



**2020 Joint Media Project Report**



## CREDITS

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# PREFACE

By Ramesh Jaura

*Director-General of the Non-profit International Press Syndicate Group and  
Editor-in-Chief of its Flagship Agency IDN-InDepthNews*

This Report of the Joint Media Project of the Non-profit International Press Syndicate Group with IDN as the Flagship Agency in partnership with Soka Gakkai International in consultative status with ECOSOC, is a compilation of independent and in-depth news and analyses by IDN from April 2019 to March 2020.

The articles in this compilation appeared on IDN-InDepthNews ([www.indepthnews.net](http://www.indepthnews.net)) in the main category Sustainability and on the thematic web-site of the International Press Syndicate SDGsforAll ([www.sdgsforall.net](http://www.sdgsforall.net)). These can be accessed free of charge 24 hours a day and 365 days a year.

2019-2020 is the fourth year of the INPS Group's media project with the SGI, a lay Buddhist organization with headquarters in Tokyo. But IDN has been a party to the previous joint projects on 'Education for Global Citizenship' and 'Fostering Global Citizenship' respectively – as the result of an agreement between the precursor of the International Press Syndicate (INPS) Japan and the SGI.



We are pleased that at the time of writing these lines, we are already in the fifth year of the INPS Group's 'SDGs for All' joint media project with the SGI. This compilation comprises 33 articles analyzing developments related to a sustainable world, peace and security on the whole and its 17 Goals with 169 targets at multiple levels – governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental. Some of the articles have been translated into several European and non-European languages.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – adopted by world leaders in September 2015 at an historic UN Summit – officially came into force on January 2016. With these new Goals that universally apply to all, countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, over meanwhile in the next thirteen years, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

The SDGs, also known as Global Goals, build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and aim to go further to end all forms of poverty. The new Goals are unique in that they call for action by all countries, poor, rich and middle-income to promote prosperity while protecting the planet.

They recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and address a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection.

While the SDGs are not legally binding, governments are expected to take ownership and establish national frameworks for the achievement of the 17 Goals.

The relevance of SDGs has been underlined by the havoc caused by COVID-19. All the more reason that countries recognize their primary responsibility for follow-up and review of the progress made in implementing the Goals, which will require quality, accessible and timely data collection.

Sincere thanks to Mr Siddharth Chatterjee, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Nairobi, Kenya, for taking the time to write a Foreword and Nobuyuki Asai, Director for Sustainable Development and Humanitarian Affairs, Soka Gakkai International (SGI), for sending his message. Ø

# FOREWORD

By Siddharth Chatterjee

*The United Nations Resident Coordinator Kenya*

When 17-year-old high school student Darnella Fraizer filmed the last minutes of George Floyd's life under the knee of police officer Derek Chauvin, she could not have imagined that her footage would reignite the explosive global question of racial inequality and the subsequent clamour for reforms in policing.

This act of filming validates the force of the media globally; we need a similar drive for urgent action in Africa. We need the continent's media to help ensure the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are achieved, and the life of every African afforded the opportunity they deserve.



“Around the world, success in achieving the SDGs will ease global anxieties, provide a better life for women and men and build a firm foundation for stability and peace in all societies, everywhere,” said the UN Deputy Secretary-General, Amina Mohammed.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, a wave of demonstrations from Lebanon to Chile, from Iran to Liberia, was sweeping across countries. This was a clear sign that, for all our progress, something in our globalized society is broken.

The COVID-19 pandemic has struck the world like a bolt of lightning exposing the contours of deep inequalities. Media reports have helped reveal the interwoven

threads of inequality and health, with poorer people suffering a strikingly disproportionate share of the fallout from the virus, either through infection or loss of livelihoods.

The global sweep of protests due to years of disenfranchisement and racism has made it clear that the world must change to offer equal treatment to all people.

Media can do the same for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Achieving the SDGs, and so improving the lives of millions of Africans, depends heavily on increasing public awareness, and the focused action and funding that such awareness ignites.

One major shortcoming of development progress is the lack of widespread knowledge about the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. We must look to the media to push the SDG discourse; what is reported and how it is reported helps shape policy and has implications for the millions of people whose lives are affected. Knowledge is power and if citizens are aware of the issues, they are empowered to help determine the national response.

Traditionally, development experts have failed to explain the relatively new concept of sustainable development to influencers such as educators, politicians, and the media. Doing so is key, so that easily understood narratives are developed to raise public support.

We are already a third of the way towards the 2030 Agenda deadline which 193 UN member states committed to. But at the current pace of change – notwithstanding the global pandemic – Africa is likely to miss out on the time-bound targets in key sectors – including health, education, employment, energy, infrastructure, and the environment.

Improved public awareness of the SDGs themselves, and of the actions needed and

By stepping up to address and explain the global quest for social justice and equality which the SDGs represent, the media can help galvanize civil society, business, international bodies, regional organizations, and individuals.

Development is never far from the media agenda in Africa, so the opportunity to build understanding of sustainability is there. Sustainable development experts must explain why the SDGs are important, and why 'business as usual' in development is no longer viable in the face of increasing populations and climate change. Then, news outlets, who would then be able to develop compelling narratives to make the concept understandable by all can help raise the SDG profile, thereby raising public support.

We must "flip the orthodoxy".

What is reported, how it is reported, and on what channels helps in shaping policy and has implications for the millions of people whose lives are affected.

To this end, the media must be brought into the conversation and be made to understand the role they can play towards the greater good.

The SDGs pledge that "no one will be left behind" and to "endeavour to reach the furthest behind first." In practice, this means taking explicit action to end extreme poverty, curb inequalities, confront discrimination and fast-track progress for the furthest behind.

The media can shine a spotlight on those left behind, for example by using COVID-19 to examine the wider issue of universal health coverage, the subject of SDG 3.

It also plays a critical role in holding governments to account for their Agenda 2030 commitments. Though these commitments demand that countries have clear reporting and accountability mechanisms, most nations still have no reliable data on their progress towards specific goals. This matters because countries can only unlock financing for the SDGs by disaggregating data to understand where resources are required. In Africa, where national commitments are rarely backed by adequate investment, this is particularly important.

Rapid mobile penetration in Africa offers unparalleled opportunities for content sharing on digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Though the lack of affordable internet connections and poor connectivity remain a challenge, mobile technology is a powerful enabler across many sectors'

One in every six people on Earth lives in Africa; its problems are the world's problems and solving them is the world's responsibility. If Africa fails to achieve Agenda 2030, the implications will be felt across the planet through conflict, migration, population growth and climate catastrophe.

The media in Africa is a stakeholder in the achievements of the SDGs. Ø

## MESSAGE

*By Nobuyuki Asai, Director for Sustainable Development  
and Humanitarian Affairs, Soka Gakkai International (SGI)*

The Joint Media Project was concluded in March 2020, just as the COVID-19 infection was spreading. The impact of COVID-19 is likely to affect many areas and sectors of the international community, not only for the remainder of the year, but for the next several years.



Under the current circumstances, a considerable amount of money has been spent in an effort to deal with the COVID-19 situation, raising concern that the funds needed for achieving the SDGs will not be available. It has even been said that the SDGs have been forgotten in the midst of the crisis.

I believe, however, that as the international community moves toward recovery from COVID-19, it is precisely the time to return to the spirit of the SDGs.

In countries where the infection has been largely contained, there is talk of rebuilding the economic and social structure. The international community's fundamental approach should be based on the principles of the SDGs, which have already been agreed upon—the most central principle being that of “Leaving no one behind.” We must also think about how to “Build back better”; it is also an opportune time to begin discussions from scratch.

One could argue that at the backdrop of COVID-19 is the progression of deforestation, due to overpopulation, resulting in more human-wildlife contact. UNEP previously pointed out the link between deforestation and viruses (in the UNEP Frontiers 2016 Report). Climate change is also threatening the natural habitat of wildlife, and in 2014, in Japan, where I live, the domestic outbreak of dengue fever transmitted by mosquitoes became big news.

I believe these phenomena are warnings that demonstrate human society is not sustainable unless we build an economy, society and environment in accordance with the SDGs.

The Joint Media Project highlights the various efforts being made to achieve the SDGs, as well as the obstacles. In light of the above-mentioned situation, I feel that the value of our project is increasing, especially at this time. Ø

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## UN Chief's Call for Global Ceasefire Gathering Support

By Radwan Jakeem



*Photo: Screenshot of the UN chief calling for an immediate global ceasefire. Credit: UN WebTV.*

NEW YORK (IDN) – In a clarion call for "an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world", UN Secretary-General António Guterres on March 23 urged warring parties across the world to lay down their weapons in support of the bigger battle against COVID-19: the common enemy that is now threatening all of humankind.

The ceasefire would allow humanitarians to reach populations that are most vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19, which first emerged in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, and has now been reported in more than 180 countries.

So far, there are nearly 300,000 cases worldwide, and more than 12,700 deaths, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Answering questions from reporters which were read by Melissa Fleming, head of the UN Department of Global Communications, the UN chief said his Special Envoys will work with warring parties to make sure the ceasefire appeal leads to action.

In the blog on March 24, Ms. Christine Bell who directs the Political Settlements Research Programme (PSRP) greeted the ceasefire appeal arguing that "the COVID-19 threat is unusual in that it is imminent".

She added: "If illness takes hold in conflicted states, it is possible that this call will be heeded. But even ceasefires require agreements and diplomacy. Creative thinking on how to address coronavirus and conflict together could play a game-changing role in

ending unnecessary deaths by disease and warfare in some of the world's most troubled places."

Fully aware of necessary steps, the UN chief appealed to warring parties to pull back from hostilities, put aside mistrust and animosity, silence the guns, stop the artillery, and end the airstrikes. This would indeed help create "corridors for life-saving aid", open "precious windows for diplomacy", and bring hope to places among the most vulnerable to COVID-19, as well as end "the sickness of war and fight the disease" that is ravaging our world.

Mr. Guterres added in his remarks: "Let us take inspiration from coalitions and dialogue slowly taking shape among rival parties in some parts to enable joint approaches to COVID-19."

Only stopping the fighting everywhere *now* will "the most vulnerable – women and children, people with disabilities, the marginalized and the displaced – (who) pay the highest price" will see the light at the end of the tunnel.

The most vulnerable are also at the highest risk of suffering devastating losses from COVID-19.



Health professionals, already few in number, have often been targeted. Refugees and others displaced by violent conflict are doubly vulnerable. Indeed, "the fury of the virus illustrates the folly of war", the UN chief emphasized. He added: "It is time to put armed conflict on lockdown and focus together on the true fight of our lives."

Picking up the threads of the UN chief's appeal, Ms. Bell added: "We know from experience that the relationship between armed conflict and crisis is complicated and leads to unpredictable results. If this unpredictability is, however, itself predictable — a "known unknown" — can a "smart" response be put in place?" Our ongoing research at the Political Settlements Research Programme suggests that the following 11 baseline understandings are likely to be key in designing the most effective responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in conflict-affected regions:

1. Implementing technical solutions is always political, and "conflict lenses" are needed to anticipate the effectiveness of any response.
2. Mid-level peacebuilders have unique capacities to bridge and build trust between the state and local communities.
3. Flexible aid may be needed that can bypass the State in contentious areas.
4. Crisis management can have "peace dividends".
5. Conflict parties often seek to make military and political gains, under cover of crisis response.
6. State and non-State armed actor capacities for mobilization, and their political and military calculations, will be different.
7. COVID-19 may pose unique logistical challenges to current peace processes
8. Diplomacy and peacekeeping may become "absent".
9. Emergency legislation is a response with conflict-dangers.
10. Elections are also peculiarly at threat, with specific conflict consequences.
11. A lack of international legal confidence.

As a sign of support for Mr. Guterres' call, New People's Army guerrillas in the Philippines have been ordered to stop assaults and shift to a defensive

position from March 26 to April 15, the Communist Party of the Philippines said in a statement.

The rebels said the ceasefire is a "direct response to the call of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres for a global ceasefire between warring parties for the common purpose of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic".

The German affiliate of the 1985 Nobel Peace Laureate IPPNW (International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War) has also supported the UN chief's call for a global ceasefire.

"The virus drastically demonstrates both the mutual global dependencies and the irresponsibility of military conflicts. The long-lasting wars and conflicts in Yemen, Libya, Syria or Afghanistan, for example, have massively weakened their health systems there and made millions of people particularly vulnerable to the current pandemic," declared

Susanne Grabenhorst, chairwoman of the IPPNW on March 25. The economic sanctions imposed by Europe / USA also contributed to this, she said. The IPPNW is therefore once again calling for the sanctions to be lifted.

In addition to the countries of the Middle East, there are now increasing numbers of infections in various African countries. The IPPNW is, therefore calling for generous financial aid and international solidarity to support countries with weak health systems.

According to WHO estimates, around 18 million health workers will be missing in countries with low and middle incomes by 2030. Aid that has been promised so far cannot be withdrawn due to the crisis.

The IPPNW is also demanding that military resources be redirected in the sense of an "arms conversion" for civilian purposes, for the service of health and peaceful life. "The pandemic must not be used to advance militarization in the slipstream of the crisis."

The medical organization criticizes sharply that NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg wants to stick to the 2% target despite the corona pandemic.

[IDN-InDepthNews – 25 March 2020]

## The Civil Society Prepared for Intra-Afghan Peace

By Bernhard Schell



*Photo: Community leaders in Afghanistan strategize human rights. Credit: UNAMA*

DOHA | KABUL (IDN) — Women, youth as well as community and religious leaders in Afghanistan have been craving for peace and earnestly preparing for it long before the United States signed a landmark agreement with the Taliban on February 29. The deal sets the stage to end America's longest war stretching over more than 18 years and allow President Donald Trump to begin the promised withdrawal of American troops. U.S. forces and their allies have been present in Afghanistan since 2001.

A series of events organised by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in 2019 and 2020 aimed at fostering peace and facilitating participation of considerable sections of the population in decision-making. The results of these efforts are expected to go a long way when the intra-Afghan negotiations kick off in Kabul on March 10.

UNAMA head Tadamichi Yamamoto, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, said after the signing of the U.S.-Taliban agreement in Qatar capital Doha: "All stakeholders must now look to make genuine and concrete steps toward ending the war."

In New York, the UN head's spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said that Secretary-General António Guterres had reiterated "the United Nations commitment to supporting the people and the government of Afghanistan." Mr Guterres expressed the hope that the "deeply held aspirations of the Afghan people for peace" will be realized through an inclusive Afghan-led process with the meaningful participation of women and young people.

They are indeed prepared to participate. A meeting on the role of women in peace adopted a declaration on January 13, titled 'Women as pioneers for peace', calling for the substantive involvement and participation of women in bringing peace to Afghanistan. The day-long UNAMA-backed event held in Herat, the capital of the western province, brought together around 100 women activists, government leaders and civil society representatives from across the region. The discussions focussed on recommendations made by more than 1,000 women including from Badghis, Ghor, Farah and Herat, following a year-long consultation on peace and security.

Participants, who included Herat Governor, Abdul Quayom Rahimi and his Deputy, Monesa Hassanzadeh, reaffirmed a call for women to take the centre stage and ensure that their role and rights are adequately reflected and safeguarded in peace efforts, as well as any subsequent agreement. "Without women in the peace process, there is no peace," Rahimi told the participants.

Member of the Afghan Parliament Massouda Karokhi urged women to be courageous. "I call upon all women not to miss this chance and to stand up in order to participate in the peace process, be courageous."

The crucial role that youth can play in promoting peace, security and stability in Afghanistan was reinforced at the UN-backed events in the northeast throughout 2019, enabling hundreds of young people to make their voices heard on some of the country's most pressing issues.

In a series of events organized by UNAMA's regional office in Kunduz, young people from across the region came together to discuss their role in building peace in their communities and talked about how they could participate more substantially in Afghanistan's development agenda.

In the wide-ranging discussions at each of the events, participants not only recognized the potential of young people as powerful agents of change in preventing and resolving conflict, but also underscored the importance of involving youth in any peace efforts and national decision-making processes.

"Peace efforts without engaging youth will not last," said Salahuddin Qazizada, a university lecturer and participant during one of the televised events in Badakhshan last year. "It is essential for youth to be heard and for youth to participate in efforts to create peace and stability in the country," he stressed.

The important role of community leaders in promoting and protecting human rights was the focus of a UN-backed event in Afghanistan's southeast province of Ghazni.

Some 40 religious scholars, women's rights activists, journalists and other community leaders gathered for a daylong symposium early February to discuss how civil society could more effectively empower their communities by increasing awareness of human rights and putting in place better mechanisms to protect those rights.

One participant, Abdul Mosawir Omer, called for strengthening rule of law and putting in place practical mechanisms to protect human rights and support human rights defenders. "We need solid measures to deter perpetrators from violations," emphasised Omer, a civil society activist.

Other participants highlighted the many challenges faced by communities across the south-eastern province, including violence against women and human rights violations resulting from the armed conflict in Afghanistan.

As the discussion turned to education, participants called for investment in schools as well as in community awareness initiatives to promote human rights, especially the rights of women."

"Afghanistan should pay more attention to education," said Wakil Ashrafi, a civil society activist. "Without an educated society, it's difficult to address human rights."

Efforts by religious and community leaders to foster peace and reconciliation in the country's south and nationwide were reinforced by a series of UN-backed events throughout 2019 enabling hundreds of Ulema and tribal elders to discuss best approaches in trying circumstances. A tribal leader, Azeem Khan Samandar, told UNAMA in an interview that Ulema (religious scholars), as custodians of peace, will continue to preach unity and work for peace as they have done throughout history.

"We have been talking in our communities, expressing different views on the peace process," noted Samandar, a regular participant at UN-backed events. Samandar said that Afghans, despite their differences, are united in their demand for peace. "Despite our different perspectives, everyone is thirsty for peace," he said.

Community elder, Haji Neamathullah, concurred. "In my engagements and private discussions with my fellow citizens, the first thing that always comes up is the demand and hope for peace in our country," said Neamathullah. "Everyone in this country is fed up with violence and looking to a new chapter of peace."

Afghanistan's Ulema play an essential role in setting moral and ethical standards for their communities. They often work as peace brokers and are respected at all levels of society, exerting influence on individual and community decisions. Traditionally, local disputes have been resolved with their intervention, a tradition which has continued today, especially in parts of the south with no formal judicial system. IDN-InDepthNews – 01 March 2020]

## Awards for Mauritanian Anti-Slavery and Iranian Women Rights Activist

By Jamshed Baruah



*Photo: Collage of Biram Dah Abeid from Mauritania and Shaparak Shajarizadeh of Iran.*

GENEVA (IDN) – Biram Dah Abeid, a descendant of former slaves who has been called "the Nelson Mandela of Mauritania", and Shaparak Shajarizadeh, a prominent Iranian women's rights activist have been honoured for their courage to fight gross violations of human rights

Abeid, founder of the Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement (IRA), has mobilized tens of thousands of Mauritians to protest slavery and the government's failure to apply anti-slavery laws.

By staging demonstrations, sit-ins, hunger strikes, marches, and disseminating information at home and abroad, Abeid has pressured the government to hold slave owners accountable for their crimes and raise awareness about the possibility of a slave-free Mauritania.

The Mauritanian government imprisoned him multiple times over the last decade: in December 2010, in 2012, in 2014 for over a year and a half, and most recently in 2018 for a period of five months.

Despite facing harassment and imprisonment, Abeid has worked to strengthen the enforcement of Mauritanian laws forbidding slavery, as well as to improve the social integration and livelihood of former slaves and other members of the majority black-African population facing discrimination.

In 2017, Abeid was listed by Time Magazine as one of the top 100 most important people in the world.

While he received the 2020 Geneva Summit Courage Award, Shaparak Shajarizadeh a prominent Iranian women's rights activist – who was jailed, beaten and brutalized for removing her headscarf in public – was awarded the 2020 Geneva Summit International Women's Rights Award at a ceremony on February 18. The award was presented by an international coalition of 25 human rights organizations.

"Over the past decade, my government has become renowned for its persecution, torture, and imprisonment of peaceful people whose only crime is fighting for equality and against discrimination," said Abeid. "It is on their behalf, and in the spirit of their courage, that I am humbled and deeply grateful to receive this prestigious award."



Abeid was chosen for his "fearless commitment to fighting slavery in Mauritania, defending hundreds of thousands of victims at the expense of his own freedom", said Hillel Neuer, the executive director of United Nations Watch, a co-organizer of the conference together with Liberal International, Human Rights Foundation, and more than 20 other human rights groups.

Previous laureates of the Courage Award include former political prisoner and Tibetan filmmaker Dhondup Wangchen, jailed Saudi blogger Raif Badawi, Venezuelan opposition leader Antonio Ledezma, and Russian dissident Vladimir

Kara-Murza,

The two award winners – Abeid and Shajarizadeh – addressed UN diplomats, human rights activists, and journalists from around the world attending the 12th annual Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy.

The Iranian activist became a leader in the "Girls of Revolution Street" and "White Wednesday" civil disobedience movements. In February 2018, she was famously arrested for removing her hijab in defiance of Iran's compulsory law. That year, Shajarizadeh was named by BBC as one of the 100 most inspiring and influential women around the world.

"I am extremely honoured to be nominated for this award," said Shajarizadeh. "I feel more encouraged to continue my small share of changing the world on behalf of the brave Iranian women, and women all around the world, who are risking their lives each day to seize their dignity, fight for equality, and defend human rights."

Shajarizadeh was chosen for her "fearless defence of women's rights in Iran, for which she was jailed, beaten and brutalized", said Neuer.

Previous laureates of the International Women's Rights Award include anti-FGM activist Nimco Ali, Congolese anti-rape activist Julienne Lusenge, and Yazidi member of the Iraqi Parliament Vian Dakhil.

In addressing the 12th Geneva Summit, Shajarizadeh joined other champions of human rights from around the world, including dissidents, activists, victims, and relatives of political prisoners from Iran, China, Pakistan, Cuba, Russia, Turkey, and Venezuela, who will be testifying on the human rights situation in their countries.

The event took place just days before the UN Human Rights Council's main annual session, in order to place urgent situations on the world agenda. "It's a focal point for dissidents worldwide," said Neuer. [IDN-InDepthNews – 25 February 2020]

## Experts Concerned About the State of Children

By Jaya Ramachadran



*Photo credit: PAHO/WHO/Fernando Revilla. Source: WHO*

GENEVA (IDN) — A landmark report focuses on the health and future of children and adolescents worldwide who are under immediate threat from ecological degradation, climate change and exploitative marketing practices that push heavily processed fast food, sugary drinks, alcohol and tobacco at children.

The report by a Commission of over 40 child and adolescent health experts from around the world finds that "children stand on the precipice of a climate crisis" and "no single country is adequately protecting children's health, their environment and their futures".

The Commission, convened by the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and The Lancet calls for "a new global movement" to place children at the centre of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The report, titled *A future for the world's children?* was released on February 19.

"Despite improvements in child and adolescent health over the past 20 years, progress has stalled, and is set to reverse," said Co-Chair of the Commission, Helen Clark, who served as the 37th Prime Minister of New Zealand from 1999 to 2008, and was the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) from 2009 to 2017.

She highlighted that an estimated 250 million children under five years old in low- and middle-income countries are at risk of not reaching their developmental potential, based on proxy measures of stunting and poverty. "But of even greater concern, every child worldwide now faces existential threats from climate change and commercial pressures."

The report includes a new global index of 180 countries, comparing performance on 'child flourishing', including measures of child survival and well-being, such as health, education, and nutrition; sustainability, with a proxy for greenhouse gas emissions, and equity, or income gaps.

The Commission's report says, while the poorest countries need to do more to support their children's ability to live healthy lives, excessive carbon emissions – disproportionately from wealthier countries – threaten the future of all children. If global warming exceeds 4°C by the year 2100 in line with current projections, this would lead to devastating health consequences for children, due to rising ocean levels, heatwaves, proliferation of diseases like malaria and dengue, and malnutrition.

The index shows that children in Norway, the Republic of Korea, and the Netherlands have the best chance at survival and well-being, while children in the Central African Republic, Chad, Somalia, Niger and Mali face the worst odds. However, when authors took per capita CO2 emissions into account, they found that top countries trail behind: Norway ranked 156, the Republic of Korea 166, and the Netherlands 160. Each of the three emits 210% more CO2 per capita than their 2030 target. USA, Australia, and Saudi Arabia are among the ten worst emitters.

"More than 2 billion people live in countries where development is hampered by humanitarian crises, conflicts, and natural disasters, problems increasingly linked with climate change," said Minister Awa Coll-Seck from Senegal, Co-Chair of the Commission.

"While some of the poorest countries have among the lowest CO2 emissions, many are exposed to the harshest impacts of a rapidly changing climate. Promoting better conditions today for children to survive and thrive nationally does not have to come at the cost of eroding children's futures globally."

The only countries on track to beat CO2 emission per capita targets by 2030, while also performing fairly (within the top 70) on child flourishing measures are: Albania, Armenia, Grenada, Jordan, Moldova, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Uruguay and Viet Nam.

The report also highlights the distinct threat posed to children from harmful marketing. Evidence suggests that children in some countries see as many as 30,000 advertisements on television alone in a single year, while youth exposure to vaping (e-cigarettes) advertisements increased by more than 250% in the USA over two years, reaching more than 24 million young people.

