

[On International Day, UN celebrates historic event that opened doors to outer space](#)

12 April 2017 – The United Nations today commemorated the International Day of Human Space Flight to celebrate the 56th anniversary of the first human space flight, which ushered in the beginning of the space era for mankind.

“The International Day is an opportunity for us to recognize how much humanity has achieved thanks to international cooperation in space and the benefits space technology and applications has brought us for making the world a better place,” said the UN Champion for Space, Scott Kelly in a message on the occasion.

The [International Day](#) commemorates the historic space flight that Yuri Gagarin, a Soviet citizen, took on 12 April, 1961, and which opened the way for space exploration for the benefit of all of Earth’s inhabitants.

This year’s commemoration features a live “Twitter Chat” with Mr. Kelly, a former astronaut with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), who holds the record for the most cumulative number of days spent in space by an American astronaut.

During his “year in space,” astronaut Kelly and NASA partnered with the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (OOSA) on the #WhySpaceMatters campaign to draw attention to the importance of space-based science technology and their applications for sustainable development.

In 2011, the UN General Assembly declared 12 April as the International Day of Human Space Flight “to celebrate each year at the international level the beginning of the space era for mankind, reaffirming the important contribution of space science and technology in achieving sustainable development goals and increasing the well-being of States and peoples, as well as ensuring the realization of their aspiration to maintain outer space for peaceful purposes.”

The Assembly expressed its deep conviction of the common interest of mankind in promoting and expanding the exploration and use of outer space, as the province of all mankind, for peaceful purposes and in continuing efforts to extend to all States the benefits derived there from.

VIDEO: International Day of Human Space Flight

'Alarming' rise in use of children in 'suicide' attacks by Boko Haram in Lake Chad region – UNICEF

12 April 2017 – The use of children, particularly girls, by the Boko Haram terrorist group in violent attacks in the Lake Chad region has seen an [alarming](#) surge in 2017, the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has reported.

According to the UNICEF report, [Silent Shame: Bringing out the voices of children caught in the Lake Chad crisis](#), 27 children have been used to carry out bomb attacks in public places across Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon in the first quarter of this year. During the same period last year, the number was nine.

In the first three months of this year, the number of children used in bomb attacks is nearly the same as the whole of last year – this is the worst possible use of children in conflict, the UNICEF Regional Director for West and Central Africa, Marie-Pierre Poirier, said in a news release [announcing the grim findings](#).

These children are victims, not perpetrators. Forcing or deceiving them into committing such horrific acts is reprehensible.

Since 2014, 117 children – more than 80 per cent of them girls – have been used in 'suicide' attacks across the region. As a result of this distressing tactic, girls, boys and even infants have been viewed with increasing fear at markets and checkpoints, where they are thought to carry explosives.

Fear of stigma pushing children into isolation

The UNICEF report documents troubling accounts by children who were held in captivity by Boko Haram and narrates the deep suspicion they are met with when they return to their communities.

[Children] bear their horrors in silent shame and endure isolation as they remove themselves from other groups for fear they might be outed and alienated even further UNICEF report *Silent Shame*

Many children who have been associated with armed groups keep their experience secret because they fear the stigmatization and even violent reprisals from their community, the report noted. They bear their horrors in silent shame and endure isolation as they remove themselves from other groups for fear they might be outed and alienated even further.

The report also highlights the challenges local authorities face with

children who have been intercepted at checkpoints and taken into administrative custody for questioning and screening, including for prolonged periods.

VIDEO: Surge in girls being used in Boko Haram 'suicide' attacks / UNICEF

Voicing concern over such custodies and that, last year, nearly 1,500 children were under administrative custody in the four countries, UNICEF has called on Governments to urgently transfer them to civilian authorities for reintegration and support, and to put in place handover protocols to handle children encountered during military operations.

All children affected by the crisis need psychosocial support and safe spaces to recover, said UNICEF, highlighting the particular need to pay attention to the care and protection of separated and unaccompanied children.

