

Abuses by non-State actors no justification for rights violations by Governments – UN rights chief

1 May 2017 – Raising alarm over use of rhetoric by States that they can “solve problems” and find ways around lawful safeguards, the United Nations rights chief today urged vigilance to protect and promote human rights of everyone.

“The use of, or the creation of, some form of political fog to create confusion at times, even amounting to the depth charging of truth or parts of it, so that a government can pursue a particular line [is,] I think something [...] to watch very carefully,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein at a press briefing in Geneva.

“Violations by non-State actors of human rights norms, of international law, do not, and should not serve as grounds for violations thereby by Government actors,” he underscored.

In his remarks, he expressed particular concern over the renewed state of emergency in Turkey and the human rights situation in the country.

According to reports, up to 150,000 civil servants have been suspended. Furthermore, there are reports that last week about 10,000 police officers were also suspended and some one thousand among them detained.

“With such a large number, it is highly unlikely that the suspensions and detentions will have met due process standards,” added Mr. Zeid.

“Yes, the terror attacks need to be tackled, but not at the expense of human rights, and I am very concerned about the renewed state of emergency which was undertaken in mid-April and the climate of fear in the country,” he underscored.

SEE ALSO: [State of emergency should not overshadow rights protection, UN experts stress ahead of Turkey referendum](#)

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In the same vein, he also drew attention to the dangers confronting human rights defenders, journalists and civil society members in their lines of work.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights also spoke out against the impact of human rights violations on the lives of people and the resulting increased suffering.

“Human rights violations have also resulted in famines in Yemen and South Sudan and human rights deficits have exacerbated the impact of droughts in other places like Kenya, Somalia and northern Nigeria,” he said.

Rights of indigenous peoples ‘not in a very good state,’ UN expert says

1 May 2017 – The rights of indigenous peoples are being abused by authorities and corporations that want access to their land and the resources – such as petrol – that lie beneath it, the United Nations expert on the issue today said on the sidelines of the 2017 session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, currently under way in New York.

“The situation of indigenous peoples’ rights is really not in a very good state these days because there are policies and laws used to criminalize them,” Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, said in a press briefing alongside three other indigenous leaders.

She noted the use of harassment, torture and arrests against indigenous peoples peacefully protecting their property. This is out of line with the <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>>UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the General Assembly in September 2007, which established a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity, well-being and rights of the world’s indigenous peoples.

“The main preoccupation of indigenous peoples is really to work on the defence of their land and resources, and protection of the right of self-determination. In their assertion of this right, they are accused of being a terrorist or arrested,” Ms. Tauli-Corpuz.

The independent UN expert just returned from Honduras, where she met with the family of an indigenous right defender killed last year. She noted the hearings in the case are being delayed and said that there was a “lack of determination from the side of prosecutors to pursue” a case.

Ms. Tauli-Corpuz had also recently been in the United States, where members of the Standing Rock reservation are protesting the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. There, she saw indigenous peoples arrested and pounced on by police dogs.

These “gatherings are not violent and should not be subjected to this type of force,” said Ms. Tauli-Corpuz.

Indigenous peoples represent five per cent of the world’s population, but their lands hold about 80 per cent of the world’s biodiversity, according to

UN-cited figures.

“Petrol, minerals, it’s all beneath the earth, which leads to a tremendous problem,” said Lourdes Tibán Guala, a Member of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues from Ecuador.

Speaking alongside Ms. Tauli-Corpuz, she described the importance of land to indigenous peoples: “The land passes everything, health, education, agriculture. But whenever there are discussions about the economy of a country, indigenous people’s lands are the first to be used.”

This is done without discussions with the indigenous peoples, but with the belief that the nations will trade for “some chickens, some cows.”

“But indigenous peoples do not want machinery on their territory without prior consultation,” the Ecuadorian advocate stressed.

Among other issues raised in today’s briefing was the idea of having an Ambassador for the indigenous peoples joining Ambassadors from the 193 UN Member States on the General Assembly floor.

The [sixteenth session](#), of the [Permanent Forum](#), which opened last Monday, runs at UN Headquarters through Friday, 5 May.

[Protection, sustainable management of forests ‘fundamental to security of humanity’s place on this planet,’ UN Forum told](#)

1 May 2017 – Kick-starting action on the recently-adopted [Global Forest Goals](#) to protect, sustainably manage and increase world’s forest area will be a key focus for delegations gathered in New York for the twelfth session of the [UN Forum on Forests](#), which opened today at United Nations Headquarters.