Professor Anthony Costello, one of the Commission's authors, said: "Industry self-regulation has failed. Studies in Australia, Canada, Mexico, New Zealand and the USA – among many others – have shown that self-regulation has not hampered commercial ability to advertise to children.

"For example, despite industry signing up to self-regulation in Australia, children and adolescent viewers were still exposed to 51 million alcohol ads during just one year of televised football, cricket and rugby. And the reality could be much worse still: we have few facts and figures about the huge expansion of social media advertising and algorithms aimed at our children."

Children's exposure to commercial marketing of junk food and sugary beverages is associated with purchase of unhealthy foods and overweight and obesity, linking predatory marketing to the alarming rise in childhood obesity. The number of obese children and adolescents increased from 11 million in 1975 to 124 million in 2016 – an 11-fold increase, with dire individual and societal costs.

Dr. Richard Horton, Editor-in-Chief of *The Lancet* family of journals, said: "The opportunity is great. The evidence is available. The tools are at hand. From heads-of-state to local government, from UN leaders to children themselves, this Commission calls for the birth of a new era for child and adolescent health. It will take courage and commitment to deliver. It is the supreme test of our generation."

"From the climate crisis to obesity and harmful commercial marketing, children around the world are having to contend with threats that were unimaginable just a few generations ago," said Henrietta Fore, UNICEF Executive Director. [IDN-InDepthNews – 24 February 2020]

## Buddhist Leader Calls for Nuclear Weapons Free Security

By Ramesh Jaura



*Photo: SGI president Daisaku Ikeda. Credit: Seikyo Shimbun*

BERLIN | TOKYO (IDN) – An eminent Buddhist philosopher and nuclear disarmament advocate has tabled four critical initiatives to "contribute to the creation of a sustainable global society where all can live with dignity and a sense of security". The initiatives cover four major areas: building support for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW); multilateral negotiations for nuclear disarmament; climate change and disaster risk reduction (DRR); and education for children in crisis.

The initiatives are explicated in the 2020 Peace Proposal by Daisaku Ikeda, President of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) Buddhist network. It is his 38th annual peace proposal titled '*Toward Our Shared Future: Constructing an Era of Human Solidarity*'. The original Japanese version was released on January 26 marking the 90th anniversary of the establishment of the Soka Gakkai and the 45th anniversary of the founding of SGI.

Dr. Ikeda strongly pleads for entry into force of the TPNW in 2020, the year which marks the 75th anniversary of the inhumane atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. "This would make 2020 the

year that humankind finally began to leave the nuclear age behind," he says.

Since being adopted by the UN General Assembly in July 2017, the TPNW has been signed by 80 states and ratified by 35. Fifteen more States must sign and ratify at an accelerated pace in order to reach the 50-ratification milestone required for entry into force of the Treaty.

As follow-up on enforcement of the Treaty, the SGI president proposes a *People's Forum for a World Without Nuclear Weapons* centred on hibakusha and civil society in Hiroshima or Nagasaki.



A key theme, Dr Ikeda says, should be the right to life—with international human rights law as a lens for bringing into focus the catastrophic nature of these weapons. The Forum, he suggests, should serve “as an opportunity for the mutual sharing of visions about what a world built through the prohibition of nuclear weapons would look like”.

According to the 2019 report of Norwegian People’s Aid, a partner of the International Campaign to Ban Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), 135 countries currently support the TPNW. The number of municipalities expressing support in nuclear-weapon and nuclear-dependent states is also increasing.

### ***Multilateral negotiations***

The second area in which Dr. Ikeda offers concrete proposals concerns policies for making substantive progress toward nuclear disarmament. He calls in particular for two agreements to be included in the final outcome statement of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review Conference from April 27-May 22 at UN Headquarters in New York.

The first agreement relates to the start of multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations and the second refers to deliberations on the convergence of new technologies including artificial intelligence (AI) and nuclear weapons.

The SGI president believes it is crucial to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) between the United States and Russia, and then to begin multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament.

The New START is scheduled to expire in February 2021, but negotiations are currently stalled. The loss of the New START framework, following the demise of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, would create conditions in which, for the first time in half a century, there are no mutual restraints on the nuclear arsenals of either country. “This void invites the risk of a renewed nuclear arms race,” warns Dr. Ikeda.

Furthermore, the accelerating development of miniaturized nuclear warheads and supersonic weapons generates the future prospect that the use of nuclear weapons will be considered in geographically limited conflicts. The five-year extension of the New START is therefore absolutely essential.

With this in view, Dr. Ikeda proposes, the NPT Review Conference should encourage a moratorium on the

modernization of nuclear weapons. “States Parties should come to an understanding that multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations need to be initiated before the next NPT Review Conference in 2025.”

He adds: “On the basis of a five-year extension of the New START, the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China should commence negotiations on a new nuclear disarmament treaty, beginning with dialogues on verification regimes.”

Keeping in view the verification experience accumulated by the U.S. and Russia and the discourse at the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification (IPNDV) – which started five years ago with the participation of more than 25 countries with and without nuclear weapons – the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (USA, Russia, Britain, France and China) should begin negotiations on the impediments to nuclear disarmament.

“The confidence-building achieved through this dialogue can propel progress toward the start of substantive negotiations regarding numerical targets for the reduction of nuclear weapons.” To create the conditions for multilateral nuclear disarmament, Dr. Ikeda proposes re-examining the concept of “common security” that had helped promote efforts to bring the Cold War to an end.

Common security—a response to the mass destruction that would ensue if nuclear deterrence failed—emerged from the thinking and policies of European leaders such as West German Chancellor Willy Brandt and his policy of reconciliation with the Eastern European states.

At the historic 1985 Geneva Summit between the U.S.-Soviet leaders, Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev endorsed U.S. President Ronald Reagan that “A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought”.

The Agenda for Disarmament issued by UN Secretary-General António Guterres in May 2018 called for “disarmament to save humanity”. In a speech the day after the report’s release, UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu, who was involved in its preparation, addressed the relationship between security and disarmament as follows:

“Disarmament is a driving force for international peace and security, it is a useful tool for ensuring national

security...Disarmament is not a utopian ideal, but a tangible pursuit to prevent conflict and mitigate its impact whenever and wherever it does occur."

Dr. Ikeda adds: "Based on this kind of mutually beneficial win-win approach, now is the time to energetically promote the good-faith pursuit of nuclear disarmament to which Article VI of the NPT commits us."

Article VI urges each of the Parties to the Treaty to undertake "to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control".

Dr. Ikeda wants the 2020 NPT Review Conference to seek consensus on the threat posed by cyberattacks on nuclear weapons-related systems and the introduction of AI into the operation of such systems.

It would be advisable if the Conference develops "a deeper shared awareness of these threats" and begins deliberations on "the development of a prohibition regime", says the SGI president

The need for such a regime is underlined by the fact that "cyberattacks. . . could affect not just the command and control centres of nuclear weapons, but a wide range of related systems including early warning, communications and delivery systems. In the worst-case scenario, a cyberattack on any one of these systems could lead to the launch or detonation of the nuclear weapons themselves".

### ***Climate change and disaster reduction***

Climate change, says Dr Ikeda, is "a fundamental challenge, on which the fate of humankind hinges". It threatens to render meaningless global efforts toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Praising the energy of youth climate activists, he states, "When young people's will to transform reality merges with an indomitable optimism, the possibilities are limitless."

With this in view, the SGI president proposes that UN Youth Climate Summits be held every year on the way to 2030 and calls for a Security Council Resolution mainstreaming youth participation in climate-related decision-making. He adds: "The necessary responses to climate change are not limited to the reduction of greenhouse gases; there is also an urgent need to take steps to limit the damage wrought, for example, by

extreme weather events. These were also the main themes discussed at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 25) held in Madrid last month (December 2019)."

He proposes a UN conference focusing on climate change and disaster risk reduction be held in Japan. About 40 percent of the world's population live within 100 kilometres of the coast, putting them at increased risk from climate-induced disasters. The vast majority of the Japanese population also live in coastal areas.

In light of this, the SGI president finds that "it would be valuable for municipalities in the coastal areas of Japan and other Asian countries, such as China and South Korea, to share experiences and best practices related to climate change and DRR, in this way generating synergies beneficial to Asia as a whole".

This year, 2020, will mark the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Developed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, it sets out clear guidelines for achieving gender equality. The declaration states:

"The advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men are a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and should not be seen in isolation as a women's issue. They are the only way to build a sustainable, just and developed society."

The spirit of gender equality is also crucial in the field of disaster risk reduction. Whether in the context of DRR or of extreme weather events resulting from climate change, measures to strengthen resilience must go beyond improving hard infrastructure. Dr. Ikeda therefore strongly feels that "we must not only strive to ensure that gender equality becomes a reality, but also prioritize those who tend to be overlooked and left behind in everyday life as we work to build community resilience".

### ***Education for children in crisis***

The last of the four proposals of the SGI president relates to strengthening support for children and young people deprived of educational opportunities due to armed conflict or natural disasters. "It is my belief that protecting the human rights and future development of the next generation is the cornerstone of creating a sustainable global society," he says.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child will celebrate its thirtieth anniversary of entry into force this

September. With 196 States Parties — a number greater than the membership of the UN — it is the most widely ratified universal human rights treaty.

The convention stipulates that governments have an obligation to ensure the right of all children to education, and indeed the proportion of primary-school-age children who are not in school decreased from around 20 percent in 1990 to less than 10 percent in 2019. Despite this progress, millions of children and young people living in conflict — and disaster-stricken countries still face serious educational disadvantages.

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) emphasizes the role of schools in providing children with an important place to reclaim their daily lives. Spending time with friends at school offers children psychological succour to start

healing from the traumatic experiences of growing up in conflict or disaster zones.

Against this backdrop, Education Cannot Wait (ECW) is a new global fund established during the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. Dr Ikeda calls for strengthening of the financial foundation of the UNICEF-hosted Education Cannot Wait global fund.

The SGI is a community-based Buddhist network promoting peace, culture and education with 12 million members in 192 countries and territories. Every year since 1983, the SGI president has issued a peace proposal offering a Buddhist perspective and solutions to global problems on January 26, to commemorate the founding of the SGI. [IDN-InDepthNews – 13 February 2020]

*"The advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men are a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and should not be seen in isolation as a women's issue. They are the only way to build a sustainable, just and developed society."*

*- The Beijing Declaration -*

*"It is my belief that protecting the human rights and future development of the next generation is the cornerstone of creating a sustainable global society." - Dr Ikeda.*



## UN Avails of Famed Literature Festival to Achieve Global Goals

By Devinder Kumar



*Photo: The session on climate emergency at Jaipur Literature Festival. (L to R Ms. Renata Dessallien, resident coordinator of UN in India; Ms. Namita Waikar, managing editor of online journal PARI; Ms. Shubhangi Swarup, writer and filmmaker; Ms. Dia Mirza, Actress and UN Advocate for Sustainable Development. Credit: UN India/Yangerla Jamir.*

JAPIPUR (IDN) – As part of a Decade of Action for accelerating sustainable solutions to all the world’s biggest challenges — ranging from poverty and gender to climate change, inequality and closing the finance gap – the United Nations availed of a new tool end of January: the world’s largest literature festival in India’s eminent ‘pink city’ of Jaipur, the capital of the scenic, almost magical Indian state of Rajasthan. It is known as the Pink City due to the colour of the stone used for many of its glorious palaces and historic monuments.

The festival hosted the UN’s Resident Coordinator Renata Dessallien on January 27, who told audience members attending a special session on the climate emergency, that the Organization is working flat out to slow the pace of damaging climate change. Questioned whether the UN is doing enough to resolve the climate crisis, she said that the Organization could not act as a “global police” force.

“We are also not a global Government, so there are limits, to which the UN is mandated and on what it is able to do,” she explained. In fact, she added, “we are pushing the limits on many fronts. The best way to describe the United Nations is that we are the ‘world persuader’ – persuading people to do what is fundamentally right.”

There is ample evidence that from shifting weather patterns that threaten food production, to rising sea levels that increase the risk of catastrophic flooding, the impacts of climate change are global in scope and unprecedented in scale. It is estimated that over 600 million Indians are likely to be impacted adversely by climate change if we don’t change course now.

The session heard some staggering stories of people living in India’s Ladakh region who are gravely affected by Climate crisis. Solar Energy Innovator, Educationist and Managing Director of Himalayan Institute of Alternatives in Ladakh, Sonam Wangchuk said: “Up in the mountains, across the Himalayas, particularly in Ladakh, our glaciers are melting and while we always had water shortages, now

we are seeing droughts in the spring season. I know at least two villages where people had to abandon the whole village due to water (shortages). These droughts are now accompanied by flash floods in autumn.”

In 2006, while volunteering in one such village that was washed away, leading to many deaths, he had asked villagers when the last flash flooding had occurred, but “they didn’t remember. The same village had another flash flood in 2010, then in 2015 and then another one in 2017. So it’s now becoming as frequent as that.”

He appealed to the people living in the plains and the cities to be responsible and “live simply” so that the people of the mountains in turn, can ‘simply live’.

Managing Editor of online journal PARI, Namita Waikar, who is chronicling the stories of how vulnerable populations across India are being most affected by climate change for the upcoming UNDP Human Development Report, chimed in with other first-hand accounts of how life is being adversely affected in the coastal cities.



“In the rural areas, there are communities in Tamil Nadu where seaweed farmers are forced to change livelihoods due to fast disappearing seaweeds. Similarly, in places like Delhi, inland fishing communities are catching dead fish. What they told me was heart breaking,” Waikar said.

Fisherman told her that if they lay the net at night, all they catch are the “freshest of the dead fish” in the morning. Keeping sewage and industrial waste out of rivers and coastal areas is an urgent priority, she said. “Another fisherwoman said that some of the fish they caught earlier are now only seen on the Discovery channel. That clearly explains the gravity of the situation.”

Writer, educator and filmmaker, Shubhangi Swarup, who is exploring ecology in her fiction, explained how she is integrating climate change themes into her work. “Our stories have become human-centric, self-obsessed and obnoxious. We don’t have appreciation of nature and universe in our stories.

“So, I tried to write a novel where a geological fault line is the thread of the narrative. It begins with the Andaman (islands), goes to Myanmar, then Nepal and ends in Ladakh. While telling the story, I realised how ridiculous the political borders are when we are talking about solving local problems”, she said.

Civil Society Activist, Apoorva Oza, reiterated the need to take profit considerations out of the climate change debate: “There’s this excessive focus on measuring everything in economic terms. When I write a proposal, they ask me whether I’ll double the farmers’ income. All I can tell you is that they will protect nature, they’ll sustain the environment, they’ll not over-exploit groundwater. But I can’t guarantee that I can double their incomes. I can only guarantee their progress.”

The session took a gloomy turn when eminent Bollywood Actress and UN Advocate for Sustainable Development, Dia Mirza reached out to the audience and asked, “Do you have time? We just have a decade. Listen to women, listen to mothers, listen to children. And if you don’t understand science, just watch nature.”

The message was clear: everyone is responsible for creating a more environmentally sustainable world – And the arts and cultural sector is no exception.

As Moderator, Sameer Saran aptly concluded: “Since this festival is attended by the literati, stories come out of such places. If climate change becomes a part of these stories, we’ll be inspired to take better steps in mitigating climate change.

Stories we tell about ourselves define our actions. And if our stories are green, then probably our future will also be green and prosperous.”

Celebrated as the ‘greatest literary show on Earth’, the five-day Jaipur Literature Festival attracts more than 400,000 book lovers; around 2,000 speakers addressing more than 200 sessions; and authors from 20 different countries. The books being discussed are penned in more than two dozen languages.

The 13th year of the Jaipur Literature Festival saw a host of literary big-hitters in attendance, including Nobel Laureate Abhijit Banerjee, Pulitzer Prize Awardee Forrest Gander, Journalist Christina Lamb, the New Yorker journalist Dexter Filkins, Man Booker Prize winner Howard Jacobson, Elizabeth Gilbert and popular Indian writers like Shashi Tharoor and Javed Akhtar engaging in ideas, debate and dialogue. [IDN-InDepthNews – 04 February 2020]

## Tanzania Passes Law on HIV Self-Test to Tame the Virus

By Kizito Makoye



*Photo: Showing a HIV self-test. Credit Zuberi Mussa*

DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania (IDN) – Perched on a plastic chair at his shop in the bustling Sinza suburb in Dar es Salaam, Abdul\* is anxiously looking at a small kit containing liquid and a stick.

“I want to know my HIV status,” says Abdul while glancing at his watch.

A moment ago, the 28-year-old trader briskly swiped a plastic swab across his upper gum to draw some fluid and slotted it into the kit for testing. After a few minutes, one or two lines would be displayed to confirm the test’s results.

A moment ago, the 28-year-old trader briskly swiped a plastic swab across his upper gum to draw some fluid and slotted it into the kit for testing. After a few minutes, one or two lines would be displayed to confirm the test’s results.

Abdul who sells a wide range of consumer goods, is among thousands of people who had been given free HIV self-test kits as part of the government’s broader push to reach more people with undiagnosed HIV.

According to the Ministry of Health 29,000 HIV self-test kits were distributed in December and 17,000 people are believed to have used them.

The self HIV test kit, which uses an oral sample or blood from a finger prick, is the best way for individuals to examine their HIV status discreetly. The test takes only 20 minutes to confirm the results.

Amid positive signs that Tanzania is embracing the new life-saving technology that could tame the lingering stigma against those afflicted with HIV/AIDS, local residents have expressed optimism describing the new move as a step forward in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

“I’m not ashamed of taking a HIV test, after all I take it myself,” says Abdul

Tanzania President John Magufuli in December signed a new law allowing HIV/AIDS self-testing while lowering the age of HIV testing without parental consent to 15 years.

Ummy Mwalimu, Tanzania’s minister for health said HIV/AIDS self-testing can help people living with HIV to know their status and if necessary receive life-saving treatment and care.

“This move will significantly increase our pace to reach the 90-90-90 goals to end the AIDS epidemic by 2020,” she said.

The 90-90-90 are ambitious treatment targets set by the United Nations to help the end of AIDS epidemic. They



aim to ensure that by 2020, 90 percent of all people living with HIV will know their HIV status, 90 percent of all people who know their HIV status will be on antiretroviral therapy and 90 percent of all people receiving antiretroviral therapy will be virally suppressed.

While progress has been made to fight HIV/AIDS in Africa, many people are reluctant to know their HIV status to avoid the stigma associated with the disease.

Self-testing is considered among innovative approaches to diagnosis which can potentially help reach undiagnosed people who are living with HIV, and meet global goals on ending the epidemic.

A core principle of the Sustainable development Goals (SDGs) on HIV/AIDS response is that no one should be left behind. The United Nations works toward achieving ten goals that are particularly relevant to the response to AIDS.

The self-testing initiative has the potential to turn the course of the HIV/AIDS epidemic by increasing the number of people who know their HIV status, said Mwalimu.

About 1.6 million people lived with HIV in Tanzania in 2018. This equates to an estimated HIV prevalence of 4.6%. In the same year, 72,000 people were newly infected with HIV, and 24,000 people died from an AIDS-related illness, according to UNAIDS statistics. Despite these numbers, Tanzania has in the last decade made a good progress to control the epidemic by scaling-up access to antiretroviral treatment.

“HIV self-testing is a critical entry point to identify and initiate treatment. Studies show that many people in low-income countries don’t know their HIV status. Self-testing kits offer the potential to accelerate treatment and limit transmission,” said Deus Kitapondya, a Public Health specialist at Muhimbili National Hospital.

Africa is shouldering the heaviest burden of HIV/AIDS in the world. In East and Southern Africa Region 800 000 were living with new infections in 2018. An estimated 20.6 million people in that region were living with the virus in 2018.

Concerns about confidentiality and privacy are some of the key barriers to HIV testing services in Tanzania. “Very few people can willingly go to the HIV testing facility,” says Kitapondya. However, recent data on the use of HIV self-tests show that the availability of simple and discreet way to know one’s status may be one of the keys to dramatically increasing the number of people who take a test.

According to guidelines of the World Health Organisation (WHO) on HIV testing services, countries are advised to conduct pilot programmes on HIV self-testing to collect and synthesize evidence on the role of self-tests in closing the HIV testing gap.

However, Ali Mzige, a public Health expert says self-testing does not by itself provide a complete HIV diagnosis. “Once a self-test shows positive reaction, the person may be infected with HIV, but we need further tests to confirm the diagnosis and allow him/her to receive treatment and care.” \* The name has been changed to protect the interviewee. [IDN-InDepthNews – 20 January 2020]

## Urgent Health Challenges Facing the World

By Sean Buchanan



*Photo: A health worker administers a vaccination against cholera to a young boy in Yemen. Credit: UNICEF/Saleh Bahless*

GENEVA (IDN) – A list of urgent, global health challenges released by the World Health Organisation (WHO) at the beginning of 2020 reflects deep concern that leaders are failing to invest sufficient resources in core health priorities and systems. This, says the Geneva-based UN agency, is putting lives, livelihoods and economies in jeopardy.

Recommending that countries spend one percent of their gross domestic product on primary health care, to give more people access to the quality essential services they need, close to where they live, WHO has identified a series of priorities for the decade, covering a wide range of issues affecting people across the planet.

These include elevating health in the climate debate, delivering health care in situations of conflict and crisis, keeping health care clean, making health care fairer, expanding access to medicines, stopping infectious diseases, preparing for epidemics, and protecting people from dangerous products.

Arguing that the climate crisis is a health crisis, WHO notes that air pollution kills an estimated seven million people every year, while climate change causes more extreme weather events, exacerbates malnutrition and fuels the spread of infectious diseases such as malaria. The same emissions that cause global warming are said to be responsible for more than one-quarter of deaths

from heart attack, stroke, lung cancer and chronic respiratory disease.

WHO urges leaders in both the public and private sectors to work together to clean up the planet's air and mitigate the health impacts of climate change. In 2019, over 80 cities in more than 50 countries committed to WHO's air quality guidelines, agreeing to align their air pollution and climate policies and in 2020 the UN agency will work towards developing a set of policy options for governments to prevent or reduce the health risks of air pollution.

In terms of delivering health care in conflict and crisis, 2019 was the year that disease outbreaks required the highest level of response in countries with protracted conflict. There was also continuation of a disturbing trend in which health workers and facilities were targeted. WHO recorded 978 attacks on health care in 11 countries, with 193 deaths. At the same time, conflict is forcing record numbers of people out of their own homes, leaving tens of millions of people with little access to health care, sometimes for years.

WHO recognises that health is only part of the equation, saying that ultimately what is needed are political solutions to resolve protracted conflicts, stop neglecting the weakest health systems, and protecting health care workers and facilities from attacks.



Meanwhile, an estimated one in four health facilities globally lack the basic water, sanitation and hygiene services which are critical to a functioning health system. This leads to poor-quality care and an increased chance of infection for patients and health workers. All of this is taking place against a backdrop of billions of people around the world living in communities without safe water to drink or adequate sanitation services – both of which are major drivers of disease.

When it comes to the fairness of health care, WHO warns that persistent and growing socio-economic gaps result in major discrepancies in the quality of people's health – there is not only an 18-year difference in life expectancy between rich and poor countries, but also a marked gap within countries and even within cities.

At the same time, the global rise in noncommunicable diseases, such as cancer, chronic respiratory disease and diabetes, has a disproportionately large burden in low and middle-income countries and can quickly drain the resources of poorer households.

Saying that one of the best ways to reduce inequalities is through primary health care, which addresses the majority of a person's health needs, WHO is calling for all countries to allocate one percent more of their gross domestic product to primary health care, to give more people access to the quality essential services they need, close to home.

This is closely related to the need to expand access to medicines. About one-third of the world's people lack access to medicines, vaccines, diagnostic tools and other essential health products. Low access to quality health products threatens health and lives, which can both endanger patients and fuel drug resistance. Medicines and other health products are the second-largest expenditure for most health systems (after health workers) and the largest component of private health expenditure in low- and middle-income countries.

In 2020, WHO says it will sharpen its focus on priority areas for global access, including fighting substandard and falsified medical products, enhancing the capacity of low-income countries to assure the quality of medical products throughout the supply chain, and improving access to diagnosis and treatment for non-communicable diseases, including diabetes.

On the communicable diseases front, it is estimated that infectious diseases like HIV, tuberculosis, viral hepatitis, malaria, neglected tropical diseases and sexually transmitted infections will kill an

estimated four million people in 2020, most of them poor. Meanwhile, vaccine-preventable diseases continue to kill, such as measles, which took 140,000 lives in 2019, many of them children, and although polio has been driven to the brink of eradication, there were 156 cases of wild poliovirus last year, the most since 2014.

The root causes are insufficient levels of financing and the weakness of health systems in endemic countries, coupled with a lack of commitment from wealthy countries. Every year, the world spends far more responding to disease outbreaks, natural disasters and other health emergencies than it does preparing for and preventing them.

