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Global response ‘keeps door open’ to limit temperature rise to 2 degrees Celsius – UN

30 October - An unprecedented worldwide effort is underway to combat climate change, building confidence that nations can cost effectively meet their stated objective of keeping global temperature rise to under 2 degrees Celsius, the United Nations said today.

A new report issued today by the secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) assesses the collective impact of over 140 national climate action plans, called Intended Nationally Determined Contributions or INDCs, and says that together, they can dramatically slow global emissions into the atmosphere.

INDCs will form the basis of the agreement expected to be reached at the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP21), to be held in Paris, France starting at the end of November.

“These INDCs – or national climate action plans – represent a clear and determined down payment on a new era of climate ambition from the global community of nations,” said Christiana Figueres, UNFCCC Executive Secretary, in a press release.

“Governments from all corners of the Earth have signalled through their INDCs that they are determined to play their part according to their national circumstances and capabilities,” she continued.

Ms. Figueres highlighted that if countries fully implement their INDCs, these plans together will begin to make a significant dent in the growth of greenhouse gas emissions.

“As a floor they provide a foundation upon which ever higher ambition can be built. I am confident that these INDCs are not
the final word in what countries are ready to do and achieve over time – the journey to a climate-safe future is underway,” she noted, adding that the agreement to be inked in Paris can catalyze that transition.

The report captures the overall impact of national climate plans covering 146 countries as of 1 October. This comprises 119 separate INDCs from 147 Parties to the UNFCCC, including the EU, a single Party representing 28 countries. In the past month, more INDCs have been submitted, and UNFCC says submissions are likely to continue.

Meanwhile, the 146 plans include all developed nations and three quarters of developing countries under the UNFCCC, covering 86 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions – almost four times the level of the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, the world’s first international emission reduction treaty that required emissions cuts from industrialized countries.

One of the key findings is that the INDCs will bring global average emissions per capita down by as much as 8 per cent by 2025 and 9 per cent by 2030.

“The INDCs have the capability of limiting the forecast temperature rise to around 2.7 degrees Celsius by 2100, by no means enough but a lot lower than the estimated four, five, or more degrees of warming projected by many prior to the INDCs,” said Ms. Figueres.

According to UNFCCC, the report does not directly assess implications for temperature change by the end of the century under the INDCs because information on emissions beyond 2030 is required. But other independent analyses have, based on a range of assumptions, methodologies and data sources, attempted to estimate the impact of the INDCs on temperature leading to a range of average estimates below, at or above 3 degrees Celsius.

In addition, UNFCCC noted that all analyses deliver more or less similar emission levels in 2025 and 2030 and all confirm that the INDCs, if fully implemented, are an important advance on previous scenarios.

“These plans set a determined course, clearly recognizing that successful climate action achieves not only low emissions but a host of other economic and social benefits for governments, citizens and business,” Ms. Figueres stressed.

“Backed by financial support for developing countries, a clear long-term destination of climate neutrality in the second half of the century and a ratcheting up of ambition in a structured, transparent and timely way, the INDCs provide an inspiring part of what will become the Paris package,” she added.

**UN officials say good urban design key to ensuring sustainable, inclusive cities**

30 October - On the occasion of World Cities Day, top United Nations officials are highlighting the key role of urban design in building sustainable, socially integrated and prosperous cities and human settlements.

“Good design can help tackle climate change. It reduces the impacts of disaster. It can help make our cities safer, cleaner, and more equal and integrative. It promotes equal access to services, jobs and opportunities, and fosters contentment,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in his message for the Day, observed annually on 31 October.

The theme of this year’s observance – the first following the adoption by Member States in September of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals – is “Designed to Live Together.”

The Secretary-General noted that the challenges of rapid urbanization figure prominently in the newly adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Goal 11 embodies a commitment to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.”

“And as part of an integrated agenda, cities and human settlements have an important role to play across the 17-goal
spectrum,” he said.

