

Early action key to preventing crises related to El Niño and La Niña – UN relief official

2 January 2018 – La Niña is expected to impact weather around the world in 2018, a United Nations relief official said, urging governments and the international community to act early to mitigate the impacts from this potentially destructive weather pattern and its counterpart, El Niño.

“We know that the earlier we’re able to put in place a response, the more efficient and effective that response can be,” Greg Puley, Chief of Policy Advice and Planning Section, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), told *UN News*.

El Niño is the term used to describe the warming of the central to eastern tropical Pacific that occurs, on average, every three to seven years. It raises sea surface temperatures and impacts weather systems around the globe so that some places receive more rain while others receive none at all, often in a reversal of their usual weather pattern.

Its counterpart La Niña is associated with cooler-than-average sea surface temperatures, but it also results in extreme weather.

In 2016, 23 countries – representing 60 million people – had to appeal for emergency aid because of El Niño-related weather events.

While there is never 100 per cent certainty that a weather event will happen, Mr. Puley urged governments “to be willing to act on the clues.”

He discussed insurance, or forecast-based funding, which released funding early, as innovations that have “no regrets” even if a predicted event does not happen.

“If you’re aware that excess precipitation is forecast, for example, you can make some investment to reinforce river beds so that the excess precipitation doesn’t result in flooding,” he said. “It will cost you \$10 million to reinforce the river bed. It might have cost you \$50 or \$60 million to provide food, water and shelter to people who are displaced by the flood. You can make those investments when you know.”

AUDIO: Interview with UN OCHA’s Greg Puley

UN regrets reported loss of life amid Iranian protests

2 January 2018 – The United Nations regrets the reported loss of life resulting from the protests in Iran, and hopes that further violence will be avoided, a spokesperson for the world body said on Tuesday.

“The Secretary General has been carefully following the reports of protests in a number of cities in Iran,” Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesperson for António Guterres, told reporters in New York.

“We regret the reported loss of life, and we hope that further violence will be avoided,” he continued.

“We expect that the rights to peaceful assembly and expression of the Iranian people will be respected.”

According to media reports, several days of demonstrations have left at least 20 people dead.

UN experts decry Saudi Arabia's use of anti-terror laws against peaceful activists

2 January 2018 – United Nations human rights experts deplored Saudi Arabia's continued use of counter-terrorism and security-related laws against human rights defenders and urged the release of all those detained for peacefully exercising their rights.

“The rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are [severely restricted](#) in Saudi Arabia,” the group said in a joint statement issued on Tuesday.

Religious figures, writers, journalists, academics and civic activists are being targeted, along with members of the banned Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), in a “worrying pattern of widespread and systematic arbitrary arrests and detention,” they continued.

“We are witnessing the persecution of human rights defenders for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly, association and belief, as well as in retaliation for their work. The Government has ignored repeated calls by UN experts and others to halt these violations, rectify

them, and prevent their recurrence.”

More than 60 prominent religious figures, writers, journalists, academics and civic activists are reported to have been detained in a wave of arrests since September, adding to a list of past cases which had already been raised by UN experts with the Government.

“We have written to the Government requesting detailed information about these numerous arrests on terrorism, cyber-crime or any other state security-related charges during that period,” the experts said.

The experts noted that they are also seeking government clarification about how these measures are compatible with Saudi Arabia’s obligations under international human rights law, as well as with the voluntary pledges and commitments it made when seeking to join the UN Human Rights Council.

“Despite being elected as member of the Human Rights Council at the end of 2016, Saudi Arabia has continued its practice of silencing, arbitrarily arresting, detaining and persecuting human rights defenders and critics,” they said.

In addition to previous cases and new arrests since September, the experts pointed to the country’s failure to implement two recent opinions of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, calling for “the release of all the human rights defenders concerned in these cases.”

“We appeal to the Saudi authorities to ensure their right to reparation and compensation.”

The experts are independent, unpaid staff appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation.

On New Year’s Day, UNICEF challenges nations to join fight to help more newborns survive first days of life

1 January 2018 – Nearly 386,000 babies will be born on New Year’s Day – some 90 per cent in less developed regions – and the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) is challenging nations around the world to make sure more newborns survive their first days of life.

“This New Year, UNICEF’s resolution is to help give every child more than an hour, more than a day, more than a month – more than survival,” Stefan Peterson, UNICEF’s Chief of Health, said Monday.

The agency [reported](#) that Kiribati's Christmas Island in the Pacific would most likely welcome 2018's first baby; the United States, its last. Globally, over half of these births are estimated to take place in nine countries:

- India – 69,070
- China – 44,760
- Nigeria – 20,210
- Pakistan – 14,910
- Indonesia – 13,370
- United States – 11,280
- Democratic Republic of Congo – 9,400
- Ethiopia – 9,020
- Bangladesh – 8,370

While many babies will survive, some will not make it past their first day. In 2016, an estimated 2,600 children died within the first 24 hours every day of the year. UNICEF said that for almost two million newborns, their first week was also their last.

In all, 2.6 million children died before the end of their first month. Among those children, more than 80 per cent died from preventable and treatable causes such as premature birth, complications during delivery, and infections like sepsis and pneumonia.

“We call on governments and partners to join the fight to save millions of children's lives by providing proven, low-cost solutions,” said Mr. Peterson.

UNICEF-supported non-rounded estimates on births and life expectancy by countries: [here](#)

Over the past two decades, the world has seen unprecedented progress in child survival, halving the number of children worldwide who die before their fifth birthday to 5.6 million in 2016. But despite these advances, there has been slower progress for newborns. Babies dying in the first month account for 46 per cent of all deaths among children under five.

Next month, UNICEF will launch 'Every Child Alive,' a global campaign to demand and deliver affordable, quality health care solutions for every mother and newborn. These include a steady supply of clean water and electricity at health facilities, the presence of a skilled health attendant during birth, disinfecting the umbilical cord, breastfeeding within the first hour after birth, and skin-to-skin contact between the mother and child.

“We are now entering the era when all the world's newborns should have the opportunity to see the 22nd century,” added Mr. Peterson, but unfortunately, nearly half of the children born this year likely will not. “A child born in Sweden in January 2018 is most likely to live to 2100, while a child from Somalia would be unlikely to live beyond 2075,” he lamented.

[DR Congo: UN chief calls for restraint amid reports security forces violently dispersed Kinshasa protests](#)

1 January 2018 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has called on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to exercise restraint amid reports of a violent crackdown by national security forces on demonstrations in the capital, Kinshasa, and a number of other cities.

In a [statement](#) issued late Sunday by his spokesperson, Mr. Guterres expressed concern about reports of the violent dispersion of protests by national security forces, resulting in the death of at least five people, the wounding of several others and the arrest of over 120 persons.

“The Secretary-General calls on the Government and national security forces to exercise restraint and to uphold the rights of the Congolese people to the freedom of speech and peaceful assembly,” said the statement.

The Secretary-General went on to urge all Congolese political actors to remain fully committed to the 31 December 2016 political agreement, “which remains the only viable path to the holding of elections, the peaceful transfer of power and the consolidation of stability in the DRC.”

That agreement “facilitated by Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo (CENCO) mediators, and reached in Kinshasa on 31 December 2016” allowed President Joseph Kabila to stay in power beyond the end of his term and has stipulated that peaceful, credible and inclusive elections would be organized in DRC by the end of December 2017.