According to WHO, a pandemic of a new, highly infectious, airborne virus – most likely a strain of influenza – to which most people lack immunity is inevitable. It warns that is not a matter of if another pandemic will strike, but when, and when it strikes it will spread fast, potentially threatening millions of lives. Vector-borne diseases like dengue, malaria, Zika, chikungunya and yellow fever are spreading as mosquito populations move into new areas, fanned by climate change.

However, it is not just these diseases that poses a threat to health worldwide – lack of food, unsafe food and unhealthy diets are responsible for almost one-third of today's global disease burden.

Hunger and food insecurity continue to plague millions, with food shortages being perniciously exploited as weapons of war. At the same time, as people consume foods and drinks high in sugar, saturated fat, trans fat and salt, overweight, obesity and diet-related diseases are on the rise globally.

Because of the widespread impact that health issues have on development, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that health security should not be a matter for ministries of health alone and called for more funding to address gaps in health systems, and support for the most vulnerable countries. "There are no shortcuts to a healthier world ... and we must hold our leaders accountable for their commitments".

Comparing health concerns with peace and security, Ghebreyesus pointed out that many countries are willing to invest in protection against terrorist attacks, but not to allocate money to halting the spread of a virus, even though a pandemic may be far more deadly, and more economically damaging. [IDN-InDepthNews – 17 January 2020]

## UN Concerned About Haiti 10 Years Since Disastrous Earthquake

By J Nastranis



*Photo: An informal settlement in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti. Credit: UN-Habitat/Julius Mwelu.*

NEW YORK (IDN) – Hundreds of thousands of Haitians lost their lives, including 102 UN personnel, and millions were gravely affected by the devastating earthquake that struck the Caribbean nation ten years ago on January 12.

The incident ranks among the top 10 deadliest earthquakes in human history, according to a recent OCHA report. Nevertheless, \$126 million humanitarian plan for Haiti, launched in February, was only 32 per cent funded.

In a video message on the 10th anniversary of the Haiti earthquake, UN Secretary-General António Guterres lauded “the resilience of its people and the support of its many friends to overcome this disaster”.

But, according to OCHA report, deteriorating economic conditions in 2019—including low growth rate, high inflation and an increase in the cost of basic food items—have had a negative impact on the humanitarian situation in the Caribbean nation.

The adverse impact continues to be felt unabated. As the UN humanitarian affairs office, OCHA, said on December 27, 2019, the number of Haitians who do not have sufficient food to eat is expected to surpass four million this year, up from 3.7 million in 2019.

The UN chief has assured “the continued support of the international community” to enable Haiti achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and “through strengthening the institutions that are so crucial to the wellbeing and prosperity of its people”. Guterres renewed “the commitment of the United Nations to helping Haiti and its people build a brighter future”.

But, as OCHA reports, high inflation and an increase in the cost of basic food items have had a negative impact on the humanitarian situation in the Caribbean nation. At the same time, insecurity and social tensions have restricted aid workers’ access to a large part of the country.

Subsequently, the number of Haitians facing food insecurity rose to 3.7 million in 2019, up from 2.6 million in 2018. OCHA expects the figure will reach 4.2 million by March, with some 1.2 million Haitians likely to experience “emergency levels” of food insecurity. “The situation is expected to remain unstable in the coming months, which will further weaken the country’s economy and, consequently, the ability of the poorest Haitians to meet their basic needs as well as the capacity of the State to provide essential services,” the agency said.



OCHA and its partners supported 455,000 people in Haiti during the first nine months of the year. However, lack of funding prevented them from reaching even more. Humanitarians are seeking \$252 million to support more than two million people in Haiti in 2020. Overall, 4.6 million citizens, or around 40 per cent of the population, mainly women and children, will require urgent assistance.

Against this backdrop, the UN Security Council has stressed the need to resolve the ongoing political impasse in Haiti between President Jovenel Moïse and a surging opposition movement.

Council members issued a statement on January 9 night outlining the immediate necessity for parties to engage in an inclusive and open dialogue to form a government that responds to the needs of the people.

In addition to political instability, Haiti has also faced fuel shortages, corruption scandals and other challenges, prompting angry citizens to take to the streets.

“The members of the Security Council recalled the need for the Government of Haiti to address the underlying causes of instability and poverty within the country. They urged all stakeholders to refrain from violence and to resolve differences through peaceful means,” the statement said.

They further emphasized the urgent need to address deteriorating humanitarian conditions in the country, with support from the UN and the international community.

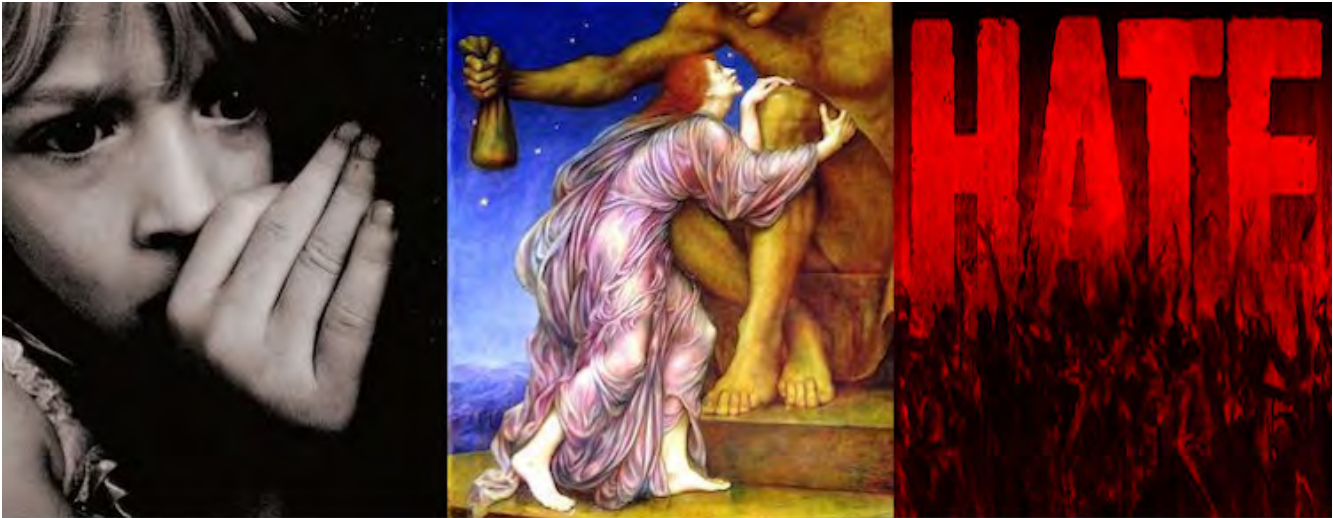
The Security Council also called for action to address recent spikes of violence, adding that those responsible must be held accountable. They particularly referred to the November 2018 massacre of civilians in the La Saline neighbourhood in the capital, Port-au-Prince, and the killing of some 15 people one year later in armed clashes in the Bel-Air district.

As *UN News* reported, Council members also urged Haitian stakeholders to continue to take advantage of the recently established UN Integrated Office in the country, which works to strengthen political stability and good governance.

The office, known by the French acronym BINUH, became operational in October following the end of 15 years of UN peacekeeping operations in Haiti. [IDN-InDepthNews – 11 January 2020]

## Fear, Greed and Hate as We Enter the 2020s

Viewpoint by Roberto Savio\*



*Collage by IDN-INPS: With images from Wikimedia Commons – Scared Child (left), 1909 painting ‘The Worship of Mammon’ (centre), and Hate (right) from CMON.*

ROME (IDN) – In a world in which the institutions that govern us are rapidly losing their moral compass, it is difficult not to realise that in 2020 we are now entering – or have already entered – a new low point in the history of humankind.

Today, for example, we face an unprecedented existential threat brought about by the climate crisis. According to scientists, we have until 2030 to stop climate change, after which the writing is on the wall for the planet. Yet, we have just had a world conference in Madrid on climate change, which ended in nothing.

Not only that, but since the beginning of the last decade, there has been a singular change of the relations of politicians with climate. Climate has become not a scientific but a political issue, with a number of politicians of not minor weight, like America’s Donald Trump, Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro, Hungary’s Viktor Orban and the Russian Federation’s Vladimir Putin arguing that there is no climate crisis.

Since the end of the last decade, we have seen also another change in a vital environment: democracy. With the fall of Berlin Wall in 1989, everybody was told that the threat of communism had now gone. As Francis Fukuyama famously wrote, it was the end of history. Capitalism and market would unify the world, and lift all boats, it was said at the time.

Then came the big financial crisis of 2008-2009 which cost governments (and therefore people) 12 trillion dollars and it became clear that only some boats were being lifted. Budget trimmings affected especially welfare, education and health, while at the same time some people were becoming fabulously rich. World debt doubled (it now stands at 325 trillion dollars), and suddenly nationalistic, xenophobic and right-wing parties sprouted everywhere. Before the crisis of 2009, there was only one, in France. Even Nordic countries, long-time symbols of civism and tolerance, saw the arrival of extreme right-wing governments.

The thirty years between the fall of Berlin Wall and the financial crisis left a culture of competition, individualism and loss of values – a culture of greed. And the ten years between that crisis of and our incoming decade saw the rise of a culture of fear. Immigration became the catalyst. We were being invaded, Islam was not compatible with our society, our jobs were being stolen, crime and drugs were pouring into our countries and the same leaders who do not believe in climate change became the guardians of Christianity, enacting restrictive laws to the applause of citizens, regardless of human rights.

In the last two decades, trade unions have become irrelevant, and laws have been introduced that support the making of jobs precarious and reductions in social protection. People started being gripped by fear, faced with the uncertain future of their children.

Historians affirm that the two main engines of change in history are greed and fear. We enter the decade of the 2020s with both. Worse, many analysts believe we do so in a climate of hate.

### ***Comeback of two flags***

The fact is that two flags that we thought had been discarded by history are making a comeback.

One is the flag 'in the name of God'. We think of ISIS and Al Qaeda, but this is the basis of the image of Trump, Bolsonaro, Orban and Putin. The use of religion by the right wing has been able to rally the poor. Theologian Juan José Tamayo has called politicians with bible in hand the Christo-neo-fascist alliance.

In the last elections in Costa Rica, evangelical pastor Fabricio Alvarado won with a campaign based on the defence of Christian values and neoliberalism, against abortion and the paganism coming from Europe. This is precisely the electoral theme of Orban in Hungary, Kaczynski in Poland and Putin in Russia.

In Brazil, the evangelical church was vital in getting Bolsonaro elected. In El Salvador, the new president Nayib Bukele asked an extreme right-wing evangelical pastor to offer a prayer during his inaugural ceremony, and there is a draft law that would make the Bible compulsory reading in all schools.

After the overthrow of Bolivian president Eva Morales by the army, new president Jeanine Áñez and her supporters went around with a bible in their hands at all ceremonies. And let us not forget that Trump was elected thanks the support of the evangelical church, which has 40 million faithfuls.

Tamayo speaks of an international of hate: hate against gender equality, against LGTBs, against abortion, against immigrants. Those who propagate hate defend reinforcement of the patriarchal family, the submission of women; they despise what is not traditional, they mistrust science and statistics, they deny climate change, and they hate Muslims, Jews and blacks. What is being totally ignored in all this is the problem of social inequalities, the growing economic gap for reasons of ethnicity, culture, gender, social class, sexual identity, and so on.

Tamayo observes that this is becoming a new international movement, which is now coming to Europe, as the recent Spanish elections show. Vox, the extreme right-wing party, created just four years ago, now has 52 seats in the Parliament, and is the third largest party, like AfD in Germany.

The Northern League party in Italy, headed by Matteo Salvini, with his rosary beads, has become the number one party, and Salvini could become prime minister at any moment. And we know well of the very large conservative front against the Pope in the Catholic Church which also wants to save traditions, is against LGTBs, is for a patriarchal family, etc., etc. All this is about using religion, fear and hate for political gains.

And what about the flag 'in the name of the nation'? Well, the best example is Benjamin Netanyahu who has passed a law which makes being a Jew the requisite for Israeli citizenship. This is how Narendra Modi in India is trying to deprive Muslims (170 million) of Indian citizenship; it is how the government in Myanmar is treating over one million Rohingyas. Those cases join religion with the fight against minorities and different religions in the name of the nation.

China has now launched a campaign for a Chinese dream (also persecuting Uighur Muslim minorities). This is exactly the same strategy as that of Trump, who calls for the American dream. The United States has no allies, and anybody who makes money in trade with the United States is an adversary, be it Canada or Germany – "America First", which in fact means "America Alone".

So, the flags "in the name of God" and "in the name of the Nation" frequently overlap. Italian political scientist and economist Riccardo Petrella observes that in recent decades, a third flag has appeared with a large audience: "in the name of money", and also that in the last two decades corruption has become another universal countervalue.

### ***Transparency***

In its last report, Transparency International, the organisation which fights and denounces corruption, analyses how corruption is weakening democracy. It notes that while fight against corruption is high on the populists' platform, when in power they tend to weaken democratic institutions, and engage in corruption like their predecessors.

Transparency cites the cases of various countries, from Guatemala to Turkey, from the United States to Poland and Hungary. When corruption seeps into the democratic system it corrupts leaders. Economic corruption has increased in the last forty years, after the "greed is good" campaign, as the market has substituted man as the centre of society. It reaches the entire public sector, besides obviously the private sector.

Two-thirds of humankind now have no trust in police and other public services, because they are considered corrupt, and they believe that corruption is so diffuse that it cannot be eliminated.

We have become accustomed to hearing about corruption in the last two decades, because it is in the news every day. We have slowly become trained to look as natural things that are not natural at all: a good sign of the extent to which we have lost a moral compass.

If you ask children today if wars and poverty are natural, they will probably answer yes. And, as adolescents, they will also probably consider corruption as natural.

It is therefore evident that two fundamental environments for humankind are in danger. One in the short term is the natural environment. The conditions of life on the planet can worsen dramatically, and we have all the forecasts. We have only the coming decade to try to reverse the trend of climate change, be it natural (some say) or man-made (all scientists).

But then the question is: how long do we have to protect our political environment, which runs our economic, social and cultural life, before that also goes into an irreversible decline?

Meanwhile, 2019 will remain in history as the year of mass demonstrations. In 21 countries, in Latin America, Africa, Asia, Europe, millions of people took to the streets to protest against corruption, social injustice, the gap between political institutions and citizens, the fear and decline of social welfare as a political priority.

Young people, who have deserted political parties and elections, have been frequently at the forefront. They are at the head of the campaign for a sustainable world, where an adolescent, Greta Thunberg, has brought together young people from all over the world. But the system does not appear to be really listening to them, unless they become violent as in Chile, Paris, Baghdad or Hong Kong.

### ***These reflections bring us to three conclusions.***

*The first* is that, not by accident, the enemies of the fight to defend our natural environment are also the enemies of our political environment. They do not care if the first is destroyed, because they are intertwined with corporations, gas and oil companies, farmers who want to take over land (like the case of Brazil and Amazonia), or coal companies, like in Poland and Australia. But they want to twist the political environment in their favour, for their power.

Orban of Hungary has campaigned for an illiberal democracy. Bolsonaro has gone further, talking about the good old days of the military dictatorship. And all of them, starting with Trump, look on international cooperation, multilateral agreements and any initiative that reduces the freedom of a country for peace and justice (like the United Nations or the European Union) as enemies. They are all in favour of building walls, forgetting that the Second World War taught us to abolish them.

*The second* is that democracy is in danger, for the same reasons that the environment is also in danger. There is no ability and will among populists to reach any internal agreement. Would it be possible today to create the United Nations, or sign the Declaration on Human Rights? Certainly not, just as there is no will to fight climate change.

*The third*, therefore, is what is going to happen in the new decade we are now entering. It looks like it will be a decisive decade. In just a few years, we must act on how we will deal with two existential issues: how to remain in our present environment, and how we will live together.

All this will be decided by voters. And this raises an issue: is it legitimate to believe that fascism, xenophobia and nationalism are the answer to our problems? Humans should learn from their mistakes (like all other animals do). And we should have learnt from the two world wars that those beliefs are not an answer but the roots of war and confrontation.

So, here a *final reflection*. According to Steven Pinker, the Canadian cognitive scientist, writing in *The Economist*, in the last seven years humans have become healthier, live longer, are more secure, richer, freer, more intelligent and educated. This trend should continue. But humans have evolved, because they have dedicated themselves mainly to the advantages of reproduction, survival and material growth not because of wisdom or happiness.

The first urgent step is to reconcile progress with human nature. We have cognitive abilities, and also the ability to cooperate and be emphatic, unlike other animals. Between the Age of Enlightenment and the Second World War, we made important progress on science, democracy, human rights, free information, market rules and the creation of institutions for international cooperation. This trend cannot be stopped, argues Pinker; it is now in our genes.

Well, within ten years we will know how the world is, and what damages are irreversible or not, and if we have made any progress in halting the climate crisis ... and we will know if all this is in human genes or is just one of the many passages of history.

*\*Publisher of OtherNews, Italian-Argentine Roberto Savio is an economist, journalist, communication expert, political commentator, activist for social and climate justice and advocate of an anti-neoliberal global governance. Director for international relations of the European Center for Peace and Development. [IDN-InDepthNews – 03 January 2020]*

### **Hate, Fear and Greed Trump's populist Creed**

It's frightening what Trump supporters will swallow  
As he lies and insults: from a "hate platform" he does wallow  
It's always the same: "Others" are to blame  
As he calls others "fake": he puts our freedom at stake

We inherited a "United" States, but it was once divided  
Ideologues captured the attention of a racist view misguided  
It took a brave opposition to seek out the truth  
After a tragic war, it took informed action in the voting booth

"There is nothing to fear but fear itself" words wisely said  
But Trump gives us "rabble rousing" hate speech instead  
As he gets more wealthy: he breeds hate that's not healthy  
It's the pillars of our democracy: that he is turning to mockery

As hate crimes accelerate, Trump refuses to soften the debate  
It's Fake news, not him, that causes the problem he does state  
It's time to call out his violence-encouraging distractions  
It's time to get to the voting booths: and take strong actions  
(Source: The Moderate Invoice)

## UN Warns of Growing Inequality Triggering New Great Divergence

By Santo D. Banerjee



*Image: Cover of Human Development Report 2019.*

NEW YORK (IDN) – In the run-up to 2020, the UN has warned that despite remarkable progress on laying a solid foundation for human development, Thailand, like many other countries, is facing challenges in tackling inequality. This is also a theme on which the 2019 Human Development Report (HDR) from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) focuses.

The report entitled *Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: inequalities in human development in the 21st Century* warns that a new generation of inequalities is opening up, around education, and around technology and climate change – two seismic shifts that, if unchecked, could trigger a ‘new great divergence’ in society of the kind not seen since the Industrial Revolution.

However, says UNDP Administrator, Achim Steiner, “inequality is not beyond solutions”.

Thailand has a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.765 in 2018, which puts the country in the high human development category, notes the report. Featuring at the 77th place in world ranking (out of 189 countries), Thailand is the developing country that has the most progressed in the world in its HDI ranking over the period 2013-2018, up by 12 ranks. This, says the report, reflects the country’s continued improvement in life expectancy at birth, years of schooling, and income per capita.

However, when discounted for inequality, Thailand’s HDI declines by 16.9% to 0.635. If not addressed, cautions the report, it will only get harder to correct the widening trajectory of inequality which is reinforced by climate change and technological disruptions which tend to hit the poorest population the hardest and earliest. “This calls for urgent action.”



The report analyses inequality in three steps: beyond income, beyond averages, and beyond today. But the problem of inequality is not beyond solutions and the report offers a range of policy options to tackle it.

### ***Beyond income***

The 2019 Human Development Index (HDI) and its sister index, the 2019 Inequality-Adjusted Human Development Index, set out that the unequal distribution of education, health and living standards hinders countries' progress. By these measures, 20 per cent of human development progress was lost globally through inequalities in 2018. The report recommends policies that look at, but also go beyond, income, including:

*Early childhood and lifelong investment:* Inequality begins even before birth and can accumulate, amplified by differences in health and education, into adulthood. For example, children in professional families in the United States are exposed to three times as many words as children in families receiving welfare benefits, with a knock-on effect on test scores later in life. Policies to address inequality, therefore, must also start at or before birth, including investing in young children's learning, health and nutrition.

*Productivity:* Such investments must continue through a person's life, when they are earning in the labour market and after. Countries with a more productive workforce tend to have a lower concentration of wealth at the top, for example, enabled by policies that support stronger unions, set the right minimum wage, create a path from the informal to the formal economy, invest in social protection, and attract women to the workplace. Policies to enhance productivity alone are not enough, however.

The growing market power of employers is linked to a declining income share for workers. Antitrust and other policies are key to address the imbalances of market power.

*Public spending and fair taxation:* the report argues that taxation cannot be looked at on its own, but it should be part of a system of policies, including public spending on health, education, and alternatives to a carbon-intensive lifestyle. More and more, domestic policies are framed by global corporate tax

discussions, highlighting the importance of new principles for international taxation, to help ensure fair play, avoid a race to the bottom in corporate tax rates, especially as digitalization brings new forms of value to the economy, and to detect and deter tax evasion.

### ***Beyond averages***

Averages often hide what is really going on in society and while they can be helpful in telling a larger story, much more detailed information is needed to create policies to tackle inequality effectively. This is true in tackling the multiple dimensions of poverty, in meeting the needs of those being left furthest behind such as people with disabilities, and in promoting gender equality and empowerment. For example:

*Gender equality:* Based on current trends, it will take 202 years to close the gender gap in economic opportunity alone, cites the report. While the silence on abuse is breaking, the glass ceiling for women to progress is not. Instead, it is a story of bias and backlash. For example, at the very time when progress is meant to be accelerating to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, the report's 2019 Gender Inequality Index says progress is slowing.

A new "social norms index" in the Report says that in half of the countries assessed, gender bias has grown in recent years. About fifty per cent of people across 77 countries said they thought men make better political leaders than women, while more than 40 per cent felt that men made better business executives.

In Thailand, gender inequality remains prevalent. After gender disaggregation, female HDI is 0.763 compared to male HDI of 0.766. This is due to lower years of schooling and lower income per women. Furthermore, women only account for 5.3 per cent in the Thai parliament, well below East Asia and Pacific's average of 20.3 per cent.

Therefore, policies that address underlying biases, social norms and power structures are key. For example, policies to balance the distribution of care, particularly for children, are crucial, says the report, given that much of the difference in earning between men and women throughout their lifecycle is generated before the age of 40.

***Beyond today***

Looking beyond today, the report asks how inequality may change in future, looking particularly at two seismic shifts that will shape life up to the 22<sup>nd</sup> century:

*The climate crisis:* As a range of global protests demonstrate, policies crucial to tackling the climate crisis like putting a price on carbon can be mis-managed, increasing perceived and actual inequalities for the less well-off, who spend more of their income on energy-intensive goods and services than their richer neighbours. If revenues from carbon pricing are ‘recycled’ to benefit taxpayers as part of a broader social policy package, then such policies could reduce rather than increase inequality.

*Technological transformation:* Technology, including in the form of renewables and energy efficiency, digital finance and digital health solutions, offers a glimpse of how the future of inequality may break from the past, if opportunities can be seized quickly and shared broadly. There is historical precedent for technological revolutions to carve deep, persistent inequalities – the Industrial Revolution not only opened up the great divergence between industrialized countries and those who depended on primary commodities; it also launched production pathways that culminated in the climate crisis.

The change that is coming goes beyond climate, says the report, but a ‘new great divergence’, driven by artificial intelligence and digital technologies, is not inevitable. The HDR recommends social protection policies that would, for example, ensure fair compensation for ‘crowdwork’, investment in lifelong learning to help workers adjust or change to new occupations, and international consensus on how to tax digital activities – all part of building a new, secure and stable digital economy as a force for convergence, not divergence, in human development.

“This Human Development Report sets out how systemic inequalities are deeply damaging our society and why,” said UNDP Administrator, Achim Steiner. “Inequality is not just about how much someone earns compared to their neighbour. It is about the unequal distribution of wealth and power: the entrenched social and political norms that are bringing people onto the streets today, and the triggers that will do so in the future unless something changes. Recognizing the real face of inequality is a first step; what happens next is a choice that each leader must make.”

Read the full report: <http://www.hdr.undp.org/> [IDN-InDepthNews – 27 December 2019]

*The Human Development Report (HDR) is an annual report published by the Human Development Report Office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).[1]*

*The first HDR was launched in 1990 by the Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq and Indian Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. Since then reports have been released most years, and have explored different themes through the human development approach, which places people at the centre of the development process.*

*The reports are ensured of editorial independence by the United Nations General Assembly. They are seen as reports to UNDP, not of UNDP. This allows each report greater freedom to explore ideas and constructively challenge policies. Each report also presents an updated set of indices, including the Human Development Index (HDI), which is a measure of average achievement in the basic dimensions of human development across countries, and a compendium of key development statistics relevant to the report theme.*

*The Human Development Reports have an extensive influence on the development debate worldwide. They have also inspired national and regional analyses which, by their nature, usually address issues that are more country – or regionally - specific.*

## Papal Visit to Japan Revives Debate About Death Penalty

By Katsuhiko Asagiri



*Photo: Mario Marazziti, co-founder of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty in 2002 and Member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies. Credit: Katsuhiko Asagiri | INPS-IDN Multimedia Director.*

TOKYO (IDN) – An international conference "*No Justice Without Life*" has called on Japan to halt all executions next year, the year of the Olympic Games. Japan is one of the 56 nations which retains capital punishment, also known as the death penalty or death sentence for capital crimes. In fact, Japan, the United States and South Korea are the only nations in the group of developed economies that mete out death penalty.

