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First progress report on Sustainable Development Agenda aims to leave no one behind

20 July – The first ever progress report on the new global development agenda provides the most up-to-date statistics on poverty, hunger, education and sanitation, among others, so that the world can address urgent global challenges over the next 15 years.

Officially launched by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at the ministerial meeting of the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) on Wednesday, the report was detailed today to highlight its most important asset – the global data it contains.

“We have the chance to truly set the world on a different sustainable path leaving no one behind,” Assistant-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, Thomas Gass, today told the press in New York.

The annual Sustainable Development Goals Report is an opportunity “to review where the world stands at the start of this collective journey,” Mr. Gass added.

He then listed a number of figures – about 800 million people around the world live in extreme poverty and hunger, 5.9
million children die before they reach the age of five, 59 million of primary school age are out of school, 2.4 billion people still lack improved sanitation facilities, one in two children under the age of five lack birth certificates.

These statistics are at the core of the progress report which is the baseline for evaluation and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 SDGs.

“It is crucial to build a global data ecosystem replete with quality reliable and timely data,” said Mr. Gass, speaking alongside Francesca Perucci, Chief of the Statistical Services Branch.

The global data is part of the 169 targets which will guide the plan of action for people, planet and prosperity from this year through 2030.

The Indicators were developed by experts representing 28 national statistical systems through an “open, inclusive and transparent process,” Mr. Gass said.

While the 17 Goals were universally accepted and approved by all 193 Member States last year, the indicators still have to be adopted by the UN’s Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly.

“The idea is that every country would provide the data – all the goals and all the targets are valid for all the countries,” Mr. Gass underscored in today’s press conference.

This week’s report is the first progress report since the launch of the SDGs. Progress reports are expected every year for the next 14 years and will be presented to the High-level Political Forum, which is the UN’s central platform for the follow-up and review of the SDGs.

During his speech yesterday, Mr. Ban said he would convene an event on 21 September for countries to deposit their instruments of ratification on the Paris Agreement on climate change, an accord that was adopted in December last year and will enter into force when 55 countries ratify, and 55 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions are accounted for.

In April, 178 countries signed the Paris Agreement at the UN Headquarters, and 19 countries have so far ratified. But these 19 countries accounted for less than 1 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. Ban encouraged at least 40 countries who committed that they will ratify this Paris Agreement before the end of this year, including the United States, China, Australia, Indonesia, Mexico, and Argentina.

He noted that a key feature of this year’s Forum is the voluntary national reviews, a mechanism that allows Governments to voluntarily present what they and their societies are doing to implement the 2030 Agenda. This year, 22 countries will share their experiences.

“Ensuring progress in achieving the SDGs will be greatly enhanced by making sure that lessons are shared and best practices are replicated,” he explained, calling on Member States to intensify efforts at follow-up and review through a participatory process, with the full engagement of the business sector and civil society.
‘World has ignored hepatitis at its peril,’ warns UN health agency ahead of World Day

20 July – With some 400 million people around the world infected with hepatitis B or C, the United Nations health agency today encouraged countries to boost testing and access to services and medicines for people in need.

“The world has ignored hepatitis at its peril,” said Dr. Margaret Chan, Director General of the UN World Health Organization (WHO). “It is time to mobilize a global response to hepatitis on the scale similar to that generated to fight other communicable diseases like HIV AIDS and tuberculosis.”

The number of people with hepatitis B or C is more than 10 times the number of people infected with HIV, according to UN figures.

Only about 1 in 20 people with viral hepatitis know they have it; and just 1 in 100 with the disease is being treated.

In May of this year, the World Health Assembly – WHO’s decision-making body – called for treating 8 million people for hepatitis B or C by 2020, to reduce new viral hepatitis infections by 90 per cent, and to decrease the number of deaths by 65 per cent in 2030, as compared with 2016. These targets are part of the first ever Global Health Sector Strategy on viral hepatitis.

“We need to act now to stop people from dying needlessly from hepatitis,” said Dr. Gottfried Hirnschall, WHO’s Director of the HIV Department and Global Hepatitis Programme.

These comments come ahead of World Hepatitis Day, marked annually on 28 July. This year’s theme is “Know hepatitis – Act now” encourages people to get tested and demand treatment.

