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Status of declaration on indigenous peoples’ rights in spotlight as UN forum opens in New York

24 April – Speaking at the opening of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, senior UN officials today underscored the need to do more to ensure that indigenous peoples are able to benefit from global development agenda, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

“Far more needs to be done to fully realize the human rights of indigenous peoples,” said Durga Prasad Bhattarai, Vice-President of the UN General Assembly, on behalf of the President of the Assembly, Peter Thomson, underscoring the importance of the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

“Targeted strategies would ensure that indigenous peoples could fully participate in implementing those accords,” he added.

In his remarks, the Assembly Vice-President also highlighted that discussions were ongoing within the 193-member body on ways to enhance the participation of indigenous peoples within the Organization and urged UN Member States and indigenous peoples to participate in upcoming dialogues on a comprehensive draft text addressing the matter.

This year also marks the tenth anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a
comprehensive statement emphasizing the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions and to pursue their development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations.

Underscoring the importance of the Declaration, Lenni Montiel, the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development, noted that as indigenous peoples continue to suffer disproportionately from poverty, discrimination and poor health care, the world “can do better.”

“[Indigenous peoples’] collective and individual rights are too often denied; this is unacceptable. […] we must do better,” he underscored.

Noting that indigenous peoples and UN Member States had requested increased engagement of the UN system, he spoke of the system's response, and cited further examples of efforts, including the International Labour Organization (ILO), UN Development Programme (UNDP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).

Such efforts would continue through the new international development phase guided by the 2030 Agenda, noted Mr. Montiel.

Also speaking today, Cristián Barros Melet, Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council, said that while the 2030 Agenda made a commitment to “leave no one behind,” voluntary national reviews on implementation had shown the risk of indigenous peoples being left behind.

“[As] an advisory body of the Council, the [Permanent] Forum has an important role to play in providing specialized advice and recommendations. It is essential to review progress made to date and to consider what additional efforts were required,” he said.

The Permanent Forum should meanwhile continue its collaboration with other Council bodies, noted Mr. Barros Melet, underscoring that its recommendations would help ensure that provisions of the Declaration were promoted. He also expressed hope that it would provide advice and guidelines which ensured indigenous issues remained an integral part of UN's work.

Also today, the Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, Lakshmi Puri, highlighted the importance of empowerment of indigenous women, noting that indigenous women and girls needed to be aware not only of their identity, but also their human rights, and they must claim those rights.

“No traditional culture or custom can be invoked to justify and perpetrate violence and harmful practices against indigenous women,” she said.

Highlighting the place of indigenous women and girls in the discussions and outcomes of the 2017 session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, she said that the international community could no longer tolerate a situation in which such precious stakeholders and actors for sustainable development were not only left behind, but also the furthest to reach.

Within the UN system, the Permanent Forum is mandated to deal with indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights.

It also works to raises awareness and promotes the integration and coordination of activities related to indigenous issues within the UN system; and prepares and disseminates information on indigenous issues.

Its current (sixteenth) session, the Permanent Forum runs until 5 May 2017.
World Immunization Week: Power of vaccines still not fully utilized, says UN health agency

24 April – Vaccinations stave off 26 potentially deadly diseases, the United Nations health agency is emphasizing on the first day of World Immunization Week, which also marks the halfway point of the Organization's goal to stop millions of deaths from vaccine-preventable diseases.

Vaccines are one of modern medicine's major success stories – tackling infectious diseases by making people immune or resistant, stimulating the body's own immune system – having prevented at least 10 million deaths between 2010 and 2015, stresses Dr. Margaret Chan, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), in a press release.

At the same time, the full potential of vaccines is still not fully utilized, underlines the UN health agency, reiterating that when immunization rates are high, the wider community is protected, including infants who are too young to receive their vaccines, older adults at risk of serious diseases and people who take medication that lowers their immune systems.

WHO warns that the target of all 194 countries that signed the agency's global action plan to eliminate vaccine-preventable diseases by 2020 is behind schedule. The list with preventable diseases includes measles, rubella, and maternal and neonatal tetanus.

