COP21: UN-backed platforms show greenhouse gas emission reductions surpass global emissions of iron and steel sector

4 December - A new report by Yale University finds that the combined greenhouse gas emission reduction commitments recorded in two United Nations-backed platforms by cities, regions and companies alone surpasses the global emissions of the iron and steel sector.

Released on the eve of Action Day at the UN climate change conference (COP21), the academic report also finds that 15 of the world’s 20 largest banks, totaling close to $2 trillion dollars in market value, have made commitments to act and green bonds worth close to $50 billion are financing climate projects.

“The many thousands of governors, mayors, companies and investors who have so publicly committed to climate action are telling governments that our job in Paris is a climate change agreement that opens every possible door to help them push further and faster ahead,” said Laurent Fabius, the French Foreign Minister and President of COP21, at a press conference.

According to a press release issued by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – the organizer of the conference – the findings are “impressive” but actually understate the scale of total global climate action because they are based on data from only two platforms supported by the United Nations, France and Peru, where national, regional and civic governments and business publicly enter their commitments to take action on climate change.

“It is evident that this wonderful set of recorded climate actions is only a part of much wider, broader action towards a sustainable future. I know there are many tens of thousands of other climate initiatives out there and I welcome all who can to put their efforts, pledges and commitments on the record with us,” Mr. Fabius added.
Yale analyzed over 10,000 climate commitments made by cities, regions, businesses and investors, many involving the cooperation of national governments, who formally recorded their pledges in the Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action (NAZCA) and under the banner of the Lima to Paris Action Agenda (LPAA).

Since the opening of COP21 on Monday, leaders of dozens of LPAA cooperative initiatives announced new commitments and many new cooperative initiatives are being launched. At tomorrow’s Action Day, government leaders, including French President François Hollande, CEOs and film makers are expected to speak to this “exceptional global response” to climate change and underline the need to press ahead as quickly as possible.

According to UNFCCC, the growing wave of worldwide action by civic actors to reduce emissions and make societies and economies resilient to climate change was matched ahead of the Paris conference by an “unprecedented response” from governments. So far, 185 developed and developing countries, together representing a footprint of almost 95 per cent of global greenhouse gases, have submitted national climate action plans as their contribution to the new agreement.

“Government policies and actions alongside an ever growing number of companies, investors, cities, regions and provinces are aligning as never before. Collectively they do not yet keep us below a 2 degree Celsius temperature rise,” said UNFCCC Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres.

“But they keep that objective well within the affordable reach of humanity and they underwrite the truth that the clean energy transformation is already irreversible. Paris must trigger the next essential impetus towards that objective in terms of pace and scale,” she added.

Action Day will kick-off tomorrow morning with a message from the International Space Station.

Celebrity chefs serve up free meals from discarded food – UN environment agency

4 December - For those who have never tried ‘rejected’ veggie curry made with ‘saved’ coconut milk served with ‘broken rice’ and washed down with corn cob tea, two United Nations agencies have joined up with an Australian food charity for an event with a menu that also included ‘fish scrap cake’ and ‘rescued’ mango relish accompanied by ‘leftover’ nine-grain followed by ‘rescued’ bread pudding for dessert.

If you were in Bangkok, Thailand, this week, those were some of dishes prominent chefs and other food lovers from Thailand and Australia were preparing with ingredients that are usually discarded to promote awareness of 1.3 billion tons of food wasted each year.

The Think.Eat.Save event was organized by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the Australian food charity OzHarvest in support of the new UN Sustainable Development Goals target to halve global food waste along production and supply chains by 2030.

“UNEP is tackling food waste head-on with its Think.Eat.Save methodology for waste prevention at city, country and company-level,” Kaveh Zahedi, UNEP Regional Director and Representative for Asia and the Pacific, said in a press release.

Modelled on OzHarvest’s annual Think.Eat.Save events, which feed thousands of people across Australia, the Bangkok event had celebrity chefs like Duangporn ‘Bo’ Songvisava, Dylan ‘Lan’ Jones, Chris Miller and Australian OzHarvest ‘Chef for a Cause,’ Travis Harvey, who in May this year opened Australia’s first-ever food waste pop-up café, design a lunch menu using surplus produce saved from landfill or sourced from local farmers and suppliers.