Mr. Ban added that the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), to be held in Quito, Ecuador in October 2016, will be an opportunity to discuss a New Urban Agenda that can harness the power and forces behind urbanization and mobilize them for the common good.

In his statement, the Executive Director of UN-Habitat, Joan Clos, said that urban form is the combination of streets, building typologies and networks of public spaces. “They form the underlying structure of the city, a skeleton around which people’s lives are built and activities carried out.”

Cities are one of “the most complex human creations,” he said, adding that good design contributes to social integration, equality and diversity; fosters sustainable use of shared resources; inspires lively neighbourhoods; and can make cities safer.

It can also foster proximity to jobs and services; help to create clean, healthy cities; and anticipate climate change and reduce the impacts of disasters.

**Head of mission urges release of remaining UN personnel taken hostage in South Sudan**

30 October - The head of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) today condemned the actions of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLM/A) in Opposition for holding UN personnel hostage, and refuted allegations that the Mission was transporting weapons and fuel for the South Sudanese group.

On Monday, 18 UNMISS uniformed personnel and 12 South Sudanese UNMISS contractors had been transporting fuel by barge from Malakal to the UNMISS base in Renk when they were stopped by approximately 100 SPLA in Opposition soldiers at Kaka in Manyo County.

The Opposition soldiers then separated the UNMISS personnel and contractors from their communications equipment, disarmed the uniformed personnel and seized the barge and its cargo of fuel, according to a statement issued by the Mission.

Following dialogue with the Opposition leadership, UNMISS was able to extract the 18 uniformed personnel yesterday. However, contrary to claims made in the media, the Opposition failed to release the 12 South Sudanese contractors, the weapons of the uniformed personnel, the barge and its cargo.

“I call on the SPLM/A in Opposition leader and commanders to release the contractors and all UNMISS property without delay,” Ellen Margrethe Løj, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of UNMISS, said in the statement.

“I am adamant that the taking of UNMISS personnel as hostages is equivalent to an attack on the UN. I underline that such attacks against UN peacekeepers and other personnel may constitute a war crime.”

Ms. Løj also strongly refuted reports in the media that the barge had been transporting weapons cargo of any kind, and emphasized that all of the fuel cargo was intended for resupplying the UNMISS base in Renk, and not for the use of the Opposition.
Millions of children deprived of education in war-torn Iraq, says UNICEF

30 October - The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) today said that an estimated two million children in Iraq have no access to school and warned that an additional 1.2 million may be at the risk of dropping out due to continuous violence disrupting academic years.

“The impact of conflict, violence and displacement on education in Iraq is nothing short of devastating,” said Peter Hawkins, UNICEF’s Representative in Iraq.

“Large numbers of children – those in host communities, displaced from their homes, as well as refugee children from Syria – continue to experience significant disruptions to their education, putting Iraq at risk of losing an entire generation to conflict,” he added in a news release.

According to UNICEF, nearly one million children are displaced, 70 per cent of whom have already lost an entire year of school.

Additionally, 67 attacks on schools and education personnel were reported in the last year.

UNICEF estimates indicate that about one in five schools or approximately 5,300 schools are either severely damage or converted to shelter for displaced families or used for military purposes by parties to the conflict, making them unusable.

Moreover, the schools that remain in use are overburdened with class sizes reaching as high as 60 students and operating in two or three shifts daily, which significantly reduces the amount of time children have to learn.

The agency also reported that nearly 14,000 teachers fled northern Iraq due to the ongoing violence.

As an overall response to the Iraqi crisis, UNICEF and its partners provided access to education to nearly half a million children in the last year.

They also built 40 new schools and installed 141 prefabricated classrooms across the country, established 1,585 temporary learning spaces that enables more than 220,000 displaced children to continue their education and they also distributed learning materials for over 200,000 children.

In addition, they distributed cholera prevention materials such as books, posters and pamphlets to over 5,000 schools.

The agency said that it is coordinating with Government partners to distribute these materials to additional schools across Iraq during the first weeks of the school year.

