

Founders of 'Lonely Planet' awarded UN agency's lifetime achievement award

31 January 2017 – Hailing the impact of the popular 'Lonely Planet' travel guidebook series on global tourism, the United Nations tourism agency today awarded its founders with its 13th Lifetime Achievement Award.

"The inspirational role that Lonely Planet inferred worldwide to travellers, writers and the tourism sector in general has been the major reason to concede the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Lifetime Achievement Award to [Tony Wheeler and Maureen Wheeler]," noted the UN agency in a news release.

According to the agency, the Wheelers founded Lonely Planet Publications in 1972, after a trip across Asia.

In the last 40 years, their guidebooks have sold over 100 million copies in English and other languages. The books also ventured into many other travel areas including a television series and an award-winning travel website.

In addition, through their Planet Wheeler Foundation, Tony and Maureen Wheeler, have been involved in more than 50 projects in the developing world, principally in south-east Asia and east Africa, with a focus on poverty alleviation.

They are also involved in a number of ventures, including promoting literature and the arts, as well as entrepreneurship and protection and development of archaeological sites in developing countries.

The UNWTO Lifetime Achievement Award is conferred every year to individuals with visionary leadership and significant contributions to the global tourism sector.

Managing national borders 'cannot be based on any form of discrimination' – UN chief Guterres

31 January 2017 – Refugees fleeing conflict and persecution are entitled to protection, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said today, expressing concern at decisions around the world that have undermined the integrity of the international refugee protection regime.

“Refugees fleeing conflict and persecution are finding more and more borders closed and increasingly restricted access to the protection they need and are entitled to receive, according to international refugee law,” Mr. Guterres said in a statement.

The UN chief made a particular mention of Ethiopia, the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa, that, he noted “for decades has been keeping its borders open to hundreds of thousands of refugees from its neighbours, many times in dramatic security situations.”

Further stating that countries have the right and the obligation, to responsibly manage their borders to avoid infiltration by members of terrorist organizations, Mr. Guterres cautioned that this cannot be based on any form of discrimination related to religion, ethnicity or nationality, noting that doing so “is against the fundamental principles and values on which our societies are based.”

He also warned that it could “trigger widespread anxiety and anger that may facilitate the propaganda of the very terrorist organizations we all want to fight against” and that “blind measures, not based on solid intelligence, tend to be ineffective as they risk being bypassed by what are today sophisticated global terrorist movements.”

At the start of the regular noon-briefing at UN Headquarters, Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said Mr. Guterres is currently on his way back to New York from the African Union Summit in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, and he had had the opportunity to express his disagreement with the United States Executive Order on refugees.

The statement follows President Donald Trump’s signing last Friday of an Executive Order that, among things, suspends the US refugee programme for 120 days and, according to the media, bars entry of refugees from several mostly Muslim countries, including Syria, until further notice.

Cut off by fighting, thousands of Yemenis urgently need aid and protection – UN official says

31 January 2017 – The senior United Nations humanitarian official in Yemen voiced extreme concern today about the safety and well-being of citizens in the south-eastern part of the country, where military operations are cutting off services and causing harm to civilians.

“A halt to the fighting is required to facilitate the delivery of assistance to Al Mokha and enable the free movement of civilians,” said Humanitarian

Coordinator in Yemen, Jamie McGoldrick, in reference to the port city on the Red Sea coast of the country.

Up to 30,000 people are estimated to be trapped in Mokha, roughly one-third of the population, and in need of immediate protection and relief assistance, Mr. McGoldrick said.

He noted also that scores of civilians have been injured by repeated airstrikes, shelling and sniper attacks in and around Mokha, which has also ground most services, including the main market and the water supply system.

Meanwhile, in Dhubab, also a district of Taiz Governorate, tens of thousands of civilians are being forced to flee their homes to escape the fighting.

Mr. McGoldrick warned that some are using mined roads, and many have already been previously displaced or lost livelihoods in the fighting.

“I call on all parties to the conflict to meet their obligations under the international humanitarian law,” he said, urging all parties to ensure the humanitarian organizations have “rapid, safe and unimpeded access to reach the people in need in the town of Al Mokha and the wider affected region.”

In addition to concerns for civilians, the UN aid official expressed concern about recent damage to roads and bridges connecting the port city of Al Hudaydah with other governorates.

Noting that infrastructure is vital for moving humanitarian and commercial supplies, Mr. McGoldrick said he deplored such actions “as they risk further isolating Yemeni communities and aggravate the already alarming food security situation.”

UN agencies and partners are mobilizing food, water, shelter and medicines for those in need, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Banks, UN set standards on channelling investments for sustainable development

31 January 2017 – Nearly 20 leading global banks and investors, totalling \$6.6 trillion in assets, have launched a United Nations-backed global framework aimed at channelling the money they manage towards clean, low carbon and inclusive projects.

The Principles for Positive Impact Finance – a first of its kind set of

criteria for investments to be considered sustainable – provide financiers and investors with a global framework applicable across their different business lines, including retail and wholesale lending, corporate and investment lending and asset management.

“Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – the global action plan to end poverty, combat climate change and protect the environment – is expected to cost \$5 to \$7 trillion every year through 2030,” said the head of the UN Environment Finance Initiative, Eric Usher, in a press release.

The UN Environment Finance Initiative is a partnership between the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the global financial sector created in the wake of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, widely known as the Earth Summit, with a mission to promote sustainable finance. Over 200 financial institutions, including banks, insurers and fund managers, work with UN Environment to understand today’s environmental challenges, why they matter to finance, and how to actively participate in addressing them.

“The Positive Impact Principles are a game changer, which will help to channel the hundreds of trillions of dollars managed by banks and investors towards clean, low carbon and inclusive projects,” Mr. Usher said.

The Principles provide guidance for financiers and investors to analyse, monitor and disclose the social, environmental and economic impacts of the financial products and services they deliver.

“With global challenges such as climate change, population growth and resource scarcity accelerating, there is an increased urgency for the finance sector both to adapt and to help bring about the necessary changes in our economic and business models,” said Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Société Générale, Séverin Cabannes.

“The Principles for Positive Impact Finance provide an ambitious yet practical framework by which we can take the broader angle view we need to meet the deeply complex and interconnected challenges of our time,” he added.

The Principles were developed by the Positive Impact Working Group, a group of UN Environment Finance Initiative banking and investment members, as part of the implementation of the roadmap outlined in the Positive Impact Manifesto released in October 2015.

Currently, the Positive Impact Working Group includes: Australian Ethical, Banco Itaú, BNP Paribas, BMCE Bank of Africa, Caisse des Dépôts Group, Desjardins Group, First Rand, Hermes Investment Management, ING, Mirova, NedBank, Pax World, Piraeus Bank, SEB, Société Générale, Standard Bank, Triodos Bank, Westpac and YES Bank.

UNICEF launches \$3.3 billion appeal to assist millions of children affected by conflict, disasters

31 January 2017 – Against the backdrop of ever increasing number of children driven from their homes due to conflict, disasters and climate change, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) today launched a \$3.3 billion appeal to provide emergency assistance in 48 countries around the globe.

“From Syria to Yemen and Iraq, from South Sudan to Nigeria, children are under direct attack, their homes, schools and communities in ruins, their hopes and futures hanging in the balance,” noted the UN agency in a news release today.

“In total, almost one in four of the world’s children lives in a country affected by conflict or disaster,” it added.

UNICEF’s Humanitarian Action for Children sets out the agency’s 2017 appeal and its goals to provide children with access to safe water, nutrition, education, health and protection in some of the world’s worst conflicts and humanitarian emergencies.

The largest single component of the appeal (\$1.4 billion) is for children and families caught up in the conflict in Syria, which will soon enter its seventh year. This also includes Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, such as Jordan where, according to estimates, almost half of all refugee families have a child who is a breadwinner.

With enough funding, UNICEF hopes to reach 81 million people, including 48 million children with access to safe water, nutrition, education, health and protection.



A 28-month-old child, who has been receiving treatment for malnutrition, having her mid-upper-arm circumference measured by a health worker at a health post in Ethiopia. (file) Photo: UNICEF/Ayene

‘Silent threat’ of malnutrition

UNICEF is particularly concerned about another slow-burning threat – malnutrition.

“Malnutrition is a silent threat to millions of children,” said the agency’s Director of Emergency Programmes, Manuel Fontaine, adding:

“The damage it does can be irreversible, robbing children of their mental and physical potential. In its worst form, severe malnutrition can be deadly.”

The UN agency fears that an estimated 7.5 million children will face severe acute malnutrition across the majority of appeal countries, including almost half a million each in north east Nigeria and Yemen.

The situation is further complicated due to unavailability of accurate information in parts of the Lake Chad basin due to lack of access because of continuing activities of Boko Haram militants.

In Yemen, the worst affected areas include the capital, Sana'a, where 78 per cent of children are chronically malnourished. Furthermore, many other areas have also seen growing deprivation, from Hodeida in the west to Taiz and now Aden to the south.

UNICEF's Yemen Representative, Meritzell Relano termed the situation for children in Yemen "catastrophic", with at least 10 million in need of some form of humanitarian assistance.

"Children are dying of malnutrition, that is for sure [...] under-five mortality rate has increased to the point that we estimate that at least in 2016, 10,000 more children died of preventable diseases," she said.



Children attend a class at a primary school at an IDP camp in Maiduguri, Borno State, north east Nigeria. There are nearly 2,000 children enrolled at the UNICEF supported school in the camp. Photo: UNICEF/Naftalin

Challenges great but not insurmountable

The UN agency believes that as great as these challenges are, they're not insurmountable.

Thanks to donors, UNICEF saved lives every day in 2016, providing water to 13.6 million people, protection from measles to more than nine million children, education to over six million, and treatment for severe acute malnutrition to 2.2 million, in the first ten months of the year.

AUDIO: UNICEF seeks \$3.3 billion in emergency aid