

# [Polluted environments kill 1.4 million in Europe annually; UN agencies urge stepped-up action](#)

13 June 2017 – As some 1.4 million people in Europe and Central Asia die prematurely each year from polluted environments, United Nations agency heads at high-level meeting call for regional leaders to scale up action to stem environmental deaths and diseases.

“In the era of Sustainable Development, we can prevent the 1.4 million environment related deaths by making health a political choice across all government sectors,” said Dr. Zsuzsanna Jakab, World Health Organization Regional Director for Europe (WHO/Europe), at the opening of the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in Ostrava, Czech Republic.

European citizens annually lose 50 million years of healthy life due to environmental risks, corresponding to at least 15 per cent of Europe’s total deaths – around half of which are due to outdoor and indoor air pollution.

“We urge all European leaders to take this opportunity for more sustainable policies to address the health challenges of the 21st century,” he underscored.

WHO/Europe, the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), joined approximately 500 representatives from the 53 countries of the European Region together with international and non-governmental organizations, to commit to prioritizing action on environmental risks to health.

“We have enough evidence. We have solutions at hand. What we need is action,” agreed Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary of UNECE.

“Examples of solutions developed over the past 20 years by UNECE and WHO/Europe with a proven track record include the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution, the Protocol on Water and Health and the joint Programme on Transport, Health and Environment. But we must do more to fulfil their potential to clean the air and water and promote smart cities and clean transport systems. And while doing more, we must build on the synergies embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals.”

## ***Environment-related non-communicable diseases***

Environmental risk factors are responsible for around 26 per cent of ischemic heart disease, 25 per cent of strokes and 17 per cent of cancers in Europe. Cardiovascular deaths and diseases from environmental exposures are three times higher in low and middle income countries than in high income ones.

Air pollution is Europe’s leading environmental killer, responsible for

620,000 deaths every year from both outdoor and indoor exposure.

Successful cooperation among UNECE member States has led to significant reductions of air pollution in the region thereby saving lives, stressed Ms. Algayerova. All recent studies show that this work needs to continue and be strengthened, and lessons learned should be shared with other regions, she added.

Other environmental factors, such as chemical pollution, occupational risks and unsafe water and sanitation account for more deaths and diseases and road traffic injuries kill 85,000 people per year.

Extreme weather events from climate change, rapid urbanization and unprecedented levels of migration further exacerbate Europeans' health.

### ***Investing in cities***

By 2030, eight out of 10 Europeans will be living in cities, making them one of the main priorities in Europe's agenda at the Ministerial Conference.

A new WHO report, *Environment and health for European Cities in the 21st century: making a difference*, developed jointly with UNECE and UNEP, makes the case for investing in cities to improve people's health and reduce inequalities.

The Environment and Health Ministerial Conference in Ostrava, organized by WHO/Europe, in partnership with UNECE and UNEP is hosted by the Czech Republic and runs until 15 June.

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## **Conflict in Ukraine enters fourth year 'with no end in sight' – UN report**

13 June 2017 – Warring parties in eastern Ukraine have repeatedly failed to implement ceasefire agreements, allowing hostilities to escalate and the cumulative death toll to exceed 10,000 as the conflict entered its fourth year, a new United Nations report reveals.

The report, published today, covers the three months through 15 May 2017, during which the UN human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine recorded 36 conflict-related civilian deaths and 157 injuries, a 48 per cent increase from the previous three-month period, according to a [news release](#) from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)).

The report finds that there were daily ceasefire violations and routine use of small arms and light and heavy weapons in the conflict zone. Such attacks and the resulting damage to critical infrastructure, including schools,

hospitals and water facilities, raise serious concerns for the protection of civilians, the report notes, warning that, as summer approaches, there is a risk of further escalation in hostilities, as in previous years.

From the start of the conflict in mid-April 2014 up to 15 May 2017, at least 10,090 people, including 2,777 civilians, have been killed, and at least 23,966 injured, according to a conservative estimate.

RELATED: [Conflict-displaced Ukrainians struggling to survive &#8211 UN](#)

More than 1.6 million people fled their homes and became internally displaced, while some three million remained in territory controlled by armed groups, the report notes.