Hepatitis B and C are transmitted through contaminated blood, as well as through contaminated needles and syringes in healthcare setting and among people who inject drugs.

The viruses can also be transmitted through unsafe sex and from an infected mother to her newborn child.

A vaccine and treatment exist for hepatitis B, but there is no vaccine for hepatitis C.

Some countries are working to curb the rate of infection of the virus by lowering the prices of hepatitis C medicines, such as in Egypt, where the price of medicines fell from $900 in 2014 to $200 in 2016 as a result of access to generic drugs.

According to WHO, Brazil and Pakistan are also expanding treatment coverage, and Georgia plans to eliminate the disease entirely.
UN Daily News • www.un.org/news

UN agency steps up operations in South Sudan to thwart possible cholera outbreak

20 July – Dozens of people in South Sudan may have cholera, the United Nations children’s agency today announced, saying it is working with partners to step up its operations to avoid a possible cholera outbreak in the country.

“The Juba Teaching Hospital reported that 69 new suspected cases were admitted on Wednesday, bringing the total number of people being treated in the capital to 112,” the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) said in a press release.

An additional 29 suspected cases have been reported in Duk Island, Jonglei state, bringing the total number of cases around the country to 141. However, the actual number of cases remains unconfirmed due to a critical lack of laboratory equipment needed for diagnosis.

“A fast and coordinated response is key to preventing a cholera outbreak,” said Mahimbo Mdoe, UNICEF’s Representative in South Sudan. “That’s underway, despite the fact that life in Juba was completely brought to a standstill for days by the recent violence and many humanitarian organizations have since evacuated staff.”

The UN agency is working with the Ministry of Health of South Sudan and partner organizations to provide medical supplies and sanitation, and raise community awareness.

With rapid response teams underway, UNICEF said it is providing its partners with drugs, infusions and other health products to treat disease, including triage tents in case the number of cases continues to rise.

At the UN protection of civilians sites where thousands continue to shelter following the fighting that erupted in Juba nearly two weeks ago, the UN Mission (UNMISS) and partners are continuing to supply daily water supplies. The water is then treated with chlorine.

UNICEF calls for urgent action to protect girls, women from sexual violence

20 July – A key adviser to the United Nations children’s agency today decried the culture of impunity surrounding sexual violence against women and girls around the world, following a recent case of gang rape in India.

“Outrage is not enough,” said Anju Malhotra, UNICEF’s Principal Gender Advisor.

“We need action now to end this brutality that has become routine and to give the victims of violence the justice and protection they deserve.”

The statement was issued in response to a reported gang rape of a young Dalit woman in India by the same five men who had raped her three years prior.
The case “underlines the heinous culture of impunity that surrounds violence against girls and women,” Ms. Malhotra said.

About one out of every 10 girls in the world will experience sexual violence, according to UN figures – the majority between the ages of 15 and 19.

In 2013, following nationwide outrage and protests sparked by the death of a 23-year-old woman who was gang-rape in New Delhi in 2012, India enacted new laws to prevent and prosecute rape and other sex crimes.

At that time, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Rashida Manjoo, had said the reforms, though commendable, “did not go far enough” to address systemic gender inequalities in Indian society.

**Iraq: UN seeks $284M to start aid response ahead of Mosul military operation**

20 July – One of the top United Nations officials in Iraq is warning that an expected military operation in Mosul will lead to the largest and most dramatic humanitarian crisis in the world, which could impact as many as 1.5 million civilians.

“The impact of the Mosul military campaign on civilians will be devastating,” said Lise Grande, UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq. “Mass casualties among civilians are likely and families trying to flee are expected to be at extreme risk.”

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is asking for an additional $284 million to start preparing food, water, emergency shelter and medical assistance, and other immediately needed aid.

Military operations by the Government of Iraq and its allies to retake areas from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) are already forcing hundreds of thousands of civilians, including more than 85,000 people from Fallujah, to flee their homes in search of safety.

More than 3.3 million Iraqis are currently displaced across the country and as many as 2.5 million more people may become newly displaced along the Anbar and Mosul corridors and in Mosul city in the months ahead.

“Humanitarian partners are stretched in every conceivable way,” Ms. Grande said.

According to OCHA, “virtually every camp and reception centre receiving newly displaced families is already at full capacity.”