The event is part of the Think.Eat.Save campaign which was launched by the UNEP, the Food and Agricultural Organization and partners in 2013 to change the culture of food waste which results in 1.3 billion tonnes of food wasted globally each year, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. The total carbon footprint of food produced but not eaten is

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3.3 Gt of carbon dioxide equivalent.

An estimated 20 to 40 per cent of food is lost or wasted along the supply chain in Asia Pacific because food is lost in transit between rural production areas and urban consumers and because of poor quality roads, hot and humid weather conditions, and poor packaging, according to UNEP.

**COP21: in Paris, mayors and celebrities join UN launch of report on boosting investment towards climate smart cities**

4 December - Proven innovative policies and mechanisms are unlocking investment for much-needed climate-smart infrastructure in cities, according to a new report launched today at Paris City Hall by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and international partners.

“Your efforts enable your citizens to reduce their carbon footprint, breathe cleaner air and live more healthy lives,” Mr. Ban told mayors and local leaders from all regions of the world during an event of the Climate Summit for Local Leaders, taking place on the margins of the UN climate change conference (COP21).

Celebrities attending the event included Leonardo DiCaprio, Robert Redford and Sean Penn, advocates for climate action who support UN efforts towards building a sustainable future.

Since the beginning of the week, governments have been meeting to adopt what is hoped will be an ambitious global climate change agreement to limit global temperature rise to below two degrees Celsius. The UN chief said mayors and local leaders “are essential to this effort.”

“You know, from the ground up, how important it is to translate words into action,” he told them. “Your example can inspire national governments to act more boldly.”

The UN chief is also underlining that the recommendations of The State of City Climate Finance can help unlock the capital needed to make major investments for climate action in cities: “We know these solutions can work – they just need to be scaled up. I urge governments, banks and the international community to act on these practical recommendations.”

The report makes five recommendations for mobilizing investment in low-emission, climate-resilient urban infrastructure. It analyzes the obstacles that many cities face in obtaining the financing they need, including uncertainty over regulatory and tax policies, lack of expertise in project development, lack of control over infrastructure planning, high transaction costs and lack of proven funding models at the city and regional level.

According to the UN, urban areas account for over 70 per cent of energy-related CO2 emissions, and the world’s cities produce almost half of all global greenhouse gas emissions. Cities are also on the front lines of climate impacts and urgently need to build resilience, with more than 80 per cent of the overall annual global costs of adaption to climate change estimated to be borne by urban areas, according to the World Bank.

“There is no way that we get to two degrees or to 1.5 degrees without building and living in, and transporting ourselves around cities in a very different way than we do today,” Rachel Kyte, the World Bank Group’s Special Envoy for Climate Change, told the UN News Centre in an interview.

“At the same time cities are growing. In the next 30 years another two billion people will move into cities, and so we have to find a way to help cities get the financing necessary to become livable, green, clean, competitive, job-rich cities,” she added.

The study, which led to the report, was issued by the Cities Climate Finance Leadership Alliance, a coalition of over 40 banks, governments and civil society organizations launched by Mr. Ban at the Climate Summit he convened in September 2014 in New York.
The aim of the Alliance is to accelerate investment in low-emission, climate resilient infrastructure in cities, and to close the investment gap in urban areas over the next fifteen years. Alliance members are now reportedly working on a plan to help translate the report recommendations into action.

Earlier today, the Secretary-General gave opening remarks at a “Compact of States and Regions” event, a group which was also launched just over a year ago. Mr. Ban said the world needs “more Governors, Premiers and Chief Ministers to invest in low-emission and climate-resilient development.”

“Today, the Compact is launching a new global initiative called Regions Adapt in which its members commit to develop climate adaptation plans and report on their progress,” he explained. “Then there is the Under2MOU. In this, 57 state and regional leaders have raised the bar still further. They are committing to reduce emissions by 80 per cent by 2050.”