The conference was held on November 22 in the office building of the Diet members of the Lower House in Tokyo in the lead up to and in support of the arrival of Pope Francis on November 23 for the four-day papal journey, which put at the centre ‘the defence of life and human dignity in every circumstance’.

Mario Marazziti of the Sant’Egidio Community, co-founder of the Worldwide Campaign against the Death Penalty, who was in Japan during Pope Francis’ visit, expressed hope the pope can “inspire Japan” to start rethinking the death penalty.

Sant’Egidio is a Christian community established in a secondary school in the centre of Rome at the initiative of Andrea Riccardi in 1968, right after the second Vatican Council, which addressed relations between the Catholic Church and the modern world. Over the years, Sant’Egidio has developed into a network of communities in more than 70 countries of the world.

“The Community pays attention to the periphery and peripheral people, gathering men and women of all ages and conditions, united by a fraternal tie through the listening of the Gospel and the voluntary and free commitment for the poor and peace,” says the Community’s website.

Marazziti, a staunch opponent of death penalty, told the conference: “Capital punishment always adds another death to one already inflicted”. The families of those murdered are often told “a lie” that capital punishment does “justice” and contributes to “healing pain”. This view contributes to public opinion polls showing that a majority of Japanese favour the death penalty.

The fact however is that “instead it freezes resentment and leaves people spending years waiting for revenge,” said Marazziti, an eminent Italian journalist committed to the abolition of death penalty.

Marazziti’s proposal for *2020 Olympic Moratorium* on the death penalty drew wide support including from the Embassy of Italy in Tokyo, All-Party Parliamentary Group to Consider the Future of the Death Penalty in Japan, and Japan Federation of Bar Associations. Those that cooperated in organizing the conference were: Seimeizan Shweitzer Temple and the Soka Gakkai Peace Committee.

The relevance of the conference theme was underlined by the eighty-three-year-old Iwao Hakamada, a death row convict, and his sister Hideko (86) attending the conference. Hakamada has become a symbol of a movement opposing the death penalty in Japan.

Hakamada, a former boxer, was released from prison in 2014 because of new DNA evidence. That ruling was overturned by a higher court last year, which questioned the DNA tests. The case is now before the Supreme Court. Hakamada’s supporters and lawyers say he was victim of a criminal system that relies so heavily on forced confessions that it has come to be known as “hostage justice”.

Hakamada confessed to the murders but asserted his innocence when his trial began. According to official documents, he had been questioned, beaten and bullied by police for more than 10 hours daily without an attorney present.

He was convicted of the 1966 murder of his boss at a soybean paste-maker and the man’s wife and two children. He was sentenced to death in 1968.

One of the judges who convicted Hakamada acknowledged later that he had serious questions about the case from the start, said an Associated Press report. The police presented as evidence blood-stained clothing found in vats of soy bean paste, although the vats had been thoroughly searched before.

The judge with misgivings attempted suicide over his feelings of guilt. He was later baptized and took the same baptismal name as Hakamada’s, Paulo, and added Miki, the name of a Japanese martyr. Other boxers have come out in support of Hakamada.

“I pray to Jesus Christ and appeal for my innocence from 9 until 10:30 every night,” Hakamada wrote while in prison. “During this prayer time, I can be free from suffering. Thanks to God’s love and blessing, I exist and cry for the truth and walk toward tomorrow.”

“He has been on death row for so long. He is still on death row,” his sister, Hideko, told participants in the conference on death penalty at the Diet building in Tokyo.

“I am filled with joy he came back to me alive,” she said, choking back tears. She noted, however, that her brother was “not yet back to normal” and prone to delusions because of the trauma of prison.

At the conference, lawyers supporting Hakamada's appeal for retrial raised and asked whether one after another it was appropriate for the State "from the perspective of human rights, to take away life from citizens?" Once death penalty is executed, it is irrevocable- A wrongly convicted person cannot be brought back to life.

Takeo Kawamura, President of the All-Party Parliamentary Group to Consider the future of the Death Penalty in Japan, said: "While there is a persistent affirmation among Japanese people behind the maintenance of the death penalty system, there are voices calling for its abolition in consideration of the risk that innocent people could be executed. There is a need to trigger a nationwide debate on this issue."

The fact that the conference was organized one day ahead of the papal visit to Japan was also to recall that Pope Francis decreed the death penalty “inadmissible” last year, amending the Catholic teachings called Catechism.

Hakamada who converted to Catholicism during his decades on death row, was invited to the Pope’s Mass at Tokyo Dome and was there with his sister. Much to his disappointment and against expectation, Pope Francis did not speak to him. The pontiff said later he did not know about Hakamada's case. ***(Continued on page 37 bottom)***

## ICPD25 Outlines Pathway for Attaining the Rights of Women and Girls

By Justus Wanzala



*Photo: Nairobi ICPD25 Nairobi Summit closes with call to action. Credit: Flickr | UNFPA*

NAIRBI (IDN) – ICPD25, held in the Kenyan capital Nairobi from November 12-14 and marking the 25th anniversary of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, Egypt, ended with bold commitments towards attainment of the rights of women and girls.

The conference, attended by more than 6,000 world leaders, scholars, rights advocates and faith leaders saw partners announce commitments to end all maternal deaths, satisfy unmet need for family planning and tackle gender-based violence and harmful practices against women and girls by 2030.

Co-convened by the governments of Denmark and Kenya alongside the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the conference focused on offering an inclusive platform, bringing together governments, United Nations agencies, civil society, private sector organisations, women's groups and youth networks.

Participants noted that attainment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be achieved unless women, girls and young people are in control of their bodies, their lives, and live free of violence.

UNFPA Executive Director Natalia Kanem said the Nairobi Summit represented a renewed, re-energised vision and community working together to act and deliver. She noted that through a united front, the next ten years can be a decade of action and results for women and girls.

***(Continued from page 36)***

*But he said in his press conference on the plane way back to the Vatican that in his meeting with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on November 25 he had mentioned the need to abolish capital punishment. According to Kyodo News, the pontiff said that "we need to tackle bit by bit (the abolition of death penalty in the world)" expressing the view that it would take time to make progress. The pontiff also visited Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the two sites of the world's first atomic bombings. This, he said, was a moving experience. [IDN-InDepthNews – 30 November 2019]*

The conference also unveiled new data about the cost of achieving the set goals. According to an analysis by UNFPA and the Johns Hopkins University, in collaboration with Victoria University, the University of Washington and Avenir Health, the total cost to the world to achieve the targets would be 264 billion dollars.

Speaking at a press conference, Kanem explained that this investment serves to meet three targets: 1) the as yet unmet need for contraception, for every woman and adolescent girl to make decisions on whether or when to become pregnant, and how many children to bear; 2) preventable maternal deaths, so that no woman loses life for lack of reproductive health care; and 3) zero gender-based violence and zero cases of female genital mutilation, as well as child and forced marriages.

Kanem said, “I don’t want to refer to 264 billion dollars as a cost but rather as an investment in humanity. It is a cost we can’t avoid bearing.” This sum will include some 7.5 million dollars in new investments over the years alongside technical investment for stirring innovation and ingenuity of the private sector toward attainment of the Nairobi commitment.

The UNFPA head stressed that ICPD is inclusive, with no marginalised group including the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community being left out.

The conference provided an opportunity for marginalised groups such as young people and grassroots advocates to engage heads of state and policymakers about how to realise the rights and health of all people.

Retracing footsteps and at the same time peering into the future, Kanem told delegates that despite the long journey ahead, progress has been made in the last 25 years since the Cairo meeting. “Maternal mortality is down 44 percent worldwide,” said Kanem, adding: “This means four million women who would have otherwise died while pregnant, or at childbirth, are alive today” but “good progress is not good enough, and the promises made to girls, women and everyone should be kept.”

In terms of pledges, governments of various countries – among them Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom, alongside the European Commission – committed some one billion dollars. The private sector represented by organisations such as Ford Foundation, Johnson & Johnson, Philips, World Vision and many other organisations committed to mobilizing around eight billion dollars.

Addressing the conference, Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta said the world has changed greatly since 1994 in the field of population and development. “Inequalities have increased within and across countries and there is greater demographic diversity. Some countries in the world are facing rapid population ageing; while others prepare for the largest cohort of young people the world has ever seen,” he noted.

Calling for the elimination of practices, policies and laws that undermine the rights of women, Kenyatta said there is need for elimination of female genital mutilation (FGM) which, he said, remains one of the most serious violations of human rights of women and girls. “In April this year we signed a landmark declaration between the governments of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Somalia and Ethiopia to address cross border FGM practice,” he pointed out.

He called on participants to bear in mind those he referred to as “most important participants” who were absent in the summit, alluding to the victims of gender violence, discrimination and abuse.

“I am referring to the 1-in-5 women from all corners of the world that this year alone will experience gender-based violence, most likely from someone who is close to them; the 800 women and girls who die every day during pregnancy or childbirth; and the four million girls who, every year, have to endure the painful and traumatic effects of FMG,” he said.

Uhuru added that other non-participating but crucial categories are the more than 33,000 girls who are married off every day before the age of 18, and the millions of unemployed youth with limited hope for their future.

Ib Petersen, Denmark’s Special Envoy for ICPD25, said there will be no ICPD50, adding that women and girls around the world have waited long enough to have rights and choices. “Looking towards 2030, we now enter a decade of delivery during which we will walk the talk and hold all of us to account for the commitments we made in Nairobi,” said Petersen.

Rasmus Prehn, Danish Minister for Development Cooperation, called for more support to youth and women, noting that said women and girls are at the heart of sustainable development. “Women and girls are the true owners of their bodies,” he said.

His views were echoed by UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, who said: “Millions of women and girls are still waiting for promises to be met, they’ve been waiting for a long time.” She added that SDGs cannot be achieved until women, girls and young people are able to control their bodies and their lives, and live free of violence.”

Ambassador Kamau Macharia, Principal Secretary in the Kenyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told delegates that “as a developing country we know the cost of under development: the cost of dead mothers, orphans, those aborted and families broken by gender violence puts to shame that 264 billion dollars.”

According to Macharia, developing nations should not wait for donor support to fund their programmes but should rather mobilise own funding. “Countries making strides are those utilising their own resources to fund their own projects within the global agenda.” [IDN-InDepthNews – 17 November 2019]

## Pneumonia the Number One Killer Disease of Children

By Sean Buchanan



*Photo: Omid, ten months malnourished child suffering from pneumonia is treated in Mofleh Pediatric Hospital in the province of Herat province, west of Afghanistan on January 29, 2019. © UNICEF/UN0280720/Hashimi AFP-Services*

NEW YORK (IDN) – Pneumonia, an entirely preventable disease, claimed the lives of 800,000 children – or one child every 39 seconds – under the age of five last year, but funding to improve survival rates continues to lag, according to a new analysis.

Most deaths occurred among children under the age of two, and almost 153,000 within the first month of life, says a UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) analysis produced in September 2019, based on estimates from the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Maternal and Child Epidemiology Estimation Group (MCEE) and the United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation.

Sounding the alarm about this forgotten epidemic, six leading health and children’s organisations – ISGlobal, Save the Children, UNICEF, Every Breath Counts, Unitaid and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance – launched an appeal on November 12 for global action.

Calling for concrete commitments from high-burden countries and international donors to tackle pneumonia, the group – together with the “la Caixa” Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and USAID – will host the Global Forum on Childhood Pneumonia in Spain on January 29-31, 2020.

Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, said: “Every day, nearly 2,200 children under the age of five die from pneumonia, a curable and mostly preventable disease.

Strong global commitment and increased investments are critical to the fight against this disease. Only through cost-effective protective, preventative and treatment interventions delivered to where children are will we be able to truly save millions of lives.”

“This is a forgotten global epidemic that demands an urgent international response. Millions of children are dying for want of vaccines, affordable antibiotics, and routine oxygen treatment. The pneumonia crisis is a symptom of neglect and indefensible inequalities in access to health care.”



Just five countries were responsible for more than half of child pneumonia deaths: Nigeria (162,000), India (127,000), Pakistan (58,000), the Democratic Republic of Congo (40,000) and Ethiopia (32,000).

Children with immune systems weakened by other infections like HIV or by malnutrition, and those living in areas with high levels of air pollution and unsafe water, are at far greater risk.

The disease can be prevented with vaccines, and easily treated with low-cost antibiotics if properly diagnosed.

But tens of millions of children are still going unvaccinated – and one in three with symptoms do not receive essential medical care.

In 2018, 71 million children did not receive the recommended three doses of pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV), putting them at higher risk of pneumonia. Globally, 32 percent of children with suspected pneumonia are not taken to a health facility. That figure rises to 40 percent for the poorest children in low- and middle-income countries.

Children with severe cases of pneumonia may also require oxygen treatment, which is rarely available in the poorest countries for the children who need it.

Dr Seth Berkley, CEO of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, said: “The fact that this preventable, treatable and easily diagnosed disease is still the world’s biggest killer of young children is frankly shocking. We have made strong progress over the last decade, with millions of children in the world’s poorest countries now receiving the lifesaving pneumococcal vaccine.

Thanks largely to Gavi’s support, pneumococcal vaccine coverage in low-income countries is now higher than the global average, but we still have work to do to ensure every child has access to this lifesaver.”

Funding available to tackle pneumonia lags far behind other diseases. Only three percent of current global infectious disease research spending is allocated to pneumonia, despite the disease causing 15 percent of deaths in children under the age of five.

According to Leith Greenslade, Coordinator of Every Breath Counts, “for decades the leading killer of children has been a neglected disease and the world’s most vulnerable children have paid the price. It’s time for governments, UN and multilateral agencies, companies and NGOs to join forces to fight pneumonia and protect these children.”

In a joint call to action, the organisations urge governments in the worst-affected countries to develop and implement Pneumonia Control Strategies to reduce child pneumonia deaths; and to improve access to primary health care as part of a wider strategy for universal health coverage.

They also call on richer countries, international donors and private sector companies to boost immunisation coverage by reducing the cost of key vaccines and ensuring the successful replenishment of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, as well as increase funding for research and innovation to tackle the disease. [IDN-InDepthNews – 13 November 2019]

## \$78 Billion a Year Will Suffice to Abolish Extreme Poverty

Viewpoint by Jonathan Power



*Photo credit: Institute for Security Studies.*

*“Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere” is the first of 17 Goals of the United Nations. The latest data indicate that it would cost only \$78 billion a year – less than 0.1% of Global GDP – to abolish extreme poverty. Indeed, there is an argument for giving the abolition of the worst poverty priority over funding the combating of global warming. It’s a much, much cheaper cause than what is being estimated as necessary for stalling global warming – \$2.5 trillion each year on the energy issue, overwhelmingly targeted on renewables*

LUND, Sweden (IDN) – “Lies, damn lies and statistics”. “You can bend any fact with statistics”. There is some truth in that. Nevertheless, some statistics are necessary, revealing and surprising. Many of us when asked about the position of the poor in America would say that over the last two centuries, they have made little progress. But look at the statistics, look at the data.

True, many are living in slums and ghettos but today they have indoor plumbing, heating, electricity, smallpox and tuberculosis-free lives, adequate nutrition, much lower child and maternal mortality, doubled life expectancy, increasingly sophisticated medical attention, the availability of contraception, secondary level schooling for their children, buses, trains, cars and bicycles, much less racial prejudice, longer retirement, a rising quality of the goods they buy, better working conditions and the vote.

Once these were luxuries that only the richer could experience.

For Europe, Canada and Japan it is the same, even if poverty is not so deep rooted. In recent years this is the experience of most of Latin America although 20% still live in real poverty. In the Middle East too (including Iraq and Syria before their wars). In China, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, South East Asia and North Africa there has been good progress. In Africa, less so, but a number of countries are getting there- South Africa, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Senegal, Rwanda, Gabon, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya.

The author of “Bourgeois Equality”, Deirdre McCloskey, has called this “The Great Enrichment”.

The very poorest, living on incomes of less than \$2 a day, have experienced some of this but not that much, but they are a fast decreasing breed. Over the 20 years from 1993 the number of very poor people fell by over 1 billion. Between 1990 and 2010 the percentage of children who died before their fifth birthday dropped by almost one half. The biggest declines were in India and China during the time of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Hu Jintao.

According to *The Economist*, the average person among the very poorest lives on \$1.33 a day. It would take only \$0.57 per person to abolish extreme poverty. This would cost only \$78 billion a year, less than 0.1% of Global GDP. Indeed, there is an argument for giving the abolition of the worst poverty priority over funding the combating of global warming.

It's a much, much cheaper cause than what is being estimated as necessary for stalling global warming. Present projections estimate that the world should spend \$ 2.5 trillion each year on the energy issue, overwhelmingly targeted on renewables.

It is also a more urgent cause because people are suffering right now whereas global warming's severe impact will not come about for another ten to twenty years. Of course, we should do both. The resources are there – locked up in arms' budgets. If the justification of military expenditure is "defence" then isn't the priority of "defence" the defence of the very lives of the poorest and the defence of our planet?

Despite popular belief, the world has become a more equal place since the global financial crisis that began eleven years ago. The growth of Brazil, India and China has led to the biggest decrease in inequality since the Industrial Revolution began in Britain.

The world has also become a less violent place. There have never been so few wars as since the end of the Cold War. According to Stephen Pinker's magisterial study of 2011, "The Better Angels of Our Nature", the worldwide rate of death from war has fallen from 300 per 100,000 people during World War 2 to single digits in the 1970s and 80s to less than 1 in this century.

Sixty per cent of the world is now democratic (in 1940 you could count the number on both hands). The democracies almost never go to war with each other.

UN peacekeeping operations have exploded in number, bringing much success. Under both Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump, as Syria has shown, the U.S., the world's superpower, is becoming skittish about getting into wars and the tendency is when in to pull out.

Murder and crime rates have fallen precipitously. Poor people are the ones disproportionately hurt by crime. The European murder rate has fallen 35-fold since the Middle Ages. Though between the 1970s and 80s homicide rates climbed back up from their historic lows, reversing the progress made since the late 19th century, they have fallen sharply in the 21st century in 75 countries.

Violent crime has dropped particularly sharply in the developed world. This is not because of increased incarceration. Police tactics have markedly improved. DNA testing has enabled criminals to be tracked down more easily.

Abortion is more widely available and thus the number of children born to drug addicts, drunks and single mothers who cannot cope, and thus are more likely to turn to crime, has shrunk significantly. Not least a factor is the abolition of lead in petrol (gasoline) in 175 countries. Lead exposure damages people's brains. The parts of the brain damaged by lead are the same ones that check people's aggressive impulses. Crime shot up in the mid to late 20th century as cars and lorries spread around the world.

Surrounded still by poverty, environmental degradation, injustice, the talk of war and the fear of crime we tend to believe the worst. The media with its focus on disaster does not help. But the statistics and the facts reveal another story. That should give us the strength and the hope to fight on. We can make the world an even better place.

*Note: Jonathan Power was for 17 years a foreign affairs columnist and commentator for the International Herald Tribune. [IDN-InDepthNews – 12 November 2019]*

## Upholding International Humanitarian Law in Times of Armed Violence

Viewpoint by Rene Wadlow, President, Association of World Citizens



Image: Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949 and the Protocol Additional adopted in 1977. Source: history.com

GENEVA (IDN) – The entry of Turkish troops into what they call a "safe zone" on the frontier of Turkey and northeast Syria and especially the actions of Turkish-backed Syrian militias has raised in a dramatic way the issue of respect of international humanitarian law. Regular military personnel of all countries are theoretically informed of the rules of the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949 and the Protocol Additional adopted in 1977.

When the 1949 Geneva Conventions were drafted and adopted, it was possible to spell out in considerable detail rules regarding prisoners of war and the protection of civilians, in particular Common Article 3 (so called because it is found in all four Conventions) provides that *"each Party to the conflict shall be bound to apply, as a minimum, the following provisions: Persons taking no active part in the hostilities...shall in all circumstances be treated humanely without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria."*

The importance of Common Article 3 should not be underestimated. It sets out in straightforward terms important protections that all parties to a conflict must respect. In order to meet the need for additional protection, international humanitarian law has evolved to cover not only international armed conflict but also internal armed conflict. Today, international human rights standards are also considered part of international humanitarian law, thus providing additional protection for vulnerable population groups such as women, children and minorities.

As situations of internal violence and strife proliferate, abuses committed by non-State actors, such as armed militias, are increasing concerns. Fundamental standards of international humanitarian law are intended to ensure the effective protection of human beings in all situations. The standards are clear.

*[For useful guides to international humanitarian law see: D. Schindler and J. Toman. The Laws of Armed Conflicts (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1988)H. McCoubrey and N.D. White. International Law and Armed Conflicts (Dartmouth Publishing Co. 1992)]*

There are two major weaknesses in the effectiveness of international humanitarian law. The first is that many people do not know that it exists and that they are bound by its norms. Thus, there is an important role for greater promotional activities, the dissemination of information through general education, specific training of the military, outreach to armed militias, and cooperation with a wide range of non-governmental organizations.

The second weakness is that violations of international humanitarian law are rarely punished. Governments too often tolerate these violations. Few soldiers are tried, or court martialled for the violations of international humanitarian law. This weakness is even more true of non-governmental militias and armed groups.

In fact, most violations of international humanitarian law are not actions of individual soldiers or militia members carried away by a sudden rush of anger, fear, a desire of revenge or a sudden sexual urge to rape a woman. Soldiers and militia members violating the norms of international humanitarian law are acting on orders of their commanders.

Thus, the only solid response is an act of conscience to refuse an order of a military or militia higher up and refuse to torture, to bomb a medical facility, to shoot a prisoner, to harm a child, and to rape a woman. Conscience, that inner voice which discerns what is right from wrong and encourages right action is the value on which we can build the defence of international humanitarian law. The defence of conscience to refuse unjust orders is a large task but a crucial action for moving toward a law-based world society. [IDN-InDepthNews – 05 November 2019]



*Credit: International Committee of the Red Cross*

A century and a half after the First Geneva Convention was adopted, international humanitarian law (IHL) remains a critical tool and the necessary legal framework to protect human life and dignity when armed conflicts arise.

Strengthening its respect is in fact the single most important way to improve the lives of civilians, wounded, detainees and all persons who do not participate in the hostilities.

## How Reparations Can Help Eradicate Poverty and Secure SDGs

Viewpoint by Manish Uprety F.R.A.S. and Jainendra Karn \*

*Manish Uprety F.R.A.S. is an ex-diplomat and Jainendra Karn is a senior leader of the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP).*



*Photo: Mother in shreds of clothing with child begging on the streets of Calcutta during the Bengal famine of 1943 (left), and a family on the sidewalk in Calcutta during the Bengal famine of 1943 (right). Source: Wikipedia*

NEW DELHI (IDN) – Dealing with numbers can take a toll and might make one seek fulfilment in other spheres. No wonder the most influential poet of the last Century penned *The Waste Land* in 1922 when he was dutifully employed with the foreign transactions department of Lloyd's, an austere English bank in London.

Another case that one can think of is of Peter Bone, an accountant by training and Conservative party Member of Parliament in England from Wellingborough and Rushden who in November 2018 found glee when he made no bones about how and where the Republic of India should spend its resources. The latter reminds one of the famous aphorism *Par Updesh Kushal Bahutere*.

With immense challenges to meet in the sphere of development especially in developing countries, and many policy options and opinions available, one is but tempted to explore the issue a bit more diligently as one has finite resources and limited avenues to generate them.

In 2015, world leaders agreed to the Global Goals for Sustainable Development, a set of 17 goals for a better world by 2030. These goals aim to end poverty, fight inequality and address the urgency of climate change among others, and seek the participation of governments, businesses, civil society and the general public to work together to build a better future for everyone.

It seems like the typical case of old wine with a new label. Following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000 and the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, all 191 United Nations member states at the time, and at least 22 international organizations, committed to help achieve the eight UN Millennium

Development Goals by the year 2015. Each goal had specific targets, and dates for achieving those targets but unfortunately could not be met.

Critics of the MDGs complained of a lack of analysis and justification behind the chosen objectives, and the difficulty or lack of measurements for some goals and uneven progress, among others. Anyway through Resolution 70/1 of the United Nations General Assembly on September 25, 2015, that has the 2030 Development Agenda titled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," the eight UN MDGs transformed into seventeen SDGs and 169 targets.

However, the learning from MDGs experience was also typical in many ways especially in terms of the utilisation of development aid. It is interesting to note that the aid from the developed countries to secure the MDGs, more than half went for debt relief, and most of the remainder toward disaster relief and military aid, rather than to further development.

During the launch of the Human Development Report (HDR) for 2014 by the United Nations which for the first time considered the concepts of vulnerability and resilience in assessing human development progress, Helen Clarke, Administrator of the UNDP had noted that while every society is vulnerable to risk, some suffer far less harm and recover more quickly than others when adversity strikes.

