

# Switzerland needs to do more to keep 'dirty money' at bay, urges UN expert

4 October 2017 – Highlighting the problems posed by illicit financial flows globally, including undermining rule of law and human rights, a United Nations human rights expert has called on Switzerland to ensure that so-called dirty money – which stems from tax evasion and corruption – does not enter its financial market.

“Despite significant efforts in adopting legislation and improving procedures to detect suspicious transactions, the [risk that the Swiss financial market is used for money laundering remains](#),” said Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky, the UN [Independent Expert on foreign debt and human rights](#), in a news release issued by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)).

Facilitated by weak institutions and lack of good governance in countries of origin and financial opacity in countries of destination, illicit financial flows, such as money laundering are a particular concern in developing and under developed countries, syphoning money and resources which could have otherwise used for public services.

In the case of Switzerland, the UN expert noted that the risk of money laundering is particularly highlighted by the involvement of several banks in the Petrobas corruption scandal and in the suspicious cash flows linked to the Malaysian sovereign fund IMDB.

“It is especially troubling that these events are not from years ago – the money was still being accepted until quite recently,” added Mr. Bohoslavsky, who today concluded his first official visit to the European nation.

In the news release, the expert also underlined that criminal sanctions in Switzerland for assisting foreigners to evade taxes remained relatively weak noting that criminal liability arises only if the tax evaded in a foreign jurisdiction exceeds 300,000 CHF (about \$307,500).

He also urged that the staffing, resources and powers of the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority needed to be proportional to the size of the Swiss financial market, and those who infringed standards needed to be named to ensure individual corporate accountability.

Further, noting that favourable tax arrangements in Switzerland made it attractive for multinational corporations to establish their headquarters in the country, but also provided incentives for profit-shifting, affecting tax revenues in foreign countries.

“I call upon the Swiss authorities to carry out a social and human rights impact assessment of the proposed corporate tax reform package, which should include an analysis of how the reforms will impact on tax revenues available for the realization of economic and social rights within Switzerland and for

individuals living abroad, in particular in developing countries,” said the UN expert.

Mr. Bohoslavsky visited the country at the invitation of the Swiss authorities, where he met with Government officials as well as with leaders in the banking, financial and trading sectors, civil society and the academia in Bern (the capital), Basel, Geneva and Zurich.

His findings and key recommendations will be presented in a comprehensive report to the Geneva-based Human Rights Council – the highest UN intergovernmental forum on rights issues – in March 2018.

Independent Experts and Special Rapporteurs are appointed by the Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

---

## [Rohingya refugees living in ‘dire’ conditions, senior UN officials warn, appealing for assistance](#)

4 October 2017 – The human tragedy unfolding in southern Bangladesh is staggering in its scale, warned two senior United Nations officials today as they wrapped up a mission to the Cox’s Bazar with calls for a “significant increase in assistance” for the hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas have settled in the area after fleeing violence in neighbouring Myanmar.

“We leave Bangladesh [...] all the more determined that the United Nations do all it can to assist the Government of Bangladesh in [coping with this crisis](#),” said Mark Lowcock, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and Anthony Lake, Executive Director of the UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)).

In the last few weeks, well over half a million Rohingya people have crossed the Myanmar border in to Bangladesh, making this the world’s fastest developing refugee emergency.

“People arrive fearful, exhausted and hungry, and in desperate need of immediate help including shelter, food, clean water and sanitation, and healthcare,” they asserted. “They bring with them terrible accounts of what they have seen and suffered – stories of children being killed, women brutalized, and villages burned to the ground.”

The UN officials lauded the Government and people of Bangladesh for its “extraordinary spirit of generosity” in opening the country’s borders and their providing relief to the refugees as “an inspiring example of humanity.”

Explaining that the refugees are living in flimsy shacks in sprawling, densely-crowded sites that have sprung up to accommodate them – with ever-growing risks for a disease outbreak – they underscored the urgency for funding so that all refugees have access to food, shelter, water, sanitation facilities, health care and protective services.

“Conditions in the temporary settlements are dire. Without a significant increase in assistance, the refugees, who have suffered so much already, could face another catastrophe on top of the tragedies that caused them to flee their homes,” they stressed.

Today an update to the UN and the international aid community’s [response plan](#) was released, seeking \$434 million to scale up the relief operation supporting the refugees and host communities. In support of this, an additional \$12 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund ([CERF](#)) has been allocated to help establish additional sites for newly arrived refugees.