In a statement, the agency stresses that “in order for everyone, everywhere to survive and thrive, countries must make more concerted efforts to reach Global Vaccine Action Plan (GVAP) goals by 2020.”

WHO reports that by increasing immunization globally, the lives of an additional 1.5 million people could be saved every year.

The ‘Decade of Vaccines’

This year, Immunization Week falls at the halfway point of completing the target set by the Global Vaccine Action Plan to eliminate vaccine-preventable diseases. The goal of the plan is to improve the health of all people by extending the benefits of immunization through more equitable access to vaccines.

According to the WHO latest numbers, an estimated 19.4 million infants worldwide were not reached with routine immunization services such as Diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTP3) immunization coverage.

In one of the Immunizations Week messages, Dr. Chan speaks on behalf of the world's children, who should be a prime concern of all societies, saying that “no child should be denied the right to immunization for unfair reasons, including economic or social causes.” The WHO director adds that “all barriers must be overcome.”

Of the 19.4 million children without lifesaving DTP3 immunization about 11.5 million of them live in 10 countries, namely Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Ukraine.

The goal of all 194 GVAP signatories is to achieve vaccination coverage of at least 90% nationally and at least 80 per cent in every district by 2020.
Starvation looms for 20 million, UN agricultural advisory group told at opening session

24 April – If nothing is done soon, 20 million people will starve to death over the next six months in South Sudan, Somalia, north-eastern Nigeria and Yemen, the United Nations agricultural chief today warned the UN agency's Council.

Addressing the opening of the 165th session of the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in Rome, Directory-General José Graziano da Silva cautioned that famine – which is threatening those countries as a result of drought and ongoing conflict – will leave many dead and rip apart societies.

"Famine does not just kill people. It contributes to social instability and also perpetuates a cycle of poverty and aid dependency that endures for decades," Mr. de Silva told the FAO Council.

Comprised of 49 elected countries, the FAO Council convenes between sessions to provide advice and oversight related to programs and the budget.

As part of the week-long Council, members will be briefed on the extent of the conditions in the countries facing famine, and in the case of South Sudan, where famine has already been declared in parts of the country.

Mr. de Silva also cautioned about family farmers and rural communities in the Lake Chad Basin, where people feel “hopeless” as they struggle with the impacts of climate change, related droughts, and the lack of public investment and opportunities for youth.

“If we do not support these people, they will have no option other than to join local militias or movements of distress migration,” the Director-General said.

Approval of projects and budget

The Council is also tasked with approving FAO's Programme of Work and Budget for the years 2018 and 2019.

The budget prioritizes areas where FAO can deliver “the greatest impact to Member countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, including climate change mitigation and adaptation, sustainable agriculture production, water scarcity management, and building the resilience of poor family farmers,” according to a press release.

Food and agriculture are central to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and FAO's work is projected to contribute to the achievement of 15 of the 17 Goals.

“This full alignment has been possible because of the centrality of food and agriculture to the sustainable development agenda 2030,” Mr. da Silva said.

Council will also discuss a new scale of assessed contributions, which are the annual payments made by member countries to FAO.
Ahead of World Malaria Day, UN says 'let's close the gap' in prevention coverage

24 April – On the eve of World Malaria Day, the United Nations health agency called today for accelerating scaled-up efforts to prevent malaria, which remains a major public health threat, killing one child every two minutes worldwide in 2015.

The UN World Health Organization's (WHO) latest report, Malaria prevention works: Let's close the gap, spotlights critical gaps in prevention coverage, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

“WHO-recommended tools have made a measurable difference in the global malaria fight, but we need a much bigger push for prevention – especially in Africa, which bears the greatest burden of malaria,” said WHO Director-General Margaret Chan.

WHO said that since 2001, more than 663 million cases have been averted in sub-Saharan Africa, which shoulders 90 per cent of the global malaria burden. Insecticide-treated nets have had the greatest impact, accounting for an estimated 69 per cent of cases prevented through control tools.

However, WHO estimates that 43 per cent of people at risk of malaria in the region were not protected by either an insecticide-treated net or indoor insecticide spraying in 2015. About 69 per cent of pregnant women in 20 African countries did not have access to the recommended three or more doses of preventive treatment.

