

Much of the planet's land severely degraded owing to increased consumption, UN warns

12 September 2017 – A new United Nations report warns that a third of the planet's land is now severely degraded thanks to a doubling in the consumption of natural resources over the past 30 years.

Some 15 billion trees and 24 billion tonnes of fertile soil are lost each year, according to the *Global Land Outlook* (GLO), launched today by the secretariat of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), at the meeting of States parties taking place in Ordos, China.

The GLO takes a critical look at financial and socio-economic values of land, and its impact on the poor. It marks the first in-depth analysis of land functions viewed from multiple lenses such economic growth and global trade patterns, highlighting the inextricable links between land, these sectors, and the people that can work to save it.

“Smallholder farmers, women and indigenous communities are the most vulnerable, given their reliance on land-based resources, compounded by their exclusion from wider infrastructure and economic development,” stated a news release issued by UNCCD.

Monique Barbut, the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD, said at the launch that land degradation and drought are global challenges and intimately linked to most, if not all aspects of human security and well-being, particularly food security, employment and migration.

“As the ready supply of healthy and productive land dries up and the population grows, competition is intensifying, for land within countries and globally,” she pointed out.

More than 60 countries have established national land degradation baselines and set neutrality targets.

In an effort to slow land degradation and maintain productive soil, over 110 countries have joined a global campaign to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal target of reaching land degradation neutrality by 2030 a national target for action.

Brazil, China, India, Nigeria, Russia and South Africa are among those that have committed to the national targets during the meeting in Ordos, a significant move for some of the world's largest and most populous nations that could mean regaining resources, job security and resilience to climate change.

Ms. Barbut noted that with the human population growing an extra 200,000 people daily, and 20 countries declaring drought emergencies over the last 18

months, there are unforeseeable challenges.

“We were clearly not sufficiently prepared for these challenges,” she said. “Hundreds of millions of people go to bed desperate, hungry and thirsty as a result. Under business-as-usual scenarios, there is no future relief.”

General Assembly opens 72nd session with focus on the world's people

12 September 2017 – The United Nations General Assembly today opened its 72nd session, with an emphasis on striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet.

“The UN was created for people,” Miroslav Lajčák said in his first address as President of the General Assembly. “The people who need the UN the most are not sitting in this hall today. They are not involved in the negotiation of resolutions. They do not take the floor at high-level events. It is one of the tasks of the General Assembly to make sure that their voices can still be heard.”

Ahead of today's opening, the career diplomat from Slovakia spoke to *UN News* about his hopes for his one-year tenure, and said that conflict prevention and migration would top his agenda. [Check out the full interview.](#)

In today's address, he noted that while it was “impossible” to select one priority for the UN to focus on this year, his aim will be to strive for balance, so that all points of view are represented.

He also stressed quality and transparency in his future work.

Mr. Lajčák takes the reins one week before the start of the high-level General Assembly debate, and said he hoped the 193 UN Member States participating would treat each other with diplomacy and mutual respect.

Speaking to reporters later in the day, Mr. Lajčák reiterated the importance of using the world body to assist people around the world.

Addressing the opening of the General Assembly, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres also emphasized the importance of focusing on people in the UN's work and underscored his proposed reforms to streamline the Organization.

“People around the world are rightly demanding change and looking for governments and institutions to deliver,” he [said](#). “We all agree that the United Nations must do even more to adapt and deliver. That is the aim of the reform proposals that this Assembly will consider.”

He added that one key change within and beyond the UN must be the empowerment

of women and girls around the world, and highlighted his own roadmap for achieving gender parity.

[Egypt: UN chief condemns terrorist attack in northern Sinai](#)

12 September 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres condemned the terrorist attack that took place on Monday on a police convoy near el-Arish in northern Sinai in Egypt.

The attack reportedly killed at least 18 policemen and injured 3 others.

“The Secretary-General hopes those responsible for this act will be quickly brought to justice,” his spokesperson, Stéphane Dujarric, said in a [statement](#).

“He conveys his condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government and people of Egypt. He also wishes a swift recovery to the injured.”

[Over 3.5 million refugee children missing out on education, UN report finds](#)

12 September 2017 – Over 3.5 million refugee children did not have the chance to attend school in the last academic year, according to a report published today by the United Nations refugee agency, which is calling for education to be a vital component of humanitarian response.

