

UN chief backs new blueprint to end ‘suicidal’ war on nature



United Nations, February 19 (RHC)-- A new scientific blueprint for tackling climate change, pollution and the accelerating loss of plant and animal species shows how to end the world's "suicidal" war on nature, UN chief Antonio Guterres has said.

"Humanity is waging war on nature. This is senseless and suicidal," Guterres wrote in the preface of the United Nations Environment Programme report published on Thursday. "The consequences of our recklessness are already apparent in human suffering, towering economic losses and the accelerating erosion of life on Earth," he said.

Guterres also said that the climate emergency, the biodiversity crisis and the pollution kill millions of people every year and have left the planet broken. "But [the report] also guides us to a safer place by

providing a peace plan and a post-war rebuilding program.”

Among the recommendations was that more than \$5 trillion in annual subsidies to sectors such as fossil fuels and industrial agriculture, fishing and mining should be redirected to accelerate a shift to a low-carbon future and restore nature.

Governments should also look beyond economic growth as an indicator of performance and take account of the value of preserving ecosystems, the report said. It aimed to encourage governments to take more ambitious steps at a UN climate conference in Glasgow in November and during parallel talks to agree upon a new global pact on preserving biodiversity.

With countries launching economic recovery packages in response to the coronavirus pandemic, the authors hoped their policy prescriptions would encourage more coordinated action to rapidly transform destructive industrial and financial systems.

Robert Watson, lead author of the report, told Al Jazeera that there were “vested interests” that were stopping action. “We have subsidies for agriculture, for energy, for fossil fuels that are perverse. They encourage the use of fossil fuels. They encourage the use of bad agricultural practices,” he said.

“If we can get the business community to work with governments around the world, I’m optimistic we can start to move in the right direction,” Watson said. “I think that most governments do realise that climate change is adversely affecting food security, water security, human health and poverty alleviation.”

The report highlighted what report co-author Rachel Warren of the University of East Anglia called “a litany of frightening statistics that hasn’t really been brought together”:

- Earth is on the way to an additional 1.9C (3.5 degrees Fahrenheit) warming from now, far more than the internationally agreed-upon goals in the Paris accord.
- About nine million people a year die from pollution.
- About one million of Earth’s eight million species of plants and animals are threatened with extinction.
- Up to 400 million tonnes of heavy metals, toxic sludge and other industrial waste are dumped into the world’s waters every year.
- More than three billion people are affected by land degradation, and only 15 percent of Earth’s wetlands remain intact.
- About 60 percent of fish stocks are fished at the maximum levels. There are more than 400 oxygen-depleted “dead zones” and marine plastics pollution has increased tenfold since 1980.

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