The six forest goals and 26 associated targets, all to be achieved by 2030, the deadline set by UN Member States for the universal attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), were adopted late last week by the UN General Assembly as part of the [UN Strategic Plan for Forest 2017-2030](#), which includes a landmark target to expand the world’s forests by three per cent – an area of 120 million hectares, by 2030.

“Let us make no mistake on this matter – the health of the world’s forests is fundamental to humanity’s place on this planet,” said Assembly President Peter Thomson at the [opening](#) of the Forum’s [current session](#), emphasizing that

forests were home to 80 per cent of the Earth's land-based animal, plant and insect species.

Together, they regulate climate, prevent land degradation, reduce the risk of floods, landslides and avalanches, and protect people from droughts and dust storms. Forests also played a critical role in staving off the worst impacts of climate change, serving as the world's second-largest storehouse of carbon, he said. Indeed, the world's tropical forests alone retained a quarter trillion tons of carbon in biomass.

"If we are to succeed in the implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the protection and sustainable management of our forests will be fundamental to the security of humanity's place upon this planet," Mr. Thomson said, adding that the Assembly's decision to adopt the first-ever strategic plan was "a critical one."

Forests presently cover 30 per cent of the Earth's land area, or nearly four billion hectares. Sustainably managed forests are healthy, productive, resilient and renewable ecosystems, which provide vital goods and ecosystem services to people worldwide. An estimated 25 per cent of the global population depends on forests for their subsistence, livelihood, employment and income.

The UN forests plan provides a global framework for actions to sustainably manage all types of forests and trees outside forests and halt deforestation and forest degradation.

The goals cover a wide range of issues including increasing forest area and combating climate change, reducing poverty and increasing forest protected areas, mobilizing financing and inspiring innovation, promoting governance and enhancing cooperation across sectors and stakeholders.

VIDEO: In the Solomon Islands, once populated by head hunters, a struggle is underway to keep with the 21st Century and at the same time protect a way of life.

In his opening remarks, Peter Besseau, of Canada, Chair of the twelfth session of the Forum on Forests, said the landmark global action plan translated the aspirations of the [International Arrangement on Forest](#) into an actionable plan to guide the Forums' work for the next 13 years. "The Global Forest Goals reflect the way the Forum is transforming its work to more effectively address the challenges facing forests and the lives of the people who depend on them."

He urged all countries and stakeholders to tackle the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation; balance economic growth, social progress and environmental sustainability; and improve governance in order to integrate forest issues, as per the guidance from the Quadrennial Programme of Work.

As a unique universal body on forests, the UN Forum has an important role to

play in implementation of the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Wu Hongbo told the Forum today.

He noted that “the new method of work of the Forum, provides an excellent opportunity for the body to address the links between forests and the [SDGs](#), as well as capacity building, financing, technology development and transfer, governance, and science-policy interface, in a holistic and coherent manner.”

The six goals not only contribute to progress on the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs, but also address the [Aichi Biodiversity Targets](#), the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change, and other international forest-related commitments and goals.

“To create a better, greener future, we need the right enabling environment – from governance systems that combat illegal deforestation, to policies that ensure equitable sharing of benefits from forests” stressed the Director of UN Forum on Forests Secretariat, Manoel Sobral Filho.



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

“When sustainably managed, forests provide essential goods and services worldwide,” said Mr. Sobral Filho, adding that for millions of people living in poverty, “forests serve as safety nets in crises and often provide pathways out of poverty.”

Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world

Discussions at the Forum will take into account the 2017 theme of the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development ([HLPF](#)), *Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world* and the SDGs under in-depth review by the HLPF this year.

The Forest Forum will also discuss issues related to sustainable forest management and strategies to promote implementation of the UN forest action plan.

The six Global Forest Goals

The forest-related goals proposed by the UN Forum on Forests and adopted by the UN General Assembly are:

- Global Forest Goal 1 – Reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through sustainable forest management, including protection, restoration, afforestation and reforestation, and increase efforts to prevent forest degradation and contribute to the global effort of addressing climate change.
- Global Forest Goal 2 – Enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits, including by improving the livelihoods of forest

dependent people.

