

Nine countries join UN-supported network to halve maternal, newborn deaths in clinics

14 February 2017 – A health network is being created, with support of United Nations agencies, in nine countries – Bangladesh, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda – whose Governments have pledged to halve maternal and newborn deaths in health facilities by 2022.

The new Network for Improving Quality of Care for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, will help countries to improve the quality of care mothers and babies receive in their health facilities and respect the patients' rights, according to a press release.

“Every mother and infant deserves to receive the highest quality of care when they access health facilities in their communities,” said Dr. Anthony Costello, director of the Department of Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health at the UN World Health Organization (WHO).

With support from the WHO, UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and partners, the Quality of Care Network will use a web-based system to build a community of health practitioners, which will develop a strategy to improve quality of care, brainstorm ideas and collect information and experiences.

The Network will also use the UN agency's eight new *Standards for improving quality of maternal and newborn care in health facilities* to improve the provision and quality of health care. These include, for example, having competent and motivated health professionals, maintaining access to clean water and equipment, and ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of patients.

“Births in health facilities have increased in the past decade,” said Dr. Costello. “Attention is now shifting from access to care to improving the quality of care so that countries can achieve the Sustainable Development Goals targets to end preventable maternal, newborn and child deaths by 2030.”

Each year, some 303,000 women around the world die during pregnancy and childbirth, and some 2.7 million babies die during the first month.

With humanitarian catastrophe looming, civilians in Syria's 'Four Towns' need support now – UN relief official

13 February 2017 – A senior United Nations relief official has today called on all parties to come to an agreement and allow immediate and unfettered humanitarian access to more than 60,000 civilians trapped in four Syrian towns of Al-Zabadani, Al-Fu'ah, Kafraya and Madaya.

These four locations were referred to specifically in the so-called 'Four Towns' Agreement to facilitate humanitarian access to the people in need. However, these places have remained inaccessible for humanitarian workers since November last year.

"The unfair and totally unjustified besiegement is compounded by the tit-for-tat arrangement between the Four Towns, which makes humanitarian access prone to painstaking negotiations that are not based on humanitarian principles," Ali Al-Za'tari, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria, said in a news release.

Mr. Al-Za'tari stressed that the situation is a looming humanitarian catastrophe and called on all those directly involved forces and all parties which have influence on them to convince them to allow urgent humanitarian assistance, including medical evacuations, to take place without delay.

"This has prevented medical cases from receiving proper treatment and evacuation. People are in need, and they cannot wait any longer. We need to act now," he underlined.

Recalling that the principle of free access to people in need must be implemented the news release noted that civilians trapped in the four towns continue to suffer a cycle of daily violence and deprivation, where malnutrition and lack of proper medical care prevail.

The moral and ethical accountability befalls all those who hinder this access, the release read, adding that the UN and humanitarian partners stand ready to provide humanitarian assistance to the Four Towns as soon as negotiations with the parties to the conflict come to conclusion.

UN Security Council urges joint

measures to protect 'critical infrastructure' from terrorist attacks

13 February 2017 – Given the importance of critical infrastructure for a country's prosperity and security and against the backdrop of increasingly diverse physical and cyber threats from terrorist groups, the United Nations Security Council today underlined the need for international collaboration – both domestically and across borders – to ensure their protection.

In a resolution adopted unanimously today, the 15-member Council reiterated "the need to strengthen efforts to improve security and protection of particularly vulnerable targets, such as infrastructure and public places."

Attacks against objects and sectors such as banking and finance, telecommunications, emergency services, air, maritime and rail transportation, and energy and water supply – perceived as 'attractive targets' for terrorist groups – can result not only in civilian casualties, but also damage property on a large scale, disrupt proper functioning of public services, and create chaos in societies.

Such attacks may also cause widespread environmental damage, as well as significantly undermine national defence capabilities.

Further in the resolution, the Security Council – the UN body with the responsibility for maintenance of international peace and security – also underscored the importance of partnerships at all levels and with public and private stakeholders.

It called upon UN Member States "to share information [...] to prevent, protect, mitigate, investigate, respond to and recover from damage from terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure facilities, including through joint training, and use or establishment of relevant communication or emergency warning networks."

The resolution was adopted at an open Security Council debate on vulnerabilities, interdependencies and capabilities and the cascading impacts of terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure, as well as measures to prevent them.

