UN poised to open summit on world's oceans; outcome will 'call for action' on ocean health

2 June – Warming oceans, depleting sea life and plastic pollution are on the agenda for next week's ocean summit at the United Nations, which will call for urgent action to improve the health of the oceans, while also creating jobs and raising people out of poverty.

“Human activities are having major impacts on the ocean, affecting everything from the viability of marine habitats to the quality and temperature of the water, the health of marine life, and the continued availability of seafood,” the UN organizers said about the event being held 5 to 9 June.

The Ocean Conference, the first ever such summit convened by the UN, will focus on the targets outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by Governments in 2015. In particular among the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Goal 14 highlights the need to conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources to benefit present and future generations.
“Ocean deterioration has broader implications as it affects poverty eradication, economic growth, sustainable livelihoods and employment, global food security, human health and climate regulation,” the organizers said.

Thousands of people are expected to attend – including heads of State and Government, civil society representatives, business people, as well as actors, and ocean and marine life advocates.

**Strong showing likely from Pacific Islands, African coastal States**
A big showing is expected from small island developing States, particularly from the Pacific Islands, and from African coastal States, which are on the frontlines of climate change and whose economies are particularly vulnerable to changes in the oceans and marine life.

The current President of the UN General Assembly, Peter Thomson, said he is “very confident” that there is an appetite to take action to aid oceans and marine life.

Mr. Thomson, whose home country, Fiji, is co-hosting the Conference along with Sweden, said people had been “selfish” about their children's and grandchildren's future – but now are more cognizant of the need to sustainably use natural resources.

“Every second breathe you take comes from ocean-produced oxygen. Without a healthy ocean we're in deep trouble; whether it's food, whether it's our climate, we have to have the integrity for the ocean, the source of life,” Mr. Thomson told journalists yesterday in New York.

The main areas of work at The Ocean Conference will be a political call to action, a segment on partnership dialogues and voluntary commitments.

The Secretary-General of The Ocean Conference, Wu Hongbo, who is also the UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, said Member States have already hammered out the final text of the conference – which will include 22 specific actions to be taken.

He noted that climate change action taken by the international community is unstoppable, and needs global support: “If you drop a plastic bottle anywhere near your sea, it may end up in some other places. So all these seas and oceans are connected; so regional or individual action seems very weak. We need global solutions to the global challenge.”

**NYC's Ocean March**
On the eve of the Conference, New York City, which has about 520 miles of coastline, will host the inaugural World Ocean Festival.

New York's festival will feature a first-of-its kind grand “ocean march,” which will be a parade of sailing vessels around lower Manhattan and along 10 nautical miles of Manhattan and Brooklyn waterfront from the Hudson to the East River.

The second main event will be the Ocean Village, which will be set up at Gentry State Park in Long Island City as a “hub for all things ocean,” and will celebrate art, innovation and exhibits on ocean and climate action.
Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Kuwait, Peru, Poland elected to UN Security Council

2 June – In a single round of voting today, the United Nations General Assembly elected Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Kuwait, Peru and Poland as non-permanent members of the Security Council for the next two years. They will fill seats to be vacated by Egypt, Japan, Senegal, Ukraine and Uruguay on 31 December. Bolivia, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan and Sweden will continue as elected Council members, completing the second year of their respective terms in 2018. All new Council members will take their seats on 1 January 2018.

The five non-permanent members were elected according to the following pattern: three seats for the Group of African States and the Group of Asia-Pacific States, one for the Group of Eastern European States, and one for the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. All the new members met the required two-thirds majority and were elected in the first and only round of voting.

In a separate by-election, the Assembly voted in favour of the Netherlands assuming the Council seat that Italy was due to vacate on 31 December. The two Member States had earlier agreed to share the two-year term, beginning on 1 January 2017, after a winner failed to emerge after multiple rounds of voting to select a candidate from among the Western European and Other States.

Green economy is 'the economy of the future,' says UN chief, urging commitment to climate action

2 June – Underscoring the threats posed by climate change – those already apparent, as well as those sure to impact the future of the planet – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today urged Governments worldwide to “stay the course” and remain committed to climate action.

“[Climate change] is undeniable,” Secretary-General Guterres told the media at a press encounter in the Russian city of St. Petersburg.

“Those that will be betting on the implementation of the Paris Agreement, on the green economy, will be the ones that have a leading role in the economy of the 21st century,” he said.