Mr. Ban noted that “it could be a game changer” and described this commitment as one of the most ambitious ones made to date from states and provinces worldwide.

As Ethiopia battles devastating drought, UN sends in emergency health team

With Ethiopia battling its worst drought in 30 years due to the El Niño weather pattern, with 8.2 million people already in urgent need of food aid, the United Nations has sent an emergency health team to help support the Government’s response to a crisis that is expected to become even worse over the next eight months.

“The food security emergency is coming against a background of multiple ongoing epidemics in the country,” the interim Director of Emergency Risk Management and Humanitarian Response at the UN World Health Organization (WHO), Michelle Gayer, said today.

“This creates an additional burden for people’s health as well as the health system as malnutrition, especially in children, predisposes them to more severe infectious disease, which can kill quickly,” she added.

The current El Niño, among the strongest on record, caused by a cyclical warming in the Pacific Ocean, affects climate over a wide swathe of the world, bringing more floods to some areas and longer droughts to others, as well as stronger typhoons and cyclones.

Ethiopia has experienced two poor growing seasons in 2015. Due to delayed rains attributed to El Niño, its main annual harvest was severely reduced. Every month since January has seen an increase in the number of malnourished children, with 400,000 likely to face severe malnutrition in 2016. In addition, some 700,000 expecting and recent mothers are at risk for severe malnutrition.

Anticipating a major increase in health risks, WHO has mobilized drugs, equipment and human resources. Vulnerable populations, such as children requiring therapeutic feeding and health care, are particularly at risk of illness and death. El Niño can lead to significant increases in diseases, such as malaria, dengue fever, diarrhoea and cholera – major killers of children.

Ethiopia is one of the most affected countries by El Niño thus far. “We are very concerned that right now, there are not enough resources to provide an effective and coordinated health response across Ethiopia,” WHO Emergency Response Coordinator in Ethiopia Kebba Jaiteh said. “Without a proper response, El Niño could reverse years of progress on health for Ethiopians.”

WHO and partners predict increases in communicable, water- and vector-borne diseases and medical complications from malnutrition, and there are also concerns about increasing cases of acute watery diarrhoea. Many disease outbreaks are currently ongoing with response already being organized by the Ethiopian Health Ministry and partners.
After a recent measles outbreak, the Ministry and partners started vaccinating 5.3 million children under five in hotspot districts, but a significant funding gap remains for those between five and 14 years. While response plans are still being finalized, WHO estimates its initial funding request will require more than $8 million.

“This is just the beginning of what the health sector is going to need in the coming months to address the health consequences of El Niño in Ethiopia, across the Horn of Africa, southern Africa and in many other parts of the world,” Dr. Gayer said.

Southeast Asian countries pledge cooperation on Bay of Bengal mixed migration – UN refugee agency

4 December - Southeast Asian countries today affirmed that the only way to reduce loss of life at sea is by working together on comprehensive and sustainable approaches to mixed migration movements, the United Nations refugee agency said as the resumption of dangerous sea journeys in the region loomed.

“Unless conditions improve in their home areas, more people are expected to cross the Bay of Bengal in the coming months, seeking safety and stability in countries in South-East Asia,” according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Since 2014, some 95,000 people have made the dangerous journey in the Bay of Bengal – which is bordered by Sri Lanka and India to the west, Bangladesh to the north, and Myanmar and the northern part of the Malay Peninsula to the east – and the Andaman Sea to its southeast, with more than 1,100 dying at sea and hundreds more found buried in unmarked mass graves, according to UNHCR.

“With an unprecedented 60 million persons displaced today, it has become clear that forced displacement issues are a global phenomenon that no country can address or resolve on its own,” said Volker Türk, the UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection.

Mr. Türk, who was in the Thai capital of Bangkok where he was meeting with delegates from more than 20 countries, as well as representatives of international organizations, at the Second Special Meeting on Irregular Migration in the Indian Ocean, also noted “the numbers we are seeing in this region can be managed.”

Countries in the region today affirmed that the only way to reduce loss of life at sea is by working together on comprehensive and sustainable approaches to mixed migration movements.

UNHCR said it hopes that today’s meeting would help set up a regional mechanism to coordinate efforts not just on law enforcement but also on locating and rescuing boats in distress, facilitating passengers to land and providing reception facilities in accordance with States' international obligations.

“Until the refugees among them can return home in a safe, dignified and voluntary way, we will need a creative form of temporary refuge or alternative humanitarian stay that ensures access to health, education [and] work,” said Mr. Türk. “Allowing them to work in labour-importing countries is a win-win: It gives them dignity and self-reliance, and eases the burden on host countries,” he added.

The meeting today took stock of achievements since the previous meeting in late May – when some 5,000 Rohingya and Bangladeshis were eventually disembarked after weeks adrift at sea – in a bid to better prepare for future movements.

Mr. Turk noted that on a recent visit to Myanmar’s Rakhine state, he saw progress in seeking solutions for internally displaced people, but had also heard “legitimate grievances” that remained to be addressed, including ensuring fundamental rights such as freedom of movement and access to services.

“We hope that the new Government will give this issue the attention it deserves, in light of the fact that the absence of these
rights triggers displacement and has, as a result, international repercussions,” he said.

The refugee agency official also said Sustainable Development Goals offer a framework for addressing root causes and ensuring that no one is left behind in health, education, work and legal identity, among other rights.

**Fresh fighting in South Sudan forces thousands to flee into remote eastern DR Congo**

**4 December** - More than 4,000 people have fled to a remote region of eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) due to recent fighting between local groups, known as the ‘Arrow Boys’ and the South Sudanese Army in the Western Equatoria region of South Sudan, the United Nations refugee agency said today.

“Two UNHCR teams have so far this week registered 3,464 newly arrived refugees in areas near the border in DRC’s Dungu Territory. They also report that 1,206 Congolese refugees, previously in South Sudan, have fled to the same area as a result of the fighting,” said Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesperson Adrian Edwards during the regular bi-weekly press briefing in Geneva.

Mr. Edwards added that the Ezo settlement in South Sudan, originally home to nearly 3,300 Congolese refugees, is now virtually empty, with the remaining refugee families having fled to nearby fields.

According to Mr. Edwards, registration in DRC is ongoing in areas along the border, where more arrivals are being reported, and, at the same time, the closest UNHCR office is some 400 kilometres away in Bunia, causing delays for the UNHCR team to reach the localities where refugees are.

“Ninety per cent of the South Sudanese refugees are women and children. Some had walked for three days, carrying only their most important belongings. Most men have stayed behind in South Sudan,” said Mr. Edwards.

He also observed that some refugees have been sleeping in the open or in abandoned huts without roofing, and most are being sheltered by local families, among them former Sudanese refugees from earlier conflicts.

Mr. Edwards said that UNHCR has distributed plastic sheeting for 409 people, but he underscored that the most urgent needs of the refugees are shelter, food and medical care.

The nearest hospital is approximately 80 kilometres away, said Mr. Edwards adding that further assessments will help in determining the support needed, as many refugees have refused to return to South Sudan if there is no peace.

Highlighting the consequences of the conflict in South Sudan which erupted two years ago, Mr. Edwards said that the crisis has forced nearly 2.3 million people to flee their homes, 650,000 of these across borders as refugees and 1.65 million displaced inside the country.
New UN ‘bedside tool’ will help prevent and reduce maternal and newborn deaths worldwide

4 December - The World Health Organization (WHO) announced today a new checklist for healthcare workers that will help reduce maternal and newborn deaths with “a single and practical bedside tool” designed to make a difference for women and infants in various settings around the world.

“Worldwide, the majority of maternal and newborn deaths occur around the time of birth, typically within the first 24 hours after childbirth,” WHO said in its announcement. “Most of these deaths are preventable,” the agency stressed.

The agency’s new Safe Childbirth Checklist and Implementation Guide targets the major causes of maternal and newborn complications and deaths, including post-partum haemorrhage, infection, obstructed labour, preeclampsia and birth asphyxia.