Among the issues highlighted in the report:

- The socio-economic deprivation in the east of the country has been deepening. A cumbersome verification procedure introduced in 2016 deprived more than 400,000 citizens of Ukraine of their pensions. The report recommends abolishing the requirement that pensioners from armed-group controlled territory should register as internally displaced persons to receive their pension;
- The contact line continues to divide families and communities, infringing daily the right to freedom of movement. Long queues at the checkpoints reached a record peak in March and April, with over 900,000 crossings each month, compared with 550,000 in February;
- The report contains new cases of individuals unlawfully or arbitrarily deprived of their liberty or subjected to enforced disappearances and abductions, particularly in the territory controlled by armed groups. In a number of cases, the victims' families did not have access to those detained and had no information on their whereabouts; and,
- The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine observed systemic violations of the right to a fair trial on conflict-related charges.

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## **Joint African action crucial to protect persons with albinism from violence, highlights UN expert**

13 June 2017 – Highlighting the importance of cooperation among countries to overcome the violence and discrimination faced by persons with albinism, a United Nations rights expert has urged African nations to fully implement a regional action plan on ending attacks on persons with albinism.

The plan sets out clearly what States can do – for example educating the public, collecting data and researching the root causes of the violence, said the UN Independent Expert on human rights of persons with albinism, Ikponwosa Ero, in her message for [International Albinism Awareness Day](#).

The regional action plan to end attacks on persons with albinism in Africa – the first-ever such joint initiative – was recently endorsed by the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights. It includes 15 practical steps which are expected to go a long way in addressing the persisting and deadly challenge.

International cooperation will be a turning point in the [long battle to end discrimination for people with albinism](#), some of whom continue to be murdered for their body parts, added Ms. Ero.

According to a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), the action plan focuses on ensuring accountability as well as support for victims and uses legal and policy frameworks to deter practices of witchcraft and trafficking in body parts.

Further, Ms. Ero underscored that persons with albinism also face significant barriers restricting their equal participation in society, impacting their rights to enjoy physical and mental health and their ability to access adequate health care, education, social services, legal protection, and redress for abuses.

In particular, women and children face violence, suffer from discrimination, stigma and social exclusion, forced into becoming marginalized within their communities and face social exclusion caused by misunderstanding, deeply entrenched prejudices and stereotyping.

***‘We cannot underestimate the importance of joint action’ – UN Independent Expert***

We cannot rest until we have seen change in people’s lives and tackled the root causes of the current situation, she said, calling everyone concerned to be bold and to persevere to ensure that all people with albinism enjoy their full human rights.

We cannot underestimate the importance of joint action [...] we advance together, with renewed hope inspired by the principle of ‘leaving no one behind’ which is at the core of the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development.

Ms. Ero’s statement has been endorsed by the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights; the UN Special Rapporteur on physical and mental health, Dainius Pûras; the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, Mutuma Ruteere; the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Ms. Catalina Devandas Aguilar; and the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Agnes Callamard.

Special Rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based UN [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.

In December 2014, the UN General Assembly [designated](#) 13 June as the International Albinism Awareness Day to draw attention to the stigma and violence that persons with albinism everywhere in the world.

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## [On World Day Against Child Labour, UN urges protection for children in conflicts and disasters](#)

12 June 2017 – Children in areas affected by conflict and disasters are among the most vulnerable, the United Nations International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)) in warning on the World Day Against Child Labour, making a strong call for an end to the scourge, especially as children trapped in crisis risk falling prey to trafficking or being forced into hazardous work.

“All children have the [right to be protected](#) from child labour,” said ILO Director-General Guy Ryder in a statement on the [World Day](#).

“Yet, around the world, there are still 168 million children in child labour. Eighty-five million of them are engaged in hazardous work.”

A significant portion these children find themselves undertaking dangerous work, living in areas affected by conflict and disaster and they are the focus of the 2017 commemoration of the World Day, marked annually on 12 June.

As the world strives to achieve the elimination of child labour by 2025, the UN underlined that conflicts and disasters have a devastating impact on people’s lives. They kill, maim, injure and force people to flee their homes; destroy livelihoods, push people into poverty and starvation, and trap many in situations without basic safeguard for their rights.

The first to suffer from human rights violations and abuses are often boys and girls. Their schools are destroyed and basic services are disrupted. Many children are internally displaced or become refugees in other countries, and are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and child labour.

“Today, we are facing the greatest refugee crisis for decades,” said Mr. Ryder, referring to one of the main drivers of child labour. Globally over 1.5 billion people live in countries that are affected by conflict, violence and fragility. At the same time, around 200 million people are affected by disasters every year.