The latest appeal is in addition to the $861 million for which OCHA asked at the beginning of the year. So far, only 40 per cent has been received.

“Ninety-nine front-line programmes, including 30 life-saving health programmes, have already shut and hundreds more will in the weeks and months ahead if we don’t receive support,” said Ms. Grande.

The actual cost of the Mosul humanitarian operation will depend on the scale, duration and intensity of the battle. OCHA estimates that in the worst case, nearly $1.8 billion may be required to support the people in trouble.
Torching of house in occupied West Bank draws UN official’s concern

20 July – The United Nations official coordinating the peace process toward resolving the longstanding conflict between Israel and Palestine today expressed concern about reports of yet another arson attack targeting a Palestinian family in Duma in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

“If confirmed, this despicable act would be the third incident in this particular village in the last year,” said the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov.

On 31 July last year, Jewish extremists set fire to the home of a Palestinian family, killing 18-month-old Ali Saad Dawabsha and his parents, and leaving four year-old Ahmed orphaned.

“Indictments have been made, but the perpetrators of this terrible crime have yet to face justice,” Mr. Mladenov said.

According to media reports, the latest attack is on a relative of the family attacked on 31 July.

The third attack refers to an incident in March, in which the house of Ibrahim Mohammed Dawabsha, the only living witness to the 31 July attack, was set alight.

Mr. Mladenov called on the authorities to move swiftly in bringing all the perpetrators to justice, including those responsible for the incident last night.

He also urged Israel, as the occupying power, to ensure that vulnerable Palestinian communities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are protected in line with its obligations under international law.

Mali: UN mission decries deadly attack against Malian military camp

20 July – The United Nations peacekeeping mission in Mali today strongly condemned an attack against a military camp and its checkpoints in Nampala, in the central part of the country.

According to a UN spokesperson, even though the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the country (MINUSMA) does not operate in the area of Nampala, the Mission mobilised major aerial reconnaissance and medical resources, in coordination with the Malian authorities, in response to the attack.

Speaking after the attack, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Mali and head of MINUSMA, Mahamet Saleh Annadif, presented his condolences to the families of the victims and wished a speedy recovery to the wounded.

He stressed the need for all Malian parties to work together to prevent terrorist organisations from taking advantage of the situation to derail the peace process.
UN agency starts food aid to 6.5 million people affected by severe drought in Malawi

20 July – The United Nations food relief agency has launched what is set to become the largest ever emergency food relief operation in Malawi, where an unprecedented El Niño-related drought has left nearly 40 per cent of the population in need of emergency assistance.

“I've talked with women in rural areas who told me they have enough food for just a few more weeks, after which they will have nothing,” said Ertharin Cousin, Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme (WFP), who today concluded a three-day visit to the country.

In a telephone briefing yesterday with reporters, Ms. Cousin said severe flooding and prolonged dry spells last year have devastated this year's harvest.

“We have an opportunity to prevent this drought becoming a severe crisis if we get out ahead of it and provide the food that is required,” she said.

Ms. Cousin reiterated the message today, saying that the international community must urgently assist the people of Malawi and six other countries affected by El Niño – Lesotho, Madagascar, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe – “before food insecurity spirals into hunger and starvation.”

Across southern Africa, as many as 18 million people will require emergency assistance due to El Niño between now and March of next year, according to WFP. The UN agency is planning to reach nearly 12 million people with food aid.

In Malawi, about 80 per cent of the affected people are smallholder farmers who rely on what they grow to eat. Given that the estimated number of people currently in need is two and a half times higher than last year, the WFP official reiterated the need for $217 million to bridge a funding gap to produce, transport and pre-position food stocks in the country.

The situation is particularly dire given the already existing high level of stunting, a medical condition that results in low growth for age and is caused primarily due to malnutrition, among children. The country also suffers high rates of HIV/AIDS infections and related deaths that have left many orphans and child-headed households, and for whom food access is already challenging.
South Sudan: demonstrators protest outside UN compound without incidents

20 July – A thousand people today demonstrated in front of a United Nations compound in Juba, the capital of South Sudan, the UN Mission in the country announced, and dispersed without incidents after handing over a petition.

The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) reported that the protestors gathered around the Tomping Compound, where tens of thousands of people had sought refuge from the latest bout of fighting in the country.

