



PRESS CONFERENCE

United Nations

SG/SM/21893

27 JULY 2023

Press Conference by Secretary-General António Guterres at United Nations Headquarters

Following is the transcript of UN Secretary-General António Guterres' press conference on climate and the situation in Niger, in New York today:

Secretary-General: A very good morning. Humanity is in the hotseat. Today, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the European Commission's Copernicus Climate Change Service are releasing official data that confirms that July is set to be the hottest month ever recorded in human history. We don't have to wait for the end of the month to know this. Short of a mini-Ice Age over the next days, July will shatter records across the board.

According to the data released today, July has already seen the hottest three-week period ever recorded; the three hottest days on record; and the highest-ever ocean temperatures for this time of year. The consequences are clear and they are tragic: children swept away by monsoon rains; families running from the flames; workers collapsing in scorching heat.

For vast parts of North America, Asia, Africa and Europe, it is a cruel summer. For the entire planet, it is a disaster. And for scientists, it is unequivocal — humans are to blame. All this is entirely consistent with predictions and repeated warnings. The only surprise is the speed of the change. Climate change is here. It is terrifying. And it is just the beginning.

The era of global warming has ended; the era of global boiling has arrived. The air is unbreathable. The heat is unbearable. And the level of fossil-fuel profits and climate inaction is unacceptable. Leaders must lead. No more hesitancy. No more excuses. No more waiting for others to move first. There is simply no more time for that.

It is still possible to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C and avoid the very worst of climate change. But, only with dramatic, immediate climate action. We have seen some progress. A robust rollout of renewables. Some positive steps from sectors, such as shipping. But, none of this is going far enough or fast enough. Accelerating temperatures demand accelerated action.

We have several critical opportunities ahead. The Africa Climate Summit. The G20 [Group of 20] Summit. The UN Climate Ambition Summit. COP28 [twenty-eighth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change]. But leaders — and particularly G20 countries responsible for 80 per cent of global emissions — must step up for climate action and climate justice. What does that mean in practice?

First, emissions. We need ambitious new national emissions reduction targets from G20 members. And we need all countries to take action in line with my Climate Solidarity Pact and Acceleration Agenda: Hitting fast-forward so that developed countries commit to reach net-zero emissions as close as possible to 2040, and emerging economies as close as possible to 2050, with support from developed countries to do so.

And all actors must come together to accelerate a just and equitable transition from fossil fuels to renewables — as we stop oil and gas expansion, and funding and licensing for new coal, oil and gas. Credible plans must also be presented to exit coal by 2030 for Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and 2040 for the rest of the world. Ambitious renewable energy goals must be in line with the 1.5°C limit. And we must reach net-zero electricity by 2035 in developed countries and 2040 elsewhere, as we work to bring affordable electricity to everyone on earth.

We also need action from leaders beyond Governments. I urge companies, as well as cities, regions and financial institutions, to come to the Climate Ambition Summit with credible transition plans that are fully aligned with the United Nations' net zero standard, presented by our High-Level Expert Group.

Financial institutions must end their fossil fuel lending, underwriting and investments and shift to renewables instead. And fossil fuel companies must chart their move towards clean energy, with detailed transition plans across the entire value chain: No more greenwashing. No more deception. And no more abusive distortion of anti-trust laws to sabotage net zero alliances.

Second, adaptation. Extreme weather is becoming the new normal. All countries must respond and protect their people from the searing heat, fatal floods, storms, droughts and raging fires that result. Those countries on the front lines — who have done the least to cause the crisis and have the least resources to deal with it — must have the support they need to do so.

It is time for a global surge in adaptation investment to save millions of lives from climate [carnage.] That requires unprecedented coordination around the priorities and plans of vulnerable developing countries. Developed countries must present a clear and credible roadmap to double adaptation finance by 2025 as a first step towards devoting at least half of all climate finance to adaptation. Every person on earth must be covered by an early warning system by 2027 — by implementing the Action Plan we launched last year. And countries should consider a set of global goals to mobilize international action and support on adaptation.

That leads to the third area for accelerated action — finance. Promises made on international climate finance must be promises kept. Developed countries must honour their commitments to provide \$100 billion a year to developing countries for climate support and fully replenish the Green Climate Fund. I am concerned that only two G7 [Group of Seven] countries — Canada and Germany — have made until now replenishment pledges. Countries must also operationalize the loss and damage fund at COP28 this year. No more delays; no more excuses.

More broadly, many banks, investors and other financial actors continue to reward polluters and incentivize wrecking the planet. We need a course correction in the global financial system so that it supports accelerated climate action. That includes putting a price on carbon and pushing the multilateral development banks to overhaul their business models and approaches to risk.

We need the multilateral development banks leveraging their funds to mobilize much more private finance at reasonable cost to developing countries — and scaling up their funding to renewables, adaptation and loss and damage. In all these areas, we need Governments, civil society, business and others working in partnership to deliver. I look forward to welcoming first-movers and doers on the Acceleration Agenda to New York for the Climate Ambition Summit in September. And to hearing how leaders will respond to the facts before us. This is the price of entry.