Referring to the United States, where President Donald Trump announced yesterday the country's withdrawal from the landmark climate accord, Mr. Guterres added: “In relation to US society, I am deeply convinced that States, cities, the business community, the civil society, will also remain engaged, will bet on the green economy, because the green economy is the good economy, it is the economy of the future.”

The Paris Agreement – agreed in December 2015 and entered into force in November a year later – aims to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change, in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty.

Also today, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, voiced concern over the US withdrawal from the Agreement.
“The United States’ withdrawal from the Paris Agreement is inconsistent with its obligations to those affected by climate change,” said the High Commissioner in a tweet.

Agreement cannot be renegotiated based on the request of a single Party – UNFCCC secretariat
Separately, the secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – the international environmental treaty under whose auspices the Paris Agreement was negotiated and agreed – expressed “regret” at the announcement that the US will withdraw from the accord.

In a statement yesterday, the UNFCCC secretariat said that it took note of the announced intention to renegotiate the modalities for the US participation in the Agreement and, in that regard, the secretariat stood ready to engage in dialogue with the US Government regarding the implications of the announcement.

However, it also pointed out that the Agreement – signed by 195 Parties and ratified by 146 countries plus the European Union – “cannot be renegotiated based on the request of a single Party.”

“It enjoys profound credibility, as it was forged by all nations and is supported by a growing wave of business, investors, cities, states, regions and citizens,” added the secretariat, noting that remains committed to continue working with all Governments and partners in their efforts to “fast forward” climate action at global and national levels.

Climate changing because of human activity – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
Also today, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – the international body for assessing the science related to climate change, which provides a scientific basis for governments at all levels to develop climate related policies – underscored that scientific evidence behind climate change is clear.

“The climate is changing and it is changing because of human activity,” Jonathan Lynn, the head of Communications and Media Relations at IPCC, told journalists at a regular press briefing in Geneva.

“As the last IPCC report put it: ‘Without additional mitigation efforts beyond those in place today, and even with adaptation, warming by the end of the 21st century will lead to very high risk of severe, widespread and irreversible impacts’,“ he added.

At the same briefing, Deon Terblanche, Director of Atmospheric Research and Environment Department at the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), said that while the agency had not run new models overnight, an assumption could be made that in the worst case scenario, temperatures could rise by an additional 0.3 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level by the end of the century.
Thousands of Nigeria's returning refugees need humanitarian assistance – UN refugee agency

2 June – As thousands of refugees return from Cameroon to north-eastern Nigeria, straining the few existing services and creating a new emergency, the United Nations refugee agency is stepping up its response to improve conditions.

More than 12,000 refugees returned in May alone, with 1,800 entering in just one day early last week. They are arriving to difficult conditions in the town of Banki, some 100 kilometres southeast of Maiduguri and just inside Nigeria.

“Though returns have dropped significantly since last week – with only 24 coming back on Monday – we are nonetheless concerned, as Banki is already hosting a large population of nearly 45,000 internally displaced people, and is far from ready to receive such large numbers,” said Babar Baloch, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The decisions to return are being taken by refugees themselves – people variously cite difficult conditions at Cameroon's Minawao camp or the need to be back for the farming season. The refugees also organize their own transport.

“In Banki, and also at nearby towns where people are hoping to head, humanitarian access is very limited and largely dependent on the availability of military escorts. As most returnees are still unable to travel onwards to their home villages where security remains uncertain, there is a pressing need for additional land for more shelter and other facilities at the [internally displaced persons] site,” continued UNHCR.

According to the UN agency, people are sleeping alongside their few possessions in the open. In the absence of cooking fuel many are burning plastic. Sanitation is a major worry too, as what is available cannot serve the number of people in the site. There is little separation between areas for washing clothes and ablutions. With little or no drainage system at water collection points, and the incoming rainy season, the risk of waterborne disease is great.

UNHCR and the Nigerian Government have alerted the refugees in Cameroon that the rate of returns is a strain on the few existing services and create a new emergency for which the response capacity is very limited.

“UNHCR and our partners in Banki are doing what we can, given difficult circumstances, to improve conditions both there and in other areas that returnees are seeking to reach such as Gwoza which lies further south of Banki,” explained Mr. Balloch.

“Plastic sheeting is being provided and some 1500 emergency shelters are under way along with non-food aid kits. Currently food aid is an urgent need and we are appealing to other humanitarian partners to come forward with additional expertise and help,” he elaborated.