Some people initially threw stones at the gate, but dispersed after handing a petition to the Mission, reportedly against a proposal by the African Union to deploy a regional peacekeeping force to the country.

“A peacekeeping quick reaction force and formed police unit personnel were on the ground to control the crowd and no casualties were reported,” a UN spokesman, Farhan Haq, told reporters in New York.

The security situation has been unstable in Juba and elsewhere since the recent fighting between the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) loyal to President Salva Kiir and the SPLA in Opposition backing First Vice-President Riek Machar. Some 272 people, including 33 civilians, have been killed and at least 36,000 civilians displaced.

Yesterday, two national UN staff members were physically assaulted by youth protestors in Bor, following a speech by the local governor.

“UNMISS condemns physical attacks against its personnel and property and calls on all parties to respect the operations of the UN, its staff and assets,” Mr. Haq said today in reaction to the incident.

The UN Mission also raised concerns about increased levels of obstruction of its operations, after the Government announced today that flight safety assurances for its rotary wing aircrafts would only be granted for travels to the Greater Upper Nile and Greater Bahr el Ghazal regions.

“UNMISS is concerned by these developments, which are a clear violation of the Status of Forces Agreement signed with the Government, and which are preventing the UN from implementing its mandate in the country,” said Mr. Haq.

Despite restrictions of movement, the Mission continues to conduct patrols in Juba, including the areas known as the “protection of civilians” sites, he added.
New drive for paediatric HIV treatment launched at global AIDS conference

20 July – A new global push to end paediatric AIDS by 2020 was launched today at the 21st International AIDS Conference, the world’s largest forum devoted to any single health or development issue, said the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) today.

To achieve this goal, UNAIDS emphasized, “Prevention efforts will need to be matched by an equally robust effort to address the treatment needs of children living with HIV.”

The new global push comes at a time when children, aged 0 to 14 years, accounting for 5% of people living with HIV in 2015, represent 10% of all AIDS-related deaths. Half of all children who acquire HIV perinatally die by their second birthday unless they receive antiretroviral therapy, with peak mortality occurring at 6 to 8 weeks of life.

Discussions at the Conference also underlined the need to increase the political commitment for paediatric HIV treatment, scaling-up of point-of-care diagnostic tools for children, intensifying testing efforts for older children, strengthening of service delivery and patient monitoring for mothers and their infants, and expanding the array of child-appropriate antiretroviral medicines.

The joint UN programme credited sustained gains in preventing new HIV infections among children for laying the groundwork to end paediatric AIDS at least a decade sooner than the global target for the epidemic as a whole.

This effort will also support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) relating to health (SDG 3) has a target to end the epidemic of AIDS by 2030.

UN Members States, in June 2016, adopted a new political declaration to fast-track progress towards combating HIV and AIDS over the next five years and end the epidemic as a public health threat by 2030.

UNAIDS further said that the renewed global push to close paediatric treatment gaps support the AIDS-free component of the Start Free, Stay Free, AIDS Free framework launched by the programme and its partners.
UN rights chief 'deeply troubled' by conviction of land reform activists in Paraguay

20 July – The United Nations human rights chief today expressed concern over the recent ruling by the Court in Paraguay that convicted 11 land reform protestors, calling on the country's authorities to take urgent measures to ensure fair, independent investigations and guarantee access to justice.

“The conviction of 11 peasants in the Curuguaty case following a trial that allegedly did not respect judicial guarantees is deeply troubling,” said the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, in a news release.

Over the past four years, several human rights bodies and civil society organizations have warned against serious irregularities in the investigation, including allegations of violations of due process and the right to defense, he said.

On 15 June 2012, police raided an area, known as Marina Kue in the northeastern district of Curuguaty, which was occupied by a group of protestors. Six police officers and 11 peasants were killed in the standoff, with some 80 people wounded.

On 11 July this year, the Court sentenced four peasants for the killing of the six police officers, along with occupation of property and criminal association, to 18 to 35 years in prison. Seven other peasants received sentences of between four and six years in jail for occupation of property and criminal association.

“I'm also deeply concerned by the fact that, up to now, the deaths of 11 peasants, killed in the same incident, have not been investigated by Paraguayan authorities, nor have the allegations that some were summarily executed after being subjected to torture and other human rights violations,” he added.

