

## [UN chief condemns DPR Korea's ballistic missile launch](#)

15 May 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today urged Pyongyang to return to the path of denuclearization saying the latest ballistic missile launch by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is a threat to peace and security in the region.

“The Secretary-General [condemns](#) the launch of another ballistic missile by the DPRK, the Spokesman said in a statement.

He added that that launch violates Security Council resolution, and said that Mr. Guterres calls on the DPRK to “ensure full compliance with its international obligations.”

DPRK fired the missile while the UN chief was in Beijing for the Belt and Road Forum. Addressing President Xi Jinping, Mr. Guterres highlighted the shared aims of China's One Belt, One Road initiative and the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), such as deepening connectivity in infrastructure, trade and finance.

The missile was reportedly fired from a base in the north-west DPRK, near the border with China.

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## [Annual UN Asia-Pacific policy forum session spotlights poverty eradication, sustainable energy](#)

15 May 2017 – Asian and Pacific countries are discussing economic cooperation and integration this week at the United Nations regional office in Bangkok, whose annual session focuses on how regional countries can achieve the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

Welcoming senior officials to the 73rd Session of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific ([ESCAP](#)), Executive Secretary Shamshad Akhtar shared key achievements made in the past year in support of the [SDGs](#), the global goals set out in the UN [2030 Agenda](#).

“Together with you, we have made [considerable progress](#) in formulating strategies that seek to eradicate poverty and ensure that development balances the needs of economy, people and planet,” Ms. Akhtar told heads of Government and other high-level officials from Asia and the Pacific.

During the week-long session, participants will review and endorse a number of resolutions and policies, including a regional plan for implementing the SDGs. The plan – known as the Regional Road Map for Implementing the 2030 Agenda – sets out priorities for regional cooperation, calls for enhanced technical cooperation on areas such as disaster risk reduction and climate change, and discusses data and statistics, and other means of implementing the SDGs.

In addition, ESCAP is developing a regional resource facility on the SDGs, which will include analytical reports and online capacity building tools to teach policy makers and others about issues related to the SDGs.

“This is expected to be one of the key mechanisms to promote South-South, North-South and triangular cooperation on the 2030 Agenda in the Asia-Pacific,” said Ms. Akhtar.

In a video message to the Commission, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres lauded ESCAP for its efforts to reduce poverty, protect the environment and help to realize the 2030 Agenda.

“Your [spirit of openness and willingness](#) to work beyond borders is critical to enhancing multilateralism,” the Secretary-General said.

Among the topics to be discussed this week is regional cooperation for sustainable energy in the region, which is a special theme of this year’s meeting.

In her speech, Ms. Akhtar said ESCAP’s flagship study, which will be presented on Friday to high-level officials but is now [available online](#), recommends developing a regional cooperation framework on sustainable energy to enable Governments to identify ways to transition its energy uses to more sustainable methods.

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## [Amid ‘dramatic’ climate changes, UN launches plan to step-up polar weather and sea-ice monitoring](#)

15 May 2017 – With relatively little data available about the Earth’s Polar Regions – posing risks for people and the environment – the United Nations weather agency has kicked off of a two-year international effort to close gaps in polar forecasting capacity and to improve future environmental safety at the farthest reaches of the planet.

Polar conditions are changing dramatically, impacting weather across the globe, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said, launching the Year

of Polar Prediction, which will aim to improve predictions of weather, climate and ice conditions in the Arctic and Antarctic.

“Because of teleconnections, the poles influence weather and climate conditions in lower latitudes where hundreds of millions of people live,” [warned](#) WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas.

“Warming Arctic air masses and declining sea ice are believed to affect ocean circulation and the jet stream, and are potentially linked to extreme phenomena such as cold spell, heat waves and droughts in the northern hemisphere,” he added.

Scientists, with the help of data from operational forecasting centres, will observe, model, and improve forecasts of weather and climate systems to learn more about and improve the understanding of the weather changes at the poles.

In light of [The Year of Polar Prediction](#), special observing periods will be added to improve the number of routine observations, for example by weather balloon launches, and buoy deployments from research vessels to measure atmospheric and oceanographic conditions.

#### ***Climate change at the Poles***

The effects of worldwide greenhouse gas emissions, one of the leading causes of global warming, are felt more intensely in the Polar Region as than anywhere else. According to WMO, both the Arctic and Antarctica are warming twice as fast as the rest of the world causing melting of glaciers and ice shelves, shrinking sea ice and snow cover. Polar wildlife ecosystems and indigenous population are already feeling the impact of climate change.

“Arctic sea-ice maximum extent after the winter re-freezing period in March was the lowest on record because of a series of ‘heat-waves.’ Antarctic sea ice minimum extent after the most recent Southern Hemisphere summer melt was also the lowest on record,” explained Thomas Jung of the Alfred Wegener Institute Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research, and chair of the Polar Prediction Project steering committee.

“The rate and implications of polar environmental change is pushing our scientific knowledge to the limits,” he warned.

WMO further predicts that the noticeable changes in weather, climate and ice conditions at the poles are leading to increased human activities such as transportation, tourism, fisheries and natural resource exploitation and extraction.

“The expected increase in activity comes with its own share of risks to both the environment and society, including traditional indigenous livelihoods”, said Mr. Taalas. “Ice-laden polar seas are a challenge to navigate, whilst any oil spills could be catastrophic.”