The evidence is everywhere: humanity has unleashed destruction. This must not inspire despair, but action. We can still stop the worst. But to do so we must turn a year of burning heat into a year of burning ambition. And accelerate climate action — now.

Enfin, Permettez-moi de dire quelques mots sur la situation profondément préoccupante au Niger.

Allow me to say a few words about the deeply worrying situation in Niger.

Soyons clairs :

Let me be clear:

Les Nations unies condamnent fermement cette attaque contre le gouvernement démocratiquement élu – et soutiennent les efforts de la CEDEAO et de l'Union africaine pour restaurer la démocratie.

The United Nations strongly condemns the assault against the democratically elected Government and supports the efforts of ECOWAS and the African Union to restore democracy.

Hier, j'ai parlé au président Bazoum pour lui exprimer toute notre solidarité. Yesterday I spoke to President Bazoum to express our full solidarity,

Aujourd'hui, je souhaite m'adresser directement à ceux qui le retiennent:

Now I want to speak directly to those detaining him:

Libérez Président Bazoum – immédiatement et sans condition.

Release President Bazoum immediately and unconditionally.

Cessez d'entraver la gouvernance démocratique de votre pays, et respectez l'État de droit.

Stop obstructing the democratic governance of the country and respect the rule of law.

Nous voyons une tendance inquiétante dans la région du Sahel. Les changements anticonstitutionnels et successifs de gouvernement ont des effets terribles sur le développement et la vie des populations civiles.

We are seeing a disturbing trend in the region. Successive unconstitutional changes of government are having terrible effects on the development and lives of civilian populations.

C'est particulièrement criant dans les pays déjà touchés par les conflits, l'extrémisme violent, le terrorisme et les effets dévastateurs du changement climatique.

This is particularly glaring in countries already affected by conflict, violent extremism and terrorism, as well as the devastating effects of climate change.

Les Nations unies sont solidaires du gouvernement démocratiquement élu et du peuple nigérien.

The United Nations stands in solidarity with the democratically elected Government and the people of Niger.

****Questions and Answers**

Question: Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary-General. On behalf of the United Nations Correspondents Association, we are always delighted to see you in this room. A quick follow-up on what you just said about Niger. Do you know where President Bazoum is? You just asked for him to be freed and for the democratic government to be restored, but does anybody know where he is and how he is? And my question is about the Black Sea Grain Initiative. Can you tell us what actions you are taking and plan to take to try to revive the Black Sea Grain Initiative? And have you been in contact with the Russians? Thank you.

Secretary-General: Thank you very much. I spoke yesterday with President Bazoum. I don't know exactly where he is, but he was detained. He told me he was well, but he told me that the situation was very serious. And that is the reason why I made today a very strong appeal not only for him to be immediately released but, not only that, but for democratic institutions to be re-established. We have been in contact, of course, with our partners, namely in ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States]. Yesterday, a delegation [from] Nigeria visited Niger and Nigeria is now the President of ECOWAS and I believe that Nigeria and ECOWAS are doing everything possible in order to find a solution for this additional dramatic situation in Niger after everything that has happened in other countries of the region.

Now, we will go on with all our contacts, with all parties, Türkiye, Ukraine, Russia and other countries that are relevant from the point of view of the global market in order to re-establish the Black Sea [Grain] Initiative. And we had also contacts with the Russian Federation. It is clear that when taking out of the market millions and millions of tons of grain, it is clear that, based on economic laws, that it will lead to higher prices than the ones that would exist with the normal access of Ukrainian grain to international markets. And these increases of prices will be paid by everybody, everywhere, and namely, by developing countries and by the vulnerable people in middle-income and even developed countries. So, it is not with a handful of donations to some countries that will correct this dramatic impact that effects everybody, everywhere.

Question: Thank you. My name is Ibtisam Azem from *Araby al-Jadeed* newspaper. I have first a quick follow-up on President Bazoum. When you talked to him, did he have a message or is there anyone from your office who is in contact with the people who is holding him hostage? And my question is on climate. We have been here before. You talked and warned a lot of times. The question is which measures and how do you want to hold these countries accountable to deliver on their promises? And are you thinking about something, for example, like having a shame list for countries that don't deliver on their promises? Thank you.

Secretary-General: Well, first of all, in relation to President Bazoum, he made today a very clear statement. And we can only underline that fact. There is nothing different that he has told to us. It was through one of the platforms that he made a very clear statement. There was no contact until now from our side with the [people] responsible for this coup. We are, as I said, following closely, and fully supporting the initiative of ECOWAS, that is now, as you know, presided by Nigeria and we hope that it will be successful. In relation to climate, I think we have a first line in the direction of what you said with the Climate Action Summit. It is not a climate summit for everybody to come. It is a climate summit for those that have a clear effort responding to the present climate emergency and that have concrete commitments to make to come. I'm not thinking about a list of name and shame. I'm thinking about, for the moment, the most important thing is concrete stimulus for countries to do what they need to do.

