

Polluted environments kill 1.7 million children each year, UN health agency reports

6 March 2017 – Unhealthy environments are responsible for one-quarter of young child deaths, according to two new reports from the United Nations health agency, which reviewed the threats from pollutants such as second-hand smoke, UV radiation, unsafe water and e-waste.

According to the latest information, polluted environments take the lives of 1.7 million children under the age of five.

A polluted environment is a deadly one particularly for young children, said Margaret Chan, Director-General of the UN World Health Organization (WHO). Their developing organs and immune systems, and smaller bodies and airways, make them especially vulnerable to dirty air and water.

In one of the two reports, *Inheriting a Sustainable World: Atlas on Children's Health and the Environment*, WHO announced that many of the common causes of death among children aged between one month and five years of age are preventable with safe water and clear cooking fuels. These include diarrhoea, malaria and pneumonia.

The main pollutant is in the air, resulting in 570,000 deaths each year among children under five years old. Air pollution can stunt brain development and reduce lung function and trigger asthma. In the longer-term, exposure to air pollution can increase the child's risk of contracting heart disease, a stroke or cancer.

To counter such exposure, WHO recommends reducing air pollution, improving safe water and sanitation, and protecting pregnant women and building safer environments, among other actions described in *Don't pollute my future! The impact of the environment on children's health*.

Investing in the removal of environmental risks to health, such as improving water quality or using cleaner fuels, will result in massive health benefits, said Maria Neira, WHO Director, Department of Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health.

One of the emerging environmental threats to children is electronic and electrical waste, according to the second WHO report. Appliances such as old mobile phones that are improperly recycled expose children to toxins which can lead to reduced intelligence, attention deficit, lung damage, and cancer, the UN agency reported.

At the current rate, the amount of such waste is expected to increase by 19 per cent between 2014 and 2018, up to 50 million metric tonnes.

The reports also point out harmful chemicals that work themselves through the food chain – such as fluoride, lead and mercury, as well as the impact that climate change and UV rays have on children’s development.

AUDIO: If you smoke, burn fossil fuels like coal or drive a vehicle, chances are, you’re polluting the air and harming the health of those around you, the World Health Organization (WHO) is warning. *Credit: UN News*

[UN agency concerned new US refugee plan may ‘compound the anguish’ of people fleeing conflict](#)

6 March 2017 – Refugees are ordinary people forced to flee war, violence and persecution in their home countries and who remain in urgent need of life-saving assistance and protection, the United Nations refugee agency underscored today in the wake of the latest Executive Order signed by the President of the United States on refugee resettlement.

“The imperative remains to provide protection for people fleeing deadly violence, and we are concerned that this decision, though temporary, may compound the anguish for those it affects,” UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said in a news release, adding that his Office (UNHCR) has long been a partner for the US in finding solutions to refugee problems, “and we look forward to continuing this partnership.”

Mr. Grandi’s statement follows the signing earlier today by US President Donald Trump of an Executive order that, according to news reports, would, among other things, suspend the country’s refugee programme for 120 days. It would also bar for 90 days travel to the US by citizens of Iran, Libya, Syria, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.

Today’s measure follows a similar Order signed by the US President on 27 January, which barred all nationals from several majority Muslim countries – Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen – from entering the US for 90 days. Under that Order, Syrian refugees were barred indefinitely.

In the wake of the new Order, the UN refugee agency reiterated its readiness to engage constructively with the US Administration to ensure all refugee programmes meet the highest standards for safety and security.

“Americans have long played a crucial role in promoting global stability while simultaneously exemplifying the highest humanitarian ideals, from support for refugee emergencies overseas, to welcoming some of the most vulnerable refugee families in the United States to rebuild their lives in

safety, freedom and dignity," said UNHCR.

"This is the gold standard in refugee protection and a powerful model for all countries," it said, adding that at a time of record-high levels of forced human displacement, "this kind of humane leadership is needed more than ever."

[UN calls for support to recovery plan as Haiti loses \\$2.7 billion in Hurricane Matthew](#)

6 March 2017 – The United Nations office dedicated to disaster risk reduction today called for urgent support to improve disaster risk management in Haiti, following a damage assessment that shows the country lost \$2.7 billion, or 32 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), as a result of Hurricane Matthew six months ago.

"Hurricane Matthew revealed disturbing truths about least developed countries which lack the capacity to respond adequately to climate change and the rising intensity and frequency of weather-related disasters," said the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction, Robert Glasser in a press release.

His call came on the eve of the 5th Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Americas, which opens in Montreal, Canada, tomorrow.

"While the government's civil protection system prevented many deaths, it is unacceptable that over 600 people should have died in a hurricane that was so well-forecast," he added.

The magnitude of the losses shown by a thorough government-led Post-Disaster Needs Assessment would be a devastating blow to any economy. It came on top of two years of drought affecting the food security of one million people and the 2010 earthquake which cost 120 per cent of GDP, he said.

Mr. Glasser urged strong support for the three-year recovery plan developed by the Haitian government, the UN and other partners that seeks \$2.72 billion.

He said that Haiti demonstrated how implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the global plan to reduce disaster losses, has to take into account the role that poverty plays in driving disaster risk.

In 2012, it was estimated that 58.6 per cent of the 10.7 million people live

below the threshold of \$2.4 per day while 24 per cent live in extreme poverty or less than \$1.23 per day. Haiti is estimated to have lost on average 2 per cent of its GDP to weather-related disasters every year between 1975 and 2012.

Law marks reform of Red Cross Society

The revised Red Cross Society Law will serve as a milestone for the reform and development of the Red Cross Society of China and promote the society's participation in humanitarian work, according to Wang Rupeng, vice-president of the RCSC.

The law, which will take effect on May 8, World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day, includes major amendments to the current law, such as expanding the duty of the RCSC by allowing it to participate in and promote body and organ donation, Wang said.

"The amendments serve to ensure the RCSC performs its duty in accordance with the law and improves its credibility among the public," he said.

The law was approved by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, on Feb 24. It is the first revision to the current law since it was adopted in 1993.

Major amendments include setting up a supervision board at the RCSC to improve supervision of the organization; expanding the RCSC's official duties to participating in and promoting voluntary blood donation, and body and organ donation; and intensifying auditing of donations received by the Red Cross, according to Wang.

It also includes a new chapter that specifies legal responsibilities on law violations concerning the work of the RCSC, he added.

China's Red Cross societies or their staff members may face criminal sanctions for violations such as handling donations without donors' permission or failing to give feedback to donors about the use of their donations, according to the new chapter.

Other organizations or individuals may also face criminal sanctions for offenses such as infringement of the symbols or names of the Red Cross, damaging property of Red Cross societies, producing, publishing or spreading false information that damages the reputation of Red Cross societies, or hindering staff members of Red Cross societies from performing rescue and relief duties, according to the chapter.

Employees of government departments at all levels may also face criminal sanctions for abusing their power while supervising or managing China's Red

Cross societies, the chapter states.

“The chapter for legal responsibilities is a major achievement for the legislation of the Red Cross Society Law,” Wang said. “It applies to all individuals and organizations, including staff members of China’s Red Cross societies, and will play an important role in protecting the interests of donors and Red Cross societies, including their reputation, brand and property.”

In addition, the law, which authorizes the RCSC’s duties in organ donation, will contribute to better promotion of organ donation in China, Wang said.

China’s Red Cross societies have actively participated in organ donation in recent years following guidelines released by the central government, but a lack of legislation has been a big obstacle, he said.

The revised law will enable Red Cross societies to share their duties with health authorities in organ donation through advocacy, organizing registration for donors, witnessing the acquirement of organs and leading commemoration activities, Wang said.

Health authorities and medical institutions are responsible for issues concerning medical care and techniques such as the acquiring, distribution and transplanting of organs, he said.

The number of registered organ donation volunteers in China had reached nearly 170,000 by the end of last year, up from 66,000 in March last year, according to the China Organ Donation Administrative Center, which is affiliated with the RCSC.

The number of organs donated in China last year reached 11,296, an increase of nearly 50 percent compared with 2015, when organs donated by deceased civilians became the only legal source of organs for transplant surgeries in China, according to the China Organ Transplantation Development Foundation.

[Senior service sector in China gets reform boost](#)

By further streamlining administration and delegating power, strengthening supervision and improving the service level, China will mobilize social forces to participate in the development of elderly care industry, lower the institutional cost for entrepreneurship and create a fair development environment, according to a policy paper released by relevant Chinese authorities recently.

The Notice on Accelerating the Reform on the Entry, Supervision and Service

Level of the Senior Service Industry was released by thirteen departments, including Ministry of Civil Affairs, National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Land and Resources and National Elderly Work Committee Office.

Now entering into an aging society, China has huge demands for the elderly nursing industry. In 2015, the number of senior aged over 60 in China reached 220 million, accounting for 16.1 percent of the total population.

The quality of the industry concerns over 200 million senior citizens, especially the over 40 million incapacitated or semi- incapacitated elderly.

However, the sheer quantity and quality of China's senior service supply still fall short of the increasing demand for the industry. China is now still headache with inaccessibility of urban and rural public facilities, as well as insufficient supply of senior products.

Other than a livelihood project involving the welfare of billions of people, the senior service industry is also a rising business with great potential.

At the end of last year, the Chinese State Council released a guideline on widening the access of the senior service market and improving the quality of senior service, requiring the service to orient towards community, rural areas as well as incapacitated and semi-incapacitated senior citizens.

Nursing care resources should be further expanded and the development of small-sized and professional chain service agencies should be vigorously supported, read the guideline.

To address the short boards in senior service, the guideline also pointed out that for community senior service, China will speed up the construction of a comprehensive service information platform and provide such home service as meal assistance, cleaning assistance, walking aid, bathing assistance and medical assistance.

Small-sized community nursing homes are encouraged to meet the needs of senior citizens within close proximity as well.