Malaria: Facts, figures and prevention strategies

According to the most recent World Malaria Report, the global tally of malaria reached 429,000 malaria deaths and 212 million new cases in 2015. The rate of new malaria cases fell by 21 per cent globally between 2010 and 2015, and malaria death rates fell by 29 per cent in the same period. In sub-Saharan Africa, case incidence and death rates fell by 21 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively.

Together with diagnosis and treatment, WHO recommends a package of proven prevention approaches, including insecticide treated nets, spraying indoor walls with insecticides, and preventive medicines for the most vulnerable groups, such as pregnant women and children under the age of five.

Across the Sahel, where most malaria cases and deaths among children occur in the rainy season, WHO recommends seasonal malaria chemoprevention – a preventive therapy shown to reduce new cases of severe malaria in young children by roughly 75 per cent. As of 2015, 10 countries – Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo – had adopted the preventative therapy and begun implementing it.

“Any death from malaria – a preventable and treatable disease – is simply unacceptable,” said Pedro Alonso, Director of WHO’s Global Malaria Programme. “Today we are urging countries and partners to accelerate the pace of action, especially in low-income countries with a high malaria burden.”

Ninety-one countries reported ongoing malaria transmission in 2015; all are working to reduce their malaria burden through the deployment and use of WHO-recommended preventive, diagnostic and treatment tools.

In recent years, seven countries have been certified as having eliminated malaria: United Arab Emirates (2007), Morocco (2010), Turkmenistan (2010), Armenia (2011), Maldives (2015), Sri Lanka (2016) and Kyrgyzstan (2016). This certification is granted by WHO when countries achieve at least three consecutive years of zero locally-acquired cases of malaria.
WHO said future progress in the fight to prevent malaria will likely be shaped by technological advances and innovations in new tools, including new vector control interventions, and possibly a vaccine.

World Malaria Day falls in World Immunization Week, 24-30 April, which celebrates the widespread use of vaccines that protect people against 26 diseases. Overall, vaccines prevent an estimated two to three million deaths each year.

**Conflict-related detainees in Afghanistan tortured, ill-treated in government facilities – UN**

*24 April* – A record number of people detained by Afghan police say that have been tortured or ill-treated in the past year, according to a new United Nations report, which notes however that the Afghan Government has committed to eliminating torture and ill-treatment in national detention facilities.

"The continuing torture and ill-treatment of conflict-related detainees is a matter of serious concern, but we acknowledge the genuine commitment and the efforts of the Government to deal with this issue," said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan.

The report, Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees: Implementation of Afghanistan’s National Plan on the Elimination of Torture, is produced by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The findings are based on interviews with 469 conflict-related detainees conducted from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2016 in 62 detention facilities administered by the National Directorate of Security (NDS), Afghan National Police (ANP) and other Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) across the country.

Some 45 per cent of the people interviewed said that they were tortured or ill-treated, according to UNAMA and OHCHR.

The figure represents “the highest level documented since UNAMA began its current monitoring programme in 2010,” according to the UN political mission.

Among other findings, the UN reported that about 45 per cent of the child detainees – 38 out of 85 children interviewed – gave “credible” accounts of being tortured or ill-treated.

The torture appears to be linked to forcing confessions, according to the report, and stopped once detainees signed a “confession” – even in cases when the interviewed detainees did not understand or could not read what was written in the “confession.”

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, has spoken out against torture of detainees, saying that confessions produced in this matter are “totally unreliable.”

“People will say anything to stop the pain,” Mr. Zeid said.

He called for proper monitoring of detention facilities in Afghanistan and meaningful investigations to ensure that those accused of torture are brought to trial and held accountable.

“Ensuring accountability for such acts sends a strong message and helps to prevent future violations,” he added.

The report does commend the Government, however, for implementing its National Plan on the Elimination of Torture.
If the proposed legislative changes are adopted, Afghanistan would formally recognize the UN Committee against Torture to conduct in-country visits to detention centres and establish an independent monitoring body to visit the sites, according to the report.

Among other recommendations, the report urges Afghan authorities to provide access for victims of torture to “effective legal remedy and reparation for harm suffered.”