While a huge part of the world’s responsibility to provide sanctuary and

support to children and their families is shouldered by neighbouring host countries, ILO's Director-General says much more needs to be done to share fairly the responsibility to protect refugees.

In his statement, he particularly urges support to those States on the front line in the affected regions, so that they can provide access to the labour market for adult refugees and access to education for their children.

Amid growing concern for the safety of migrants and children in particular the ILO also noted that the [Minimum Age Convention](#), 1973 (No. 138) and the Convention [Worst Forms of Child Labour](#), 1999 (No. 182) have now been ratified by 169 and 180 States respectively.

Tomorrow I will have the honour of receiving India's ratification of both Conventions," noted Mr Ryder, explaining that with this great step forward towards universal ratification, almost all the world's children will be covered by Convention 182; and that coverage of Convention 138 will leap from 60 per cent to 80 per cent.

Together with the near universal ratification of the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), that sends a resounding message about our common cause and our common standards that protect children's human rights," he stated.

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## **Central African Republic: UN mission determined to fulfil mandate despite attacks on peacekeepers**

12 June 2017 – The United Nations envoy for the Central African Republic today warned against increasing attacks on civilians and peacekeeping personnel while stressing the need to reenergize the political process to achieve sustainable peace in the conflict-torn country.

"The intensity of the attacks, their premeditated nature and the targeting of ethnic minorities, are a reminder of the darkest moments of the Central African political and security crisis," said the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, in his briefing to the Security Council.

"The new and disturbing fact is the systematic and fierce aggression against the peacekeepers," he added.

The envoy provided an update on the situation in Bangassou, where "political spoilers" demonstrated their intention of carrying out a de facto ethnic cleansing of the town. He said that the UN Multidimensional

Integrated Stabilization Mission ([MINUSCA](#)) has gradually regained control of the town, but anti-Balaka elements continue to pose a serious threat to civilians and peacekeepers.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, plunged the country of 4.5 million people into civil conflict in 2013. According to the UN, more than half the population is in dire need of assistance. Despite significant progress and successful elections, CAR has remained in the grip of instability and sporadic unrest.

The situation in the southern-central prefectures of Ouaka and Mbomou remains complex as fighting continues between ex- Séléka factions the Popular Front for the Central African Renaissance (FPRC) and Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC).

He also expressed deep concern about the evolving situation in Bria, where some 80 per cent of the civilian population has been displaced.

Meanwhile, an outbreak of violence in the northwest prefectures of Ouham and Ouham Pende, was abated through a tripartite local mediation initiative at the end of May, with local and traditional authorities firmly in the lead and MINUSCA in a facilitation role.

The security situation in Bangui remains relatively calm thanks to continuous and integrated political and military efforts.

***Despite harsh public criticism, Mission's resolve 'remains strong'***

Mr. Onanga-Anyanga said that lately MINUSCA has been under harsh public criticism within CAR with each side expecting MINUSCA to fight its perceived enemy.

Even in the face of those cynics, MINUSCA's resolve remains stronger than ever, he said.

“Each time MINUSCA exhibits strength against armed groups, it is a victory for stability [...] Each time tensions are defused through dialogue, it is another gain for peace, and we close the distance to achieving the end-state of the mission a little bit more,” he said.

In this context, he said, “all constructive peace efforts need to be energized,” noting that the National Consultative and Follow-up Committee can provide an essential forum where the Government and the armed groups would not only discuss the modalities of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme but also broader issues related to peace and stability in the country.

He said that he believes the African Peace and Reconciliation initiative remains an essential element to facilitate an inclusive national dialogue with the support of the sub-region and finds recent contacts between the Government and the African Union and other parties encouraging.

Also briefing the Security Council was the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Andrew Gilmour, who provided an update on the human rights mapping report that covered major violations committed in the country from 2003 to 2015.

The report detailed 620 incidents, including horrific accounts of entire villages being burnt to the ground and multiple incidents of gang rapes of women and girls, and extra-judicial killings. The vast majority of incidents were attributed to the Séléka /ex- Séléka and the anti-Balaka, and the Central African defence and security forces.

“This long list and patterns of past violations and abuses is unfortunately resuming today,” he said, adding that “this is therefore a timely moment to send an unequivocal message to the perpetrators of violations that their actions are being watched and documented, and that they will be held accountable.”