

Taking on environmental health risks, UN agencies aim to protect 'foundations for life' on Earth

10 January 2018 – Two United Nations agencies are teaming up in a major new initiative taking on the herculean task of combatting environmental health risks, which claim an estimated 12.6 million lives a year.

The partnership, announced Wednesday, between the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) and the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), includes specific action to address air pollution, climate change and antimicrobial resistance as well as improve coordination on waste and chemicals management, water quality, and food and nutrition issues.

"Our health is directly related to the health of the environment we live in. Together, air, water and chemical hazards kill some 12.6 million people a year. This cannot and must not continue," said Tedros Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of WHO, in a [news release](#) announcing the undertaking.

"There is an urgent need for [us] to work more closely together to address the critical threats to environmental sustainability and climate change which are the foundations for life on this planet. This new agreement recognizes that sober reality," added Erik Solheim, the Executive Director of UNEP.

The new collaboration has a particular focus on the developing world as the worst impacts of environmental pollution and the related deaths occur in developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The initiative also includes joint management of the [BreatheLife](#) advocacy campaign to reduce air pollution for multiple climate, environment and health benefits.

The two UN agencies have been cooperating in a range of health and environment areas.

This latest partnership, is however, the most significant formal agreement on joint action across the breadth of environment and health issues in over 15 years, the agencies added.

Rohingya children trapped in

'appalling' conditions in Myanmar's Rakhine state – UNICEF

9 January 2018 – While the eyes of the world are on Myanmar's northern Rakhine and Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh, more than 60,000 Rohingya children remain nearly forgotten, trapped in appalling camps in central Rakhine where the shelters teeter on stilts above garbage and excrement, the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) reported Tuesday.

Partners have identified about 20 children separated from their families during the violence but estimate the total number to be at least 100 – most of whom are in parts of northern Rakhine state that they still cannot access, Marixie Mercado, UNICEF spokesperson told journalists in Geneva today during a briefing on her visit to Myanmar from 6 December 2017 through 3 January.

She painted a harrowing picture of the situation in Rakhine, noting that prior to 25 August, when the most recent outbreak of violence occurred, UNICEF had been treating 4,800 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition; these children are no longer receiving this life-saving treatment.

All 12 of the outpatient therapeutic treatment centres run by our partners are closed because they were either looted, destroyed or staff can't access them, she underscored.

Ms. Mercado called the inability of UN agencies to access vulnerable Rohingya children who remain in northern Myanmar "troubling," saying that while "the eyes of the world" are focused on the 655,000 refugees who have fled across the border into Bangladesh, 60,000 Rohingya children remain "almost forgotten," trapped in squalid camps in central Rakhine.

The Rohingya children who do remain in rural areas are almost totally isolated. We hear of high levels of toxic fear in children from both Rohingya and Rakhine communities, she said.

She stressed that UNICEF stood ready to work with the Myanmar Government and Rakhine state authorities to provide humanitarian relief to all children – regardless of ethnicity, religion, or status – but needed unlimited access.

The spokesperson described two of the worst camps that she visited, in Pauktaw Township – reachable only by a four-to-five-hour boat ride.

The first thing you notice when you reach the camps is the stomach-churning stench. Parts of the camps are literally cesspools. Shelters teeter on stilts above garbage and excrement, she recounted. Children walk barefoot through the muck. One camp manager reported four deaths among

children ages 3-10 within the first 18 days of December.”

Ms. Mercado also pointed to “an acute level of fear between the Rakhine and Rohingya communities,” recalling a story that parents in one Rohingya village said they hadn't had their children vaccinated against Japanese Encephalitis because the government vaccinators were accompanied by security officers – while Government workers said they dared not go to Rohingya communities without security.

“Rohingya children need a political solution to the issue of legal identity and citizenship. In the interim they need to be recognized first and foremost as children, she said, stressing that the Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees rights to health, education and opportunities to learn and grow to all children, irrespective of their ethnicity or status or the circumstances in which they find themselves.

Ms. Mercado said that the Annan Commission [a [report](#) led by the former UN Secretary-General on the situation in Rakhine state]has provided a roadmap for a durable political solution so all children's rights can be protected in a sustainable, open and fair manner in the longer term.

“UNICEF stands ready to support this crucial work. And we call on the global community, especially regional organizations and countries, to leverage their influence so children have better lives today and a future they can look forward to,” she said.

[UN chief welcomes progress on inter-Korean talks as vital to reducing tensions in region](#)

9 January 2018 – Welcoming the progress made during Tuesday's high-level inter-Korean talks in the small border village of Panmunjom, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres spotlighted, among others, the agreement to reopen military channels as critical to reducing tensions in the region.