“Far too many women and children are still dying in childbirth from preventable causes often linked to poor quality of care,” according to Dr. Marie-Paule Kieny, WHO Assistant Director-General, Health Systems and Innovation. “The WHO Safe Childbirth Checklist will help health care workers follow the essential care standards for every birth.”

WHO said of the more than 130 million births occurring each year, an estimated 303,000 result in the mother’s death, 2.6 million in stillbirth, and another 2.7 million in a newborn’s death within the first 28 days. The majority of these deaths occur in low-resource settings, often lacking skilled birth attendants, it said.

The checklist “synthesizes existing evidence-based WHO guidelines and recommendations into a single and practical bedside tool targeted at improving adherence to best practices, including adequate communication around the time of delivery,” the agency said.

WHO said the checklist was first piloted for usability in nine countries in Africa and Asia.

In September, all countries agreed to a new set of Sustainable Development Goals, which include targets to substantially reduce global maternal and newborn deaths.

To advance this agenda, WHO and partners also launched a new Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s and Adolescents’ Health 2016-2030, a roadmap for countries on what evidence-based investments and actions are required to end the preventable deaths of women, children and adolescents’ and to improve their overall health and well-being.

The checklist was developed and tested in partnership with Ariadne Labs, a joint centre of Brigham and Women’s Hospital and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.
Reports of abuses by Iraqi, Kurdish forces against Sunni Arabs increasing, UN rights office says

4 December - Reports of human rights abuses against Sunni Arabs by Iraqi and Kurdish security forces in parts of Iraq reclaimed from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) are increasing, ranging from looting to extra-judicial killings, senior United Nations officials said today.

“Reports indicate that Iraqi security forces, Kurdish security forces and their respective affiliated militias have been responsible for looting and destruction of property belonging to the Sunni Arab communities, forced evictions, abductions, illegal detention and, in some cases, extra-judicial killings,” Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) spokesperson Cécile Pouilly told a news briefing in Geneva.

Voicing concern at these reports, she also noted that gross human rights violations continue to be documented in ISIL-controlled areas, including the burning and beheading of civilians.

A joint report by OHCHR and the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in July highlighted the conflict's continuing “terrible” and deadly toll on civilians, particularly in ISIL-controlled areas, but also documented violations by Iraqi Security Forces and affiliated forces, including indiscriminate airstrikes and shelling as well as actions of reprisal against civilians.

“We urge the Government of Iraq to investigate all human rights violations and abuses, including those committed against the Arab Sunni communities, to bring the perpetrators to justice and to ensure that victims have access to appropriate remedies,” Ms. Pouilly said today.

She noted that Sunni Arabs have also faced increasing discrimination, harassment and violence from other ethnic and religious groups who accuse them of supporting ISIL, and are reported to have only limited access to basic services and essential goods, such as water, food, shelter and medical care.

She voiced particular concern at the situation of some 1,300 Sunni Arabs stuck near Sinjar in the no-man’s-land between Kurdish security forces and ISIL.

Turning to ISIL, she said OHCHR has received reports that some 16 mass graves containing the bodies of individuals murdered by ISIL have been discovered in Sinjar.

“Gross human rights violations continue to be documented in ISIL-controlled areas,” she added. “Individuals suspected of disloyalty or of not conforming to the ideology of the group continue to be targeted, and there are reports of kidnappings and the burning and beheading of civilians.”

She also called on the Iraqi authorities to ensure that the return of internally displaced people to their places of origin is carried out in accordance with humanitarian principles – voluntarily, in dignity and safety without coercion or harassment of any kind, and that they are guaranteed access to essential services such as shelter, water, food, sanitation, and healthcare.

Meanwhile, UNAMI and the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) voiced grave concern at the conflict’s heavy toll on children, with 189 killed and 301 injured since the beginning of 2015.

“UNAMI and UNICEF urge all parties to the conflict to abide by the principles of proportionality and distinction in the course of military operations, to protect children and other civilians from the effects of violence to the maximum extent possible, and to respect the civilian nature of schools and medical facilities,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Special Ján Kubiš and UNICEF Iraq Representative Peter Hawkins said in a joint statement.
“UNAMI and UNICEF remain very concerned with the safety of Iraq’s children who continue to suffer from the effects of hostilities across the country. Ongoing operations in Ramadi, Mosul, Tala’afar and other conflict-affected areas in Iraq raise the risk of additional grave violations of child rights.”