UNICEF reaffirmed its commitment to increase children’s education in Iraq, while adding that it requires $68 million by the end of the year, of which $12 million are needed immediately.
Algeria: UN agency delivers aid to flood-hit refugees in Tindouf

30 October - After heavy rains in southwestern Algeria last week resulted in devastating floods, the United Nations refugee agency has airlifted emergency aid to 11,000 families living in five camps in the region.

"The extent of devastation in Tindouf is overwhelming, with pooled water as far as the eye can see. Thousands of families lost their homes overnight and much of their personal belongings," said the representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Hamdi Bukhari.

"The airlifted relief items will partially compensate their losses, but rebuilding their lives will be an extraordinary task, and UNHCR stands ready to support this effort. Shelter, food and water are the most urgent needs," he added.

The seasonal storms damaged or destroyed mud-brick homes, shops, hospitals, schools, and roads at Laayoune, Boujdour, Awserd, Smara, and Dakhla camps, housing thousands of Sahrawi refugees.

The first of two aircraft from Accra, Ghana, brought 5,000 fleece blankets, 1,000 kitchen sets, 1,000 jerry cans, 5,000 plastic sheets, 750 family tents, and 200 plastic rolls to distribute to as many as 11,000 people, with a second aid flight due to arrive today, according to UNHCR.

The agency is leading the emergency response, with support from the Algerian Government, other UN agencies and partners on the ground. It is also leading a shelter assessment to determine the number of damaged houses that will need immediate rehabilitation before the arrival of winter.

This month marked the 40th anniversary of the Sahrawis being sheltered in the camps near Tindouf. They fled the territory of Western Sahara in 1975, making it one of the most protracted refugee situations in the world.

Prior to the flooding, UN agencies and humanitarian organizations active in the Tindouf Sahrawi refugee operation were facing funding shortfalls that restricted their regular activities, including provision of food aid.

UNHCR, the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) this week made a joint appeal for $20 million to respond to the crisis.

UN strongly condemns attack on Iranian exiles camp in Iraq

30 October - The United Nations has strongly condemned the attack that occurred Thursday evening on a camp located near Baghdad International Airport that houses over 2,100 Iranian exiles and called for the perpetrators to be brought to justice.

The attack on Camp Hurriya (Camp Liberty) left at least 26 residents dead and many more wounded, and also reportedly caused casualties among the Iraqi Security Forces in the vicinity of the camp, according to a statement issued by the spokesperson for the Secretary-General.

“The Secretary-General calls on the Government of Iraq to promptly investigate the incident and bring the perpetrators to justice. There can be no impunity for such attacks. He reminds the Government of Iraq of its responsibility to provide for the safety and security of the Camp's residents.”

The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) also urged the Government “to do its utmost” to abide by its commitments in
providing adequate security for the residents of the camp and to launch an independent investigation into the killings.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) noted that the authorities have evacuated the injured to Baghdad hospitals, adding that the full extent of the casualties and damage to the camp is still being ascertained.

“This is a most deplorable act, and I am greatly concerned at the harm that has been inflicted on those living at Camp Liberty,” said High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres.

“Every effort must continue to be made for the injured and to identify and bring to account those responsible.”

The residents of Camp Hurriya, many of whom are members of a group known as the People’s Mojahedeen of Iran, are staying there while UNHCR carries out a process to determine their refugee status, and resettle them outside of the country, in line with an agreement signed in December 2011 between the UN and the Iraqi Government.

Global tourism grew by more than 4 per cent this year, UN tourism barometer shows

30 October - The number of tourists travelling the world during the first eight months of this year reached 810 million, a more than 4 per cent increase from the same period in 2014, thanks to “robust” travel to Europe, according to the United Nations World Tourism Barometer.

According to the barometer, which provides an overview of international tourism, Europe – the world’s most visited regional destination – recorded a robust 5 per cent increase in international tourist arrivals, the highest across all regions and “notable” for a rather mature region.

