

## [Iraq a country of hope amid debris of war, says UNICEF chief wrapping up visit](#)

23 March 2017 – Children have the power to bring Iraq out of conflicts and into a peaceful future, the Executive Director of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has said.

Anthony Lake wrapped up his visit to the crisis-torn Middle Eastern country on Wednesday. Upon finishing his visit, Mr. Lake said: “I leave Iraq at a time when the country is facing significant challenges and opportunities. Yet everywhere I visited – East Mosul, Baghdad, Fallujah, Erbil – children and their families told me of their dreams and their determination to make them real.”

Some 1.4 million children have been displaced by the violence in Iraq and 200,000 children remain trapped in Mosul where heavy fighting between Government forces and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh), persists.

“UNICEF is working hard to provide children and families affected by the crisis in Mosul with lifesaving supplies of water, access to sanitation facilities, psychosocial support and the opportunity to get back to learning as soon as possible,” stated Mr. Lake.

The UNICEF chief visited schools in Fallujah that had reopened amid the debris of war and met with students who said they had dreams of being engineers and doctors.

“We are working with the Government of Iraq to provide all children in Iraq, with the resources they need to reach those dreams – whether that means new classrooms, notebooks or accelerated learning programmes,” he said.

“Because it is these students who, if they have the skills in their heads and healing in their hearts, will move the country from the conflicts of the past towards a peaceful future,” he emphasized.

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## [UN envoy and Pope Francis meet on enhancing cooperation to protect](#)

## children from violence

23 March 2017 – The United Nations envoy advocating an end to violence against children has met with His Holiness Pope Francis to discuss greater cooperation on protecting children from sexual and other forms of violence.

“Accelerating progress in children’s protection from violence needs to be at the heart of the actions of every nation, every faith and every person,” said Marta Santos Pais, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Violence against Children, during a private meeting with the Pope this past weekend in Vatican City.

The also meeting provided an opportunity to enhance collaboration on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and she noted that in a world free from fear and from violence, “everyone counts and everybody is needed.”

The meeting was meant to strengthen cooperation between the office of Ms. Santos Pais and the Holy See, which has permanent observer status at the UN, alongside 193 Member States.

The Pontiff reiterated his call for a ‘zero tolerance’ policy and reaffirmed the high priority given by the Holy See to protecting the rights of all girls and boys who are victims of violence, neglect, maltreatment, abuse and exploitation.

“This is a plague, a hidden scream that should be heard by all of us,” highlighted Pope Francis, further recognizing the need to “take all necessary measures to protect in every way the lives of our children, so that such crimes may never be repeated.”

RELATED: With more than half of all children in danger, UN envoy Santos Pais highlights how to keep them safe

Ms. Santos and the Pontiff also discussed the perils endured by children on the move who are exposed to constant incidents of violence especially when traveling unaccompanied or separated from their families, and who often lack the support of a nurturing and protective environment and in many cases end-up locked behind bars.



Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative of the Secretary-General chats with Pope Francis in her private audience at the Apostolic Palace. Photo: L'Osservatore Romano

Pope Francis and Ms. Santos Pais also discussed the growing risk of the criminalization of children living in socially excluded and poor communities, who lack support to develop to their full potential and who often become an easy target for armed gangs and organized crime networks. Victims of marginalization and exploitation, these children are at high risk of

deprivation of liberty, where they may be exposed to incidents of neglect, abuse and ill treatment.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include a target, 16.2, that calls for an end to “abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.” As this is a top UN priority, this meeting provided a significant opportunity to identify ways of enhancing collaboration and supporting implementation of the 2030 Agenda targets on violence against children.

Pope Francis and Ms. Santos Pais reaffirmed the importance of continuing to foster the cooperation between the UN and the Holy See in the promotion of children’s rights and protection from violence, and in process of implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

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## **In cyclone’s wake, UN appeals for \$20 million to help affected populations in Madagascar**

23 March 2017 – The United Nations and humanitarian partners are appealing for \$20 million to address the devastating consequences of Cyclone Enawo in Madagascar.

“Despite the fact that 200,000 square kilometres covering half of Madagascar’s 22 regions have been affected, the country will not be left behind,” said Bary Rafatolaza, Deputy Foreign Minister of Madagascar, in a news release from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

“We are working closely with national and local authorities to meet the needs of those affected by the storm,” said Violet Kakyomya, UN Resident Coordinator in Madagascar, commending the Government both in evacuating people endangered by the storm before its arrival and in mobilizing the national and international response to the cyclone.

Enawo struck the coast of Madagascar as a Category 4 cyclone on 7 March, causing extensive damage due to high winds and flooding in north-eastern parts of the country. Between 8 and 10 March, the cyclone traced an arc nearly the length of the island nation, bringing heavy rainfall and flooding to central and southeastern areas.

At least a quarter of a million people in the worst-affected areas require urgent life-saving humanitarian assistance and protection in the storm’s wake. The Government has declared a national emergency and requested international support.

Some 20,000 families who lost their homes need emergency shelter and more than 100,000 children whose schooling has been disrupted need temporary learning spaces.

Up to 85 per cent of planted subsistence crops were lost in some areas, while more than 1,300 wells – the major source of household water – are flooded and contaminated. More than 100 health centres and 3,300 classrooms were damaged by the cyclone.

Of the nearly 250,000 people who sought shelter in evacuation centres during the storm, more than 5,300 of the most vulnerable have no home to return to and remain in displacement sites.