Question: Secretary-General, Xu Dezhi with China Central Television. A quick follow up on Edie's question on the Black Sea [Grain] Initiative. Will the United Nations support an initiative without the Russian Federation? And I remember at the beginning of this year, you hoped that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine could finish this year. But, with the termination of the deal, we saw the escalation obviously; do you still think this conflict could end this year? Thank you.

Secretary-General: Well, indeed, there was not only the withdrawal from the Black Sea [Grain] Initiative, there was the systematic bombardment of harbour installations and even deposits of grain. So, it is indeed as serious escalation, unfortunately, an escalation in relation to precious commodities for the international markets. I am not a witch able to predict the future, but we are very concerned that a prolonged conflict will have even more dramatic impacts globally and particularly in relation to developing countries.

Question: And my first question? Will the UN support a grain deal without the Russian Federation?

Secretary-General: I mean, we need to be pragmatic. We need to do things that are possible and we are doing every effort we can to guarantee the success of both Ukrainian and Russian foods and fertilizers to global markets.

Question: James Bays, Al Jazeera. So, quick follow-up on Niger first. Could you lay out for us what a coup in Niger means for the stability of that region? Are you particularly concerned about Niger because it's an exporter of uranium ore? And then on climate: Your comments, a lot of them were directed to the G20. Is the G20 summit in Delhi now potentially more important this year than COP?

Secretary-General: First of all, on Niger. I am indeed extremely worried. If you look at the region, you have a dramatic terrorist increase of activity in Mali, in Burkina Faso, in Niger, and coming closer and closer to the countries of the coast. You have military regimes in Mali, in Burkina Faso, now eventually in Niger, a fragile transition in Chad and a horrible situation in Sudan. So, we are witnessing that the whole belt south of the Sahara is becoming an extremely problematic area with terrible consequences for their populations and with terrible consequences for peace and stability in the African continent and further afield. So, this is indeed another symptom, another, I would say, a very dramatic event that only benefits the terrorist groups operating in the area that are becoming more and more dangerous, everywhere.

The second question: I have the impression that all kinds of regimes all over the world are always very keen to making money with the resources they have. So, my present concern is not about uranium, it's about people.

Question: And the G20? Is the meeting in Delhi now more important than COP, given your focus on the G20 and what they have to do?

Secretary-General: No. The COP is a decisive moment where the international community comes together. But, the crucial problem to reduce emissions is to make sure that the big emitters reduce emissions. But, small island developing states are victims of climate change. They are doing their best to reduce the emissions, but they are not the problem. The problem are developed countries and the emerging economies that meet in the G20. And so, the G20's success is a basic precondition for the success of the COP, because nobody else can compensate if those members of the G20 do not seriously engage in a dramatic reduction of that emissions.

Question: Can I ask my question in French? *Vous avez parlé de la déstabilisation de l'Afrique. Depuis quelque temps, et en dépit d'initiatives telles que la force G5 Sahel, qui normalement étaient supposées combattre le terrorisme et le djihadisme, qu'est-ce qui s'est passé et où est passé la force G5 Sahel?*

Secretary-General: *Quand le G5 Sahel a été créé, j'ai eu l'occasion de dire d'une façon très claire aux membres du Conseil de sécurité que je ne croyais pas à l'efficacité d'une force sans un financement garanti et sans un mandat clair sous chapitre VII du Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies, aussi permettant des mécanismes de contrôle du point de vue du respect des droits*

humains, du point de vue de.. enfin, de l'utilisation correcte des fonds mis à la disposition des forces. Et je maintiens ma position, qui est d'ailleurs exprimée dans le Nouvel Agenda pour la paix. Nous avons besoin d'opérations d'imposition de la paix et de lutte contre le terrorisme qui soient des forces africaines robustes, avec un mandat précis sous chapitre VII, et avec un financement garanti.

Ce que j'ai dit il y a quelques années, et que malheureusement le Conseil de sécurité n'a pas eu l'unanimité pour le faire, reste aussi vrai que à ce moment-là. Je ne croyais pas à la possibilité de l'efficacité d'une force du G5 Sahel sans un mandat clair et sans un financement garanti. Malheureusement, j'avais raison. Il ne faut pas répéter les mêmes erreurs tous les jours. C'est le moment de reconnaître que le problème ne peut pas se résoudre avec les forces de maintien de la paix, là où il n'y a pas de paix à maintenir. Nous avons besoin d'une nouvelle génération de forces d'imposition de la paix, de lutte antiterroriste, mais avec un mandat clair sous chapitre VII du Conseil de sécurité, et avec un financement garanti. Merci, thank you.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT NIGER

! For information media. Not an official record.