At end of International Year of Soils, UN chief appeals for reverse in rate of soil degradation

4 December - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is marking the second World Soil Day and the end of the International Year of Soils with an appeal to reverse the current rate of soil degradation because of expanding cities, deforestation, unsustainable land use and management practices, pollution, overgrazing and climate change.

“The challenge before us is clear,” Mr. Ban said in his message on the Day, noting that the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that about 33 per cent of global soils are already degraded. “This trend must be reversed through sustainable soil management practices,” he said.

The UN chief went on to say that “sustainable soil management is fundamental to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals – many of which reflect the centrality of soils to sustain life, food, and water.

The UN General Assembly declared 2015 as the International Year of Soils, which aimed to create full awareness of civil society and decision makers about the fundamental roles of soils for human’s life. The Year also sought to achieve full recognition of the prominent contributions of soils to food security, climate change adaptation and mitigation, essential ecosystem services, poverty alleviation and sustainable development.

“The multiple roles of soils often go unnoticed,” according to José Graziano da Silva, FAO Director-General, who said that “soils don't have a voice, and few people speak out for them. They are our silent ally in food production.”

At FAO headquarters in Rome today, the agency is marking the official closure of the 2015 International Year, this year’s celebration of World Soil Day, as well as the launch of the much-awaited Status of the World Soil Resources Report.

Throughout the year, FAO and its global partners raised awareness that the planet’s soils are in danger because of expanding cities, deforestation, unsustainable land use and management practices, pollution, overgrazing and climate change, warning that the current rate of soil degradation threatens the capacity to meet the needs of future generations.

According to FAO, the demands of a growing population for food, feed and fibre are estimated to result in a 60 per cent increase by 2050.

In his message, Secretary-General Ban also cited the link between the sustainable soil management and climate change as he made his second visit to Paris to help secure agreement at the UN climate change conference, widely referred to as COP21.

“We need to ensure the sustainable use of our terrestrial ecosystems while we combat climate change and its impacts,” he said. “The carbon sequestration capacity of soils is an essential contribution to mitigating climate change.”

“Let us promote sustainable soil management rooted in proper soil governance and sound investment,” the UN chief said. “Together, we can promote the cause of soils, a truly solid ground for life.”
Ensuring fundamental freedoms vital to peaceful elections in Venezuela – UN rights experts

4 December - Voicing concerns over deteriorating restrictions on freedoms of expression, association and assembly in Venezuela, United Nations human rights experts today called on the Government to guarantee the safety of all individuals and their peaceful participation in the parliamentary elections, set for this Sunday.

“Reinstituting full space for the freedoms of expression, association and assembly, and ensuring accountability in all reports on violence is key to dissipating political tensions in Venezuela and to ensuring democratic governance,” David Kaye, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression, and Maina Kiai, Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, said jointly in a news release.

Warning that the recent killing and detention of prominent opposition politicians is “a very worrying sign” of the deteriorating environment for political participation, the experts emphasized that the “authorities must ensure the safety of those trying to exchange ideas in the last days of the electoral process.”

The safety of all, regardless of political views, is a bare minimum requirement of a peaceful election, stressed the rights experts.

Nevertheless, they stressed that the attacks were only “the tip of the iceberg,” and warned of deeper and more systematic challenges for public participation in the country.

“Democracy requires […] an environment where people can express political opinions, organize for political purposes and peacefully assemble – all without fear of retribution,” said Ms. Kiai, underscoring the significance of people’s rights to free speech, while Mr. Kaye condemned the limitations on media, saying that punishment and threats against journalists are “incompatible with international standards.”

Sharing their concerns to the Venezuela authorities through a communication, both human rights experts further reiterated their commitment to work with the Government to address the issue.

Special Rapporteurs, who are not UN staff and are independent from any government or organization, are appointed by and report back to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council.