**Girls worst affected as conflict keeps more than 25 million children out of school – UNICEF**

*24 April* – Conflict and violence has driven more than 25 million children between 6 and 15 years old – about 22 per cent of children in that age group – from schools in warzones across 22 countries, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has said.

“At no time is education more important than in times of war,” Josephine Bourne, the Chief of Education at UNICEF, said in a news release issued today.

“Without education, how will children reach their full potential and contribute to the future and stability of their families, communities and economies?”

Schools also provide a safe haven to children, protecting them from risks of abuse, exploitation and recruitment by armed groups. However, in numerous conflict zones around the globe, the number of children out of school is increasing dramatically.

According to UNICEF, at the primary school level, South Sudan has the highest rate of out-of-school children with close to 72 per cent of children missing out on education, followed by Chad (50 per cent) and Afghanistan (46 per cent).

These three countries also account for highest rate of girls who are out of school, at 76 per cent for South Sudan, Afghanistan (55 per cent) and Chad (53 per cent).

Similarly, at the lower-secondary level, the highest rates are in Niger (68 per cent), South Sudan (60 per cent) and the Central African Republic (55 per cent).

Out-of-school rates for girls spike for this age group: Nearly three quarters of girls in Niger and two in three in both Afghanistan and the Central African Republic are not in school.

*Conflict can take away everything but it can never take away your knowledge – young refugee and education activist*

To help raise awareness on challenges that children affected and uprooted by conflict face in accessing school, UNICEF has been working with Muzoon Almellehan, a 19-year-old Syrian refugee and education activist.

Ms. Almellehan fled the violence in her home country about four years ago with her school books as her only belongings.

She spent nearly three years in Jordan, including 18 months in Za'atari refugee camp, where she made it her personal mission to get more girls into education, said UNICEF, noting that she went from tent to tent talking to parents to encourage them to send their children to school.

Dubbed ‘the Malala of Syria’, Ms. Almellehan has travelled to areas affected by conflict, including in Chad and in Nigeria and spoken to children facing these challenges.
“Conflict can take away your friends, your family, your livelihood, your home. It can try to strip you of your dignity, identity, pride and hope. But it can never take away your knowledge,” said Ms. Almellehan.

“Meeting children in Chad who had fled Boko Haram reminded me of my own experiences in Syria. Education gave me the strength to carry on. I wouldn't be here without it.”

**UNICEF response**

In its response to this grave crisis in conflict-affected countries, UNICEF is running programmes to get children back to learning, providing catch-up education and informal learning opportunities, training teachers, rehabilitating schools and distributing school furniture and supplies.

In Chad, one of the worst hit by this 'education crisis', UNICEF has so far this year provided school supplies to more than 58,000 students, distributed teaching materials to more than 760 teachers, and built hundreds of classrooms, learning spaces, latrines and sports fields. It has also supported the salaries of some 327 teachers for the 2016-2017 school year.

However, despite these efforts, funding shortfalls are affecting its efforts and only 40 per cent of the UN agency's 2017 education funding needs in Chad have been met.

**UN calls for probe and accountability following possible landmine blast in eastern Ukraine**

24 April – The United Nations today called for an investigation into a possible landmine explosion in eastern Ukraine after a member of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission was killed and two others were injured.

“We extend our condolences to the family of the [OSCE] member,” said the Spokesman for the UN Secretary-General, Stephane Dujarric, “and wishes for a full recovery of those injured.

The casualties are believed to have taken place during a patrol in Luhansk, the easternmost city in Ukraine. The OSCE is an impartial civilian mission tasked with observing and reporting on the situation in Ukraine.

Speaking on behalf of the UN, the Spokesperson today also called for holding those responsible for the explosion to account.

Reiterating the statement by Secretary-General António Guterres on 31 March, the Spokesperson urged the parties to the conflict to do their utmost to ensure the safety and security of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission.

The UN fully supports the efforts of the OSCE, the Trilateral Contact Group and the Normandy Four in their efforts to facilitate a resolution to the conflict in Ukraine in accordance with the Minsk Package of Measures, he added.
UNESCO launches first-ever policy guide on Holocaust education and genocide prevention

24 April – The United Nations educational and cultural agency has launched a first-ever policy guide for education on the Holocaust and, more broadly, genocide and mass atrocities.

