of the demands expressed by demonstrators on Thursday, aimed at a worsening economic crisis that has led to a drop in living standards, inflation at around 15 per cent, a growing national deficit, and allegations of corruption levelled at President Jovenel Moise, before he took office.

The group “deplores the loss of life and property damage caused by the unacceptable acts of violence that took place on the margins of the rallies, while acknowledging the professionalism demonstrated by the Haitian National Police,” said the statement issued on Monday.

According to news reports, at least four were killed and dozens injured during four days of protests in the capital Port-au-Prince, and other cities across the Caribbean island nation. Annual carnival festivities were cancelled in parts of the country at the weekend.

Opposition groups called for demonstrations after a court report alleged that officials and former Government ministers had reportedly misappropriated millions of dollars in loans made to Haiti by Venezuela after 2008.

“The Group members call on political and civil society leaders to “engage in a constructive and inclusive dialogue in order to identify and implement realistic and lasting solutions to the political and economic crisis currently occurring in Haiti.”

The Government needs to “accelerate its structural reforms aimed at promoting a better management of the State’s resources” said the communique, “improve the living conditions of the most vulnerable, fight inequalities, and foster a conducive investment climate to stimulate the development of productive sectors – essential to catalyzing the country’s growth.”

“Change must come through the ballot box, and not through violence,” said the statement, which concludes by urging the Government and legislators “to collaborate for the electoral law and the 2018-2019 budget law to be adopted and promulgated as soon as possible. It is only through these actions that the elections scheduled by the Constitution for October 2019, can be held in a free, fair and transparent manner, and that an institutional vacuum will be avoided.”

[Despite falling attacks, ISIL terrorists remain ‘global threat’: UN report](#)

Though attacks were down last year, a new United Nations [report](#) to the Security Council on Monday shows that ISIL is still a global threat, despite evolving into a “covert” terrorism network, with countries continuing to face challenges from the growing scourge of violent extremism.

“Despite the more concealed or locally embedded activities of ISIL cells, its central leadership retains an influence and maintains an intent to generate internationally-directed attacks and thereby still plays an important role in advancing the group’s objectives,” explained Vladimir Voronkov, who heads the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism ([UNOCT](#)).

“This is exacerbated by the challenge of foreign terrorist fighters who either are leaving conflict zones, or those who are returning or who are about to be released from prison. In this context, radicalization in prison settings, is seen as a particular challenge in Europe and Iraq,” Under-Secretary-General Voronkov added.

He said that so-called “frustrated travelers” were adding to the complexity of the threat, namely fighters who’d failed to reach main battlegrounds, but been diverted instead elsewhere, either by ISIL commanders or of their own volition.

The report notes that the “centre of gravity” of the organization, known in the Arab world as Da’esh, remains in Iraq and Syria, with up to 18,000 remaining in the ranks, including some 3,000 foreign fighters.

“In terms of ISIL’s financial strength, the report notes that despite some loss of revenue due to territorial setbacks, ISIL could sustain its operations through accessible reserves, in cash or investment in businesses, ranging between \$50 and \$300 million. ISIL cells are also reported to generate revenue through criminal activities”, explained Mr. Voronkov.

The document, the eighth report on ISIL – which proclaimed its so-called caliphate across northern Syria and Iraq in 2014 – was prepared on behalf of the UN Secretary-General by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate ([CTED](#)) and the *Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team of the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee*, in close collaboration with the UNOCT and other UN entities and international organisations.

After being driven from its city strongholds of Mosul and Raqqa, intense fighting in recent months has left Da’esh defending a small enclave against US-backed fighters in eastern Syria, close to the Iraqi border. According to news reports, around 600 terrorist fighters continue to battle with coalition forces, which have labelled this the “final battle” to crush ISIL.

Challenges faced by Member States

The UN analysis shows that Member States continue to face tremendous challenges across the world in tackling the threats posed by ISIL, with the threat level continuing to expand. This is especially true in North, West and East Africa as well as in Central Asia. Training camps have been identified in Afghanistan, and in South-East Asia, where women and youth are increasingly mobilized for terrorist operations across the region.

The head of CTED, Michele Coninx, highlighted three of those major challenges faced by Member States:

- **The “destructive legacy” left in Syria and Iraq, most noticeable in the high number of families who remain internally-displaced due to the destruction of homes and infrastructure overall:** She noted that “reconstruction will take many years and will require significant resources, as will restoring and reconciling communities after so many years of conflict.”
- **The growth in the number of terrorist suspects and offenders in custody:** The risk posed by such prisoners is difficult to assess and manage.
- **ISIL’s ability to exploit new technologies and find innovative ways to finance itself and find new recruits:** Ms. Coninx noted for example the risks linked to anonymous technologies like blockchain and cryptocurrencies, and other internet-based ways of avoiding detection.