On 3 March, UNHCR, Cameroon and Nigeria, signed a Tripartite Agreement aimed at facilitating voluntary returns. The objective and purpose of the tripartite agreement is to ensure that returns comply with international standards.

The situation is part of a wider crisis in the Lake Chad Basin that has displaced over 2.7 million people, including some 210,000 Nigerian refugees into neighbouring countries. As of mid-May, 96,000 of these were registered as being in Cameroon.

UNHCR is monitoring the situation on both sides of Nigeria's border with its neighbours and we continue to urge all countries in the region to allow safe haven and asylum procedures to all those in need. Taking into account the security constraints, UNHCR has started strengthening presence in border entry points for better monitoring and reporting.
UN agencies urge aid for cyclone-hit communities in Bangladesh, Myanmar

2 June – United Nations agencies are calling for urgent aid to help hundreds of thousands of people affected by Cyclone Mora, which swept across the Bay of Bengal earlier this week.

“There is an urgent need for shelter materials,” the spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Andrej Mahecic, told journalists in Geneva.

“Food rations, drinking water and latrines are some of the other needs identified so far in the cyclone-affected areas,” Mr. Mahecic said, adding that more needs are likely to be identified as governments in Bangladesh and Myanmar complete their ongoing assessments of the damage.

The Rohingya community displaced in Myanmar and living in settlements in Bangladesh has been particularly hard hit.

In Bangladesh, there are more than 33,000 Rohingya refugees registered in the official camps of Kutupalong and Nayapara. Outside the camps, more than 200,000 undocumented Rohingya are living in makeshift sites and local villages in the south-eastern part of the country.

In Myanmar, some 120,500 internally displaced people have been living in central Rakhine since 2012, when inter-communal violence forced them to flee, according to UNHCR.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) today launched an appeal for $3.7 million to help the Rohingya in Bangladesh. The funds aim to help up to 80,000 people between now and the end of the year, and “will target health, water, sanitation, shelter and protection.”

The cyclone, which pounded Bangladesh with 117 km/hour winds and heavy train, tore through the settlement houses which offered little resistance to the storm’s strength.

“The storm destroyed 25 per cent of shelters and left as many as 80 per cent damaged,” IOM said. “Food and fuel supplies were destroyed, electricity lines were cut, and health and sanitation infrastructure was also badly damaged.”

Some 1.3 million children are estimated to be in urgent need of aid as a result of the storm.

The Director of Emergency Programmes at the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Manuel Fontaine, warned that children from the Rohingya community, who were already displaced and living in precarious conditions before the Cyclone, is now “hit by double humanitarian crisis.”

Iraq: UN refugee agency sounds alarm for more support as
fighting continues in Mosul

2 June – As heavy fighting continues to drive large numbers of people from Mosul, the United Nations refugee agency today appealed for urgent support to meet the critical needs of vulnerable children, women and men displaced from and returning to the city.

According to Iraqi authorities, more than 750,000 have been forced to flee since military operations to retake the city from Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) fighters.

“A shortage of funds threatens to undermine our humanitarian response at this critical time,” Andrej Mahecic, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees told the press at a regular media briefing in Geneva.

We expect more large movements of people from the west of the city where the fighting is currently concentrated

The UN agency is in need of about $126 million to sustain its operations. Nearly half of this amount – $60 million – is needed for the more than 100,000 newly displaced families to provide them emergency shelter in the camps, legal assistance to replace lost and missing documents, child protection, prevent sexual and gender based violence, as well as for blankets, mattresses and other core relief items.

[We expect] more large movements of people from the west of the city where the fighting is currently concentrated

A further $24 million is needed to assist and support Iraqi families returning to their homes.

Estimates indicate that 125,000 internally displaced people have returned to their homes, many in east Mosul and on the outskirts of the city but most are living in damaged buildings and need shelter assistance as well as financial support. Their situation also needs monitoring for protection concerns.

So far, the UN agency has also established 12 camps in support of the overall efforts by the Iraqi authorities to provide shelter to currently 316,000 internally displaced Iraqis in relative proximity to Mosul.

Overall UNHCR's protection and assistance programmes in Iraq amount to $578 million in 2017. However, these are currently 21 per cent funded – a major cause for concern given that the year is already into its sixth month.

Urgent aid needed for over 9,000 children fleeing violence in DR
Congo to Angola – UNICEF

2 June – More than 9,000 children who have arrived at two temporary reception centres in a northern Angolan city from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) need urgent support, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said today.

