

[Those responsible for St. Petersburg metro attack must be held accountable – UN chief Guterres](#)

3 April 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has condemned today's explosion on the metro in Russia's second largest city of St. Petersburg and underlined need to bring those responsible to justice.

According to a statement issued by Mr. Guterres' spokesperson, the UN chief [expressed his deepest condolences](#) to the families of the victims and to the Government as well as to people of Russia.

He also underscored that those responsible for the "appalling act" must be held accountable.

According to reports, at least ten people were killed in the blast that hit a train as it was travelling between two underground stations. Dozens more are also said to have been injured.

[Follow China's example, shut down ivory factories and shops, UN agency urges countries](#)

3 April 2017 – Applauding the Chinese Government's closure of many of its ivory factories and retail outlets, the United Nations environment wing has called on other countries and territories to follow China's example and improve the survival prospects for elephants across the world.

The move, announced by the country's State Forestry Administration, represents the first concrete steps in an "almost complete" ban on the domestic trade in ivory. It was announced last year and expected to be fully implemented by the end of 2017.

"This is an historic step and may well be a turning point in our fight to save elephants from extinction," the Executive Director of UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)), Erik Solheim, said in a [news release](#) issued late last week.

"The true measure of the success of these new rules will be how well they are enforced," he added.

According to UNEP, the closures on 31 March represent the end of business for

around one-third of officially sanctioned ivory-carvers and licensed retailers in one of the world's largest markets for the sale of ivory, where elephant tusks are used to make decorative objects and as traditional gifts or displays of wealth.

With 100,000 elephants killed in the last decade alone and only around 500,000 left worldwide, bans like this cannot happen soon enough.

Mr. Solheim also pledged to work closely with the Chinese government to ensure a healthy natural legacy remains for the world's children and grandchildren.

Lower prices mean fewer poachers

Also, following the announcement of the ban, ivory prices have fallen by almost two-thirds and public awareness campaigns have played a key role in reducing the demand. These mean that the killing of elephants for their tusks and illicit trade of the ivory is not as lucrative as it once was.

Such legislation, enforcement and a change in public attitudes will not only protect wildlife but also benefit people who live in the countries where elephants are found.

Furthermore, combatting illegal trade in ivory helps the fight against corruption as well as helps curb the funding that finance the activities of criminal gangs.

What's good the elephants is good for everyone.

[Lack of infrastructure, jobs drives rural youth to cities, says UN rural poverty agency head](#)

3 April 2017 – Investing in rural youth is essential to stem the migration of young people looking for work in cities and to keeping a global food supply, the new head of the United Nations agency charged with eradicating rural poverty today said.

In one of his [first interviews](#) since taking on the leadership of the UN's International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Gilbert Houngbo said he wants people to see life in rural areas as a choice and not a necessity.

“Food security and nutrition are essential, but we have to go beyond that and really aim at the fight against poverty and look at agriculture as a decent income-generating activity,” noted Mr. Houngbo, who was

previously the Deputy Director-General of the International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)).

Without adequate investment in the world's most vulnerable communities, he continued, there will be increased instability and conflict and people will find it harder to bounce back from shocks, giving them more reasons to flee rural areas.

"We need to work on those hardships so that young people can be happy in a rural setting, instead of looking to go to the capital or move outside their country," he said.

Mr. Hougbo, whose senior positions include serving as Prime Minister of Togo, understands first-hand the challenges of living in the countryside, according to IFAD. Mr. Hougbo grew up in rural Togo, and pledged to work through IFAD to aid young people living in rural poverty.

"When I was a youngster of eight years old, I had to walk four kilometres every morning to go and get water for the house, and a few years later I had to walk 20 kilometres every day to get to high school," he said. "It is unacceptable that kids today have to go through the same thing 40 to 50 years later."

Mr. Hougbo said his priority is to ensure that IFAD continues to have the resources to invest in rural areas so that they become "places of prosperity and hope, where people can build decent lives and not be compelled to migrate."