The UN’s support to Member States

For several years, various parts of the UN have supported Member States in the fields of prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration (PRR) of former fighters; international judicial cooperation; countering terrorist financing; border management and law enforcement; countering terrorist narratives and

engaging communities to prevent violent extremism.

Specifically, explained CTED's Executive Director Coninx, the [UN Office on Drugs and Crime](#) (UNODC) and UNOCT are leading a joint project to provide tailored capacity-building assistance to prison staff.

In the Lake Chad Basin, she said CTED and UNODC are working to provide Member States with technical expertise to develop comprehensive strategies to prosecute, rehabilitate and reintegrate persons associated with the Boko Haram extremist group.

Other initiatives include the development of a practical guide for requesting electronic evidence across borders, and the deployment of a specialized consultant to support Iraq in its efforts to develop a holistic and comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy.

"The Secretary-General has stressed that despite recent successes against ISIL / Da'esh and its affiliates, the threat posed by returning and relocating fighters, as well as from individuals inspired by them, remains high and has a global reach," stressed Mr. Voronkov. "I would therefore emphasize, the recent ISIL losses should not lead to complacency at any level," he concluded.

Engaging women and girls in science 'vital' for Sustainable Development Goals

However, women and girls remain "woefully under-represented", said the Secretary-General, for reasons that include gender stereotyping, a lack of visible role models and unsupportive – or even hostile – policies and environments, at a national level.

The Secretary-General called for concerted efforts to overcome these obstacles, tackle misconceptions about girls' abilities, and promote access to learning opportunities for women and girls, particularly in rural areas.

The International Day was established in 2015, following the adoption of a General Assembly resolution, signalling the international community's interest in achieving equality and gender-parity in science for sustainable development, and recognizing that full access and participation in STEM subjects is imperative for the empowerment of women and girls.

The 2019 theme of the Day is "Investment in Women and Girls for Inclusive Green Growth," and a two-day event began on Monday at UN Headquarters in New York, bringing together global experts and leaders to evaluate the economic

and social impact of women's participation in science-based sustainable development programmes.

The event featured a high-level panel focusing on the public-sector financing of science for green growth, investment to attract and retain high calibre women in science, and financing to ensure gender equality in science.

The second day of the event, will discuss the factors that influence whether girls choose STEM subjects, as they transition from school to higher education: [UN data](#) shows that only around 30 per cent of female students select STEM-related fields in higher education.

There will also be a panel convened by young change-makers and passionate advocates for girls in science from around the world, which aims to give girls the chance to gain core leadership skills, and the opportunity to present a vision for the use of science, to achieve sustainable development goals.

Organizations and UN agencies across the world, led by [UN Women](#) and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), have been commemorating the International Day through various events, articles and videos.

The International Atomic Energy Agency ([IAEA](#)) released a video on Monday to coincide with the Day, in which eight successful nuclear scientists are asked how their gender has affected their career, highlighting the bias and prejudice that still exists in the industry.

[Judicial independence under threat in Nigeria, warns UN rights expert](#)

The dismissal of Nigeria's Chief Justice may constitute a grave attack on judicial independence from the State, a UN-appointed independent rights [expert](#) said on Monday, warning of "threats, pressures and interferences" made against the lawyers defending him.

Chief Justice Walter Onnoghen, was suspended on 25 January, the independent UN [Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers](#), Diego Garcia-Sayán noted in his statement. His comments come ahead of general elections in Nigeria, due to be held on Saturday.

"International human rights standards provide that judges may be dismissed only on serious grounds of misconduct or incompetence," he said. "Any decision to suspend or remove a judge from office should be fair and should be taken by an independent authority, such as a judicial council or a court."

According to Mr. Garcia-Sayán, who reports to the [UN Human Rights Council](#), the decision to replace Chief Justice Onnoghen with Ibrahim Tanko Mohammad was taken by Nigeria's President, Muhammadu Buhari, who insisted he had "acted in compliance" with an order issued by a tribunal to decide on alleged breaches of the code of conduct for public officials.

This was despite the fact that four other courts with higher jurisdiction, had already ordered that proceedings be halted, the UN expert outlined, listing the Court of Appeal, the National Industrial Court and the two Federal High Courts.

On the issue of intimidation of defence lawyers and judges involved in the decision to remove Chief Justice Onnoghen, Mr. Garcia-Sayán said that one of the senior advocates defending him was arrested on Wednesday.

Others had been "subject to serious threats, pressures and interferences", he warned, adding that such allegations "may constitute, if proven, grave attacks to the independence of the judiciary and the free exercise of the legal profession".

"Lawyers play an essential role in securing access to justice, and should never suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or other sanctions for action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics," Mr. García-Sayán said.