It also underlined that Boko Haram must end grave violations against children, including the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict as so-called suicide bombers.

At the same time, UNICEF continues to provide support to the children and families.

Last year, it reached more than 312,000 children with psychosocial support and reunited more than 800 children with their families in the four countries. It is also working with communities and families to fight stigma against survivors of sexual violence and to build a protective environment for former abducted children.

However, its response in the region remains severely underfunded. Last year, its \$154 million appeal was only 40 per cent funded.

[UN calls for urgent access to reach some 400,000 civilians trapped in Syria's Ghouta](#)

11 April 2017 – Voicing concern over the impact of deteriorating security and humanitarian situation on the lives some 400,000 people trapped in eastern Ghouta in Syria, a United Nations spokesperson today underlined the need to ensure that humanitarians have unrestricted access to the affected areas.

“There have been continued reports of heavy aerial bombardment and artillery shelling which have resulted in civilian deaths and injuries,” Stéphane Dujarric, the Spokesman for the Secretary-General, [told](#) the regular daily

briefing at UN Headquarters in New York.

According to reports, Government forces have prevented commercial trucks from entering the town, located in rural Damascus, since late March.

Lack of supplies have resulted in price hikes of basic staples and closures of many bakeries due to lack of flour and much higher prices for fuel and gas.

“It is critical that the UN and partners be given access to the area before the conditions deteriorate further,” Mr. Dujarric underscored.

The last UN humanitarian delivery to any of the besieged areas of eastern Ghouta was nearly six months ago, in October last year, with other areas not having been accessed since last June.

“We also remind all parties of their obligation to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure as required by international humanitarian and human rights law,” said the UN spokesperson.

Last week, Jan Egeland, UN Senior Adviser on Syria had also [underlined](#) the plight of the civilians trapped in the town and called for an urgent ceasefire to enable safe delivery of desperately needed relief and medical supplies.

He had also stressed that special arrangements needed to be made for hospitals and that medical facilities must not be targets for attack and urged that a “notification system” be established to ensure the safety of medical premises.

“We cannot have a situation where armed actors do not, cannot or will not guarantee that medical facilities will not be attacked,” said Mr. Egeland, adding:

“We will urge now again such notification system to be established and I have hope that this year it will for the first time be established and will work.”

[UN announces first-ever World Ocean Festival](#)

11 April 2017 – With global leaders heading to the United Nations for a major conference in June on the protection and sustainable use of the planet’s oceans, the UN today announced that the inaugural World Ocean Festival will kick off the week-long event, with activists and enthusiasts taking to the streets – and waterways – of New York City to raise their voices to reverse the declining health of our oceans.

At a joint press briefing at UN Headquarters today, Penny Abeywardena, the Commissioner of the (New York City) Mayor's Office for International Affairs, joined Peter Thomson, President of the UN General Assembly, to announce the first ever Festival which will be held on Sunday, 4 June, the day before the opening of [The Ocean Conference](#), which will run from 5 to 9 June.

The Festival, organized by the Global Brian Foundation, will galvanize people across the world to bring public attention to the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), specifically [Goal 14](#), on conservation and sustainable use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, "right here in New York City, a premier coastal city," said Ms. Abeywardena.

"Through these gatherings, people will come together to catalyze specific steps we can take as a community to preserve our oceans and engage our citizens and in particular, our young people," she said, adding that, with 520 miles (about 835 kilometres) of coastline, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio's administration recognizes the need for cities to lead on protecting the planet from degradation through sustainable consumption and effective management of the world's natural resources and mitigating the worst impacts of climate change.

For his part, Assembly President Thomson said New York City is a model not only in the United States but around the world of what cities can do in integrating the [SDGs](#) with their urban development planning, drawing attention to Mayor de Blasio's 'One NYC' initiative.