Mr. Zeid stressed that the UN Human Rights Committee, the body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by its State parties, made a specific recommendation to Paraguay on this case in 2013, asking for an immediate, independent and impartial investigation.

The Committee noted “allegations of serious irregularities in the actions of the Public Prosecution Service, the judiciary and the security forces in relation to the police raid,” as well as reports of a lack of impartiality and independence in the investigations into the events.

Mr. Zeid recalled that, this past April, Paraguay committed to implementing a recommendation to create an independent investigation commission on the Curuguaty case during a review of the country's human rights situation by the Human Rights Council, a Geneva-based inter-governmental body made up of 47 UN Member States responsible for the promotion and protection of all human rights.

He urged the Paraguayan authorities to “take urgent measures to guarantee that victims have access to justice and ensure that independent investigations are carried out into all alleged human rights violations, in accordance with international standards and obligations.”

The High Commissioner also stressed the urgent need for the authorities to move the long overdue land reform forward. A 2008 census shows that some 80 per cent of the land belongs to 2.5 per cent of the population, a gap that is causing social tensions.
One year on, Iran deal ‘best’ way to ensure peaceful nuclear programme – UN chief

20 July – United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today said that the nuclear deal agreed to last year by Iran and six world powers is the best way of ensuring the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear programme, calling for the comprehensive implementation of the accord, as well as a subsequent Security Council resolution that endorsed it.

In a statement issued today, the Secretary-General congratulated the Council and the participants in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on the first anniversary of the “historic achievement” and commended progress made so far.

On 20 July last year, the Council adopted resolution 2231 (2015), endorsing the JCPOA under which Iran pledged that it would not seek, develop or acquire nuclear weapons. The resolution called the deal a “culmination of diplomatic efforts” by Iran and the so-called E3+3 – China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

In his statement, Mr. Ban said the JCPOA was “a triumph of diplomacy” for conflict resolution and prevention, and strengthened global norms for nuclear non-proliferation.

He explained that, combined with a robust verification regime, the agreement ended one of the Council’s strictest sanctions regimes, and provided Iran with the opportunity for greater engagement with the international community.

“Resolution 2231 (2015) heralded a fundamental shift in Iran’s relationship with the Security Council, and provided a defined time schedule for the removal of the Iran nuclear issue from the Council’s agenda,” the Secretary-General said.

He also commended Iran for implementing its nuclear-related commitments, as verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency, while also applauding the steps taken by the European Union and the United States.

“One year on, I remain certain that the JCPOA is the best way to ensure the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear programme and to realise the great aspirations of the Iranian people,” he said, calling for the agreement and resolution 2231 to be implemented in a comprehensive manner, based on mutual respect and mutual benefit.

That would facilitate greater cooperation to achieve international peace and security, he added.
UN forum on indigenous issues urges talks between Mexican officials, teacher union wing

20 July – The head of the United Nations forum on indigenous issues today urged Mexican officials to meet with a wing of the national union of teachers to resolve the conflict in the southern state of Oaxaca, where violent protests over education took at least six lives.

“I would like to express my absolute rejection and condemnation of the events that took place on 19 and 20 June this year in Asuncion Nochixtlán and neighbouring municipalities in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico,” said Alvaro Pop, Chairperson of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

In addition to the people killed, more than 100 were injured in protests that followed President Enrique Peña Nieto's changes to the education system.

The group that is protesting the changes is known as the National Coordinator of Education Workers (CNTE), an offshoot of the national teacher's union.

In today's statement, Mr. Pop urges the Government to dialogue in an “effective, participatory and mutually respectful manner” with the CNTE “to find a solution that respects national and international obligations undertaken by Mexico to promote and protect the rights of its indigenous peoples.”

He noted that Oaxaca has the largest cultural diversity among all the Mexican states, and that Mexico has formally and constitutionally recognized the rights of indigenous peoples “to education in line with their cultural methods of teaching and learning.”

This stems from Mexico having signed on to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organization and the recently adopted American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Mr. Pop's comments come ahead of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, marked annually on 9 August, which this year focus on “Indigenous Peoples and Education.”

The UN is currently marking the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, which began in 2005.