

UN RIGHTS CHIEF ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Environmental threats biggest challenge

AGENCIES

The UN rights chief has said the “triple planetary crises” of climate change, pollution and nature loss represented the biggest threat to human rights globally at the opening of a month-long session set to prioritise environmental issues.

“The interlinked crises of pollution, climate change and biodiversity act as threat multipliers, amplifying conflicts, tensions and structural inequalities, and forcing people into increasingly vulnerable situations,” Bachelet told the opening of the 48th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on Monday.

“As these environmental threats intensify, they will constitute the single greatest challenge to human rights of our era,” said Bachelet, referring to recent “extreme and murderous” climate events such as floods in Germany and California’s wildfires.

The former Chilean president said the threats were already “directly and severely impacting a broad range of rights, including the rights to adequate food, water, education, housing, health, development, and even life itself”.

She said environmental damage usually hurt the poorest people and nations the most, as they often have the least capacity to respond.

Bachelet said recent months have unleashed “extreme and murderous climate events”, while drought was potentially forcing millions of people into misery, hunger and displacement.

“We must set the bar higher – indeed, our common future depends on it,” she added.

The session is also expected to debate on rights violations in Afghanistan, Myanmar and Tigray, Ethiopia. In the same speech, she voiced alarm at attacks on indigenous people in Brazil by illegal miners in the Amazon.

Geneva-based diplomats told Reuters that two new resolutions on the environment were expected, including one that would create a new Special Rapporteur on Climate Change and another that would create a new right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

Germany’s foreign minister Heiko Maas on Monday voiced support for the first idea, which has not yet been formally submitted in draft form. “Climate change affects virtually all human rights,” he said.

Decisions made by the Council’s 47 members are not legally binding but carry political weight.



An iceberg is seen at the shore of a graveyard in Nuuk, Greenland. Greenland and the earth’s other polar region of Antarctica have together lost 6.3tn tons of ice since 1994. If all the ice in Greenland melted, the global sea level would jump by about 6 meters (20ft), and although this is unlikely to happen on any sort of foreseeable timescale, scientists have warned that the world’s largest island is reaching a tipping point due to the pressures exerted upon it by global heating. Photo was taken on Monday.

PHOTO: REUTERS



SEPTEMBER 15

1916 - Military tanks went into action for the first time in history as part of the Allied offensive at the Battle of the Somme.

1928 - Scottish bacteriologist Alexander Fleming discovers penicillin while studying influenza.

2008 - Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc. files for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, the largest in US history triggering a global economic meltdown.

SOURCE: REUTERS

Farming accounts for 35pc of it

Study says animal-based food generates twice the emissions as plants

AFP, Paris

Animal farming accounts for twice as many greenhouse gas emissions as plants grown for consumption, according to a study published Monday that mapped agricultural activities worldwide.

What humans eat accounts for a major chunk of the emissions behind climate-change -- transportation, deforestation, cold-storage and the digestive systems of cattle all send polluting gases into the atmosphere.

Researchers looked at carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide released by food production and consumption from farming on land. And they found that, from 2007 to 2013, the emissions amounted to 17.318 billion metric tonnes of CO2 equivalent greenhouse gases per year -- or 35 percent of all human-caused emissions.

The study, which modelled net emissions

ALL HUMAN-CAUSED EMISSIONS



Beef industry alone responsible for some 25 percent of all food emissions

Rice is the worst plant offender, accounting for 12 percent

for over 170 plant and 16 animal products in nearly 200 countries, calculated that 57 percent of food-related emissions were from animal-based foods -- including crops grown to feed livestock.

Plants grown for human consumption generated 29 percent of food emissions,

the study published in Nature Food found, and the rest was attributed to other commodities like cotton and rubber. It did not include emissions from fisheries.

For better understanding, the research team broke down the globe’s farmland into some 60,000 grid squares. This allowed the researchers to model location-specific emissions data for dozens of major crops and animal products.

Beef was the largest-contributing commodity, responsible for some 25 percent of food emissions, and rice was the worst plant offender, accounting for 12 percent.

This helped place cattle-farming South America and rice-growing Southeast Asia as the biggest emitters of greenhouse gasses related to food production.

The study noted the growing demand for food worldwide and the industry’s potential to exacerbate global warming.