“The protection of children, nutrition, access to safe drinking water and sanitation, as well as prevention of disease, have been UNICEF's immediate concerns – and actions – since the arrival of refugees in Lunda Norte,” said Abubacar Sultan, the UNICEF Representative in Angola.

UNICEF, provincial authorities and other partners are providing assistance – life-saving interventions in health, water and adequate sanitation services – to children and their families who arrive at the camps in the city of Dundo, after days, often weeks, of travelling on foot. To date, more than 25,000 people have arrived in Angola, having fled violence in the DRC's Kasai province.

UNICEF is also taking action to protect 200 children who have arrived at the camps without their families.

The agency has trained social welfare workers on how to register these children because registration is critical to ensure the safety of children and protect them from trafficking, abuse and exploitation. By registering children, there is also a greater chance that they can be reunited with their families.

UNICEF and partners have identified temporary placement of the unaccompanied children in a friendly and protective environment while efforts are made to trace their biological families, Mr. Sultan said.

UN Security Council adds individuals and groups to DPR Korea sanctions list

2 June – Strongly condemning the nuclear weapons and ballistic missile development activities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the United Nations Security Council today decided to apply existing sanctions to 14 individuals and four entities.

Unanimously adopting a resolution, the 15-member body also reaffirmed its decisions that the north-east Asian country should abandon all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programmes in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner, and immediately cease all related activities.

In the text, the Council condemned “in the strongest terms” the country's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile development activities, including a series of ballistic missile launches, dating back to 9 September 2016, which were conducted “in violation and flagrant disregard” of the relevant Council resolutions.

So far this year, the DPRK has conducted nine ballistic missile tests, including one on Monday. In response, Council members have issued seven press statements, most recent one on 22 May, condemning the country's actions and expressing its readiness to take further significant measures, including sanctions.

Today's resolution contains one annex with the list of the 14 individuals who are now subject to travel ban and asset freeze.
and a second annex with the list of the four entities subject to asset freeze.

Those sanction measures are specified in resolution 1718, which was adopted in 2006.

**Cholera cases in Yemen may reach 130,000 in two weeks, UNICEF warns**

2 June – With about 70,000 cholera cases reported with nearly 600 fatalities in Yemen, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) today warned that an already dire situation for children is turning into a disaster.

“Cholera doesn't need a permit to cross a checkpoint or a border, nor does it differentiate between areas of political control,” said UNICEF Regional Director, Geert Cappelaere, following his visit to the war-torn country.

“Cholera is spreading incredibly fast in Yemen […] The number of suspected cases is expected to reach 130,000 within the next two weeks,” he warned.

He said he witnessed harrowing scenes of children who were barely alive - tiny babies weighing less than two kilos – fighting for their lives at one of the few functioning hospitals he visited.

“But they are the lucky ones. Countless children around Yemen die every day in silence from causes that can easily be prevented or treated like cholera, diarrhoea or malnutrition,” he said.

He said health workers are racing against time to prevent cholera from killing more children. They are dedicated and committed, despite not receiving their salaries in almost nine months.

For its part, UNICEF has been working with partners to respond since the start of this outbreak four weeks ago, providing safe water to over 1 million people across Yemen and delivered over 40 tonnes of lifesaving medical equipment – including medicine, oral rehydration salts, intravenous fluids and diarrhoea disease kits.

He called for stepping up global support, as UNICEF urgently requires $16 million to prevent the outbreak from spreading further.

“But most importantly, it is time for parties to the conflict to prioritise the boys and girls of Yemen and put an end to the fighting through a peaceful political agreement. This is the ultimate way to save the lives of children in Yemen, and to help them thrive,” he said.
In final Security Council briefing, UN envoy hails Ivorians for turning page on conflict to a peaceful future

2 June – Briefing the Security Council for the final time as the United Nations mission in Côte d’Ivoire draws down, the UN envoy for the country thanked the Government for its support and said that though more needs to be done, but the West African nation has shown its resolve for a peaceful, stable and prosperous future.

“Since the post-elections crisis that roiled Côte d’Ivoire only six years ago, demonstrable progress has been made on all fronts,” highlighted Aïchatou Mindaoudou, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the country and the head of the UN Operations in Côte d’Ivoire, known by its French acronym, UNOCI.