A society is all about its experiences. Colonization by the European countries had an extremely deleterious effect on societies of Africa and Asia. Its pernicious impact can be witnessed even in the contemporary times and judged by the development indices.

When the SDGs were announced in 2015, it was understandable that success on global goal no. 1—eradication of extreme poverty—depended on Africa's performance. However, recent forecasts from the United Nations and the World Bank suggest that Africa is not going to make it.

Why has poverty in Africa stayed so stubbornly high despite record economic growth and what role has its historical experience to play would be an interesting study?

The World Bank report mentions three main reasons:

- (i) less of Africa's growth translates into poverty reduction because of high initial poverty, including low asset levels and limited access to public services, which prevent households from taking advantage of opportunities;
- (ii) Africa's increasing reliance on natural resources for income growth rather than agricultural – and rural development excludes the 85 percent of the poor population living in rural areas; and
- (iii) Africa's high fertility and resulting high population growth mean that even high growth translates into less income per person—a point too often ignored in discussions on the sub-continent and in Washington.

It is not difficult to infer that high initial poverty and reliance on natural resources and lack of agricultural development have a direct link to European colonization.

Regarding Asia, the famed British economic historian Angus Maddison had calculated that in 1600, of the world GDP (GDP being computed in 1990 dollars and in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms) total share of China and India was 51.4%, with China accounting for 29% and India 22.4% of world GDP.

A hundred years later, China's GDP had fallen but India's went up to 24.4% of world output. By 1820, however, India's share had fallen to 16.1%. By 1870, it further went down to 12.2%.

Noted economist Utsa Patnaik has calculated that over roughly 200 years, the East India Company and the British Raj siphoned out at least GBP 9.2 Trillion (or USD 44.6 Trillion; since the exchange rate was USD 4.8 per GBP sterling during much of the colonial period) from India.

In the colonial era, most of India's sizeable foreign exchange earnings went straight to London—severely hampering the country's ability to import machinery and technology in order to embark on a modernisation path similar to what Japan did in the 1870s.

Harvard educated renowned statistician-economist and Indian Member of Parliament Dr. Subarmanian Swamy who has worked with Nobel laureates like Simon Kuznets and Paul Samuelson calculates the amount looted by the British from India to be USD 71 Trillion.

Under the British Raj, India suffered countless famines. The worst hit was Bengal in 1770, followed by severe ones in 1783, 1866, 1873, 1892, 1897 and lastly 1943-44. Earlier when famines had hit the country, indigenous rulers were quick with useful responses to avert major disasters. But not only a ruthless economic agenda but also a total lack of empathy for native citizens was a prominent trait of the European colonization.

The famine of 1770 alone killed approximately 10 million people, millions more than the Jewish holocaust during the Second World War or the Belgian genocide in the Congo. It wiped out one-third the population of Bengal. John Fiske, in his book *The Unseen World*, wrote that the famine of 1770 in Bengal was far deadlier than the Black Plague that terrorised Europe in the fourteenth century.

We should all be concerned, but what can be done? The recent World Bank study, *Accelerating Poverty Reduction in Africa*, offers governments and stakeholders both new suggestions as well as new takes on old recommendations. It should also have considered reparations to the colonized countries by the European colonizers, and the important role reparations can play to accelerate the process of development and secure the UN Global Goals.

In 2013 Caribbean Heads of Governments established the Caricom Reparations Commission (CRC) with a mandate to prepare the case for reparatory justice for the region's indigenous and African descendant communities who are the victims of Crimes against Humanity (CAH) in the forms of genocide, slavery, slave trading, and racial apartheid.

The CRC asserts that victims and descendants of these CAH have a legal right to reparatory justice, and that those who committed these crimes, and who have been enriched by the proceeds of these crimes, have a reparatory case to answer.

One can only speculate what a developing country like India currently ranked at number 130 in HDI with its 46.6 million children who are stunted because of malnutrition can achieve if it manages to secure USD 71 Trillion from Britain as reparation.

Monetary inputs have the capability to initiate virtuous economic and development processes in a society. A good example of it is the 1948 Marshall Plan or the European Recovery Program. More than USD 13 billion under the Marshall Plan helped to facilitate the recovery of Europe's national economies and helped build a 'new Europe' with a political economy that was based on open markets and free trade, rather than protectionism and self-interest. It was a stimulus that set off a chain of events leading to a range of accomplishments. However, aid is always conditional where terms are dictated by the donor.

Therefore, the CRC sets a wonderful precedent to establish the moral, ethical and legal case for the payment of Reparations by the Governments of all the former colonial powers and the relevant institutions of those countries, to the nations that were colonized.

In fact, it is far a better alternative than the same old clarion call to "mobilize resources for the poor" made to the Asian and African governments to raise taxes as a share of GDP or the strings that come attached with overseas aid.

It's November 2019. Would Right Honourable Peter Bone and others including international institutions help set a continuing historical wrong right, and kindly pay heed to make reparations play a mainstreamed role to eradicate poverty and secure UN Global Goals, and pave way for a more just and humane world? [IDN-InDepthNews – 02 November 2019]



## UN Chief Unveils Grand Design for the 75th Anniversary

By J Nastranis



*Credit: UN*

NEW YORK (IDN) – In the midst of multiple crises compounded by paucity of funds threatening the very functioning of the United Nations, Secretary-General António Guterres has announced plans emphasizing the vital significance of the world body. Commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations in 2020, he said, will feature a large and inclusive global conversation on the role of global cooperation in building the future we want.

"United Nations Day highlights the enduring ideals of the Charter, which entered into force ... 74 years ago. Amid stormy global seas, the Charter remains our shared moral anchor," he stressed.

With the ratification of the UN Charter – the founding document – by the majority of its signatories, including the five permanent members of the Security Council, the United Nations officially came into being. October 24 has been celebrated as UN Day since 1948. In 1971, the United Nations General Assembly recommended that the day be observed by Member States as a public holiday.

The launch of the “biggest-ever global conversation” about the future of the planet, as part of the events marking next year’s 75-year anniversary of the Organization, as the Secretary-General declared, aims to reach the global public, via dialogues which will be held around the world, from January 2020. The objective of the dialogues is to listen to the hopes and fears of a wide range of people, to learn from their experiences, and spark discussion on ways to build a better world for all.

Feedback will be sought from all segments and generations of society, in settings as varied as classrooms, boardrooms, parliaments and village halls, but there will be a particular focus on youth, and marginalized groups. The views and ideas generated, will be presented to world leaders, and senior UN officials, at a high-profile event in September 2020.



*Photo in Text: Screenshot of Press Conference by Mr. Fabrizio Hochschild, Special Adviser on the Preparations for the Commemoration of the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the United Nations. Credit: UN Web TV*

The information gathered – alongside the results of global opinion polling and media analysis – will feed into a global vision for 2045, the year the UN turns 100. “It is expected to increase understanding of threats to a sustainable, inclusive future for all, and drive collective action to achieve that vision,” UN News said.

Speaking at a press conference on October 24, Fabrizio Hochschild, the senior UN official overseeing the 75-year anniversary events, said that they come at a time when the world is more inter-connected than ever before, and facing a host of problems that need to be faced through global cooperation; but also a time when nations are retreating from the institutions set up to address such challenges.

Mr. Hochschild said that the Secretary-General hopes to inspire a process of reflection on the state of the world, and the extent to which it is drifting away from the UN’s aspirations for a better future, as laid out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The UN-inspired conversations will, said Mr. Hochschild, be focused around three main areas. Firstly, defining the future we want, as we look towards 2045; identifying the global megatrends, and where they are taking the world away from that vision; and a critical discussion that generates ideas for improving global cooperation.

While UN75 seeks to drive conversation in all segments of society – from classrooms to boardrooms, parliaments to village halls – it will place special

emphasis on youth and those whose voices are too often marginalized or not heard in global affairs.

In a film released on October 24, the Secretary-General appealed to people everywhere to add their voices to this campaign: “We need your opinions, your strategies, your ideas for us to be able to deliver better for the people of the world that we must serve.”

To help frame and inspire dialogues UN has highlighted some of the Issue Briefs which outline issues such as the climate crisis, inequality, new forms of conflict and violence, and the rapid changes in demography and digital technologies. These issues will all require effective cooperation across borders, sectors, and generations.

The United Nations wants to gather diverse perspectives and creative ideas on what is needed to address these emerging risks and opportunities. How can we collectively navigate the gap between the future we need and where we are headed, if these mega-trends continue?

### ***The Impact of Digital Technologies***

Technologies can help make our world fairer, more peaceful, and more just. Digital advances can support and accelerate achievement of each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals – from ending extreme poverty to reducing maternal and infant mortality, promoting sustainable farming and decent work, and achieving universal literacy.

But technologies can also threaten privacy, erode security and fuel inequality. They have implications for human rights and human agency. Like generations before, we – governments, businesses and individuals – have a choice to make in how we harness and manage new technologies.

### ***A New Era of Conflict and Violence***

The nature of conflict and violence has transformed substantially since the UN was founded 75 years ago. Conflicts are less deadly but longer, and more often waged between domestic groups rather than states. Homicides are becoming more frequent in some parts of the world, while gender-based attacks are increasing.

Separately, technological advances have seen the weaponization of bots, drones, and livestreaming, cyberattacks, ransomware, and data hacks. Meanwhile, international cooperation is under strain, diminishing global potential for the prevention and resolution of conflict and violence in all forms.

### ***Inequality – Bridging the Divide***

The world has made significant strides in reducing poverty: over the last three decades, more than one billion people have lifted themselves out of extreme poverty. Yet the income share of the poorer half of humanity has barely shifted over this period, despite global economic output more than tripling since 1990. Inequalities undermine economic progress, which in turn exacerbates the social divides that inequalities create.

Inequalities driven by income, geography, gender, age, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, class and religion – determining access, opportunities and outcomes – continue to persist, within and among countries. In some parts of the world, these divides are becoming more pronounced. Meanwhile, gaps in newer areas, such as access to online and mobile technologies, are emerging.

### ***The Climate Crisis – A Race We Can Win***

“Climate change is the defining crisis of our time and it is happening even more quickly than we feared. But we are far from powerless in the face of this global threat, as Secretary-General Guterres pointed out in September, adding that “the climate emergency is a race we are losing, but it is a race we can win”.

No corner of the globe is immune from the devastating consequences of climate change. Rising temperatures are fuelling environmental degradation, natural disasters, weather extremes, food and water insecurity, economic disruption, conflict and terrorism.

Sea levels are rising, the Arctic is melting, coral reefs are dying, oceans are acidifying, and forests are burning. It is clear that business as usual is not good enough. As the infinite cost of climate change reaches irreversible highs, now is the time for bold collective action.

### ***Shifting Demographics***

The world's population is expected to increase by two billion people, from 7.7 billion at present to 9.7 billion in 2050, before reaching a peak of nearly 11 billion by the end of the century as fertility rates continue to decline. During this period, the global population is projected to become more and more urban, while children below age 5 will be outnumbered by persons aged 65 or above.

Half of global population growth between now and 2050 is expected to come from just nine countries: India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Indonesia, Egypt and the United States of America (in descending order of increase). The population of Sub-Saharan Africa is likely to double, while the population of Europe is likely to shrink.

Meanwhile, people are on the move. While the percentage of international migrants has remained around 3 per cent of the global population over the past two decades, their number has increased by more than half since 2000. At the same time, the number of people forced to flee their homes has risen sharply due to protracted conflicts and could increase further due to climate change and environmental degradation. The vast majority of refugee and migrant flow are to countries in the global South. [IDN-InDepthNews, 24 October 2019]

## UN Focuses on Rural Women's Role in Ensuring Food Security

By Santo D. Banerjee



*Photo: A woman dressed in blue rides a white donkey through open vast terrain surrounded by mountains. Credit: UN.*

NEW YORK (IDN) – Since the first International Day of Rural Women was observed on October 15, 2008, there is agreement that rural women and girls, including indigenous women, play a critical role in enhancing agricultural and rural development, improving food security and eradicating rural poverty.

In fact when the UN General Assembly established the new international day in its resolution 62/136 of December 18, 2007, it called for “attaching greater importance to the improvement of the situation of rural women, including indigenous women, in their national, regional and global development strategies”.

The resolution also calls for ensuring that the perspectives of rural women are taken into account and that they participate in the design, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of policies and activities related to emergencies, including natural disasters, humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction;

It emphasizes the need to invest in and strengthen efforts to meet the basic needs of rural women through improved availability, access to and use of critical rural infrastructure, such as energy and transport.

Further it calls for addressing the specific health needs of rural women and taking concrete measures to enhance and provide access to the highest attainable standards of health for women in rural areas, including in such areas of sexual and reproductive health as pre- and post-natal health care, emergency obstetric care, family planning information and increasing knowledge, awareness and support for the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS;

The UN General Assembly also asked the international community to design and implement national policies that promote and protect the enjoyment by rural women

and girls of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and create an environment that does not tolerate violations of their rights, including domestic violence, sexual violence and all other forms of gender-based violence;

Other measures proposed by the resolution are: Equal access to basic social services, appropriate social protection/social security measures, equal access to and control of economic resources, specific assistance programmes and advisory services to promote economic skills of rural women in banking, modern trading and financial procedures and providing microcredit and other financial and business services to a greater number of women in rural areas, in particular female-headed households, for their economic empowerment.

The resolution also calls for designing and revising laws to ensure that, where private ownership of land and property exists, rural women are accorded full and equal rights to own land and other property, including through the right to inheritance, and undertaking administrative reforms and other necessary measures to give women the same right as men to credit, capital, appropriate technologies and access to markets and information.

Explaining the logic behind the UN General Assembly's resolution, UN Women – the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women – says: “Certainly, rural women are at the front of the battle lines when natural resources and agriculture are threatened.” For example, a quarter of the total damage and loss resulting from climate-related disasters from 2006 to 2016 was suffered by the agricultural sector in developing countries, and this significantly impacted rural women and girls' food security and productive potential.

Women are more likely to die during most climate-related disasters and face greater constraints in accessing natural resources like land and water. What's more, climate change exacerbates existing inequalities, potentially leaving rural women and girls further behind.

“Consequently, one of the most effective ways to achieve progress on the threats posed by climate change is addressing gender inequality,” adds UN Women. Empowered women have greater capacity to respond to climate change; they play important roles in adopting low-carbon technologies, spreading knowledge about climate change, and urging action.

UN Women considers adopting gender-responsive climate policy and programmes and promoting women's leadership in climate action among the key pieces in reducing the harmful effects of global warming.

Along with other UN and development entities, UN Women recognize the need to empower rural women and girls in the context of climate change. The 2019 Secretary General report (A/74/224) on “Improving the situation of women and girls in rural areas” focuses on climate, and UN Women is implementing multiple programmes to empower women in the face of global warming.

Promoting women's empowerment through climate resilient agriculture is in fact a mainstay of UN Women's programmatic activities on sustainable development, and its Joint Programme with Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP), and IFAD on Rural Women's Economic Empowerment prioritizes sustainable livelihoods and rights, aiming, among others, for increased incomes and adoption of climate-resilient agricultural practices. [IDN-InDepthNews – 13 October 2019]

## We Have a Long Way to Go Battling Climate Change, Laments UN Chief

By Shanta Roy



*Photo credit: unfccc.int*

NEW YORK (IDN) – The much-publicized Climate Action Summit, hosted by the United Nations on September 23, took off on a not-so-positive note even though it was billed as a high-level meeting of world political leaders.

Despite dire warnings from UN Secretary-General António Guterres of an impending “climate emergency” – with hurricanes, droughts, floods and heat waves in the far horizon – only 64 speakers, mostly heads of government and heads of state, turned up for the summit.

And 129 of the UN’s 193 member states were virtually missing in action (MIA) at a landmark event mandated to map out a strategy to fight global warming, and most importantly, to provide a platform for firm commitments to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and pledge increased funding for the ongoing battle against climate change.

The world’s five major emitters of carbon dioxide have been identified as China, the U.S., India, Russia and Japan. But both the U.S. and Japan skipped the meeting.

Summing up the outcome of the summit, Oxfam International Executive Director Winnie Byanyima warned: “This largely disappointing set of outcomes from the Climate Action Summit raises the stakes even higher for the upcoming COP25 (scheduled to take place in Chile, December 2-13, 2019) and COP26 in Glasgow, UK (at the end of 2020), when leaders have another chance to lead or let down, once again. We cannot keep pushing these decisions down the road – we are running out of time.”

Asked if there were any worthwhile commitments and concrete actions at the summit, Dr Richard J. Ponzio, Director, Just Security 2020 and Senior Fellow at the Stimson Center, a nonpartisan policy research think tank based in Washington DC, told IDN that some countries (Germany, Qatar) made notable new financial commitments, but on the whole, the largest emitting countries failed to step up to the challenges of what is required to have a fighting chance up reaching the goals outlined in the Paris Climate Accord.

But despite a groundswell of global public concern for the climate crisis, led by students and youth activists, he said, few world leaders were willing to step-up to undertake the significant economic structural reforms – and to provide the private sector both the incentives and disincentives – required to reach net-zero carbon emissions by the 2050 target.

Asked about the future, Dr Ponzio said despite the best intentions of some world leaders, including UN Secretary-General Guterres, “our climate governance system doesn’t seem to be up-to-the-task of keeping global warming below 2 degrees centigrade – let alone 1.5 degrees centigrade target advocated by most scientists”.

Just as the United Nations was itself an innovation in global governance in 1945 over its failed predecessor the League of Nations, the world needs nothing short of a major overhaul of the UN and how global collective action works today to meet the challenge of runaway climate change, said Dr Ponzio.

Asked for a response, Andrew Norton, Director of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) said: “The summit did not go far enough.”

He said the science is clear – “we cannot exceed a 1.5°C temperature rise. It is time to ditch the 2°C target.”

Despite being a key opportunity for all leaders to show they had got the message and would take action that reflected the urgency the climate emergency demands, many rich and historically responsible governments fell short, he complained

Norton pointed out that the 47 Least Developed Countries (LDCs), described as the poorest of the world’s poor, showed true leadership by declaring determined commitments to get on to a climate resilient pathway by 2030 and achieve net zero emissions by 2050.

Despite hundreds of new initiatives announced with billions of dollars attached, most are not responding to what the people living in climate vulnerable areas say they need. Instead, they are being determined by international partners and donors, he noted.

“Although many rich countries pledged to double the finance for the Green Climate Fund, to be effective it must include fundamental reforms to make sure more money is directed to the local level and the poorest countries can directly access it.

“There is a lot to do between now and 2020. Leaders need to roll up their sleeves and update their plans in time for the UN climate summit in Glasgow in late 2020, at the latest.”

He said Governments must ensure that every policy they have — including for aid, trade and agriculture — is in line with tackling climate change. With national pledges as they stand, the world is heading for 3°C rise by the end of the century, with catastrophic implications.

“The voices of children have not yet been heard by the powerful, and the implications of the science have not been taken on board. Leaders need to go further and faster and the next year must not be wasted.”

Asked for a final rundown, Iain Keith, Campaign Director at Avaaz, a global movement empowering people to address crises worldwide, told IDN: “Climate courage is on the rise.

Millions of kids bravely walking out of school, a UN that challenges its members, and indigenous people's fighting fires in the Amazon.”

He said everyone in the world wants action on climate change NOW. But it takes courage to take the first step down a new path, and leaders of major polluters need to find it, or be pushed by 15 years olds.”

“We got a lot of new commitments, but we fell short of the clear plans needed to keep warming below even the higher Paris threshold of 2 degrees. But when you look at this compared to Paris, the progress below shows some big steps in the right direction, but when compared to the latest IPCC report on 1.5 degrees of warming, we still have a big ambition gap to close,” he added.

According to Secretary-General Guterres, the summit did produce several positive initiatives.

“Let me be specific about just a few,” he told at the conclusion of the meeting.

He pointed out that 77 countries – many in the industrialized world – had committed to net zero carbon emissions by 2050. And they were joined by 10 regions and more than 100 cities – including several of the world's largest.

Meanwhile, 70 countries announced they will boost their National Determined Contributions by 2020, while well over 100 leaders in the private sector committed to accelerating their move into the green economy.

More than 2,000 cities committed to putting climate risk at the centre of decision-making, creating 1,000 bankable, climate-smart urban projects.

Many countries around the world – from Pakistan to Guatemala, Colombia to Nigeria, New Zealand to Barbados – made major commitments today to plant more than 11 billion trees.

A group of the world's largest asset-owners – responsible for directing more than \$2 trillion – committed to move to carbon-neutral investment portfolios by 2050.

Multilateral and National Development Banks have increased their pledges, he said while the International Development Finance Club announced that it will mobilize \$1 trillion in clean energy funding by 2025 in 20 least developed countries.

The Club will also promote carbon neutrality by reducing fossil fuels in portfolios and define exit strategies from coal financing.

130 banks – one-third of the global banking sector – signed up to align their businesses with the Paris agreement objectives and the Sustainable Development Goals.

All of this, in addition to the clear call by asset managers representing nearly half the world's invested capital – some \$34 trillion – who are demanding urgent climate action and calling on global leaders to put a meaningful price on carbon and phase out fossil fuel subsidies and thermal coal power worldwide.

“I want to once again salute those countries that have already increased their climate finance support, especially those that have doubled their contributions to the Green Climate Fund,” said Guterres, leaving open the perennial problem of how many of these commitments will be eventually realized?

And his parting words on stage said it all: “You have delivered a boost in momentum, cooperation and ambition. But we have a long way to go. We are not yet there.” [IDN-InDepthNews – 26 September 2019]



## Thai Farmer Shows How ‘Sufficiency Economy’ Works in Practice

By Bronwen Evans\*



*Photo collage: (left to right) Kumnung Chantasit demonstrating how to plant cardamom; An example of how banana trunks and leaves are used to protect the young trees; One of the hard working Thai chickens. Credit: Bronwen Evans.*

CHANTHABURI, Thailand (IDN) – There are generally two reasons why Thai farmers embrace organics – one is health and the other is economics. For 73-year old Kumnung Chantasit it was the latter. He had farmed the same plot of land in Thailand’s eastern province of Chanthaburi since boyhood. Despite the rich volcanic soil, he found himself sinking deeper and deeper into debt as he struggled to pay for the fertilisers and pesticides he thought he needed.

Finally, 26 years ago he was inspired to try a different path, that of the “sufficiency economy” as taught by Thailand’s late King Bhumibol Aduladej, an integrated farming system that could support a family on just four acres – and Kumnung had eight.

Following these principles, he created a diverse garden of fruit trees, fishponds, herbs and chickens, while replacing chemical pesticides and fertilisers with composts and organic teas made with his own herbs and fruit waste. His system is so successful he managed to pay back his debts, and now earns enough to live comfortably with his children and grandchildren and has become a well-respected teacher of the methods.

The first thing to notice when visiting his farm is the soil which is full of worms and humus and the abundant ground cover which includes massive clumps of pandanus and cardamom, which have been divided up and propagated over many years. These companion plants to his fruit trees increase biodiversity and encourage microorganisms, while also providing year-round revenue. Water for the gardens comes from fishponds which add to the nutrients in the soil.

Meanwhile a flock of around 100 wild chickens, descendants of the indigenous Thai red jungle fowl, till the soil, keep insect pests at bay, and provide eggs. He also uses the eggs to produce his own home-made hormone stimulant which encourages the fruiting and flowering of his trees.

The trees in the forest garden look vigorous and healthy, with dark green leaves, a testament to the richness of the soil. Mainly he grows the tropical fruit that does so well in Thailand's southeast region such as durian, mangosteen, longkongs, and rambutan. There are also papayas, bananas and coconuts as well as limes. The tallest trees are durian, native to southeast Asia, which can grow up to 45 metres tall and have massive branches that carry the spikey, football-sized fruit.

In Thailand it is called the king of the fruits and its sweet creamy flesh is hugely popular in Asia, commanding high prices. One of the durian trees in Kumnung's orchard is 55-years old, which he says produces 100-150 kilogrammes of fruit a year, providing annual earnings of over \$3,000. In the middle layer of the forest there are longkongs and mangosteen, then lime trees, and at ground level, herbs and a new generation of recently planted durian trees.

As the trees grow up, they crowd out the sun loving bananas which, when they are cut down add fibre, microorganisms and potassium to the soil. Pepper plants climb up some of the trees.

In addition to concepts that are common to biodynamics and permaculture such as limit disturbance to the soil, keep soil covered with plants, have diverse plantings, and integrate animals into the system, Kumnung follows King Bhumibol's philosophical teachings on the sufficiency economy.

These focus on human behavior and the cultivation of qualities such as moderation, reasonableness, and adequate immunity against unforeseen events or crises. We should possess a broad knowledge, be thoughtful and careful and ethical in our behavior, act with honesty, integrity, diligence and self-control. Since Thailand is a Buddhist country, the sufficiency economy draws inspiration from Buddhism and includes concepts such as following the "middle path" and avoiding extremes such as extreme self-deprivation or excessive consumption.

An integral part of the philosophy is aiming for independence in our daily lives. So, we should not be wasteful but take just enough of our earnings or production to sustain ourselves – the rest we should divide up – give away some, save some, and sell some. By following this path, we can become resilient and can experience balance and harmony in our lives.