- Global Forest Goal 3 – Increase significantly the area of protected forests worldwide and other areas of sustainably managed forests, as well as the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests.
 - Global Forest Goal 4 – Mobilize significantly increased, new and additional financial resources from all sources for the implementation of sustainable forest management and strengthen scientific and technical cooperation and partnerships.
 - Global Forest Goal 5 – Promote governance frameworks to implement sustainable forest management, including through the UN Forest Instrument, and enhance the contribution of forests to the 2030 Agenda.
 - Global Forest Goal 6 – Enhance cooperation, coordination, coherence and synergies on forest-related issues at all levels, including within the UN System and across Collaborative Partnership on Forests member organizations, as well as across sectors and relevant stakeholders.
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[Middle East peace effort lacks progress on political front – UN reports](#)

1 May 2017 – The lack of progress in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is impeding Palestine's development, according to a new United Nations report, which also reiterates the international community's commitment to a two-state solution in the region.

The report, issued by the Office of the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process ([UNSCO](#)), notes that "despite a number of international efforts over the past six months to advance the two-state solution, last year has been characterized by a [continued lack of progress](#) on the political front."

In contrast to recommendations outlined in the [July 2016 report by the Middle East Quartet](#), there has been "a surge in Israeli settlement-related activity and a continued high rate of demolitions in Palestinian and Bedouin communities" as well as "continuing acts of violence against civilians, signs of a deepening political rift between Gaza and the West Bank, and continued military build-up and firing of rockets by extremist groups in Gaza."

This environment threatens the erosion of the achievements of the Palestinian state building effort, according to the report.

"The institutions of Palestinian governance remain vulnerable to political instability and require affirmative steps to protect and advance

state-building efforts,” the authors wrote.

The report also notes a “deepening political rift” between Gaza and the West Bank. Tensions between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas are aggravating a “difficult situation in the Gaza Strip” with an intra-Palestinian disagreement over issues such as electricity access and payment of salaries.

Analysing the impact of the Hamas take-over ten years ago and the ensuing Israeli closures and conflicts, the report notes that “Gaza is facing a downward spiral of de-development, while the people in Gaza are caught in a cycle of humanitarian need and perpetual aid dependency.”

The report covers the period from 15 September 2016 to 15 April 2017.

It will be presented to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLIC) at its bi-annual meeting in Brussels on 4 May. The Committee, chaired by Norway and co-sponsored by the European Union and the United States, serves as the principal policy-level coordination mechanism for development assistance to the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

'Broadly positive' outlook for Asia-Pacific threatened by rising global uncertainty, warns UN report

1 May 2017 – Warning that despite a broadly positive economic outlook for 2017, Asia-Pacific economies are vulnerable to rising global uncertainty and trade protectionism, the United Nations social and economic development arm in the region has called for better governance and stronger fiscal management resources to sustain and improve economic growth.

In its latest edition of the [Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific](#), the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) noted that the region's developing economies are projected to grow at 5.0 and 5.1 per cent in 2017 and 2018, respectively, a steeper-than-anticipated increase in those risks could reduce average regional growth in 2017 by up to 1.2 percentage points.

“As we enter the second year of the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development, economic growth in Asia-Pacific economies is steady but modest amid prolonged weak external demand and rising trade protectionism,” said Shamshad Akhtar, the Executive Secretary of UNESCAP, in a [news release](#) announcing the findings.

Overcoming such challenges is also important given the role of better

governance for effective resource mobilization as well as the use of fiscal resources to advancing the 2030 Agenda.

“In addition to ensuring sustained and robust economic growth, policymakers will need to address social and environmental challenges in order to improve the quality of this growth.” she added.

According to UNESCAP, economic expansion has been accompanied by rising income inequality with inadequate creation of “decent jobs” in the region, which trails the world in social protection coverage. Furthermore, its study has shown that developing Asia-Pacific economies use twice as many resources per dollar of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the rest of the world.

“When institutions are weak, inequalities tend to increase and the pace of poverty reduction declines,” noted the UN Asia-Pacific development arm, adding: “The quality of governance also affects environmental outcomes, as reflected in [...] environmental rules and safeguards, and initiate ecological innovation and technological transfer.”

To address such challenges, UNESCAP has called for effective governance, including a proactive fiscal policy through productive investments in such areas as infrastructure, social protection and resource efficiency.

Effective governance can also for example, improve health outcomes in the Pacific, promote economic diversification in north and central Asia, create “decent jobs” in south and south-west Asia, reduce development gaps in south-east Asia, and accelerate ecological innovation in east and north-east Asia.