Asia and the Pacific, the Americas and the Middle East all enjoyed 4 per cent growth, while limited data available for Africa points to an estimated 5 per cent decrease, with North Africa decreasing by 10 per cent and Sub-Saharan Africa by 3 per cent.

“Although demand has been positive overall, tourism flows have been determined to some extent by the comparatively strong currency fluctuations,” said the Madrid-based UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), which produced the barometer.

China continues to report double-digit growth in outbound travel, benefiting Japan, Thailand, the United States and various European destinations, it said, while among the other emerging markets, India, South Africa and Egypt reported double-digit growth in tourism expenditure.

“Meanwhile, expenditure from the Russian Federation and Brazil was significantly down, reflecting the economic constrains in both markets and the depreciation of the ruble and the real against virtually all other currencies,” according to the barometer.

Overall, international tourist arrivals grew by 4.3 per cent in the first eight months of 2015 and overnight visitors travelling the world between January and August 2015 reached 810 million, 33 million more than in the same period of 2014.

“Sustained growth in international tourism is very positive news for all as the sector increasingly contributes to creating jobs, promoting trade and investment, developing infrastructure and fostering inclusive economic growth,” said UNWTO Secretary-General Taleb Rifai.

But Mr. Rifai warned against complacency, saying that while advancing fundamental issues such as travel facilitation and connectivity, “sustainability” needs to remain a core priority.
“As world leaders prepare to meet in Paris next December for the 21st Session of the Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21/CMP11) and following the approval of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the UN General Assembly in September 2015, sustainability must be at the forefront of the tourism agenda,” he stated.

**Ceasefire in Colombia would be ‘decisive step toward ending conflict’ – UN**

30 October - The United Nations welcomes the intention expressed by both the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to establish a bilateral ceasefire by the end of the year, a spokesperson for the world body said today.

“This would be a decisive step toward ending the conflict,” Stéphane Dujarric told reporters in New York, in response to a question on the possibility of a ceasefire and recent statements by Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos.

The Government and the FARC have been in talks for the last 33 months, seeking to end a 51-year conflict that has made almost a quarter of a million victims.

“We appreciate the confidence reiterated by President Santos in a United Nations role in the monitoring and verification of a ceasefire, and we note his intention to seek a mandate from the Security Council,” Mr. Dujarric added, noting that the UN and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) have been working with the parties, at their invitation, on the design of a monitoring and verification mechanism.

“It is anticipated that the parties will soon finalise their discussions on this point so that a consensual request can be considered by the Security Council of the United Nations,” he stated.

“The Secretary-General hopes that the two sides will seize the upcoming round of talks in Havana as an opportunity to move forward on this point as well as all pending substantive issues,” he underlined, adding that the Secretary-General reaffirms his commitment to the success of the peace process and will continue to lend all possible support through his representative.

**Caribbean region becomes free of highly enriched uranium – UN atomic watchdog**

30 October - The United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) today announced that Jamaica completed the conversion of its research reactor to low enriched uranium this month, decreasing proliferation risks and making the Caribbean region completely free of highly enriched uranium.

In the announcement, IAEA said the conversion of the so-called SLOWPOKE reactor was part of a joint effort between Jamaica and the United States Department of Energy’s National Nuclear Security Administration with support from the UN atomic watchdog.

“Our assistance with the conversion and enhancement of the reactor’s utilizations capacity is an important step in our development work at the Caribbean,” said Luis Carlos Longoria Gandara, Director of the IAEA’s Division for Latin America and the Caribbean. “Jamaica, but also the wider region, can benefit greatly from the peaceful use of nuclear technologies.”

The research reactor, the only one in the Caribbean, has operated at the University of West Indies for over 30 years, according to IAEA.
“Jamaican scientists plan to expand research work related to food safety, food security, water and air quality,” it said.

The conversion of this reactor is part of global efforts, supported by the IAEA, to minimize the risks associated with the civilian use of highly enriched uranium, while maintaining scientific research capabilities and the operating performance of research reactor facilities, the agency said.