Recently Kumnung divided up his land for his three children. It is incredible that just eight acres can support so many people. What a great testament to the value of building up the soil, planning and creating a dynamic ecosystem.

*Note: Bronwen Evans is an award-winning journalist and broadcaster, formerly from New Zealand. She has been living in Thailand for 20 years where she has created an eco-resort in Chanthaburi on the southeast coast Faasai Resort and Spa committed to responsible tourism as well as a nature sanctuary and organic farm that draws on permaculture principles. [IDN-InDepthNews – 21 September 2019]*

## Climate Change: A People-Centered Approach

Viewpoint by Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, President, Soka Gakkai International (SGI)s



*Photo: Dr. Daisaku Ikeda. Credit: Seikyo Shimbun.*

TOKYO (IDN) – “That which is common to the greatest number has the least care bestowed upon it,” observed Aristotle, highlighting an all-too-common human tendency. His warning is still relevant today, especially in our fight against climate change.

The Paris Agreement, adopted in December 2015, is an international framework to strengthen efforts to mitigate global warming. However, as UN Secretary-General António Guterres warns, “climate change is moving faster than our efforts to address it,” and is posing a threat to the very survival of humankind. This year alone has seen strong heat waves sweeping over Europe and India and record high temperatures in the Arctic region including Alaska and Siberia.

According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the long-term trend of rising global temperatures is undeniably related to many of the extreme weather events seen all over the world, and this is likely to continue for some time.

As the phrases climate crisis and climate emergency ring in our ears more and more, the UN Climate Action Summit 2019 will take place in New York on September 23. Our world stands at a crucial crossroads: Will governments be able to step up their concerted efforts to reduce the causes of global warming such as greenhouse gas emissions, and effectively respond to the impact of rising temperatures including loss and damage caused by extreme weather?

The rising sea levels due to the melting of the Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets, as well as heat waves, torrential rain and other extreme weather events have had devastating effects on economies and businesses. Moreover, the effects of climate change are driving more and more people into forced displacement.

The Toda Peace Institute, which I founded in 1996, has been working in recent years on a research program on Climate Change and Conflict that focuses on forced migration. The research has highlighted the extremely grave situation that the people of the Pacific Islands are facing. Affected by rising sea levels, people and communities in the region are being forced to consider relocation, while little attention has been given to what this means to them emotionally and spiritually.

To many Pacific Island societies, one's ancestral land is like a mother. Being forced to move from the land to which one is deeply connected is almost equivalent to losing one's fundamental identity. Ontological security that our native land provides cannot be replaced by material security guaranteed by resettlement to a new site. The research program urges that such inseparable connections between people and their lands be included as a vital perspective in planning action to combat climate change.

I am reminded of the Buddhist teaching of the Four Views of the Sal Grove, which illustrates how differences in people's mental or spiritual state or perspective will cause them to see the same thing in completely different ways.

For example, the sight of the same forest might inspire one person to be moved by its natural beauty and another to calculate its economic value. The problem is that what is missing in one's perspective will also be completely lacking in one's overall worldview.

Consequently, the loss of something irreplaceably precious to a certain community can cause great suffering and deprivation without even being noticed by the overwhelming majority of people.

As we develop responses to climate change challenges, we must consider and incorporate the needs and perspectives of those who are affected by the impact of global warming around the world and who are also vulnerable to gender inequalities and other forms of structural discrimination, rather than simply focusing on economic costs that are more easily quantified.

In this regard, I hope that the leaders of governments who will be attending the Climate Action Summit in New York will re-examine the way they engage with the world, and strengthen collaborative action through their deliberations on global warming challenges.

In order to powerfully advance the Paris Agreement, they must take the initiative to find ways to cut greenhouse gases in every sector from power generation and transportation to food production and distribution, as well as finding ways to increase carbon dioxide absorption, including the planting of trees.

As part of the lead-up to the Summit, the UN Climate Youth Summit will take place on September 21, bringing together young people from around the world.

It is certainly not an easy task to halt global warming. But if we take youth initiatives seriously as a starting point from which to develop a hope-inspiring scenario that engages more people to take action, I believe it will certainly be possible to open a way to build a sustainable global society. Indeed the fate of humanity in this century rests on our relentless efforts to follow the lead of our youth in this respect. [IDN-InDepthNews – 19 September 2019]

## Stunting a Hurdle to Sustainable Development in India

By Sudha Ramachandran



*Image source: OpEd in The Hindu – For a malnutrition-free India*

BANGALORE (IDN) – India’s needs to redouble its efforts to reduce stunting among its children not only because this would improve their mental and physical development, learning capacity and life chances but also, to meet the 2022 deadline set by its National Nutrition Mission and enable the world to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

According to India’s National Family Health Service-3 and 4 (NFHS-3 and 4) figures, the proportion of its children under five years of age that are stunted declined from 48% in 2006 to 38% in 2016. While the decadal decline is significant, the reduction per year was just 1%.

Not only is this the slowest rate of decline among emerging economies but also, at this rate, 31.4% of India’s children will be stunted by the 2022 deadline. According to the Food and Nutrition Security Analysis, India, 2019, a report prepared by the UN World Food Programme in collaboration with India’s Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, India should reduce stunting by at least 2% annually to reach the National Nutrition Mission target of 25% by 2022.

Stunting (low height for age) is a manifestation of chronic under-nutrition and India is home to the largest number of stunted children in the world; around 46.6 million of its children are stunted. Therefore, its progress in dealing with stunting will have “critical impact” on whether or not the global community will be able to meet the 2030 deadline in achieving SDG 2, which aims at ending all forms of hunger and malnutrition, an official in India’s Ministry of Women and Child Development told IDN.

Stunting and other forms of under-nutrition are said to be responsible for nearly half of all child deaths globally. Associated with an underdeveloped brain, it results in diminished mental ability and learning capacity and poor performance in school. It puts the individual at risk of nutrition-related chronic diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity.

Stunting has “lifelong consequences,” Shoba Suri, Senior Fellow with the New Delhi-based Observer Research Foundation’s Health Initiative said. It prevents a child from realizing her full potential in education and thus leaves her with “fewer professional opportunities” later in life. Stunting impacts an individual’s capacity to earn a living. Stunted children are estimated to earn 20% less as adults compared to healthy individuals.

Stunting has potential implications for India’s economic development as well, Suri said, citing a World Bank study, which found that “a 1% loss in adult height due to childhood stunting is associated with a 1.4% loss in economic productivity”.

By reducing stunting India will be able to “improve economic productivity,” the government official said. Its success in preventing stunting will determine whether the global community will be able to achieve SDG 8, which “aims not just at economic growth but growth that is inclusive by the 2030 deadline.” SDG 8 cannot be achieved, she said, so long as “millions of Indians are stunted and thus unable to access full and productive employment.”

It was to combat malnutrition to prevent related problems like stunting among children that the Indian government has put in place programs focusing on child nutrition. Foremost among these is the Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) which was launched in 1975. This program is aimed at improving child nutrition and health by providing nutrition supplements, immunization, and health check-ups for children between 0-6 years of age.

However, the ICDS has failed to have the desired impact. “Poor implementation of the program, lack of monitoring, gaps in the coverage of beneficiaries and inadequate skills of community workers” are among the reasons for ICDS’ failure to reduce stunting and other malnutrition-related problems more effectively, Suri said.

Besides, most nutrition intervention programs in India focus on the post-birth period. But nutrition and health of the pregnant woman impacts the development of the fetus. It is therefore essential that nutrition programs target pregnant women too.

Importantly, while stunting is directly linked to nutrition, studies point to the role that other factors like hygiene, sanitation, gender empowerment, immunization, education, poverty alleviation and agricultural production play in preventing stunting nutrition. Thus, preventing stunting should not be the concern of just the Ministry of Women and Child Development. It requires multiple ministries and departments, including those responsible for tribal affairs, water and sanitation, rural development, etc to co-ordinate their actions to step up the pace of reducing stunting in the country, the government official said.

In 2017, the Indian government launched the Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition (POSHAN) Abhiyaan. Targets were set to reduce stunting, under-nutrition and low birth weight by 2% each and anemia by 3% by 2022. It “seems promising” as it “calls for multi-ministerial convergence,” Suri said.

However, this promising program is being crippled by disinterest and non-implementation. The Ministry of Women and Child Development recently informed the Indian Parliament that several state governments have not utilized the funds allocated to them for implementation of Poshan Abhiyaan, While Bihar is said to have utilized just a quarter of the allocated funds, states like West Bengal and Odisha haven’t taken even the first steps towards implementing this program while Goa and Karnataka haven’t begun utilizing their funds for fighting malnutrition.

“None of the four most laggard states can afford to not implement the Poshan Abhiyaan” as they all have “serious levels of malnutrition.” Average malnutrition in nine of Karnataka’s 30 districts are said to be higher than the national average. The percentage of Karnataka’s underweight children is almost as high as the national average. In the circumstances, no excuse proffered by the state government to justify its lethargic approach to malnutrition is acceptable,” an editorial in Deccan Herald said.

According to Suri, programs working to improve nutrition among children should focus on the first 1000 days of a child’s life as this period “is a critical window of opportunity”. Besides, spreading awareness “about under-nutrition, breastfeeding and infant and upcomes in children,” she pointed out. [IDN-InDepthNews – 07 August 2019]

## Afghani Teenager in Kyrgyzstan Plunges into Learning

By Bagymdat Atabaeva\*



*Collage: Afghani teenager Turganbay Abdulbakhidov with classmates in the background. Photos by Nurbek Bogachiev.*

*The writer is a student of media studies at the University of Central Asia in Kyrgyzstan. She is doing an internship with IDN-InDepthNews as a correspondent for Kyrgyzstan.*

NARYN, Kyrgyzstan (IDN) – Turganbay Abdulbakhidov is a 16-year-old teenager from Afghanistan who immigrated into Naryn region two years ago. His family used to make a living through cattle breeding in the Pamir mountains. Without electricity, proper medical services, educational institutions, and sustainable housing, these people live on the roof top of the world caught in a web of virtually no one’s land encompassing Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

“My family always moves around,” Turganbay told IDN, and the latest move to Naryn is turning out to be a positive one. “I have always wanted to study; this was number one motivation for me to move here, and start a new life in Kyrgyzstan,” he added.

He got accepted to the Access program in the local School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE). This program is oriented to assist socially vulnerable children. No fee is charged from students since the program is funded by the American Council. The program in which Turganbay is enrolled in, has three main parts: English language, IT, and Community services. Children also actively participate in the cultural events and are encouraged to organize voluntary campaigns.

Turganbay joined the program in November 2018 and was placed in the 6th grade though his age indicates he should be placed in the 9th grade. “We hadn’t any strong prejudices about him,” says Zarrina Tynaibekova, one of his teachers at the school. “All (teachers at the boarding school) realized that he would need a lot of attention and support from our side to catch up with the program. We got a special order from Ministry of Education to adjust the school material and see if he can finish 2 classes in one year. Surprisingly, he did. He is a very striving student.”

He finished the year as a top student. “He is one of the most active in my group,” Ainura Alakaeva - English Instructor at SPCE told IDN. When asked how different he is from other children she noted his curiosity and communicability. “I was little surprised that he learnt technology fast. He loves working on computer and making videos, he already has good photo and video-editing skills. I think this is all because of his curiosity and ambition,” she adds.

Turganbay's story may not be something strange to many millenniums living in this region of ongoing conflicts. But, they may be able to learn some lessons from his experience of not to be intimidated by change. The history of people moving across the region could be traced back many centuries when ethnic Kyrgyz started moving into upper Pamir mountains in the 16th century, and later a second wave moved in 1920-30s. Main reason was to avoid expropriation of their cattle after Soviets took over Kyrgyzstan.

After Vakhani valley was given to Afghanistan as a buffer zone between British India and Russian Central Asia, political borders divided Pamir Kyrgyz into two big groups. These were: a bigger group of more than 65,000 people living in modern Tajikistan and a smaller group of 2,000 people in Afghanistan whom Soviets didn't touch at all.

On October 17 last year, the local government and locals of Naryn gathered in the midnight on the main square of the city. They met and welcomed 6 families of Afghanistan origin into their new houses. Local government promised to provide them with housing after a local media exposed their plight. However, promises didn't realize straight away. Society was debating on sharing responsibilities with the Afghani government, necessity of proper documentation, cultural similarities and differences, as the issue of public housing is rather sensitive here.

Opinions of the people here were divided. Some declared their willingness to help, while others were sceptical about the positive aspects of immigration. Some believed that it would be hard for people from Pamir region to adjust to local weather, lifestyle, culture, and technology. They turned out to be right: about one-third of those who willingly came to Naryn have moved back to the Pamir mountains.

Coming from a completely different world, Turganbay wasn't afraid to accept new challenges and study hard to realize his dreams. As a result of the special order from the Kyrgyz Ministry of Education to adjust his school curriculum, the teenager grabbed the opportunity and came out with flying colours

Right at the beginning, he was talkative and curious. In comparison to Naryn children, he is very outgoing and not afraid of sharing his opinions. He also asks a lot of questions, just as he would do when he first came into the school," says Zarrina who is his current Class Instructor at the School named after an academician and an honoured worker of science Uson-Asanov.

"One of the biggest challenges for me was not getting acquainted with technology, but getting used to writing and reading in Cyrillic Script," noted Turganbay. And actually he still uses the Arabic script to write in Kyrgyz and later changes it to the Cyrillic script when it comes to taking notes, writing essays and using phone.

In this religiously liberal country, he faced some problems outside his classroom. These are some of the harder challenges for him to overcome. Turganbay who came from a family of practicing Muslims and a society which used Quran as their constitution found differences in behaviour and lifestyle of his classmates and the society – sometimes overwhelming. With a tight schedule he managed to keep to the requirements of devout Muslims to pray 5 times a day. When he had misconceptions in the school he kept learning more and asking questions.

"I want to continue my education in a Madrasa," says Turganbay. So, to spend his summer productively he is now studying in a madrasa in Kara-Balta which is another town in Kyrgyzstan. "He is very tolerant and patient," says Zarrina. "In class he is very much respected by his classmates as he always tries to help everyone, especially girls. Children in my class respectfully call him bayke ("elder brother" – from Kyrgyz)."

Turganbay is a very faithful and a modest teenager, but is also not afraid of singing and performing to a large group of people in a more secular setting. Just recently during a festival in a local theatre he sang a song "Ulanbek's family", which is a Kyrgyz song translated into English, and also congratulated guests in English.

"I used to go to School in Afghanistan which was much far from our house. However, in our society, education isn't a priority, it's not even an option. Children from early age help their fathers to graze cattle, so their future profession is kind of decided for them," claims Turganbay. Despite huge differences between Pamir and Kyrgyz lifestyles, Turganbay didn't change one main thing in his daily routine – learning and assisting others in learning.

*He is aware that he is lucky because he is now getting used to having books, internet and going to school with a variety of sciences being taught in contrast to Afghani school Turganbay used to go. (Continued on page 65)*



## Mineral Resources Pillaging Leaves Behind Poverty Holes for Africans

By Jeffrey Moyo



*Photo: Foreign corporations exploit Africa's mineral resources. Source: Wikimedia Commons*

HARARE (IDN) – More than a decade ago, he lost his home as diamond miners from China razed it to the ground searching for the gems. Still, today, 74-year old Tobias Mukwada lives with his family in shanty thatched huts they erected hoping that perhaps one day the Chinese diamond merchants would remember them and offer them a decent home.

But for the poverty-stricken Mukwada and his family, it may be a wait in vain.

Zimbabwe's former president Robert Mugabe ordered Chinese diamond miners out of the mining fields in the country's eastern highlands in 2016.

"The Chinese removed us from our homes before they destroyed them as they mined for diamonds and promised to build new homes for us which they only did for some very few people. They made quick money from our diamonds and we fell into more poverty instead," Mukwada told IDN.

***(Continued from page 64)***

He realises that for children of Naryn, these are usual things and thus they may forget to value them. But in Turganbay's homeland families would be left apart from civilization and live in hunger of both knowledge and food. Turganbay is aware that education has opened doors for him to enter a new civilization without having to reject his past or religious beliefs. "I want to study not only sciences, English and Russian, but also spiritual sciences like theology. I want to continue my education in a Madrasa," he says, adding, "I want to become a teacher. I think teachers directly affect the character of a generation. Being a teacher, I can nurture leaders and I always felt like I have a lot to share." [IDN-InDepthNews – 17 July 2019]

Chinese-owned Anjin was expelled by the Zimbabwean government in February 2016, along with Mbada Diamonds, on the grounds that their special grant licenses had expired. Prior to that, then President Mugabe had accused the two mining corporations of massive leakages and smuggling of the gems out of the Southern African country.

Even now, under the country's new leader, Emmerson Mnangagwa, there is no respite for the country's fertile diamond fields, as another door opened for Chinese mining corporations again this year.

Billions of American dollars in revenue have been lost through leakages as foreign corporations have fed from the Southern African nation's diamonds. In a televised interview to mark his 93rd birthday, former President Mugabe claimed in 2016 that the country had lost an amount of 15 billion dollars in diamond mining revenue.

As such pillaging has taken place, many Zimbabweans like Mukwada have wallowed in poverty, of course in the midst of plentiful gems.

Zimbabweans like Mukwada are however not the only ones contending with poverty as foreign corporations pounce on mineral resources across the rest of the African continent.

In Zambia, copper mining tycoons like Anil Agarwal, the Indian billionaire who is owner of Vedanta Resources Ltd, stand accused by government there of owing the government millions of dollars in taxes. Zambia's Information Minister Dora Siliya told reporters in May in Lusaka the country's capital, that "...the company owes the nation 3.01 billion kwacha in taxes."

Yet, just like its neighbour in the south, Zimbabwe, Zambia is battling with grim cases of poverty in a country with a population of approximately 18 million people. According to the World Bank, 60 percent of Zambians live in poverty and 42 percent in extreme poverty, living on less than 1.25 dollars a day.

Zambia boasts rich mineral resources, with copper contributing over 75 percent of the country's national foreign earnings, accounting for up to 6.1 billion dollars in 2017. The country is the second-largest producer of copper across the African continent, and according to the U.S. Geological Survey 2015, the eighth largest in the world.

However, the attentions of foreign investors and comprehensive extractive mega-projects in Zambia have had little effect on the share of people living below the poverty line.

Zambian economists have pinned the blame on their government for brokering mining deals with foreign corporations that have rarely dared to plough back into communities they have mined over the years.

"Government ministers who are corrupt receive bribes worth tens of thousands of dollars if not millions before they allow foreign mining corporations to loot the country's resources with no benefits being channelled towards benefiting poor communities whose minerals are being looted by foreign mining corporations," David Mwansa, an independent economist based in Lusaka, told IDN.

Few African countries like Mozambique, hard beaten with years of poverty, seem to have had their own Damascene moment following experiences with foreign mining corporations.

Recently, a senior Mozambican government official came out charging, expelling some foreign mining corporations from the country after accusing the firms of fuelling poverty and environmental degradation in the country.

Announcing the suspension of Chinese and South African gold mining companies' activities in the coastal African nation in May 2019, the governor of Manica in Mozambique, Rodrigues Alberto, said: "We will continue to be ruthless with these companies. If they are not prepared, we will have them shut down. Our resources cannot be a curse."

According to the World Bank, nearly 50 percent of the Mozambican population of about 31 million people still live in poverty.

Last year, a World Bank report titled *The Changing Wealth of Nations 2018* unearthed evidence of how much poorer Africa was becoming, thanks to rampant mineral, oil and gas extraction by foreign corporations. The report showed massive depletion of Africa's natural wealth by transnational corporations.

According to the report, Africa's smash-and-grab 'development policies' aiming to attract foreign direct investment have now become counter-productive: "Especially for resource-rich countries, the depletion of natural resources is often not compensated for by other investments."

Turning to the Democratic Republic of Congo with a population of about 87 million people, also a prey of foreign mining corporations, one of the country's provinces, Katanga, is blessed with enormous natural wealth, including vast deposits of precious minerals such as diamonds, gold and tantalum.

Katanga province saw a spectacular mining boom around the turn of the century, when the country's former President Laurent-Desire Kabila and then later his son Joseph licensed international mining corporations to tap its treasures.

Over the years, this arrangement generated riches for the Congolese elite, and vastly more for the prospectors, but offered little to the poverty-ravaged population.

According to a United Nations investigation, the Kabila regime "transferred ownership of at least \$5 billion dollars of assets from the state-mining sector to private companies under its control, with no compensation or benefit for the State treasury" from 1999 to 2002.

For many DRC development experts like Tresor Monide, the populous country's mineral resources have unleashed a curse instead of blessings for millions of Congolese citizens. "Politicians have received millions of dollars in bribes, selling away the country's rich mineral resources for a song to foreign mining firms which rarely remit tax to government. It's pathetic here in the DRC," Monide, an independent development expert based in Kinshasa, told IDN.

According to the *Financial Times* investigative journalist Tom Burgis, "the combination of staggering wealth, rampant violence and abject poverty in DR Congo is no coincidence, but part of a pattern causing devastation across Africa."

According to a 2016 report from War on Want entitled '*The New Colonialism: Britain's scramble for Africa's energy and mineral resources*', Africa is facing a new and devastating colonial invasion driven by a determination to plunder the continent's natural resources – especially its strategic energy and mineral resources.

One of the case studies in the report is the scramble for gas and oil in Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara. Morocco has occupied much of Western Sahara since 1975. Most of the population there has been expelled by force, many to camps in the Algerian desert where 165,000 refugees still live.

The case of people in Western Sahara is typical of many other Africans relegated to living like squatters in their own country, thanks to the mineral resources curse that has drawn foreign mining corporations which have stopped at nothing, elbowing out many poor Africans like Mukwada in Zimbabwe from their lands.

"It seems what we only own is poverty, and not necessarily minerals," said Mukwada. [IDN-  
InDepthNews – 21 June 2019]

## World Population Expected to Reach Nearly 10 Billion by 2050

By Jaya Ramachandran



*Photo: Portrait of Pardhi tribal community members, Maharashtra, India (7 June 2019). Credit: UNICEF | Sri Kolari*

NEW YORK (IDN) – Compared to 7.7 billion today, around 8.5 billion people are expected to inhabit the planet Earth within little more than a decade, and almost 10 billion by 2050, with only a few countries accounting for most of the increase, says a new United Nations report. *The World Population Prospects 2019: Highlights*, published by the Population Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), provides a comprehensive overview of global demographic patterns and prospects. T

he study concludes that the world's population could reach its peak around the end of the current century, at a level of nearly 11 billion.

Besides, while some countries continue to grow rapidly, others are seeing their populations decline. At the same time, the world is growing older, as global life expectancy continues to rise and the fertility level continues to fall. Such changes in the size and distribution of the world's population have important consequences for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ensuring that no one is left behind, warns the report launched on June 17.

Liu Zhenmin, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, said the report offers a roadmap indicating where to target action and interventions. "Many of the fastest growing populations are in the poorest countries, where population growth brings additional challenges in the effort to eradicate poverty (SDG1), achieve greater equality (SDGs 5 and 10), combat hunger and malnutrition (SDG 2) and strengthen the coverage and quality of health and education systems (SDGs 3 and 4) to ensure that no one is left behind."

According to the report, nine countries will comprise more than half the projected growth of the global population between now and 2050: India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, the United Republic of Tanzania, Indonesia, Egypt and the United States of America (in descending order of the expected increase). Around 2027, India is projected to overtake China as the world's most populous country.

The population of sub-Saharan Africa is projected to double by 2050 (99% increase). Regions that may experience lower rates of population growth between 2019 and 2050 include Oceania excluding Australia/New Zealand (56%), Northern Africa and Western Asia (46%), Australia/New Zealand (28%), Central and Southern Asia (25%), Latin America and the Caribbean (18%), Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (3%), and Europe and Northern America (2%).

The global fertility rate, which fell from 3.2 births per woman in 1990 to 2.5 in 2019, is projected to decline further to 2.2 in 2050. In 2019, fertility remains above 2.1 births per woman, on average, over a lifetime in sub-Saharan Africa (4.6), Oceania excluding Australia/New Zealand (3.4), Northern Africa and Western Asia (2.9), and Central and Southern Asia (2.4). A fertility level of 2.1 births per woman is needed to ensure replacement of generations and avoid population decline over the long run in the absence of immigration, says the study.

In most of sub-Saharan Africa, and in parts of Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, recent reductions in fertility have caused the population at working ages (25-64 years) to grow faster than at other ages, creating an opportunity for accelerated economic growth thanks to a favourable population age distribution. To benefit from this “demographic dividend”, governments should invest in education and health, especially for young people, and create conditions conducive to sustained economic growth.

The study finds that people in the poorest countries still live 7 years less than the global average. Life expectancy at birth for the world, which increased from 64.2 years in 1990 to 72.6 years in 2019, is expected to increase further to 77.1 years in 2050. While considerable progress has been made in closing the longevity differential between countries, large gaps remain.

In 2019, life expectancy at birth in the least developed countries lags 7.4 years behind the global average, due largely to persistently high levels of child and maternal mortality, as well as violence, conflict and the continuing impact of the HIV epidemic.

Another highlight of the report is that the world’s population is growing older, with the age group of 65 and over growing the fastest.