The mission, set up in April 2004, will close at the end of June. Its complement of uniformed personnel had already left the country in February and the phased reduction of its civilian personnel was completed in April.

Noting the lessons learned by the mission during the course of its deployment, Ms. Mindaoudou highlighted the strong political mandate accorded to the mission as well as the confidence placed by the Security Council.

In particular, she hailed the quick reaction force established within UNOCI – with a mandate to respond in Liberia in support of mandate of the UN mission in that country (UNMIL) – as “among the most forward-leaning intermission cooperation initiatives in the history of UN peacekeeping.”

She also said that the support of the coalition of international partners, all working in pursuit of same goal had been vital.

Lastly, noting that no peacekeeping operation can substitute for national political will or national efforts to overcome the issues that led to conflict, the head of UNOCI noted that though more needed to be done in order to address the remaining fragilities, but Côte d’Ivoire has demonstrated its determination to do the work required for the country to regain its former place as a pillar of peace, stability and economic prosperity in West Africa.

In conclusion, Special Representative Mindaoudou expressed her appreciation to all partners for their collaboration and cooperation and voiced admiration for the people and Government of Côte d’Ivoire – at the local, regional and national levels.

“They, themselves, were the decisive factor in turning the page on crisis and conflict and, I have no doubt, whose continued determined efforts will ensure that the hard-won peace will be sustained.”

Earlier today, Côte d’Ivoire was elected a non-permanent member of the Security Council for a period of two years. It will assume its seat on 1 January 2018.
UN will work with Colombian Government and FARC-EP on extended weapons hand-in deadline

2 June – The United Nations Mission in Colombia has said that it will comply with new deadlines agreed between the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) for a weapon hand-in, now set for June 20.

After signing a hard-won peace deal, both parties embarked on a path to peace 180 days ago, and have been working together successfully enabling the FARC-EP to lay down their individual weapons, for which the initial date was set for May 30. Due to delays in the different phases of implementation of the agreement the term has now been extended.

In a statement released yesterday, the UN Mission indicated that it has been working intensely in the logistic deployment of 44 containers in 26 identified war zones. In these containers, it will receive and hold over 7,000 FARC-EP identified weapons, for which the Mission has deployed 450 international observers and 72 civilian officers. These weapons include munition, mines and explosives.

The containers, including the weapons handed over by the FARC-EP, will then be transported to eight reception and storage centres. Based on the newly agreed timetable, the extraction of weapons from war zones will be achieved by 1 September.

On a recent visit to Colombia, a delegation from the UN Security Council witnessed first-hand the implementation of the peace agreement, observed the progress as well as the challenges to the agreement that ended the 50-year old conflict. The delegation met with President Juan Manuel Santos and toured the Amazon region of Colombia where one of the monitoring mechanism facilities is set up under a historic peace agreement.

UN rights chief calls for probe into protestor deaths in Bahrain

2 June – Expressing concern at the violence and arrests that occurred as part of a wider crackdown on dissent in Bahrain, the top United Nations human rights official today called on the Government to promptly launch an independent, effective investigation into the deaths of protestors on 23 May.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein issued his call after what his Office (OHCHR) described as the deadliest security operation in the Al-Diraz area since March 2011 and the third one since December 2016.

According to OHCHR, supporters of Sheikh Isa Qassem, the highest Shia authority in Bahrain, had been holding a sit-in since June 2016. At least five protestors were killed and some 286 individuals were arrested. Official accounts suggest that 19 security personnel were injured during the recent security operation by Bahraini security.

The operation came two days after a Bahraini Court had handed down a one-year-suspended sentence to Sheikh Isa Qassem on charges related to illegal funding and money laundering.

“I urge the Government to investigate the events of 23 May, in particular the loss of lives, to ensure that the findings are
made public and that those responsible are held accountable,” High Commissioner Zeid said, also calling on all sides to refrain from violence.

Reports that those who died were buried without the consent of their families were also disturbing, he said, adding that loved ones must be allowed to perform funerals in line with their customs and traditions.

Last Wednesday, one of the country's last remaining opposition groups, the National Democratic Action Society, also known as Waad, was dissolved by a court in Manama. Sources suggest that a number of activists and human rights defenders have also been summoned for interrogations in recent days, with allegations of ill treatment during the questioning.

“Human rights defenders working in Bahrain reportedly continue to face restrictions, intimidation, interrogations, detention and travel bans,” Mr. Zeid said. “I urge Bahrain to choose a different path – one of engagement and dialogue, as well as accountability for violence, regardless of the perpetrator. My Office stands ready to offer technical assistance and advice on the promotion and protection of human rights in Bahrain.”