An opportunity to address major woes humanity has put upon the ocean

As for the Conference, he said "the ocean is in deep trouble," facing threats from marine pollution; fishery subsidies at a time when fish stocks are collapsing; and degraded coastal ecosystems planet-wide. "The Ocean Conference is [a timely opportunity] to address these major woes humanity has put upon the ocean," he continued, adding that also will provide an opportunity to think about the impacts of climate change.

"With ocean acidification, we're already seeing the effects of this; its serious business in Oregon and Washington state and its spreading around the world and is also serious business for the tropics, where because of rising temperatures life is leaving our waters because it is too hot," explained Mr. Thomson, noting that 40 per cent of the cause of rising sea levels is due to the fact that oceans are heating up.

And yet "all human problems have human solutions and that's what the Ocean Conference is about, working to find what the solutions are" he emphasized, noting that UN Member States are currently making good progress on the 'call to action' that would be agreed by the Conference. Further, in addition to a plenary, the Conference would also feature seven partnership dialogues focused on SDG 14.

Mr. Thomson went on to highlight the [registry of voluntary commitments](#), which the UN was promoting all stakeholders and "everybody who gives a hoot about the ocean" register between now and the Conference "so that you stand and be

counted in our call to action to reverse the cycle of decline in which the ocean has been caught.” The roll of the media is important in all this, to get the word out about the state of the planet’s oceans “but also that we’re doing something about it.”

Natalia Vega-Berry, founder of the Global Brain Foundation and Executive Producer of the World Ocean Festival said the event will aim to show world leaders gathering for the UN conference the urgency for taking action. “Our ocean is a connective tissue for the world’s entire population. It makes planet Earth and us all one, as we are surrounded by shores. At the same time, our ocean is at great risk of pollution, overfishing, climate change and more.”

While coastal cities and island nations feel the most pressing burden of such threats, she said that the Festival will aim to bring together all people who care deeply about the oceans’ future to “raise their voices in support of the ocean and call to world leaders to take action to save it.”

She said that while the Festival will be held in New York, other cities could also be inspired to organize their own events.

New York’s festival will feature a first-of-its kind grand “ocean march”, which will be a parade of sailing vessels around lower Manhattan and along 10 nautical miles of Manhattan and Brooklyn waterfront from the Hudson to the East River. The second main event will be the Ocean Village, which will be set up at Gentry State Park in Long Island City as a “hub for all things ocean,” and will celebrate art, innovation and exhibits on ocean and climate action.

Lives still being lost to preventable diseases in Yemen’s war-torn Taiz city, senior UN official warns

11 April 2017 – Despite long-standing humanitarian access restrictions in Yemen, the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in the country reported that he has been able to enter Taiz City where, amid some gains, he observed setbacks, particularly as regards the health sector.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), on 9 April, Jamie McGoldrick got a first-hand glimpse of the situation inside the city, which is located in the Yemeni highlands.

“Compared to the last time I was in the city, over nine months ago – and in spite of its current status as an active conflict zone – markets seemed busier with more people, more vehicles were on the roads and many more shops

and restaurants were open,” he said in a [statement](#).

Mr. McGoldrick also cited local relief committee members and hospital managers in emphasizing that a recent reduction in fighting has allowed some semblance of normalcy to return to the hard-hit city, enabling some of the partially-functioning hospitals to conduct minor repairs.

“However,” he cautioned, “they also stressed that lives are being lost to preventable diseases. Hospitals and feeding centers struggle to cope due to problems with salary payments, insufficient essential supplies, and lack of medicines. Increasing malnutrition rates, particularly in children, are worsening the already difficult humanitarian situation.”

The UN humanitarian coordinator then called on parties to the conflict to build on the momentum of his recent visit by helping to establish a predictable and regular access mechanism to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need across Taiz.

“I further call on them to ensure that the mechanism does not only cover Taiz city but also helps to improve humanitarian access to the rural areas in the governorate, where the need is also great,” concluded Mr. McGoldrick.