By 2050, one in six people in the world will be over age 65 (16%), up from one in 11 in 2019 (9%). Regions where the share of the population aged 65 years or over is projected to double between 2019 and 2050 include Northern Africa and Western Asia, Central and Southern Asia, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

By 2050, one in four persons living in Europe and Northern America could be aged 65 or over. In 2018, for the first time in history, persons aged 65 or above outnumbered children under five years of age globally. The number of persons aged 80 years or over is projected to triple, from 143 million in 2019 to 426 million in 2050.

Falling proportion of working-age population is putting pressure on social protection systems, adds the report.

The potential support ratio, which compares numbers of persons at working ages to those over age 65, is falling around the world. In Japan this ratio is 1.8, the lowest in the world. An additional 29 countries, mostly in Europe and the Caribbean, already have potential support ratios below three.

By 2050, 48 countries, mostly in Europe, Northern America, and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, are expected to have potential support ratios below two.

These low values underscore the potential impact of population ageing on the labour market and economic performance, as well as the fiscal pressures that many countries will face in the coming decades as they seek to build and maintain public systems of health care, pensions and social protection for older persons.

The report further points out that a growing number of countries are experiencing a reduction in population size.

Since 2010, 27 countries or areas have experienced a reduction of one per cent or more in the size of their populations. This drop is caused by sustained low levels of fertility. The impact of low fertility on population size is reinforced in some locations by high rates of emigration.

Between 2019 and 2050, populations are projected to decrease by one per cent or more in 55 countries or areas, of which 26 may see a reduction of at least ten per cent. In China, for example, the population is projected to decrease by 31.4 million, or around 2.2 per cent, between 2019 and 2050.

According to the report, migration has become a major component of population change in some countries.

Between 2010 and 2020, fourteen countries or areas will see a net inflow of more than one million migrants, while ten countries will see a net outflow of similar magnitude. Some of the largest migratory outflows are driven by the demand for migrant workers (Bangladesh, Nepal and the Philippines) or by violence, insecurity and armed conflict (Myanmar, Syria and Venezuela).

Belarus, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Ukraine will experience a net inflow of migrants over the decade, helping to offset population losses caused by an excess of deaths over births.

“These data constitute a critical piece of the evidence base needed for monitoring global progress toward achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030”, says John Wilmoth, Director of the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

“More than one third of the indicators approved for use as part of the global monitoring of the SDGs rely on data from World Population Prospects,” he added.

The study presents the main results of the 26th round of the UN’s global population estimates and projections. It includes updated population estimates from 1950 to the present for 235 countries or areas, based on detailed analyses of all available information about the relevant historical demographic trends.

The latest assessment uses the results of 1,690 national population censuses conducted between 1950 and 2018, as well as information from vital registration systems and from 2,700 nationally representative sample surveys.

The 2019 revision also presents population projections from the present until 2100, depicting a range of possible or plausible outcomes at the global, regional and country levels. [IDN- InDepthNews – 17 June 2019]

## African Governments Join Activists to Fight Sextortion

By Kizito Makoye



Photo: Women taking part in a demonstration to oppose sextortion in Dar es Salaam in 2018. Credit: Edwin Mjwahuzi

DAR ES SALAAM (IDN) – A poster bearing a message “Graduate with A’s not with AIDS” at the University of Dar es Salaam, tells a grim story of female students who offer sex to obtain higher grades.

“My teacher wanted to date me. When I refused his sexual advances, he retaliated by giving me poor grades,” says Helena (not her real name).

The 23-year-old law student, who has since experienced dismal performance in her studies, is increasingly worried about her academic future.

The University of Dar es Salaam, known for academic excellence, was in the spotlight in late 2018 after allegations of sexual harassment against female students.

Sitting under a huge baobab tree where friends are huddled for group discussions, Helena, who is just one of many students who have fallen victim of sexual assault, has broken her silence.

“I have reported the issue to the anti-corruption authorities, I hope they will help me,” she says.

A culture of shame engulfing the university community has made it increasingly hard for the victims of sexual abuse to recount their tales, according to women's rights groups.

As part of its efforts to deter sexual harassment against women, Tanzania’s Prevention and Combating of Corruption Bureau (PCCB), has established gender desks, where victims of sextortion can file their cases with female officers.

Sextortion is a form of corruption where people holding positions of authority extort sexual favours from students or women seeking jobs or promotion by using verbal coercion.

The move to establish gender desks, which comes barely two years after the East African country adopted ethical guidelines, ostensibly to deter bad behaviour among public servants, is hailed as a milestone in the fight against gender violence, say women’s rights campaigners.

Sextortion is a global phenomenon in which corruption and sexual exploitation intersect. Although the problem inflicts physical and mental distress on victims, authorities have failed on multiple fronts to address it.

Diwani Athumani, PCCB Director-General, explained that the bureau's initiative is intended to seek justice for the victims of sextortion, with a view to ending sexual harassment in the male-dominated system. "We encourage women to come forward to speak up against sexual corruption," he said. "Breaking their silence will help them to be on the right side of justice." According to Athumani, the bureau has also launched a free hotline for people to report sexual abuse.

While sextortion is criminalised in Tanzania, campaigners say the law is too weak to deter the perpetrators who often pay the fines and get released. Section 25 of Tanzania's anti-corruption law of 2007 states: "Anybody being in the position of power or authority, who in the exercise of his authority, demands or imposes sexual favours, or any other favours on any person as a condition for giving employment, a promotion, a right, a privilege, or any other preferential treatment, commits an offence and shall be liable, on conviction, to a fine of not exceeding five million shillings or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years or both."

Fighting for social justice is part of a growing pattern across Africa, where governments have joined forces with women's rights activists to curb the rising wave of gender-based violence.

From Kigali to Accra, from Nairobi to Lagos, authorities and women rights activists are proving adept in creating public friendly units to address the distasteful trend of sexual harassment. In Rwanda, the government had established a gender desk in 2005 with support from UN Women, to enhance the protection of women from abuse.

While anti-corruption laws offer some grounds for prosecuting sextortion, analysts say sexual discrimination and harassment laws often target the kind of abuse involved in sextortion. "The manager who abuses his power to extort sex from junior officer who wants to avoid being fired, is engaging in both quid pro quo sexual harassment and sextortion," said Eliana Mbugua, a Kenya-based gender rights expert.

According to Mbugua, many sexual harassment laws are confined to employment and only involve administrative sanctions.

In Tanzania, where nearly nine in every 10 women have experienced sexual harassment, campaigners say having gender desks where victims of sexual abuse can discreetly recount their tales to trained officials is a good move.

Leila Sheikh, a Dar es Salaam-based social justice activist, who had experienced sexual harassment while working for the Tanzania Commission for AIDS over a decade ago, urges women to raise their voices against the vice.

"Women need to speak up, to raise our voices against gender-based violence. Speaking up sets the wheel of justice in motion," she says.

Sextortion, which undermines self-confidence, is hard to prove since it takes place secretly and the evidence is elusive. While anecdotal evidence shows the prevalence of the problem, the authorities have not previously recorded data due to stigma and shame.

In a 2012 toolkit entitled "Naming, Shaming and Ending Sextortion", the International Association of Women Judges highlighted gaps in criminal justice systems around the globe in addressing sextortion, while suggesting measures to improve domestic laws and policies.

Chris Peter Maina, Professor of Law at the University of Dar es Salaam, decries sextortion on the grounds that it violates fundamental ethical values, urging people holding positions of power to stop sexually harassing junior people over whom they exercise authority.

"Even though seducing someone may not technically constitute violation of the law, people in authority should not abuse their power," he stresses.

Maina urges victims of sextortion to come forward and expose the perpetrators, saying that "victims' fear of exposing perpetrators is the main barrier to the effective fight against sextortion." [IDN-InDepthNews – 12 June 2019]



## Female Solar Engineers Light Up Remote Villages in Zanzibar

By Kizito Makoye



*Photo: Mariam Kassim Salum charging her phone on a solar equipment in Zanzibar, Tanzania. Courtesy: Barefoot College*

KENDWA, Tanzania (IDN) – As darkness falls, Natasha Mahmood and her brother huddle around the weak flame of a paraffin lamp, rushing to finish their homework before their mother blows it out to save fuel.

“I often try to get it done early. But that’s not always the case. My teacher sometimes punishes me for failing to complete my work,” says Mahmood, as a trail of smoke from the lamp rises into a corrugated roof smirched with soot.

For years, 14-year-old Mahmood, a pupil at Dimbani primary school in Kendwa village, northern Zanzibar, has been pleading with her mother to get a better lamp to avoid harmful smoke that makes her sneeze, but Mahmood's mother has been dilly-dallying to discuss the matter with her husband, who is the sole decision maker on family matters.

Now, however, as part of an initiative aimed at bringing electricity to many off-grid areas in Tanzania’s semi-autonomous archipelago, Mahmood and her brother will soon be studying every night under a bright solar LED light, because their home is due to be fitted with solar power, thanks to a group of women trained as solar engineers who convinced Mahmood’s father to install solar power.

With the equivalent of just three dollars a month, Mahmood's father has hired a female engineer in the village to install and maintain his family’s mini solar system.

“I can’t wait study under brighter light. I will no longer suffer from harmful smoke,” says Mahmood with a broad smile.

Despite being one of the world’s best tourist destinations, government statistics show that half of the population in Zanzibar live below the poverty line, with no access to electricity.

A short walk from pristine beaches dotted with five-star hotels to the dusty villages nearby, where thatched homes are plunged into darkness after sunset, is enough to show the gap between the rich and the poor.

While solar power provides cheap electricity to remote off-grid areas and reduces climate changing emissions, it is widely seen as a source of employment and income for women in Zanzibar's male-dominated community, say experts from [Barefoot College](#), an India-based charity working to empower women in East Africa.

In this east African country where only 24 percent of the population has access to grid electricity, according to Tanzania's Ministry of Energy, empowering women can help them realise their full potential and actively participate in community decision-making, notes Malik Khamis, an official in Zanzibar's Ministry of Empowerment, Social Welfare, Youth, Women and Children.

Barefoot College is trying to lift women out of poverty by imparting transferable skills and knowledge so that they can earn a living as solar engineers.

The charity works closely with community elders in Zanzibar, who help identify suitable candidates for training, usually illiterate women with strong roots in their villages.

The project has been created to meet the growing needs of cash-strapped rural women who are unable to find paid work elsewhere due to the male-dominated system.

According to Khamis, members of local communities are usually asked to choose two women aged between 35 and 55 to leave their families and attend a five-month course at college to learn solar engineering.

When they graduate, they return to their villages and start working as technicians, installing solar power with a salary of up to the equivalent of 60 dollars a month.

Women solar engineers from villages like Kendwa have so far installed electricity in more than 1000 households in Zanzibar, according to the charity.

Ali Hemed Mabrouk, who works as a tailor in Kendwa village, is busy sewing clothes under a bright LED lamp connected to a battery charged by a small solar panel nestled on his roof. For this brighter, cleaner and safer electricity, Ali now pays less than half of what he had previously spent buying kerosene.

Having solar-powered electricity is a blessing for the 51-year-old father of six. By working at night, he has been able to raise his family's income by up to 10 dollars a month. Not so long ago, darkness would have prevented this.

"When you don't have electricity there are a lot of opportunities you will be missing. Your children may use a paraffin lamp for studying, which will make them sick and cost you money for their treatment," says Ali.

Abu-Bakr Khalid Bakar, Barefoot College community support manager, says that helping women to become solar engineers is the best way to reduce poverty and protect the environment, since they are quick to promote the use of clean energy.

Husna Husein Makame, a widow and mother of three children, has a reason to smile now that she is able to earn a living for her family.

After months of training as a community solar engineer for her village, she is now able to earn a regular income and subsequently raise her status working for the scheme that seeks to bring light to many off-grid rural villages in the Indian Ocean archipelago best known for spices.

"I really enjoyed participating in the lessons. I am now enjoying the fruits of my hard work," she says, adding that the Barefoot College charity has made a huge impact on improving access to electricity in remote villages.

"I had no status in society before," says Makame, "but with my skills and knowledge, everyone now calls me 'Mhandisi' [Swahili for engineer]." [IDN-InDepthNews – 06 June 2019]

## Generation 2030 in the Nordic Countries Tackles SDGs

By Lowana Veal



*Photo: Gathered at the climate summit in Helsinki, from back left: Norway's Environment Minister; Denmark's Energy Minister; Norway's Prime Minister; Finland's Prime Minister; Iceland's Prime Minister; Sweden's Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate, and Deputy Prime Minister; and Iceland's Environment Minister Photographer: Laura Kotila/Valtioneuvoston kanslia*

REYKJAVIK (IDN) – On September 5, 2017 – two years after the United Nations adopted Agenda 2030 with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets – the Nordic countries jointly launched the Generation 2030 programme with the aim of speeding up implementation of Agenda 2030 through official Nordic cooperation.

A budget of 1.925 million dollars was allocated for the project, which runs until December 2020.

The process had actually started the year before, in autumn 2016, “when a dialogue meeting was arranged in Helsinki”, says Fanny Rehula, project officer for the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM). At that time, it was decided to focus on SDG 12 (sustainable consumption and production), although activities supporting sustainable consumption and production should also relate to other SDG goals including goals 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 15 and 17. The idea of a youth conference also emerged at this time.

One of the initial aims of Generation 2030 was to stress that, as agents of change, children and young people play a crucial role in the implementation of Agenda 2030, “and that emphasis is placed on active efforts to ensure a sustainable future for today’s children and young people, thereby making them an especially important target group and participant in Nordic efforts relating to Agenda 2030”, as their website says.

The emphasis on young people as agents of change has resulted in a number of activities. One of these was a recent conference in Iceland, at the tail end of an NCM meeting that was held in Iceland because the country currently holds the presidency of the NCM. The conference, with the theme of Youth Leading a Sustainable Lifestyle,

consisted of round-table discussions and questions put by young people to Nordic environment ministers as well as short talks by Iceland's education minister, Prime Minister and the new Secretary-General of the NCM, Paula Lehtomäki.

Moderators Hrunn Gunnsteinsdóttir and Saevar Helgi Bragason dubbed the conference “a dialogue to bring youth together” and said that footage from the conference would be shown at the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development Goals later in 2019.

Lehtomäki reminded participants that all five Nordic nations – Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland – had issued a statement in January 2019 about aiming for carbon neutrality. Part of the statement includes measures related to SDG 12 and youth, saying that the “common Nordic voice” will encourage climate-conscious consumer choices by developing information on how to reduce individual climate impacts, using existing consumer information schemes and initiatives, and giving youth organisations a clear role in awareness-raising on climate-friendly consumer behaviour.

Indeed, “the Nordic countries are already doing a lot when it comes to sustainability. Both nationally, but also through Nordic collaboration,” Lehtomäki told the conference. “One example is the Nordic Swan Ecolabel that has made it easier for consumers to make environmentally friendly choices for 30 years.”

“Another example is LOOP, Nordic Innovation's acceleration programme that supports Nordic businesses with ventures for the circular economy to succeed,” she said.

Putting the issue into context, she explained: “Because we know that if everyone on the planet consumed as much as the average Nordic person does, we would need four planets. But we only have one. And it is struggling.”

Lehtomäki, who was Finland's environment minister from 2007 to 2011, told the audience that she once attended a big conference where a large group of young people had asked: “Are you going to be the first generation who makes a change – or the last who doesn't?”

Swedish schoolgirl activist Greta Thunberg, who started the climate strikes that have now grown into a global phenomenon, gave a short video presentation to the conference and brought up similar points.

Because she disapproves of air travel, she could not be present in person but in a statement prepared for the conference said: “We young people are the future and we are facing an existential crisis, the climate crisis. We young people didn't create that crisis, we were just born into this world and there was a crisis, and yet we are the ones that are going to be most affected by it and that's not fair.”

She emphasised the need for action. “We need to hold the older generations accountable for what they have done and what they keep doing to us, and then we need to act now, as every day that goes by without real action is a failure, and every year that goes by without real action is a complete disaster, so we need to do something now.”

Lehtomäki brought the same issue up in her speech: “Youth is calling for action. Politicians, businesses and other stakeholders – including myself – need to take this very seriously. Because the burden of climate change should not rest on youth, it should be carried and solved by those who are in the position to make the necessary changes today.”

Given that Thunberg started the *Fridays for Future* climate strikes in Sweden, has Generation 2030 been working with her in any way? No, says Rehula. But in relation to the climate strikes, although nothing has been planned, “youth as actors for change will continually be involved in the work of the Generation 2030 programme,” she added.

Conference participants heard that together with Iceland's environment minister, Guðmundur Ingi Guðbrandsson, Iceland's Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir intends to set up meetings with the organisers of the student climate strikes. Like his Icelandic counterparts, Norwegian climate and environment minister Ola Elvestuen stated that meetings would be set up in Norway this spring to respond to the climate strikes. **(Continued on page 77 bottom)**

## Ancient Silk Route Hub Gets Ready for Modern Tourism

By Kalinga Seneviratne



*Photo: The Kalyan minaret is one of the most prominent landmarks in the city of Bukhara. The minaret was built by the Qarakhanid ruler Mohammad Arslan Khan in 1127 to summon Muslims to prayer five times a day. Credit: This and pictures in the text below were taken by Kalinga Seneviratne | IDN-INPS*

BUKHARA, Uzbekistan (IDN) – The city of Bukhara was a major trading hub of the ancient Silk Routes that connected Asia to the Arab world and Europe. With the Uzbekistan government’s lifting of restrictions on foreign tourists in 2016 and global interests on the ancient Silk Routes gathering momentum, this 2000-year-old city is poised to become a major tourist hub of Central Asia. ***(Read more on page 78)***

***(Continued from page 76)***

Independent of the NCM and Generation 2030, youth councils have been set up in Iceland and Finland with the remit of working towards the SDGs. Due to the focus on young people, the NCM, as one of the activities of Generation 2030, decided to sponsor three summits of young people from the ReGeneration 2030 movement.

ReGeneration 2030 is a movement for young people aged between 15 and 29 in the Nordic and Baltic countries. The summits, which are held once a year on the Åland Islands, are intended to implement messages and sustainable solutions which are then submitted to politicians, academics, stakeholders and other leaders. The first summit was held in 2018.

The 2019 Summit will work along the theme of Changing Climate, Changing Lifestyles and will focus on SDGs 12 and 13. Regeneration 2030 was one of the organisers for the Youth Leading a Sustainable Lifestyle conference, participation in which was restricted to young people under 30 years of age.

Jakobsdóttir made the closing remarks at the Reykjavik conference. “Kids and young people have been demonstrating every Friday these past weeks here in Reykjavik, just like their peers all over the world, demanding real action for climate change for the sake of future generations. The future is yours and you are realising it and claiming it,” she said. “And we do not want to disappoint you.” [IDN-InDepthNews – 26 May 2019]

The city grew up nourished by the merchants that arrived from Persia, India, China and Russia and it was a popular and important resting point in the development of these routes between the 10th and 17th centuries.

Bukhara was not only a trading post, but also a centre of scholarship, religion and culture. It is a good example of a well-preserved Persian-influenced Islamic city going back to the 8th century.

Many of its grand Persian-style Madrasah buildings have been restored since declared a UNESCO Heritage Site in 1993. Today, however, they are not centres of Islamic learning but host art galleries, souvenir shops, restaurants and performing theatre – perhaps a legacy of its days as part of the Soviet Union.

Many local and foreign investors, particularly from Turkey and Russia, are building small hotels within the preserved historic city, reflecting the style of the ancient Madrasahs.

Elizaveta Nekrasova, a local retired archaeologist, is not entirely happy with the frantic tourist infrastructure development of the ancient city. Though Bukhara holds a lot of scope to attract millions of tourists a year, she argues that tourism development should not be just for the sake of the tourist dollar but should convey the rich cultural knowledge of its people and civilisation.

“There are over 140 sites of great cultural interest in Bukhara,” she told IDN. “You need to choose sites that will interest and educate tourists.”

She explained that the old city area, where most of the development is taking place, had an ancient water system with about 100 reservoirs and an underground canal system taking water to the communities. “You can find it in the old sector, and this could be a tourist attraction” argues Elizaveta, pointing out that new guidebooks are needed to alert travellers to the unique architecture and history of the city.

There are mulberry trees full of juicy mulberries – both red and white – during the spring season now. They basically grow in the ‘wild’ along the canals and walkways of the old city, with both locals and tourists helping themselves to the berries as they walk the footpaths.

“This has an interesting history,” explains Elizaveta, “going back to the Silk Routes days. This history could be connected to an interesting narrative for visitors that will explain why these trade routes were called Silk Routes”. She also pointed out that there were a number of unique bazars across the ancient city that could be excavated, and an interesting narrative built to connect with current attempts to revive these great trading routes that would interest travellers.



It is believed that Uzbekistan is discussing introducing a Silk Route visa similar to Europe’s Schengen visa with neighbouring Central Asian countries. Since introducing an electronic visa system and visa-free travel for citizens of many European and Asian countries in 2017, Uzbekistan has more than doubled its tourist arrivals to over 4.5 million last year.

However, the bulk of tourists visit the capital Tashkent and the cradle of Moghul Islamic culture Samarkand. Bukhara is about eight hours by train from Tashkent. Recently, a Japanese built ‘bullet train’ has been introduced that cuts travel time by almost half.

As a centre of culture and trade, Bukhara has many unique offerings for tourists such as colourful folk dances, miniature arts and puppetry. The centre of the old city is the 1500-year old mud-brick fortress called “The Arc” and it is surrounded by impressively restored Madrasahs, the immaculately carved Kalyan Minaret and 10th century Samanid Mausoleum – one of the world’s most beautiful buildings made with exquisitely patterned mudbricks. These bear witness to a rich architecture of an ancient Islamic city.

Each evening during the tourist season from May to September, the Nodir Divan Begi Madrasah comes to life. During the day, it is another complex of souvenir shops, but at night it becomes a dining-theatre where a colourful

90-minute folk music, dance and Central Asian desert fashion show is presented to tourists by the Bukhara Philharmonic and Folklore Centre.



The music is very similar to Indian folk music such as that from Rajasthan. “We are employed by the government and train everyday,” a member of the group told IDN. “We perform to about 500 people every day during the tourist season.”

Bukhara has a rich history of miniature arts that go back to the 10th century when Persian manuscripts were produced here. The old city houses many such arts shops and many of them are also their studios.

Feruz Temurov, who taught this art form at the local university for eight years, now has his own studio-cum-shop in the old city. “I find this job more interesting than teaching” he says. “I meet a lot of different people and I get chances to go overseas”.

He has held two exhibitions in France, three in Moscow and one in Vienna. “Bukhara arts is very famous, tourists are coming, and I can make a living on this,” he adds, but complains that too many people are now getting into this business to capitalise on the demand from tourists.

Puppets made with paper pulp is also a local cultural speciality, and puppet shows are performed by using the thumb and forefinger. “We are 17 people from three families running this business,” says 20-year-old Farrukh Akhmedov, who learned the art of making paper puppets from his father.

During the tourist season, tourists come to their shop to learn about this traditional art and Farrukh’s father gives them a three-minute live performance. They can also buy the puppets made at the workshop for between 50 and 100 dollars each. “This is a year-long job,” he explains, “but we still work in off-season making puppets.”



Many residents of the old city living along narrow pathways have added extra rooms to their houses since the government has recently encouraged local residents to get involved in the tourist trade.

Today, Shavkat Boltaev, a professional photographer who worked for the government during the Soviet era, is a pensioner. He has added three upper floor rooms to his historic house and established a ‘homestay resort’ using his 5000 Facebook friends to advertise his business.

“After the collapse of the Soviet Union we had a hard time. But, now with the government encouraging tourism business, it has opened up new opportunities for us,” he told IDN. He has opened a gallery exhibiting his historic photos of Bukhara and has also gone into printing postcards.

“I like meeting people and I use my contacts in the photographic world to attract tourists here and stay at my place,” explains an optimistic Boltaev. “I want creative people to come here, have seminars and learn a lot of interesting things about our ancient city and region”. [IDN-InDepthNews – 25 May 2019]

## Not Faith but Manipulation of the Faithful Behind Hate Attacks

By Sean Buchanan



*Photo: A view of Baku, Azerbaijan. Credit: Katsuhiro Asagiri | IDN-INPS*

NEW YORK (IDN) – Following a recent series of hate-fuelled attacks on places of worship around the world, a forum on intercultural dialogue was told May 2 that “in all these heinous and cowardly attacks... we see a common pattern: hatred of the ‘other’. These criminals are hijacking entire faith communities, pitting religions against each other.”

Miguel Angel Moratinos, High Representative for the Alliance of Civilisations (UNOAC), who was addressing the UN-backed 5th World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue in Baku, Azerbaijan, said that the problem is never faith, it is “those who manipulate the faithful and turn them against each other by their perverted interpretations of holy texts.”

“The volatile nexus between protracted conflicts, terrorism, and violent extremism remains an ongoing challenge for the international community,” he stated, saying that violent extremists seek to “divide and sow instability in our societies”.

Moratinos said the theme of the 5th Forum – *Building Dialogue into action against discrimination, inequality & violent extremism* – was very timely as those gathered at the Forum would no doubt reflect on the “horrific terrorist attacks” that had taken place over recent days and months.