Highly enriched uranium can be a nuclear proliferation and security concern because it can eventually be used for producing material used for nuclear weapons.

**UN rights office voices concern at clampdown on political activism in Cambodia**

30 October - The United Nations human rights office expressed concern today over a worsening climate for opposition politicians and activists in Cambodia, and stressed that the right to peaceful assembly and to freedom of expression belongs to all.

According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 11 opposition activists are serving prison sentences of between seven and 20 years for participating in or leading an “insurrection.” Another opposition Member of Parliament is awaiting trial on charges that include incitement to commit crimes and forging public documents.

“We stress that the right to peaceful assembly and to freedom of expression belongs to all individuals, regardless of their political or other opinion,” OHCHR spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani told reporters in Geneva.

On what appears to be an organised attack last Monday, a group of pro-government protesters in Phnom Penh verbally and physically assaulted opposition Members of Parliament and threatened the safety of the private residence of the National Assembly’s First Vice-President.

Reports suggest that police and other state security forces looked on while the attacks took place – in stark contrast to their response to protests that have been organised in the past by groups criticizing the Government.

“It is the Government's responsibility to ensure that individuals are not targeted for their political affiliation or for expressing dissenting views,” said Ms. Shamdasani.

OHCHR welcomed the establishment of an investigative commission into last Monday’s incident, but stressed that the investigation would only be credible if it was “independent, impartial, thorough and prompt.”

“Those responsible for the violence must be brought to justice,” Ms. Shamdasani stated, while also urging the Government to take all necessary measures to ensure the security of all the democratically-elected representatives of the people of Cambodia, irrespective of their political affiliation.
Disaster risk reduction ‘core development priority’ of Asia and the Pacific – UN regional body

30 October - Building resilience in the face of natural disasters is “not a choice, but rather a collective imperative,” the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) declared today, as it called on all government agencies to take on disaster risk reduction as a priority and make it an integral part of sustainable development in the region.

ESCAP convened a meeting of senior government officials and experts from 33 countries in Bangkok, Thailand, this week to discuss how to make the Asia-Pacific region more resilient to disasters and endorsed a set of collective recommendations and initiatives.

The backdrop for the fourth session of the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction was the continued, severe impact of natural disasters, which threatens to roll back hard-won development gains across the region, ESCAP said in a press release.

According to ESCAP’s newly released Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2015, the region bears the brunt of disasters worldwide, accounting for almost 60 per cent of lives lost and 45 per cent of economic losses between 2005 and 2014.

“All is the most disaster-prone region, so building resilience is not a choice, but rather a collective imperative,” ESCAP Executive Secretary Shamshad Akhtar said. “Disaster risk reduction is a core development priority of Asia and the Pacific.”

All government agencies were called on to take on disaster risk reduction as a priority.

Countries in the region also agreed to work more closely together to strengthen technical areas such as drought monitoring and early warning, to enhance the use of space applications, and to promote risk-sensitive development strategies.

The Committee also requested ESCAP to build greater coherence among UN actors in their work on disaster risk reduction through the UN’s Regional Coordination Mechanism in Asia and the Pacific.

Ban welcomes ‘peaceful and orderly’ elections in Tanzania

30 October - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon congratulated the people, Government and political parties of Tanzania for the peaceful and orderly manner in which the country held its elections on 25 October 2015.

“The responsible conduct of the citizens of Tanzania as they cast their ballots and awaited the results was a concrete manifestation of their commitment to democracy, peace and stability,” said Mr. Ban in a statement issued by his spokesperson in New York.

At the same time, the UN Chief said that he was concerned about the situation in Zanzibar and underscores that any disputes related to the electoral process should be addressed through the existing legal framework in a peaceful and transparent manner.

“The Secretary-General calls on all stakeholders to remain calm, reject the use of violence, and avoid making statements that could further increase tensions,” the statement concluded.

Mr. Ban reiterated these points in a phone call today with the President of Tanzania, Jakaya Kikwete.