Afghanistan: UN Mission urges restraint amid ongoing violent protests in Kabul

2 June – The United Nations envoy for Afghanistan today called on protesters on the street of the nation's capital to use restraint and avoid violence, while expressing his understanding of their frustration over a string of terrorist attacks that have killed hundreds of civilians in recent months.

“The genuine anger expressed by the protesters, many of whom suffered the loss of family and friends, is fully understandable,” said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan. “But this tragic week has already added too much civilian suffering to Afghanistan, and further violence will not solve any problems.”

According to media reports, protesters took to the street of Kabul, following Wednesday's terrorist attack in the diplomatic quarter of the city that killed and injured many civilians. The protesters blaming the Afghan Government for not having been able to stop a string of attacks in the capital clashed with riot police on Friday.

Mr. Yamamoto, who is also the head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), recognized the constitutional right of those with grievances to express them peacefully in public demonstrations, but reminded those protesting, and also those in a position to protect the protestors, that all have an obligation to avoid violence.

“During the emotional period following the horrific attack that took place this week in Kabul, it is imperative to seek ways to listen to and voice grievances peacefully,” said Mr. Yamamoto, welcoming the Government's willingness to meet with those who have protested today.

He said that UNAMA is encouraged that the Government of Afghanistan has stressed today that its security forces must ensure the principles of tolerance, professionalism and law-based behavior, welcoming the Government's commitment to prosecute and bring to justice the perpetrators of crimes against the people.

UNAMA assists the process of peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.
Over 40 migrants die of thirst in the Sahara, signalling ‘broadening death trap,’ warns UN agency

The alarm has been raised by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as some 44 migrants and refugees – including women and children – are reported to have succumbed to extreme dehydration when the truck they were travelling in (to Libya) broke down in the desert in northern Niger, exposing them to extreme heat and lack of drinking water. Only six could be saved.

“It is quite clear that human smugglers will go to any extent to exploit desperate refugees and migrants,” said the UN agency in a news release today.

“These shocking deaths are part of the bigger picture of exploitation as smugglers broaden the death trap from the Mediterranean to the Sahara Desert.”

Further, according to the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Niger to Libya route is the one most sub-Saharan African migrants take when trying to reach Europe via the Mediterranean Sea.

Each week, thousands of desperate migrants are crammed into pick-up trucks for the days-long ride, often with only enough room for a few litres of water attempting to cross one of most inhospitable and deadliest places on the planet.

“The migrants are often lied to and cheated on their way [and] smugglers usually run away with their money, [leaving them] in the middle of nowhere, in a country they don’t know, trying to gain enough money to either continue the route or go back home,” said Guiseppe Loprete, the head of IOM operations in Niger.

Both IOM and UNHCR have been working to support refugees and migrants in the region, as well as warning them of the perils of the desert and sea journeys but operations remain constrained in the want of additional resources.

The UN refugee agency is currently in need of $75.5 million to meet the increased humanitarian and protection needs of people in Libya – including those internally displaced, host communities, as well as refugees and asylum seekers.

The appeal includes protection monitoring and interventions, as well as advocacy on issues related to respect for human rights, access to basic services, asylum procedures and freedom of movement.

Additional resources are also required in Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali and Chad to help prevent and respond to risks associated with such deadly journeys.

According to estimates, so far this year, the perilous Mediterranean crossing has claimed more than 1,700 lives.

“This latest tragedy was a grim reminder that probably more migrants die in the Sahara desert than in the Mediterranean, but due to the inhospitable nature of the region, it was virtually impossible to know the exact number,” said Mr. Loprete.
FEATURE: UN Ocean Conference ‘dream come true’ for Caribbean nations such as Trinidad and Tobago

2 June – Protecting the oceans is among the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the blueprint for a more just and equitable world adopted by the 193 Member States of the United Nations in September 2015.

SDG 14 on conserving and sustainably using marine resources is the springboard for the Ocean Conference, taking place at UN Headquarters in New York from 5 to 9 June.

The meeting is especially relevant to Caribbean countries, according to Juan Miguel Diez, Director of the UN Information Centre (UNIC) for the region.