[Syria: Agriculture should be kick-started now despite huge destruction – UN report](#)

3 April 2017 – With six years of conflict in Syria causing more than \$16 billion of lost crop and livestock production and destroyed farming assets, a United Nations report published today stressed the need to reboot and kick-start the agricultural sector now to dramatically reduce the need for humanitarian aid and migration.

"Ramping up investment in the recovery of the agriculture sector could dramatically reduce the need for humanitarian aid. It could also have a significant impact on stemming the flow of migrants," [said](#) Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) Director-General José Graziano da Silva on the report, which was released ahead of an international conference on Syria's future in Brussels.

The report, Counting the Cost: Agriculture in Syria after six years of crisis, presents the first comprehensive nationwide assessment of the damage of the war on the agriculture sector. The assessment, which took place in August and September 2016, included surveys of more than 3,500 households across Syria, interviews with more than 380 community groups and analysis of primary and secondary agricultural data.

Of the \$16 billion total bill, the cost of damage to assets – such as tractors, machinery, commercial farms, veterinary clinics, animal sheds, greenhouses, irrigation systems and processing facilities – is estimated at over \$3 billion, though this number is likely to rise significantly when the full extent of damages in the main conflict areas can be better assessed.

About \$6.3 billion of the total is made up of damage and loss in crop production. In the livestock sector, damage and loss was calculated at around \$5.5 billion, and in the fisheries sector the estimate is almost \$80 million.

The initial cost of rebuilding the agriculture sector over a three-year period is estimated at between \$10.7 and \$17.1 billion in total, depending on whether there is no change in the conflict, a partial return to peace or a full return to peace.

The report outlines a response plan under each of these possible scenarios, including addressing underlying issues such as sustainable water use for irrigation.

Rural households are clear about what they require to resume or boost their agricultural production. Basic supplies such as fertilizer, seeds and veterinary medicine for livestock are urgently needed. After those needs have been met, emphasis should shift to credit, processing and marketing support, and repairing critical assets such as irrigation infrastructure.

Around 95 per cent of communities surveyed felt that if they were assisted with even basic agricultural support such as seeds, fertilizers and fuel to power irrigation pumps, it would reduce the number of people abandoning rural areas to find opportunities elsewhere, and also encourage the return of migrants and internally displaced people.

[Some 300 million people suffer from depression, UN warns ahead of World Health Day](#)

31 March 2017 – More than 300 million people are now living with depression, which is the leading cause of ill health and disability worldwide, according to the latest estimates from the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) released

ahead of World Health Day.

“These new figures are a [wake-up call](#) for all countries to re-think their approaches to mental health and to treat it with the urgency that it deserves,” WHO Director-General Margaret Chan said in a news release.

With the number of people with depression increasing more than 18 per cent from 2005 to 2015, WHO is carrying out a year-long campaign, [Depression: let’s talk](#), with the aim of encouraging more people with depression to get help. This is also the theme of the 2017 edition of World Health Day, marked on 7 April.

Lack of support for people with mental disorders, coupled with a fear of stigma, prevent many from accessing the treatment they need to live healthy, productive lives. Depression is an important risk factor for suicide, which claims hundreds of thousands of lives each year.

One of the first steps is to address issues around prejudice and discrimination. “The continuing stigma associated with mental illness was the reason why we decided to name our campaign Depression: let’s talk,” said Shekhar Saxena, Director of the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse at WHO. “For someone living with depression, talking to a person they trust is often the first step towards treatment and recovery.”

Increased investment is also needed. In many countries, there is no, or very little, support available for people with mental health disorders. Even in high-income countries, nearly 50 per cent of people with depression do not get treatment. On average, just three per cent of government health budgets is invested in mental health, varying from less than one per cent in low-income countries to five per cent in high-income countries.

Every \$1 invested in scaling up treatment for depression and anxiety leads to a return of \$4 in better health and ability to work.

Failure to act is costly. According to a WHO-led study, which calculated treatment costs and health outcomes in 36 low-, middle- and high-income countries for the 15 years from 2016-2030, low levels of recognition and access to care for depression and another common mental disorder, anxiety, result in a global economic loss of \$1 trillion every year.

Households lose out financially when people cannot work. Employers suffer when employees become less productive and are unable to work. Governments have to pay higher health and welfare expenditures.