“Accurate weather and sea-ice information will thus become increasingly vital in order to improve safety management in Polar Regions and beyond,” the WMO chief concluded.

### *Improving Arctic forecasts*

Polar and high mountain activities are among WMO's top strategic priorities because of the growing impact of climate change from greenhouse gas emissions.

The Arctic and Antarctic are currently among the world's most poorly observed regions. Lack of data along with limitations of models, impact the quality of forecasts while insufficient information about polar weather will also affect quality of weather forecasts in other parts of the world.

WMO therefore expects that advances in Polar prediction will lead to improved weather forecasts and climate predictions both for Polar Regions as well as densely populated countries in other parts of the world.

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## Ongoing forest destruction has put Asia-Pacific at risk of missing global development targets – UN agency

15 May 2017 – The destruction of forests in many Asian countries continues apace, threatening the realization of global sustainable development goals by the 2030 deadline, according to the United Nations agricultural agency.

"While forests are critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), they continue to be degraded and lost at a rate of 3.3 million hectares per year," warned Patrick Durst, the Senior Forestry Officer at the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

Covering one-third of the earth's surface, forests provide an invaluable variety of social, economic and environmental benefits. Forests and trees sustain and protect all life in invaluable ways.

They provide the clean air for breathing and the safe water to drink. Home to more than 80 per cent of land animals and plants, forests safeguard the planet's biodiversity and act as a natural defence against climate change.

"In this region, forests continue to be converted to agriculture, destroyed and replaced by man-made infrastructure, housing, mining, and other land uses. Forest fires also continue to pose a threat to the region," said Mr. Durst.

When the [SDGs](#) were formulated and agreed upon in 2015, forests were explicitly mentioned in order that they be aided through the protection, restoration and promotion of sustainable forests while halting and reversing

associated land degradation and the loss of biodiversity.



Sustainably managed forests hold vast potential to play a decisive role in ending hunger, improving livelihoods and combating climate change. Photo: FAO/Simon Maina

According to FAO, a third of the world's biggest cities, including Mumbai, Bogotá and New York, obtain much of their drinking water directly from forested areas. In short, life on earth is made possible and sustainable thanks to forests and trees.

### ***Forests and poverty reduction***

Forests also play a major role in supporting human livelihoods. Nina Brandstrup, FAO Representative in Sri Lanka, underscored that they have much to contribute to ending poverty – the first SDG.

“Globally, 1.3 billion people, mostly in developing countries, are estimated to be ‘forest peoples,’ who depend on forests for their livelihoods and income. Twenty-eight per cent of the total income of households living in or near forests come from forest and environmental income. Ending poverty would need to take the health of our forests into account and engage those ‘forest peoples’ directly,” she explained.

According to FAO's Global Forest Resource Assessment in 2015, forests continue to be lost in many countries of the Asia-Pacific region, including Sri Lanka. Degradation of forest quality further decreases the forests' capacity to provide goods and services necessary for human survival. These losses will be more acutely felt as the demand for forest products steadily rises in the future.

While most countries in the Asia-Pacific region continue to struggle to respond to forest loss, some are taking positive action. Through reforestation programmes, China and Viet Nam are actually increasing the amount of forested land.

Meantime, the Government of Sri Lanka has announced plans to increase the country's forest cover by as much as 35 per cent – including with the people that will benefit most.

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**[South Sudan: UN, partners seek \\$1.4 billion to cope with 'world's fastest](#)**

## growing refugee crisis'

15 May 2017 – The United Nations refugees and food relief agencies today urged donors to step up support for people fleeing crisis-hit South Sudan as the \$1.4 billion response plan remains 86 per cent unfunded.

Bitter conflict and deteriorating humanitarian conditions in South Sudan are driving people from their homes in record numbers, said UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, in a news release jointly issued by his office ([UNHCR](#)) and the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)).

The situation in South Sudan continues to worsen, with a combination of conflict, drought and famine leading to further displacement and a rapid exodus of people fleeing one of the world's most severe crises.

South Sudan has now become the world's fastest growing refugee crisis with more than 1.8 million refugees, including one million children, having sought safety in Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic, the news release said.

The suffering of the South Sudanese people is just unimaginable, said WFP Executive Director David Beasley. Aid workers often cannot reach the most vulnerable hungry people. Many are dying from hunger and disease, many more have fled their homeland for safety abroad.

Humanitarian agencies are seeking \$1.4 billion to provide life-saving aid to South Sudanese refugees in the six neighbouring countries until the end of 2017, according to an updated response plan presented in Geneva today. But the plan so far remains only 14 per cent funded.

The current rate of people fleeing South Sudan exceeds the humanitarian community's already pessimistic estimates. For example, the number of people fleeing to Sudan in March surpassed the expected figure for the entire year. Uganda is also seeing higher than expected arrivals and at this rate is likely to soon host over one million South Sudanese refugees.

Our funding situation forced us to cut food rations for many refugees in Uganda," Mr. Beasley said.

With acute underfunding, humanitarian agencies are struggling to provide food, water, nutrition support, shelter and health services to refugees.

Communities hosting refugees are among the world's poorest and are under immense pressure.

Helping refugees is not just about providing emergency aid, said UNHCR's Grandi. It also means supporting governments and communities in neighbouring countries to shore up services and economies in the areas receiving them.