In addition to providing water, sanitation and hygiene assistance for 168,000 people, the \$20 million will fund food assistance for 170,000 people, and support more than 230,000 farmers in replanting crops and replacing livestock.

**Images of the devastation wreaked by Cyclone Enawo in Madagascar. Credit: Johnnah Raniriniaina (Maroantsetra)/OCHA**

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## **Faced with ‘clear science, real threats’ countries must remain committed to Paris climate deal – UN**

23 March 2017 – Climate change is an unprecedented and growing threat to peace, prosperity and development and addressing it presents an economic opportunity for Governments and business, senior United Nations officials said today.

“We are dealing with scientific facts, not politics. And the facts are clear. Climate change is a direct threat in itself, and a multiplier of many other threats,” UN Secretary-General António Guterres told a General Assembly High-Level action event aimed at invigorating political momentum on climate change, highlighting its deep links to the UN 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

Mr. Guterres said his messages to the meeting are simple.

“First, climate change is an unprecedented and growing threat – to peace and prosperity and the same in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Second, addressing climate change is a massive opportunity that we cannot afford to miss,” he said.

The Paris Agreement on climate change adopted in December 2015 is unique in its universality, with every single government having signed it. The pact entered force in less than a year. To date more than 130 Parties have ratified it, and the numbers are growing monthly.

The countries that supported the Paris Agreement are the same that adopted the 2030 Agenda – they comprise all UN Member States.

The reason for this consensus is clear: all nations recognize that implementing the 2030 Agenda goes hand-in-glove with limiting global temperature rise and increasing climate resilience.



Secretary-General António Guterres addresses a General Assembly High-Level action event aimed at invigorating political momentum on climate change, highlighting its deep links to the UN 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

Mr. Guterres said that last year was once again the hottest on record. Sea ice is at a historic low and sea levels at a historic high. These trends are indisputable, he stressed, explaining that consequences of climate change include food insecurity, water scarcity, poverty and displacement.

Tackling climate change is a tremendous opportunity for Governments and business as there is no trade-off between a healthy environment and a healthy economy.

“We can have both. Green business is good business,” he said.

Climate action is a necessity and can advance the attainment of sustainable development goals.

“How we go about it can be the subject of scientific and political debate. But there is no question that we must act, urgently and decisively, now,” Mr. Guterres said. “And it remains the only viable way to safeguard peace, prosperity and a sustainable future.”

Also addressing the event, were Peter Thomson, President of the General Assembly, and Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

#### ***Still possible to bend curve on climate change trajectories***

Mr. Thomson said that he had recently met with Petteri Taalas, the Secretary-General of the UN World Meteorological Organization (WMO), who confirmed that the world is currently on track towards a 3 to 4°C increase in global temperatures.

“I have always understood [...] that once we reach the 3°C – 4°C range, humanity’s survival on this planet will be put in jeopardy,” he said.

Cyclone Winston and Cyclone Pam which devastated Fiji and Vanuatu in recent years were among the strongest tropical cyclones to ever make landfall in the Southern Hemisphere. Fiji, an island nation from which Mr. Thomson hails, has already begun relocating low-lying villages to higher ground, away from the encroaching shoreline and the rising threat of storm surges.

“While the prognosis is dire, the scientific community assures us it is possible to bend the curve on current trajectories, if we work together to curb the growth of global greenhouse gas emissions,” Mr. Thomson said, reiterating his call for all parties to the Paris Agreement to ratify it without delay and for those that have already done so to deliver on their commitments.

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## Vital for Sri Lanka to send message that ‘impunity is no longer tolerated’ underlines UN rights chief

22 March 2017 – Presenting an oral update on the rights situation in Sri Lanka, the top United Nations human rights official today said that a general lack of trust in the impartiality of the justice system in the country regarding past violations and continuing unwillingness or inability to address impunity reinforces the need for international participation in a judicial mechanism.

“It is important for the country’s future to send the signal that impunity is no longer tolerated,” Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, told the UN Human Rights Council today.

“For this to be credible, [the judicial mechanism] should include a special counsel, foreign judges and defence lawyers, and authorized prosecutors and investigators,” he added, noting that national consultations had also identified international participation as a way to gain the trust of the victims.

He also said that while the design of truth and reparations processes appear to be underway, such efforts needed to be in consultation with victims and the civil society, and that the repeal of the terrorism prevention act and its replacement with legislation that complies with international human rights law is to be concluded.

Also in his remarks, the UN rights chief hailed the work of the civil society and human rights defenders in the country and underlined that they must be protected from harassment and intimidation.

Making particular reference to the reports of intimidation of members of

civil society at the Palais des Nations (the UN Office at Geneva), the High Commissioner said that his office (OHCHR) would be looking into the issues closely.

He also called on the Sri Lankan Government to consult the independent commissions in the country, the Human Rights Commission, which he said play an invaluable role in strengthening good governance.

“I encourage respect for their mandate and autonomy, adequate financing, and implementation of their recommendations,” he added.

Mr. Zeid also welcomed a number of directives made by the President of Sri Lanka regarding detention but noted that reports of torture, excessive use of force and failure to respect due process are a cause for worry.

“There is clearly a need for unequivocal instructions to all branches of the security forces that any such conduct is unacceptable and that abuses will be punished,” underlined the High Commissioner.

In conclusion, the UN rights chief said that victims should be kept at the centre of the efforts in the island nation and noted that justice for them was vital to ensure sustainable peace.