*Source: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan*

While the two senior UN officials welcomed assurances of close cooperation with the Government, they underscored that the “appalling situation” is not over as people continue to flee for their lives, crossing from Myanmar into Bangladesh – and requiring immediate support.

“We call again on the Myanmar authorities to allow the full resumption of humanitarian action across all of Rakhine state, and will continue to advocate for conditions to be created that allow for people to safely, securely and voluntarily go home,” they concluded.

---

## [Counselling and dieting among new UN health agency guidelines on child obesity](#)

An estimated 41 million children under five years old are obese or overweight, United Nations health experts warned today, launching new guidelines to tackle what they call a global epidemic.

Faced with evidence indicating that the problem affects rich and poor countries alike, the World Health Organization (WHO) has released details on how trained professionals can better identify youngsters in need of help.

The just-published [obesity guidelines](#) include counselling and dieting, an assessment of eating habits along with the more usual weight and height measurements.

Failing to heed these recommendations may leave vulnerable children at an increased risk of dying young from a range of life-threatening diseases, WHO warns.

In 2016, Asia accounted for half of all overweight or obese children, and one quarter lived in Africa, according to the UN agency's Dr. Francesco Branca, Director of the Department of Nutrition for Health and Development.

He explained that this is related to the fact that children in poorer countries often get too little breastmilk, nor the right complimentary food.

Paradoxically, this leaves under-nourished children at greater risk of putting on excess weight as they grow, when they're offered so-called "cheap calories," in the form of fatty, sugary foods.

"Malnutrition is responsible for a lack of resilience to changes in the food environment. So a malnourished child would be more susceptible to gaining more weight when exposed to a food environment which is high in fat, sugar, for instance."

The problem of excess weight is rising in all world regions, but most rapidly in poorer and middle-income countries.

Dr. Branca insisted that it was up to governments to do more to address the problem, faced with what he called an "unsuitable food system" that fails to provide sufficient nutritious foods "with the right levels of vitamins and minerals."

Educating people about the risks of eating unhealthily is a welcome first step, he said, but what's really needed is more regulation to ensure that healthier foods are cheaper and more readily available.

---

## [UN chief to visit storm-ravaged islands of Antigua, Barbuda and Dominica this weekend](#)

4 October 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres announced today that he will be visiting hurricane hit islands of Antigua, Barbuda and Dominica this Saturday to survey the damage caused by multiple storms and what more the UN can do help people recover.

Speaking to journalists at a press stakeout at UN Headquarters, in New York, Mr. Guterres also highlighted the growing impact of climate change and said that over the past 30 years, the number of annual weather-related disasters nearly tripled, causing great economic losses.

Scientists are learning more and more about the links between climate change and extreme weather," said the Secretary General.

Climate change is warming the seas. This, in turn, means more water vapor in the atmosphere [and] when storms come, they bring more rain," he added.

*More to follow...*

---

## [Sustainable development of cities key to implement SDGs, says head of UN regional development arm](#)

4 October 2017 – Noting the high speed of urbanization in Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Nations development arm in the region underlined the need to keep a close watch on the provision of services, equipment, mobility, housing and urban land to make sure they can match pace with the demand.

Speaking at the opening of the [Cities Conference](#), Alicia Bárcena, the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) underscored that despite significant progress in reducing poverty, high degrees of socioeconomic residential segregation continues to persist in metropolises and large and small cities and towns.

Socioeconomic segregation deepens inequity and contributes to social fragmentation and the high levels of violence that characterize many cities in [the region]," she [said](#).

According to estimates, by 2030 – the timeframe to realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – there could be more than 92 million additional people living in cities in Latin America and the Caribbean. The region is already the most urbanized developing region in the world.

Therefore, added Ms. Bárcena, it is necessary to guarantee the right to the city as a basic requirement for achieving sustainable development.

Concluding this Friday, the Cities Conference focuses on the regional implementation of the New Urban Agenda – the outcome of the [Habitat III](#) conference – to build inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities.

Also at the inaugural session of the Conference, the head of ECLAC presented the Regional Action Plan for implementing the Habitat III outcome, proposing actions the countries of the region can take to ensure sustainable

development of their cities and human settlements.

The Regional Action Plan is centred on six action areas, which include national urban policies; urban legal frameworks; urban and territorial planning and design; financing urbanization; local implementation; and monitoring, reporting and revision mechanisms.

The Cities Conference has been organized by ECLAC, the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the General Assembly of Ministers and High-level Authorities of the Housing and Urban Development Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean (known by its Spanish acronym, MINURVI) in Santiago, Chile.