‘Potty-trained’ cows!

THE GUARDIAN

A herd of cows has been “potty-trained” in an experiment that scientists say could pave the way for more environmentally friendly farms.

Waste from cattle farms often contaminates soil and waterways and contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and the acidification of soil. For this reason, toilet-training cattle has long been viewed as desirable, but several previous attempts have been unsuccessful.

In the latest study, scientists tried a method they called the MooLoo approach to teach calves to use a toilet area in their barn, meaning that urine could be collected and treated.

The calves were trained via a system of rewards and mild punishments. When they urinated in the assigned area, they were given a sweet drink or some mashed barley, and when they relieved themselves elsewhere, they were surprised by a short blast of water from above.

Within a few weeks, after about 15 training sessions, 11 out of the 16 calves in the experiment had been successfully toilet-trained, according to the study published in the journal Current Biology. The five calves who were not reliably trained probably just needed more time to master the skill, the authors suggested. Langbein said a future ambition would be to teach cows to also defecate in a toilet area.

The team are now working to create an automated system that could be used to train calves with almost no intervention from farmers.

The ammonia produced in cow urine doesn’t directly contribute to the climate crisis, but when it leaches into the soil, microbes convert it into nitrous oxide, which is the third most significant greenhouse gas after methane and carbon dioxide. According to the study, initial estimates suggest that if 80 percent of cattle urine was collected from a barn, the ammonia emissions would be reduced by more than half.



Norway’s Labor leader Jonas Gahr Store (2nd R) cheers after seeing the exit poll results of the Labor Party’s election event in Folkets Hus, in Oslo, during the 2021 Norwegian parliamentary elections. Jonas Gahr Store, in all likelihood the next prime minister, and his two preferred allies, the Centre and Socialist Left, won an absolute majority with 89 of 169 seats in parliament, according to preliminary election results.

PHOTO: AFP

US will assess Pakistan ties soon: Blinken

REUTERS, Washington

The United States will be looking at its relationship with Pakistan in the coming weeks, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday, to formulate what role Washington would want it play in the future of Afghanistan.

Testifying before Congress on the Taliban victory in Afghanistan, Blinken heard from lawmakers across party lines who pushed for a harder line on Pakistan, an uneasy partner of Washington over the 20-year war.

He said Pakistan has a “multiplicity of interests some that are in conflict with ours.”

“It is one that is involved hedging its bets constantly about the future of Afghanistan, it’s one that’s involved harboring members of the Taliban, including the Haqqanis ... It is one that’s also involved in different points cooperation with us on counterterrorism,” Blinken said.

The top US diplomat also called on Pakistan to deny legitimacy to the Taliban unless they meet international demands.

Asked by lawmakers if it is time for Washington to reassess its relationship with Pakistan, Blinken said the administration would soon be doing that.

“This is one of the things we’re going to be looking at in the days, and weeks ahead - the role that Pakistan has played over the last 20 years but also the role we would want to see it play in the coming years and what it will take for it to do that,” he said.

Democratic Representative Joaquin Castro, one of several lawmakers to criticize Pakistan, called on the United States to consider removing its status as a major non-Nato ally, which gives Islamabad privileged access to US weaponry.

US TROOPS WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN

‘Inherited a deadline’

Blinken defends move as he faces tough grilling by lawmakers

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Monday insisted the Biden administration had prepared for worst-case scenarios in Afghanistan, as irate lawmakers accused the White House of presiding over a historic disaster.

The famously even-tempered top US diplomat stayed cool as he faced the toughest grilling of his career at the first congressional hearing on President Joe Biden’s end to the 20-year war, which brought a swift victory by the Taliban.

As rival Republicans raised their voices, waved pictures of slain soldiers and occasionally demanded he resign, Blinken repeatedly noted that former president Donald Trump had set the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

“We inherited a deadline; we did not inherit a plan,” Blinken told the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

After Trump’s February 2020 deal with the Taliban and drawdown of US troops, the Islamist movement was in the “strongest military position it had



been since 9/11,” the attacks 20 years ago that prompted America’s longest war, Blinken said.

Blinken said the Biden administration was “intensely focused” on the safety of Americans and had been “constantly assessing” how long the Western-backed government could survive.

“Even the most pessimistic assessments did not predict that government forces in Kabul would collapse while US forces remained,” Blinken said.