“We place the fight against xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism at the heart of our action for peace,” UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Director-General Irina Bokova told the 15th plenary assembly of the World Jewish Congress in New York yesterday as she launched the new guide.

Education about the Holocaust and preventing genocide is designed to be a resource for policy-makers, curriculum developers and textbook writers to engage in or reinforce education about the Holocaust and the prevention of genocide.

It also provides effective responses and recommendations to facilitate debate on these issues in classrooms, and is the first step in a series of projects conducted in partnership with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and with the support of the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

“I am convinced education, culture and knowledge have become core security issues in the world today to combat violent extremism built on distortions of faith or history,” said Ms. Bokova.

Also in attendance was UN Secretary-General António Guterres, who had said he would be on the frontlines in the fight against anti-Semitism to make sure it is condemned and eradicated.

According to his spokesman, Mr. Guterres said that while there is hope that the horrors and the shock of the Holocaust would put an end to antisemitism, unfortunately, it is not the case, and antisemitism is alive and well.

In a world with a multiplication of forms of populism, xenophobia and hatred, he said antisemitism has gained an intensity that is unacceptable and that we need to fight with strong determination.

Mr. Guterres added that a modern form of antisemitism is the denial of the right of the State of Israel to exist, noting that Israel has an undeniable right to exist and to live in peace and security with its neighbours. And he reiterated his support for the two-state solution.

The World Jewish Congress is an international organization representing Jewish communities and associations in 100 countries around the world. It has been UNESCO's official partner since 1962.
Accountability for rights abuses in South Sudan 'more important than ever,' says senior UN official

23 April – A lack of accountability for crimes perpetrated during the ongoing conflict in South Sudan remains one of the country's “biggest challenges,” the Human Rights Director for the United Nations Mission (UNMISS) said today as he wrapped up a visit to the north-western Wau region.

Violence earlier in April led to the death of 19 Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) soldiers and at least 28 civilians, according to State officials. The killing of civilians in Wau town followed the ambush and killing of the SPLA soldiers by suspected SPLA-In Opposition fighters.

According to a news release, the Human Rights Division of UNMISS has interviewed 43 individuals, including eight women and two children, from 11 April, to collect information about alleged human rights violations perpetrated by government forces and aligned armed groups in Wau town on 10 April.

“I can confirm that, as of Sunday, nobody is being detained in connection with this attack against civilians,” said Eugene Nindorera. “I talked to victims and witnesses and was shaken to hear their testimonies of how they had to flee their houses after being attacked. It's more important than ever before that people are held accountable for the crimes they have committed.”

He further confirmed after meeting the Governor of Wau state that the Governor had established a committee to produce a comprehensive report to determine the motive for the attacks and identify the perpetrators in order to hold them accountable.

“I welcome this move,” Mr. Nindorera said, “and I encourage Governor Andrea Mayar Acho to exert his authority to ensure that people are held responsible for the crimes they have committed.”

Meanwhile, UNMISS has confirmed that by Thursday (20 April) the protection of civilians site adjacent to the UNMISS base in Wau had registered some 17,000 new arrivals, mainly women and children, while around 5,000 people had sought sanctuary inside the compound of the Wau Catholic Church. The influx of newly displaced people has led to over-crowding and pressure on humanitarian services.
UN and World Bank sign new partnership to build resilience for the most vulnerable

22 April – Building resilience for the world’s most vulnerable people by reducing poverty, promoting shared prosperity, enhancing food security, and sustaining peace in crisis-affected situations will be the focus of a new partnership framework agreed by the United Nations and World Bank.

According to a joint statement, the framework, signed by UN Secretary-General António Guterres and World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim, is in response to global calls for the two institutions to work more closely together on prevention and reducing needs, risks, and vulnerability as the world faces a spike in violent conflict.

The Secretary-General has been at World Bank headquarters in Washington, D.C., for the past two days for the Spring Meetings convened annually by the Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). They bring together central bankers, ministers of finance and development, private sector executives, and academics to discuss issues of global concern, such as the world economic outlook, poverty eradication, economic development, and aid effectiveness.