“[Left Behind: Refugee Education in Crisis](#)” found that there are 6.4 million refugees of school age – between five and 17 – among the 17.2 million refugees under the mandate of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)).

“The education of these young people is crucial to the peaceful and sustainable development of the countries that have welcomed them, and to their homes when they are able to return,” High Commissioner Filippo Grandi said in a [news release](#)

“Yet compared to other children and adolescents around the world, the gap in opportunity for refugees is growing ever wider.”

Globally, 91 per cent of children attend primary school, according to UNHCR. For refugees, that figure is far lower at only 61 per cent – and in low-income countries it is less than 50 per cent.

As refugee children get older, the obstacles only increase: just 23 per cent of refugee adolescents are enrolled in secondary school, compared to 84 per cent globally. In low-income countries, which host 28 per cent of the world’s refugees, the number in secondary education is disturbingly low, at a mere 9 per cent.

Ensuring that refugees have equitable access to quality education is a shared responsibility Filippo Grandi

As for tertiary education, UNHCR noted that the picture is just as grim. Across the world, enrolment in tertiary education stands at 36 per cent, up 2 percentage points from the previous year. For refugees, despite big improvements in overall numbers thanks to investment in scholarships and other programmes, the percentage remains stuck at 1 per cent.

Refugee girls remain particularly disadvantaged. For every ten refugee boys in primary school, there are fewer than eight refugee girls. At secondary school the figure is worse, with fewer than seven refugee girls for every ten refugee boys.

“Ensuring that refugees have equitable access to quality education is a shared responsibility,” Mr. Grandi stated. “It is time for all of us to put words into actions.”

[UN and partners aiding ‘unprecedented’ flow of refugees from Myanmar](#)

12 September 2017 – The flow of desperate Rohingya fleeing across the border from Myanmar into Bangladesh is unprecedented in terms of volume and speed, United Nations humanitarian agencies said today, amid calls for international support for the emergency response.

About 370,000 people have crossed the Bangladeshi border in the last two and a half weeks, according to the UN’s International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)).

“UN agencies and the Government were expecting the possibility that as many as 100,000 more people could come across when there were already 600,000

Rohingyas in Bangladesh. But I don't think anyone expected a mass exodus like this, unprecedented in terms of value and speed," said IOM Asia-Pacific Spokesperson Chris Lom, speaking with *UN News* from Cox's Bazar, a thin stretch of beach in south-eastern Bangladesh.

Mr. Lom, who is one of the UN aid workers on the ground, said the people he spoke with are "very vulnerable, traumatized."

There are "hundreds of people virtually camped out anywhere there is space. Any spare muddy piece of land or on hillside," he said, calling for a coordinated, emergency response that is fully funded by the international community to avert a humanitarian crisis.

About 60 per cent of the Rohingya refugees – some 200,000 – are children, according to Jean Lieby, Chief of Child Protection at the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) in Bangladesh, who is also in Cox Bazar.

"The first thing you see here in the different Rohingya camps is the [large number of children](#). You see children who have not slept for days, they are weak and hungry," she told journalists in Geneva by phone.



Arrival of new Undocumented Myanmar Nationals (UMNs) continue to increase and the UN Migration Agency (IOM) is scaling up its humanitarian response in Cox's Bazar. Photo: Saikat Biswas/UN Migration Agency



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A UN Migration Agency (IOM) mobile medical provides healthcare to the new arrivals where around 27,000 people received service from IOM healthcare facilities in the first 12 days of the influx. Photo: Saikat Biswas/UN Migration Agency

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Meanwhile, emergency relief supplies are being airlifted to Bangladesh today, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) said.

"A UNHCR-chartered Boeing 777 flew in with [91 metric tonnes of aid](#)," spokesperson Adrian Edwards told the press, detailing a list that includes shelter material, jerry cans, blankets, sleeping mats and other essential items for 25,000 refugees.

A second flight is scheduled to land later today with some 1,700 family tents, with more aid to be delivered shortly.

The UN World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) has already provided some 68,800 people with high-energy biscuits, including to women-friendly spaces supported by the UN Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)), and some 77,600 people with warm meals, working through a local partner.

UN and aid partners have launched an emergency appeal for Rohingya refugees, calling for \$77 million to cover the next three months.