“The Secretary-General [has welcomed] particularly the agreement to work to ease military tensions, hold military-to-military talks, and reopen the inter-Korean military hotline,” said a [statement](#) from UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric, who added that the re-establishment and strengthening of such channels is critical to lowering the risk of miscalculation or misunderstanding and to reduce tensions in the region.

Mr. Guterres also welcomed the decision of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to send a delegation to the Olympic Winter Games, which will be held from 9 to 25 February in PyeongChang, Republic of Korea.

As the United Nations General Assembly has recognized, the holding of the Olympic Games can foster an atmosphere of peace, tolerance and understanding among nations. This is particularly relevant on the Korean Peninsula and beyond, the statement said.

The Secretary-General seized the opportunity to acknowledge other efforts that have contributed to reducing tensions. He hopes such engagement and efforts will contribute to the resumption of sincere dialogue leading to sustainable peace and denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula, the Spokesman concluded.

For UN General Assembly's discussion of and action on a resolution on the 2018 Winter Olympic Games, see press release [here](#)

As Syria war grinds on, Syrian refugees in Lebanon are becoming poorer, more vulnerable – UN

9 January 2018 – More than half the war-weary Syrian refugees in Lebanon are living in extreme poverty and borrowing money for food and to pay rent has become commonplace, the United Nations reported Tuesday.

This news came with a warning that more of these refugees find themselves dependent on international aid amid an uncertain outlook for humanitarian funding in 2018.

Seven years into the crisis, Syrian refugees in Lebanon are finding it increasingly more difficult to make ends meet [and] are [more vulnerable than ever](#), William Spindler, spokesperson of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), told reporters at the regular press briefing in Geneva.

He was briefing on the annual Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR), carried out by UNHCR, the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) and the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)), which showed that 58 per cent of households are currently living in extreme poverty – on less than \$2.87 per person per day.

And the number of households living below the overall poverty line – less than \$3.84 per day – has also continued to rise, Mr. Spindler explained, noting that 76 per cent of refugee households live below that level.

Borrowing money for food, to cover health expenses and pay rent continues to be extremely common, with almost nine out of 10 refugees saying they are in

debt.

It is more vital than ever that donors stay the course amid deepening poverty and growing vulnerabilities.

While food insecurity remains critically high, other vulnerabilities continue to grow, such as obtaining legal residency leaving refugees exposed to an increased risk of arrest and hindering access to work, school or health care.

Overall, Mr. Spindler said, 74 per cent of surveyed Syrian refugees aged 15 and above do not have legal residency in Lebanon.

Self-reliance opportunities remain extremely limited in an economy affected by the Syrian conflict and insufficient external funding.

In 2017, only 36 per cent of the total funding needed to provide adequate humanitarian support in Lebanon was received, as of the beginning of December, underscored Mr. Spindler, noting that under the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, \$2.7 billion is required to meet needs in 2018.

It is more vital than ever that donors stay the course amid deepening poverty and growing vulnerabilities, the spokesperson emphasized.

[Syria: 13 million people in desperate need as seventh war-torn winter sets in, UN warns](#)

8 January 2018 – With millions of desperate people across Syria now facing their seventh winter of war, the United Nations warned on Tuesday that intensified military operations in the country's north are forcing families to flee, in the cold, to areas without enough resources to support them.

While some parts of Syria are witnessing a welcome reprieve from hostilities, many others face intensified military operations and conflict, UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric told the regular briefing in New York, noting that more than 13 million people in the country need basic aid and protection.

The UN is deeply concerned for the safety and protection of tens of thousands of people in southern Idlib and rural Hama in northeastern Syria, where ongoing hostilities have reportedly caused hundreds of deaths and injuries of civilians, he added.

Since the first of December, fighting has displaced tens of thousands of civilians – already in dire circumstances.

“With the onset of winter, safe shelter is among the biggest concerns, as many families are fleeing into areas that are already at full capacity or into communities with depleted resources,” Mr. Dujarric underscored.

He also expressed alarm by the increasing hostilities in East Ghouta that continue to put civilians in the line of fire, resulting in civilian deaths and injuries and damaging infrastructure.

“We received alarming reports that the only emergency medical centre in Modira in besieged area of East Ghouta was damaged by an airstrike, rendering it inoperable,” he said.

Mr. Dujarric also announced that Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock will visit Syria from 9 to 12 January. The UN aid chief is expected to meet Government representatives and see first-hand the impact of the conflict on civilians.

“He will assess the humanitarian response and discuss how to improve access and delivery with key interlocutors,” the spokesperson elaborated, adding that it will be Mr. Lowcock's first mission to Syria as Emergency Relief Coordinator.