The UN and World Bank noted that human and economic costs of conflict are massive, affecting long-term stability and prospects for economic development and poverty reduction. Violent conflict drives 80 per cent of humanitarian needs costs, with the UN estimating that $22.1 billion is required in 2017 for humanitarian assistance – a sharp increase from the $9 billion needed just five years ago.

Under the framework agreed today, the UN and World Bank will work in complementary ways to: reduce the multi-dimensional risks of crisis and help prevent violent conflict; develop joint analyses and tools for more effective solutions; coordinate support to address protracted crises including forced displacement; and scale up impact by leveraging financing.

This framework […] is in response to global calls for our institutions to work more closely together on prevention and reducing needs, risks, and vulnerability as the world faces a spike in violent conflict.

Building on nearly a decade of efforts to strengthen UN-World Bank collaboration in crisis-affected situations, and updating an earlier framework signed in 2008, the new partnership also reflects developments since then, including commitments made at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit calling for a “new way of working” that shifts the focus from “meeting needs” to “reducing needs, risks, and vulnerability.”

The framework also notes the importance of aligning and leveraging financial resources, doing more through innovative, data-driven operational responses.

To advance this work, the two institutions will focus on building resilience in, among others: situations where there is a risk of violent conflict or ongoing conflict; situations with high levels of forced displacement; protracted and post-crisis situations; and when climate change and natural disasters affect these situations.

The framework notes areas for operational collaboration in which the UN and World Bank will:

- Identify and reduce critical multi-dimensional risks of crisis, and prevent violent conflict in relevant countries or regions within the mandate of both institutions;
- Coordinate support for situations of protracted crisis, including aligning strategies, objectives and collective outcomes, in particular for populations affected by forced displacement, and based on joint analyses and assessments.
- Develop joint analyses and tools where the complementarity of mandates may enable more effective solutions; and
- Scale up impact, by leveraging existing financing and comparative advantages, and ensuring that operational policies, frameworks, and tools used by both organizations facilitate cooperation and improve efficiency and complementarity.

UN welcomes release of 26 Qatari abductees in Iraq

22 April – The United Nations has welcomed the release and return to their country of 26 Qatari nationals abducted in Muthanna governorate, Iraq, in December 2015.

“We understand that the Qatari nationals were released unharmed. We are grateful to the Iraqi authorities and to all who contributed to the safe release of the abductees,” said a statement issued yesterday evening by UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric.

According to media reports, the 26 Qatari were kidnapped from a desert camp in Iraq's southern Muthanna province in mid-December 2015.

Mother Earth Day: Environmental and climate literacy vital for a cleaner, greener planet, says UN

22 April – Environmental and climate literacy is the engine not only for creating green voters and advancing environmental and climate laws and policies but also for accelerating green technologies and jobs, the United Nations is emphasizing on Mother Earth Day.

International Mother Earth Day, marked annually on 22 April, is celebrated to remind everyone that the Earth and its ecosystems provide us with life and sustenance.

It also recognizes a collective responsibility, as called for in the landmark 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, to promote harmony with nature and the Earth to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations of humanity.

The International Day provides an opportunity to raise public awareness around the world to the challenges regarding the well-being of the planet and all the life it supports, says the UN.

The theme for 2017 is 'Environmental and Climate Literacy.' Education is the foundation for progress. A global citizenry must be built that is fluent in the concepts of climate change and aware of its unprecedented threat to our planet. Everyone must be empowered with the knowledge to inspire action in defense of environmental protection, the world body stresses.

Recognizing that Mother Earth is a common expression for the planet Earth in a number of countries and regions, which reflects the interdependence that exists among human beings, other living species and the planet we all inhabit, and noting that Earth Day is observed each year in many countries, the UN General Assembly, through a resolution adopted in 2009, decided to designate 22 April as International Mother Earth Day.

It invites all Member States, the organizations of the United Nations system, international, regional and subregional
organizations, civil society, non-governmental organizations and relevant stakeholders to observe and raise awareness of International Mother Earth Day, as appropriate.