VIDEO: UN flags three key areas to enhance protection of critical infrastructure against terrorist attacks. Credit: UN News

International community needs to unite – UN chief Guterres' Chef de Cabinet

Noting that international counter-terrorism cooperation – especially in the area of critical infrastructure – has been limited, Maria Luiza Viotti, Chef de Cabinet of the Secretary-General António Guterres, called on all international community to unite in a coordinated response and outlined the

importance of a coordinated response comprising all actors and stakeholders.

“Strategically, this means that the international community needs to unite and be more creative, proactive and effective, including through the development of strong public-private partnerships,” she said, delivering the UN chief’s message to the forum.

“As our world becomes increasingly interconnected – through travel, commerce, communications and in cyber space, we become more vulnerable to attacks by technologically savvy terrorists seeking new ways to spread fear,” Ms. Viotti added.



The Security Council unanimously adopts resolution 2341 (2017), calling upon Member States to consider developing or further improving their strategies for reducing risks to critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

One attack can have a ripple effect worldwide – INTERPOL chief

Also cautioning that the consequences of an attack in today’s interconnected world could be far reaching, Jürgen Stock, the Secretary-General of the International Criminal Police Organization (ICPO-INTERPOL) said: “One attack on a single point of failure could lead to the disruption or destruction of multiple vital systems in the country directly affected, and a ripple effect worldwide.”

“This creates an appealing target to those intending to harm us. And as our cities and infrastructure evolve, so do their weapons,” he added.

To mitigate such threats, he called for strengthening critical site security and emergency preparedness standards and procedures; protecting national borders and countering terrorist mobility; enhancing vigilance and efforts to interdict materials and tools before they become the “next weapon”; and boosting inter-agency and international collaboration, as a force multiplier.

“In an interconnected world, we will not succeed in protecting national infrastructure in isolation. This is why initiatives [...] and the steps [...] by the international community are essential,” he underlined.

Other speakers speaking at the debate included Hamid Ali Rao, Deputy Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW); Chris Trelawny, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organizations (IMO) on Maritime Security and Facilitation; Olli Heinonen, Senior Advisor on Science and Non-proliferation at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and former Deputy Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Make food systems climate resilient now or future production will be compromised – UN warns

13 February 2017 – Failure to act now to make food systems more resilient to climate change will seriously compromise food production in many regions, which in turn could fail international efforts to end hunger and extreme poverty by 2030, the United Nations agricultural agency warned today.

“Agriculture holds the key to solving two of the greatest problems now facing humanity: eradicating poverty and hunger, and contributing to maintaining the stable climatic conditions in which civilization can thrive,” Food and Agriculture Organization Director-General José Graziano da Silva told a roundtable on climate change during the in Dubai.

The FAO Director-General stressed in particular the need to support small farmers in the developing world adapt to climate change.

Innovative approaches exist that can help them improve yields and build their resilience, he said, noting ‘green manuring,’ greater use of nitrogen-fixing cover crops, improving sustainable soil management, agroforestry techniques, and integrating animal production into cropping systems.

“But farmers face major barriers, such as the lack of access to credit and markets, lack of knowledge and information, insecurity about land tenure, and high transaction costs of moving away from existing practices,” the Director-General said.

For example, he said, 70 countries do not have established meteorological services. FAO is working with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) to develop low-cost, farmer friendly services to address this need.

Ultimately, ‘an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,’ he argued.

One critical front for action is water management, said Mr. Graziano da Silva. Millions of the world’s small-scale farmers are already wrestling with water scarcity, which will likely intensify as a result of climate change, he said.

This is why at the last UN climate change conference FAO and partners launched a global framework on water scarcity in agriculture that aims to support developing countries in bringing stronger policies and programmes for the sustainable use of water in agriculture online, he explained.

UN chief Guterres 'strongly condemns' DPR Korea's ballistic missile launch

13 February 2017 – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today voiced strong opposition to the latest ballistic missile launch by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, calling on Pyongyang to fully comply with its international obligations to denuclearize.

"The Secretary-General strongly condemns the launch of another ballistic missile by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on 12 February," his spokesperson said in a statement.

The launch "is a further troubling violation" of Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2321 (2016) which strengthened sanctions against the regime.

The Secretary-General urged the DPRK leadership to return "to the path of denuclearization;" while appealing to the international community to continue addressing the in a united manner.

This afternoon, the UN Security Council will discuss the missile launch behind closed doors.