“I stand before you today with a heavy heart,” Moratinos said, explaining that the day before he had been in Colombo, Sri Lanka, where he had paid his respects to the victims of terrorist attacks on Catholic Churches and hotels that left over 250 people dead on Easter Sunday.



Citing a “spate of hate crimes and terrorist attacks” targeting places of worship, Moratinos said this was a stark reminder that “no religion, country or ethnicity is spared” from such unspeakable violence.

He recalled that a synagogue in California was attacked while Jewish worshipers were observing the final day of Passover, and that last year there had been a deadly shooting at a synagogue in Pittsburg. These incidents came amidst similar violence, including an attack on a cathedral in the Philippines, as well as the massacre in April of Muslims worshipping inside mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand.

***Social media only add 'fuel to the raging fore'***

According to Moratinos, social media platforms only add “fuel to the raging fire”, along with the dark web, which offers a space for radicals, white-supremist and ultra-right advocates to “spew their twisted ideologies”.

He maintained that preventing violent extremism and ensuring sustainable peace are complimentary and mutually reinforcing goals.

“The importance of dialogue as an essential tool for conflict prevention and prevent violent extremism cannot be overstated,” he stressed.

Moratinos highlighted the role of youth in providing a counter-narrative for violent extremism through their community engagement, promoting inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue and countering hate speech through positive use of social media. “After all, these young people are our hope not only for the future but also for our present,” he said.

***'No room' for exclusion***

In her opening remarks, Nada Al-Nashif, Assistant Director-General for the Social and Human Sciences at the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), stressed the importance of promoting intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding.

Noting that the Baku Process was launched by Azerbaijan over 10 years ago to establish an effective and efficient dialogue between cultures and civilizations, she said that while “we have come a long way”, there is a need to focus and follow up with concrete actions to create continuity and impact.

She pointed to new emerging forces of division that are spreading hatred, intolerance and ignorance.

At a time when cultural diversity is under threat from the pressures of exclusive populism, she noted that “the world is facing the largest refugee and displacement crisis of recent history”.

“New technologies with the potential to better connect individuals and communities, are being misused to seed division and misunderstanding,” she said.

Al-Nashif stressed the urgent need to bolster inclusion and cohesion in societies undergoing “deep, sometimes unpredictable transformations”,

adding that they are also important to catalyse the necessary innovation to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

“Challenges today are complex and pay no respect to borders,” she underscored. “There is no room for unilateralism or exclusion.”

The goal must be “to embrace change on the basis of human rights and mutual respect, to shape it in positive directions, to craft a future that is more just, inclusive and sustainable for every woman and man.”

Because “dialogue is key”, she said that is why it “stands at the heart of UNESCO’s mission to build the defences of peace in the minds of women and men”.

Al-Nashif noted that UNESCO tirelessly protects education as a human right, calling it “the most effective way to disarm processes that can lead to violent extremism, by undermining prejudice, by fighting ignorance and indifference ... Diversity is our key resource for achieving inclusive and sustainable societies.”

### ***Baku 'positive platform' process***

Ilham Aliyev, President of Azerbaijan, spoke in depth about the Baku Process, which he credited with focusing international attention on intercultural dialogue, calling it a “good and positive platform to make the right decision”.

Saying that the Baku process is “one of the most important” between Europe and the rest of the world, he underscored: “We need dialogue on cultural, inter-religious, political, economic and security issues.”

Yousef bin Ahmad Al-Othaimeen, Secretary-General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, lamented that today the world is witnessing all kinds of discrimination.

“Terrorism has no religion, race or nationality”, he asserted, calling dialogue between cultures “an absolute necessity”.

Speaking on behalf of the Council of Europe, Deputy Secretary-General Gabriella Battaini-Dragnoni argued that inclusive societies, with equal rights and dignity for all, require understanding.

“Promotion of intercultural dialogue is not an event, it is a never-ending challenge” that requires education to ease anxiousness and dispel ignorance, she said, adding that by coming together, with mutual assurances, governments pave the way for social inclusion based on political will.

Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, Director General of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, spoke passionately on the need for political will to make intercultural dialogue a success.

“We cannot fight the rise of extremism without political will,” he said, castigating the world’s decision-makers – from the global super powers to the UN Security Council – for their inability to deliver much-needed progress on this front. [IDN-InDepthNews – 05 May 2019]

## Cyclone-Ripped Southern Africa Faces Tough Challenges

By Jeffrey Moyo



*Photo: Cyclone Idai has impacted almost 3 million people across Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi. Credit: UNDP*

CHIMANIMANI, Zimbabwe (IDN) – The cyclone will affect the region for months to come after it impacted key livelihoods of fishing and agriculture in the largely rural region, the World Food Programme (WFP) said commenting the havoc caused by Cyclone Kenneth that struck Mozambique on April 25, nearly five weeks after the Cyclone Idai that lashed Southern Africa.

Some 31,000 hectares (76,600 acres) of crops were lost at the peak of the harvest season. “The area is already very vulnerable to food insecurity,” spokesman Herve Verhoosel said.

On April 28, the Spokesman for UN Secretary-General António Guterres said the Secretary-General was “deeply saddened” at reports of loss of lives and destruction in Mozambique and Comoros as a result of Cyclone Kenneth. He made an appeal to the international community “for additional resources, which are critically needed to fund the response in the immediate, medium and longer term”.

Earlier, in Zimbabwe, Cyclone Idai – which knocked out Southern African countries like Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe on the night of March 14-15, 2019 – left 57-year-old Murambi without a field to plant her crops even as the next cropping season beckons. “To me it has done the worst damage. I lost a husband because of the cyclone. I also lost the fields on which we used to grow our crops,” she told IDN.

In Malawi, the worst hard times have befallen many like 71-year old Agness Banda. “I’m the only one left in my family. My home was destroyed, my entire family was destroyed too and everything that belonged to us as a family was destroyed in the cyclone,” Banda told IDN.

"Impacts of climate change have reached catastrophic proportions across our region; cyclones like Idai are one of them," Adias Muluzi, a climate change expert based in Blantyre, Malawi's second largest city, told IDN.

For Mozambique, fighting hard to surmount climate change impacts of two tropical cyclones, it would rather take two to tango, as the country's Health Minister Nazira Abdula says: "mitigating the negative impacts of climate change requires concerted efforts from various government sectors, our partners and society at large".

Backed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Mozambique has been at pains to integrate disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation components in sectors such as agriculture, education, health, infrastructure and energy.

In Zimbabwe too, UNDP and partners have been implementing the Zimbabwe Resilience Building Fund, which provides the evidence base for policy making on resilience; strengthens resilience capacities of at-risk communities and provides cost effective response to emergencies via existing safety nets and other relevant programs.

Even in Malawi, UNDP with support from the Green Climate Fund, is providing correct weather predictions and increasing community-based early warning systems to 75 percent of the districts to benefit two million people.

UN Environment's Regional Director for Africa, Juliette Biao, has also stressed the need for more and urgent investment in ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation to reduce the human and financial toll of natural disasters.

"Sound environmental management, climate change impacts and disaster responses are closely interlinked and require a more systematic and comprehensive approach to disaster risk management," says Biao.

Joseph Tasosa, director of the Zimbabwe Environmental Trust is convinced of the pressing "need to think of improved awareness and emergency preparedness mechanisms to reinforce the resilience of local communities to the overwhelming climate change effects".

Within the context of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030), UN Environment developed the Second Edition of the Awareness and preparedness for emergencies at local level (APELL) Handbook. Launched in 2015, this new edition highlights the importance of an integrated multi-hazard approach at local level, and emphasizes the importance of multi-stakeholder and all-of-society engagement.

Also, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction in a 2018 report underlined the staggering financial impact of climate-related disasters. According to the report, "the last twenty years have seen a dramatic rise of 151 percent in direct economic losses from climate-related disasters".

Mami Mizutori, the UN's Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction has gone on record saying: "Cyclone Idai is a clear demonstration of the exposure and vulnerability of many low-lying cities and towns to sea-level rise as the impact of climate change continues to influence and disrupt normal weather patterns."

"Climate change impacts like cyclone Idai will be felt more and more as we go and the impacts will grow more deadly; the worse is yet to come," Happison Chikova, Zimbabwe's independent climate change expert, told IDN.

Even to meteorological experts like Malawi's Chimango Simengwa "rise in worldwide temperatures together with ocean warming, is causing tropical cyclones". Warmer air temperatures mean more rains are held up and then released through cyclones such as Idai, says Joseph Tasosa of the Zimbabwe Environmental Trust. "Cyclone Idai came with about a year's worth of rain in a short space of time," Tasosa adds.

Against this background, observers recall that at the seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 17) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Durban, the world's rich nations pledged to ramp up aid to USD 100 billion per year in restorative climate funding to poorer nations by 2020. However, just 10 per cent of the climate change funding has been secured so far. [IDN-InDepthNews – 01 May 2019]

## Radio Connects a Kyrgyz Community with the World

By Kalinga Seneviratne



*Photo collage by the writer with logo of Suusamyir FM 103 and a picture of the community radio volunteers.*

SUUSAMYR, Kyrgyzstan (IDN) – Travelling on the new Silk Roads recently upgraded by the Chinese, one drives up through stunning mountains that are still covered by snow even as summer approaches. The road from Kyrgyzstan’s capital Bishkek climbs up to a peak of about 4,000 meters before descending over 1,500 meters to a picturesque valley to reach one of the remotest communities in the country, the village of Suusamyir home to about 1,300 traditionally nomadic people.

A community radio project here run by a handful of passionate young volunteers is giving a new meaning to radio in the broadband age, where this traditional media is liberating the community from remoteness by connecting them with the world. “Most of our listeners live in the mountains,” says Aizada Kalkanbekova, Director of Suusamyir FM 103. “They have no electricity, only have this radio. They get our news and they ask for music and want longer transmission.”

When IDN asked a group of local teenage community radio volunteers how they feel living in such a remote community, they were quick to point out that the radio allows them to connect with the world outside.

“People turn on the radio while they are working, even when they go to the field during summer and get entertained and educated. We connect them to the world with news, information and music,” said 16-year old Indusbekova Aitengir, a volunteer broadcaster with the radio. With her experience in radio, she wants to go to university and get educated to become an English interpreter, where she may be able to open up the world further to her people.

Fellow schoolmate Umsunai Achykova, who wants to become a software engineer, says: “People here are mostly relatives and they look after themselves. Not like other places in Kyrgyzstan where people blame government for not helping them. We don’t criticize government.”

It is interesting to note that in many countries in Asia where community radio was established with donor funding and training from Europe using the “voice for the voiceless” principle, the governments have seen community radio as their opposition and have often been hostile or at best uncooperative.

But, Suusamy FM 103 community radio is taking a different path. It is even about to go into a joint venture with the local government to produce a fortnightly community newsletter that will publish both the municipality news provided by the local government and independent community news produced by the radio station.

Suusamy is bitterly cold, blanketed by snow, in winter. But come summer and entire valley blossoms with tall, lush grass, making it some of the best pasturelands in the whole country, popular with local nomadic communities. This place is also becoming a tourist attraction for mountain climbers and travellers looking for a peaceful unpolluted spot to enjoy the crisp mountain air. Heavy snow during winter has also attracted a Kyrgyzstani businessman to set up a ski resort on the slopes nearby.

Station director Aizada, a mother of three children and a university graduate, told IDN that it all started in 2011 with virtually no funds. She set up a local NGO called ‘Aijaryk’ with her as its executive director. Internews, with funds from the European Union, gave them training to set up a community radio.

“At that time, I had no idea what community radio all about,” she says, adding, “it took us two years to get a license”. By that time, funding for her NGO had dried up, so she had to look for funds to set up the station like buying a transmitter and studio equipment that cost about \$ 20,000.

“At that time UNDP started a pasture project here and we offered to work with them using radio



to promote the project (in the local community),“ she explains. “That got us the equipment and we started the station with 5 trained volunteers in December 2011.”

Suusamy valley is the largest pasture area in Kyrgyzstan. During the Soviet days these were widely used, but after its collapse infrastructure related to pastures has badly deteriorated. Pastureland in the Suusamy area can accommodate over 28,000 heads of livestock. The project helped to open roads to additional 30,000 hectares of pastureland, with upgrading of 51 kilometres of mountain roads, and restoration of 56 culverts.

“We played a development communication role,” recalls Aizada. “Old men came to the station and explained their traditional role on how to pasture. The pasture committee (set up by UNDP) came in and their members talked about what they were doing.” Initially local pastures were worried about why they had to pay to the committee to use the new services and the radio played a key role in explaining the reasons and discussing the need for it.

Today, Aizada runs the radio station with no funds from anywhere and she survives because of her job at the Association of Community Media in Kyrgyzstan as a trainer for which she was trained by the DW Academy in Germany. For this job she has to travel regularly to the capital Bishkek, which takes at least 4 hours each way. “I don’t get any salary for running the radio station. It’s purely volunteer work,” she points out.

The radio station broadcasts from 3.30 pm to 7.00 pm each day with 11 volunteers, 7 of them school children. They also have a local imam and a doctor from the village hospital broadcasting as well. The doctor appears in a health program done by 15-year old volunteer broadcaster Sarymsakova Gulzar. The imam has his own program of 30 minutes a week talking about Islam, and sometimes he invites a police officer to discuss the problems of extremism. “The government wants him to do that,” says Aizada.

The team of young volunteers produces news programs from the five villages in the vicinity and they have now set up a website to post their news as well. When they go out to gather news, one of them takes pictures to post in the web with the news story. “Whole of Kyrgyzstan (and the world) can now read our news,” says website producer Anarbek Kaldykov. Their Facebook page has 700 followers and Instagram some 670.

A news report they have done recently with pictures that showed flooding at the school, immediately drew the attention of the local council, who came in and solved the problem.

Aizada argues that their tie-up with the local council to produce a newsletter will help the radio station to put itself on a financial footing because the council will pay them for it. The radio has already started recording council sessions and broadcasting it on radio. “Local people now say, we know what you do at meetings (and hence) council members come better prepared to meetings,” she notes. “This has helped to improve governance (at local level).”

“The local government has given us good support. They are very open, always give us interviews, even if local people criticize them on radio,” says Aizada, pointing out that her young volunteer broadcasters often air ‘vox pops’ with the community members that raise community concerns. “When we collect vox pops we come to be the bridge between the people and municipality,” argues Sarymsakova. “Because we are relatives we can’t fight”.

The most popular programs on air are the evening entertainment programs where people in the mountains call or WhatsApp requesting songs, as well as news. When asked why older people are not volunteers at the station, Aizada told IDN: “The culture of Kyrgyzstan is that older people don’t do volunteers work. They can’t understand it. They even ask younger people why they broadcast for no pay.”

The young volunteers who broadcast on radio have high ambitions. One of their original broadcasters has gone to university, graduated and now works as a journalist in Bishkek. “She (Aizada) persuaded me to go into journalism,” says Jayil, who has come over for the weekend to visit his family. “Now I work at the parliament as a press officer,” he says.

“Being a volunteer here gives us confidence,” says Indusbekova. “My speaking ability has improved. I can express my opinions now, earlier I was very shy.” [IDN-InDepthNews – 15 April 2019]

## Angola Plans Manufacturing Russian Military Equipment

By Kester Kenn Klomegah



*Photo: President of Angola Joao Lourenco.*

MOSCOW (IDN) – Many African countries are looking for profitable business, investment and trade rather than development aid. Now Angola, a south-central Africa, has announced corporate plans to diversify its state business away from purchasing to full-fledged manufacturing of Russian military equipment for the southern African market, and possibly other regions in Africa – impeding realization of the Sustainable Development Goal 16 calling for peace and justice.

Should Angola become a key producer and distributor of Russian arms, there is always the possibility some of them could eventually appear outside Angola in the 16-member Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, warns Professor David Shinn at the Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University.

"Weapons produced by any country can and do appear in African conflict zones. There is plenty of documentation, for example, that weapons made in China, Russia, and Western countries are being used in ongoing conflicts in Darfur, the eastern Congo, and

Somalia," says Professor Shinn, a former U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia (1996-99) and Burkina Faso (1987-90).

In some cases, African governments have transferred the arms to rebel groups and many others have been purchased on the international arms market, he adds.

Professor Shinn added that South Africa has the most advanced capacity to produce military equipment followed by Egypt. Sudan, which received assistance from China and Iran in building its arms industry, and Nigeria, among others, also have the ability to produce military equipment. In this sense, what Angola proposes to do (i.e. to establish a manufacturing plant) is not much different except that it would, reportedly, be assisted by the Russian Federation.

Nevertheless, Professor Shinn hopes that possible Angolan arms export initiatives would be subject to approval by the Angolan parliament, and be of great interest for SADC, the African Union and Security Council of the United Nations.



On February 29, 2019, the Security Council adopted a resolution that outlines steps leading towards the goal of ending conflict in Africa through enhanced international cooperation and partnership as well as robust support for peace operations led by the African Union.

Unanimously adopting resolution 2457 (2019) at the outset of a day-long open debate, the Council welcomed the 54-nation African Union's determination to rid the continent of conflict through its "Silencing the Guns in Africa by the Year 2020" initiative, expressing its readiness to contribute to that goal.

The importance of this resolution is underlined by the fact that there are currently fifteen African countries involved in war or are experiencing post-war conflict and tension. In West Africa, the countries include Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Togo. In East Africa, the countries include Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda.

President João Lourenço of Angola revealed his plan to manufacture Russian weapons in an exclusive interview to the Russian news agency Itar-TASS during his four-day official visit to Moscow from April 2-5, 2019. He said that Angola is one of the principal buyers of Russian arms and that his country wants not only to buy but also produce.

"As for our military and technical cooperation with Russia, it will continue and be deepened. We would like to evolve from our current state of purchasers of Russian military equipment and technologies towards becoming the manufacturers and having an assembly plant of Russian military equipment in our country," he told the news agency.

Although this was Lourenço's first official visit to Russia as Angola's President, he has first-hand knowledge about the Russian capital, since he studied at the Military-Political Academy from 1978-1982.

Over the years, Russia has made "military-technical cooperation" an important part of its foreign policy objectives with Africa. According to Angola's Defence Minister Salviano de Jesus Sequeira, Russia has already delivered six SU-30K fighter jets to Angola this year and two more are expected by the end of May.

Besides, Sequeira said, the country is interested in buying Russian S-400 air defence systems, but there are

no talks about this because of economic difficulties and added that "Angolan armed forces are used to work with Russian weapons". For that reason, military cooperation between the two countries will last forever.

According to the Ministry of Defence website report, Russia agreed to supply arms and military equipment to Angola worth US\$2.5 billion, including spare parts for the Soviet-made weaponry, light weapons, ammunition, tanks, artillery and multi-purpose helicopters.

In a research report titled "Angola: Russia and Angola - the Rebirth of a Strategic Partnership" that was released by the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), the authors Ana Christina Alves, Alexandra Arkhangel'skaya and Vladimir Shubin acknowledged that "defence remains the most solid Russia-Angola cooperation dimension. To date, Russia is Angola's most strategic military partner."

Ana Christina Alves, a Senior Researcher at the SAIIA's Global Powers and Africa Programme explained further that "the military equipment is, undoubtedly, the largest and most profitable side of Russia's trade with Africa – of which the figures unfortunately don't feature in official bilateral trade data. If these were included, the bilateral trade volume would appear much more impressive. This is, perhaps, the strongest dimension of Russia's dealings in Africa at present, but because of the nature of the business very little is known outside military circles, so hard to get the actual picture."

Military-technical cooperation has long been a priority area in bilateral ties, with the Soviet Union beginning to supply weapons for guerrilla units back in the 1960s, Andrei Tokarev, Head of the Center for Southern African Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences, told Kommersant, local Russian financial daily newspaper.

Foreign experts have also expressed their concern. Professor Alex Vines, Head of the Africa Programme at Chatham House, who recently served as a member of the Commonwealth Observer Group to Ghana in 2016 and a UN election officer in Mozambique and Angola, in an emailed discussion acknowledged Russia's military-technical cooperation with African countries. He wrote in an email from London that "the Angolan military partnership with Russia has been tight for many years and a significant part of procurement through its Simpoptex is with Russia. [IDN-InDepthNews – 08 April 2019]

## Ocean Warming Blamed for Lack of Iceland's Capelin

By Lowana Veal



*Photo: An Atlantic Puffin with a capelin in the sea off Bay Bulls, Newfoundland. CC BY-SA 4.0*

REYKJAVIK (IDN) - After five research expeditions in search of capelin, Iceland's Marine and Freshwater Research Institute (IMFRI) has decided not to recommend a quota for it this year, arguing that global warming is probably responsible for the lack of the fish.

According to Thorsteinn Sigurdsson, head of the Pelagic Division at the institute, capelin (*Mallotus villosus*) is a cold-water fish and mostly chooses to be at a marine temperature between 1-3°C. "Concomitant with ocean warming north of Iceland before the turn of the century, changes started to appear in the distribution of capelin off Iceland and instead of being spread out to the north of Iceland and the West Fjords, it was mostly found off the east coast of Greenland," he said.

"It is handy to lay the blame on the environmental changes that have occurred since the late 1990s. Conceivably, this may have had a negative effect on recruitment to the stock, which subsequently

led to the fishable stock of capelin in recent years being far below what it was during the 1980s and 1990s," Sigurdsson added.

Over the last 20 years or so, "ocean temperatures around Iceland have been markedly increasing", said Dr Olafur S. Astthorsson from IMFRI, who was responsible for compiling the chapter on marine ecosystems that was part of a comprehensive study on the effect of climate change on Iceland.

Admittedly, sea temperatures have decreased slightly since 2015, "but they are still higher than pre-2000", he noted, adding that "sea temperatures in frontal waters such as around Iceland may fluctuate from year to year and over longer periods. We don't know whether this decrease now is just a one-off year or an indication of a colder possible period."

Capelin moves around in huge shoals but can be elusive to find. Nevertheless, with the exception of 2009-2011 and 2014, the small pelagic fish has

been extremely important in terms of marine export revenue, second only to cod. Using figures retrieved from Statistics Iceland, economist Fridrik Thor Gunnarsson from the lobby group Fisheries Iceland says that capelin usually represents 6-12 percent of marine export value.

The municipality of Fjardabyggd received and processed 47 percent of Iceland's capelin catch in 2018. Comprising seven villages of varying size, the most important fishing villages are Neskaupstadur, Eskifjordur and Faskrudsfjordur. Each village has at least one company that freezes capelin, renders it down to fishmeal and oil, and removes the yellow-covered roe known as masago that is used as a decoration for sushi.

In these villages, life between January and March centres on capelin, and staff work round the clock. The repercussions for Fjardabyggd are expected to be dire because of the lack of capelin.

“Wage income in Fjardabyggd will decline by five percent or ISK 1.25 billion [9.4 million euro] in 2019 from the previous year,” said Valgeir Aegir Ingolfsson, Employment and Development Officer for the municipality. “The salaries of employees in the fisheries sector will decrease by 13 percent from the previous year, based on a slightly changed capelin season between years. The decline in export revenues into the community will be around ISK 10 billion 751.3 million euro. The turnover of companies that are directly connected to the local fishing industry will decrease by close to ISK 600 million [4.5 million].”

Moreover, “[t]he recession will also be felt in other industries in Fjardabyggd” which in turn will affect the attitude of residents and businesses for investment, maintenance and other service purchases, as well as having effects on the real estate market. “The income of the municipalities and the port fund will decrease by ISK 260 million [1.95 million euro] from the budget for the year 2019,” he added.

“This means that various proposed developments in the municipality will probably have to be postponed due to lack of finance,” he pointed out.

The problem is unlikely to be restricted to this year alone. Sigurdsson explained that unlike other fish which spawn off Iceland, capelin dies after spawning.

“About 90% of capelin spawn when three years old and about 10 percent when four years old. Thus the majority of the spawning stock is composed of one age group. This means that if spawning, hatching or something else result in the age group being small one year, this is reflected in the spawning stock three years later being poor. We have seen such cases in recent years, which is reflected in decreasing stock,” he said.

Sigurdsson pointed out that the condition of the capelin stock has been poor for most of this century, which is reflected in catches from the stock: “The average catch for the last five years has been less than a third of that which occurred 1980-2000, or about 300,000 tonnes. The maximum catch was 1.6 million tonnes in 1996.”

There has also been increasing ocean acidification around Iceland, which could conceivably have an effect on some aquatic fauna. Asked whether shell-forming invertebrates such as shrimps might be affected, the author of the ocean acidification chapter in the climate change study, emeritus professor Jon Olafsson from the University of Iceland, said:

“No, there's been very little research done on this here. Potentially there might be a general effect on marine organisms which build shells or structures of calcium carbonate, but individual species are not mentioned.”

The IMFRI specialist in Norway lobster (*Nephrops norvegicus*), Jonas Jonasson, said that stock abundance is estimated to have declined by 20 percent from 2016, and “recruitment has been low since the 2005-year class”. Without reversal, this will lead to a “further decrease in stock size in coming years”. Recruitment refers to the number of five-year-old lobster, as that is the age at which most lobster is caught. [IDN-InDepthNews – 02 April 2019]

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