“Nonetheless, we planned and exercised a wide range of contingencies,” he added.

Republican lawmakers, seeing a

vulnerability for Biden, have portrayed the pullout as chaotic and accused the president of abandoning Americans to the fate of the Taliban.

“This was an unmitigated disaster of epic proportions,” said Representative Mike McCaul, the top Republican on the committee. “I never thought in my lifetime that I would see an unconditional surrender to the Taliban,” he added.

Accusing the administration of “betrayal” of Afghan allies, McCaul pointed out that the Taliban’s caretaker government included figures such as Sirajuddin Haqqani, whose arrest is sought by Washington on terrorism allegations.

Blinken said there was “no evidence that staying longer would have made the Afghan security forces or the Afghan government any more resilient or self-sustaining.”

“If 20 years and hundreds of billions of dollars in support, equipment and training did not suffice, why would another year, another five, another 10?”

MAJOR STUDY ON COVID-19

No need for a vaccine third jab booster

AFP, Paris

Vaccines are effective enough at preventing severe cases of Covid-19 that there is no current need for the general population to be given third doses, according to a report in The Lancet published Monday.

Some countries have started offering extra doses over fears about the much more contagious Delta variant, causing the World Health Organization to call for a moratorium on third jabs amid concerns about vaccine supplies to poorer nations, where millions have yet to receive their first jab.

The new report by scientists, including from the WHO, concluded that even with the threat of Delta, “booster doses for the general population are not appropriate at this stage in the pandemic”.

The authors, who reviewed observational studies and clinical trials, found that vaccines remain highly effective against severe symptoms of Covid-19, across all the main virus variants including Delta, although they had lower success in preventing asymptomatic cases of the disease.

“Taken as a whole, the currently available studies do not provide credible evidence of substantially declining protection against severe disease, which is the primary goal of vaccination,” said lead author Ana-Maria Henao-Restrepo, of the WHO.

She said vaccine doses should be prioritised to people around the world still waiting for a jab.

“If vaccines are deployed where they would do the most good, they could hasten the end of the pandemic by inhibiting further evolution of variants,” she added.

MORE NEWS

Quad leaders to meet Sept 24

Joe Biden will host the prime ministers of India, Japan and Australia for an in-person summit September 24, the first-ever White House gathering of the “Quad” grouping, the president’s office said. “The Quad Leaders will be focused on deepening our ties and advancing practical cooperation on areas such as combatting Covid-19, addressing the climate crisis, partnering on emerging technologies and cyberspace, and promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific,” White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said in a statement. The diplomatic grouping, seen as a counter to China’s growing influence, held online leaders’ talks in March, and ministers from the four countries have also held in-person discussions.

Facebook’s double standard

Facebook exempts certain celebrities, politicians and other high-profile users from some its own rules for posts as part of a program launched as a quality-control mechanism, the Wall Street Journal reported on Monday. The program, referred to as “cross check” or “XCheck,” shields millions of elite users from rules that Facebook claims to apply equally at the social network, according to a report citing internal documents. XCheck grew to include at least 5.8 million users in 2020, the report indicated. The article cites examples of posts from high-profile people, including one from soccer star Neymar showing nude images of a woman who accused him of rape and that Facebook subsequently removed. A double-standard regarding content moderation would defy assurances Facebook gave to an independent board set up as a final arbiter of disputes regarding what is allowed to be posted at the leading social network. Facebook spokesman Andy Stone in a series of tweets defended the program, but noted the social media giant is aware its enforcement of rules is “not perfect”.

Covid scare: Putin self-isolates

Russian President Vladimir Putin is self-isolating after members of his entourage fell ill with Covid-19 and will therefore not travel to Tajikistan this week for planned regional security meetings, the Kremlin said yesterday. Putin, 68, was due to travel to Tajikistan for high-level meetings of the CSTO and SCO regional alliances with the rapid deterioration of security in neighbouring Afghanistan in focus. The Kremlin yesterday said in a statement that Putin had called Tajikistan’s President Emomali Rakhmon to explain he could not travel due to his self-isolation regime and would take part in the meetings via video link instead. The Russian leader has taken an array of health precautions throughout the pandemic and has had two doses of the Sputnik V Covid-19 vaccine.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS