

Australia's Aboriginal children 'essentially being punished for being poor' – UN rights expert

4 April 2017 – Stressing that the rates of incarceration for Australia's indigenous peoples have reached astounding, "tsunami" proportions, a United Nations human rights expert today called on the authorities to respect the peoples' right to self-determination, to full and effective participation in society, and to step up the fight against racism.

"High rates of incarceration were described to me as a tsunami affecting indigenous peoples [...] while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders make up only three per cent of the total population, they constitute 27 per cent of the prison population, and much more in some prisons," said Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, the UN [Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous people](#), at the end of her [official visit](#) to the nation.

The situation of youths and children from these communities is particularly concerning and the number of children being removed from their homes is increasing.

For instance, at a youth detention centre in Townsville, Queensland province, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children constituted 95 per cent of the children detained.

"These children are essentially being punished for being poor and in most cases, prison will only aggravate the cycle of violence, poverty and crime," [noted](#) Ms. Tauli-Corpuz. "I found meeting young children, some only 12 years old, in detention the most disturbing element of my visit."

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"As already recommended by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, I urge Australia to increase the age of criminal responsibility. Children should be detained only as a last resort," she highlighted.

The expert also noted that Aboriginal children were seven times more likely than non-indigenous children to be in contact with the child protection system or to be subject to abuse or neglect.

New relationship between Government and National Congress of First Peoples needed

She also noted that while numerous policies have been adopted to address the socio-economic disadvantage of indigenous peoples, these have failed to deliver on targets in the areas of health, education and employment.

In particular, Ms. Tauli-Corpuz criticized the Government programme known as the Indigenous Advancement Strategy which was initiated in 2014 and involved a large budget cut in funding for support programmes.

“The implementation of the strategy has been bureaucratic, rigid and has wasted considerable resources on administration. Travelling across the country, I have repeatedly been told about its dire consequences,” she said, pointing to threats that targets on closing the gap in areas such as life expectancy, infant mortality, education and employment would not be met.

Urging for a comprehensive approach including specific objectives on reduction of detention rates, child removal and violence against women, the UN rights expert also called on the Government to forge a new relationship with the national representative body for indigenous peoples, the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples, and restore their funding.

In her remarks, Ms. Tauli-Corpuz also spoke of effective community-led initiatives in a range of areas including public health, housing, education, child-protection, conservation and administration of justice, and their potential in making immediate significant positive changes in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

The rights expert will present a comprehensive report on her two-week long mission to the Geneva-based UN [Human Rights Council](#) at its session in September this year.

Special Rapporteurs are appointed by the 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.

Renewable energy sources could be cheaper than fossil fuels within 10 years – UN-backed report

3 April 2017 – A new United Nations-backed report has revealed overwhelming consensus that renewable power will dominate in the future, with many experts saying that even large international corporations are increasingly choosing renewable energy products either from utilities or through direct investment in their own generating capacity.

“[The report] is meant to spur discussion and debate about both the opportunities and challenges of achieving a 100 per cent renewable energy future by mid-century,” [said](#) Christine Lins, the Executive Secretary of Renewable Energy Policy Network for the 21st Century (REN21) – a global

renewable energy policy multi-stakeholder network hosted by the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)).

“Wishful thinking won’t get us there; only by fully understanding the challenges and engaging in informed debate about how to overcome them, can governments adopt the right policies and financial incentives to accelerate the pace of deployment,” she added.

At a press conference at UN Headquarters today, Ms. Lins said that 2016 was the third year in a row where the global economy continued to grow, by three per cent, but emissions related to the energy sector decreased. And that was mainly due to renewable energy and efficiency investment in China and in the United States.

“And so, we actually really see that renewables are, on the one hand making their way into the energy systems of many countries, but also we see that we have come a long way. We have a 20 per cent of the world’s final energy consumption nowadays coming from renewables,” she added.



Christine Lins, Executive Secretary of Renewable Energy Policy Network for the 21st Century (REN21). UN Photo/Evan Schneider

The [Renewables Global Futures Report: Great debates towards 100 per cent renewable energy](#) also noted that more than 70 per cent of the experts expressed that a global transition to 100 per cent renewable energy is both feasible and realistic, with European and Australian experts most strongly supporting this view.

The report also found that similar number expected the cost of renewables to continue to fall, beating all fossil fuels within the next ten years.

Noting some challenges in achieving the 100 per cent transition, the report mentioned that in some regions, most notably Africa, the US and Japan, experts were sceptical about reaching that figure in their own countries or regions by 2050, largely due to the vested interests of the conventional energy industry.

Also, the lack of long-term policy certainty and the absence of a stable climate for investment in energy efficiency and renewables hinder development in most countries, read the report.

“When REN21 was founded in 2004, the future of renewable energy looked very different than it does today,” noted Arthouros Zervos, the Chair of REN21, adding: “at that time, calls for 100 per cent renewable energy were not taken seriously, today the world’s leading energy experts are engaged in rational discussions about its feasibility, and in what time frame.”

The REN21 report is based on interviews with 114 renowned energy experts from all regions of the world.

In addition to governments, REN21 also includes international organizations, industry associations, science and academia and the civil society, as well as UN agencies including the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)) and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

[UN supporting Colombian authorities to aid landslide-affected community](#)



Cleaning up operations in Mocoa, a city in Putamayo province, Colombia, after a deadly landslide on 31 March 2017 claimed the lives of upwards of 200 people. Photo: Local UN Coordination Team in Mocoa

3 April 2017 – The United Nations humanitarian community is working closely with Colombian authorities as Government-led search-and-rescue efforts are underway in the country’s Putamayo province after deadly landslides over the weekend.

[Secretary-General](#) António Guterres is expected to speak with President Juan Manuel Santos about the efforts and any urgent needs later today, his spokesperson told journalists in New York.

The Secretary-General spoke yesterday with Ambassador Maria Emma Majia Velez, Permanent Representative of Colombia to the UN, and “conveyed his condolences to the people and Government of Colombia,” the spokesperson said.

Quoting UN humanitarian sources, the spokesperson said that more than 250 people were killed and “many more” are missing or injured, including children.

“The United Nations commends Colombia for its efforts to ensure that immediate humanitarian needs are being met,” the spokesperson said, adding that the Organization stands ready to offer assistance.

[Population ageing and decline ‘key focus’ as UN Commission opens 50th](#)

annual session

3 April 2017 – The United Nations advisory body on issues related to population and development today kicked off its annual session, with a focus on changing population age structures and sustainable development.

“Population ageing and population decline have now become key issues for a growing number of Member States,” Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Wu Hongbo told the opening segment of the Commission on Population and Development’s [fiftieth annual session](#), which will run at UN Headquarters through 7 April.

He also noted that with global fertility at, or even below, fertility level, international migration “is becoming the main driver of population change for a number of countries.”

Noting that demographic trends and population policies have evolved over the past decades, Mr. Wu stressed the important role of the Commission.

John Wilmoth, Director, Population Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, said that continued success in reducing death rates, including among older persons and for deaths due to heart disease, cancer and other causes previously considered intractable, has contributed to the further ageing of the world’s population.

He said that between 2015 and 2050, the population aged 65 or older in Europe will increase from 23 to 28 per cent. In North America, the corresponding percentage will rise from 18 to 23 per cent. By 2050, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Oceania will all have more than 18 per cent of their populations at ages 65 and above.

In ageing societies, social protection mechanisms, pension systems and health care programmes are being adjusted and strengthened. Women’s participation in the workforce is being supported more than ever before, and some countries are slowly pushing up the age of retirement.



Dar es Salaam, Tanzania’s commercial hub, is considered one of the fastest growing urban centres in the region, with a population that has been growing rapidly for more than a decade. Photo: Hendri Lombard/World Bank

Meanwhile, due to a relatively slow decline in rates of fertility, many parts of Africa will retain a young population for decades to come, he said. Nevertheless, as the birth rate continues to fall due in part to continuing investments in sexual and reproductive health, there will be an opportunity for a “demographic dividend.”

As the relatively large youth cohorts of today enter the labour force of tomorrow, they will be responsible, on average, for a smaller number of

children requiring their support, while the size of the older population will still be relatively small, he said.

If this future population of workers is empowered by having access to health care, education and opportunities for employment, countries will be in a good position to reap the full benefit of the favourable demographic situation caused by the temporary bulge in the age distribution as it passes through the working ages, he added.

In a statement delivered by his Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, Chef de Cabinet, UN [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres, who said that progress in providing access to education and to sexual and reproductive health-care services, especially for girls and women, has improved the lives of women and children, and has led to falling birth rates in many countries.

“When this trend is accompanied by investments in human capital, especially for youth, a demographic dividend can result, accelerating a country’s economic growth,” he said.

That dividend can be further enhanced with increased labour force participation by women, who must be empowered and afforded the same education and employment opportunities as men, Mr. Guterres said, stressing that men also must do their part, by sharing in household work and caregiving responsibilities.

The former head of the UN refugee agency said that international migration can also help address the challenges of population ageing, by adding workers to the population and reducing the average age, encouraging all governments to facilitate migration that is safe, orderly and regular.

VIDEO: A lot has changed in the world over the past 70 years. The Commission on Population and Development was there for all these changes. In this video, key players look back to the important events and milestones in population research throughout the years.

Today’s opening session also featured a keynote address by EliyaZulu, Executive Director of the African Institute for Development Policy in Nairobi, on the topic of “Changing age structures and sustainable development in youthful societies.

In 2018, the General Assembly will convene an intergovernmental conference on international migration for adopting a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. The Commission on Population and Development may choose as its theme for its session in 2018 “Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration.”

Peace ‘incomplete’ without demining, UN chief says ahead of World Mine Awareness Day

3 April 2017 – On the eve of the International Day for World Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres urged all Governments to remember landmines and explosive remnants of war when discussing peace agreements or when sending urgent humanitarian aid to conflict zones.

“Peace without [mine action](#) is incomplete peace,” the Secretary-General said in his message for the Day, which is centred this year on the theme of ‘Needs driven. People centred.’

“I urge all Member States to keep this issue at the top of the international agenda when negotiating peace, when seeking to prevent harm during conflicts and when deploying emergency humanitarian responses in war zones,” he added.

Each year, landmines and other explosive hazards kill or maim thousands of people around the world.

“Mine action establishes the foundations for lasting recovery and development,” added Mr. Guterres. “No one should have to live in fear of dying even after the fighting stops.”

This year marks 20 years since the creation of the UN Mine Action Service, a collaboration of UN departments, agencies, programmes and funds. Known as [UNMAS](#) for short, the entity currently works in 18 countries and territories to save lives and rebuilds communities.

To promote mine action and raise funds for its work, the UN Global Advocate, actor Daniel Craig – aka James Bond – has lent his likeness to a campaign to give away [a customized Skyfall Silver 2016 Aston Martin Vantage car](#). The winner will also have an opportunity to chat with Mr. Craig in a secret location.

In his message for the Day, Mr. Guterres applauded UNMAS for “its leadership, courage and commitment to peace.”

He also commended the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action – which brings together representatives from all UN mine-action entities – for its “needs-driven, people centred approach.”

So far, UNMAS and its partners – much of the demining and mine-risk education is carried out by non-governmental organizations and commercial contractors – have cleared and returned 72 per cent of known contaminated land to communities, and cleared 31 hospitals and 35 education sites, as well as markets and water wells.

To honour this work and raise awareness about eradicating landmines and unexploded ordinance, the UN General Assembly, in 2005, established 4 April as the [International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action](#).