“The Ocean Conference is a dream come true for us in the Caribbean,” he said. “It brings together SDG 14, but also the rest of the SDGs, and provides us with an amazing opportunity to continue to do our work to raise awareness about this particular goal, but also to bring stakeholders together.”

The UNIC is based in Trinidad and Tobago, home to nearly 1.4 million people whose existence is tied to the sea, as Neila Bobb Prescott of the Food and Agriculture Organization’s (FAO) field office in the capital, Port of Spain, explained.

“Trinidad and Tobago is blessed with a particular phenomenon in that in our authority or geographic area, the ocean is 15 times greater than the land. We have so many livelihoods impacted by the health of the marine system, so hence we need to pay attention to it,” she said.

“We may not be the conventional sun, sea and sand people, but the marine resource is where you will find our oil and gas fields as well where you will find the endangered and threatened species around the island.”

Although the twin island nation moves to the beat of calypso, soca and other pulsating rhythms, it is oil and natural gas exports which power the economy. The University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) estimates they account for as much as 60 per cent of gross domestic product.

The country’s Director of Maritime Services, Ronald Alfred, pointed out that the sector is closely aligned with shipping.

“Trinidad and Tobago is a member of the International Maritime Organization and we do abide by all the conventions they have put forward; for example, the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL). It is actually in our national legislation, and we do have our personnel that go to ships that come to our shores and check to make sure that the vessels are compliant with these legislations, thereby doing our small part to preserve the oceans for a long time.”

However, sometimes the ship steering the economy collides with another important industry: fishing.

For the past 20 years, the group Fishermen and Friends of the Sea has locked horns with the Government over “everything that has to do with the sea and all the negative aspects,” according to its president, Terrance Beddoe, a former agronomist with FAO.

“Two Sundays ago, there was a tank which held 150,000 barrels of oil. It sprung a leak at the bottom,” he told UN News in late May. “The policy makers or the people concerned said it’s only 300 barrels, but we have seen this oil stretch a mile long and five miles wide in the gulf (Gulf of Paria, on Trinidad’s west coast). It must have an effect on the fish.”
Navigating future maritime conflicts like this will partly be up to the young people currently studying marine sciences at the UTT campus in Chaguaramas.

Dr. Reia Guppy, assistant professor of marine sciences at the University, believes that all major activity in the country – whether in the energy sector, or fisheries and agriculture – is linked to the marine and coastal environments.

“Shipping across the globe is the largest growing industry in the world, and with the recent opening of the Panama Canal there’s even more efforts for Trinidad and Tobago to be part of that hub, which means, of course, that besides user conflict with fishermen, there is also the potential for invasive species coming into our waters,” she said. “So there’s a host of research and interest from our Department and other environmental units within the University of Trinidad and Tobago to study the marine environment to ensure sustainable development for the country.”

At times, those stakeholder conflicts can be personal or internal.

Welldon Mapp works for the Environmental Research Institute Charlotteville (ERIC), a UN-supported NGO which fosters natural resource awareness among the residents of his fishing village in north-east Tobago.

He has wrestled with the dichotomy of being a fisherman and an advocate for the sustainable management of marine resources.

“The entire thing about conservation is that when you’ve grown up in a family of hunters and you now realize that you have to protect what you used to use as a livelihood source, whether for food or income, and you realize that you’re creating harm to it and still you depend on it,” he said.

“I think it was the right time in my life for me to take a stand: to really understand what I’m taking from the natural environment, understand how it could be protected, and to fall in place where I could create a balance for myself to make me feel comfortable as a person within my community and not really creating harm but doing what I’m doing every day but creating a better benefit in the long run.”

When world leaders signed off on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, they agreed to implement a plan of action for people, prosperity and the planet, that supports the needs of both present and future generations.

Businessman Gary Aboud is another Trinidadian who is looking at the long term.

The secretary of Fishermen and Friends of the Sea is not one to mince words, whether railing against the industry, or local politicians, or the UN.

But when asked to reflect on the ocean’s importance, the firebrand turns philosophical.

“The sea is part of the planet, and I don’t think the sea is more important than the land or the air. All of the eco-systems—the marine and the terrestrial—correlate and implicate each other in a homogenous mix,” he stated.

“So, I think the sea is as important as the blood that beats in your mother’s heart. The sea is as important as the air that we require to breathe. We think that the sea is an abstract thing because it’s ‘over there.’ But I think maybe a planetary consciousness needs to shift and we need to start thinking that the things that are not apparently within our realm of influence are in fact in our realm of influence.”