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Ban pledges \$10 million for post-quake assistance during Chile visit

5 March - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today pledged to release up to \$10 million in United Nations funds to support relief and recovery efforts in Chile, as he began a two-day visit to see the earthquake damage and assess how the world body can help.

“I am very moved to see such strong courage and resilience of the Chilean people,” Mr. Ban said upon his arrival in the capital, Santiago, where he was greeted by Foreign Minister Mariano Fernández and the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Alicia Bárcena.



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (centre) arrives in Chile

The 8.8-magnitude quake that struck the coast of Chile last Saturday killed several hundred people and affected around 2 million.

“Chile has been extraordinarily generous in assisting Haiti in its time of need. Now is the moment for the United Nations and the international community to stand with Chile and its people,” stated Mr. Ban, who had offered immediate support and aid to country through the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the wake of the disaster.

The Secretary-General met with Chilean President Michelle Bachelet to discuss the country's immediate and long-term needs, and they also held a joint meeting with government ministers and the heads of UN agencies in Santiago.



“The UN Country Team represented at this meeting is working with the international community to provide the emergency relief goods indicated by the Government of Chile, including generators, satellite radios and mobile hospitals,” said Mr. Ban.

“We are ready to help provide any assistance that the Chilean Government requests, immediate and long-term,” he added, while commending what he described as Ms. Bachelet’s “extraordinary leadership,” as well as her Government’s coordination with President-elect Sebastián Piñera.

The President voiced her gratitude for the UN’s technical and financial support for the recovery efforts, as well as Mr. Ban’s visit to the area to personally see the damages caused by the quake.

The Secretary-General also announced the creation of a joint working group between UN agencies and the Chilean Government to define the priority areas in which to allocate the funds that will be released from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), particularly in health, emergency shelters, education and water and sanitation.

ECLAC and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), along with OCHA, will coordinate the working group with the Chilean authorities.

In addition to meeting with top officials, Mr. Ban will later today visit “A Roof for Chile” Foundation for a ceremony with hundreds of young volunteers who will go to the damaged areas. The Catholic Church-based non-governmental organization builds temporary housing for slum dwellers and seeks to provide them with education, social services and micro-credit, as well as guide them in acquiring permanent housing.

Tonight he will join Ms. Bachelet in the launching of a 24-hour telethon to be broadcast on national television to help raise \$30 million for earthquake victims.

On Saturday, the Secretary-General will travel to Concepción, the second largest city in Chile, over 300 miles south of Santiago, and the adjacent port of Talcahuano, two of the most devastated areas close to the epicentre of the quake. He will also meet with the heads of the 22 UN agencies operating in Chile.

Meanwhile, Chilean officials have assured the public that drugs and medicines will be available free of charge. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the Government has said there is no evidence of outbreaks of communicable diseases, although disease surveillance has been stepped up given unsanitary conditions in some areas which remain without safe drinking water and where garbage is accumulating.

WHO is working with the Government to coordinate international health aid arriving from other countries, as well as to coordinate technical aspects related to mobile field hospitals and to support communication needs.

UN officials herald upcoming election as milestone for Iraq



Iraqis signing in to attend the educational conference on out-of-country voting held in Jordan on 25 February 2010

5 March - As millions of Iraqis prepare to head to the polls on Sunday, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his top envoy in the country stressed the importance of the parliamentary election and voiced their hope for a strong and peaceful turnout.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson, Mr. Ban welcomed the reaching of another “important milestone” in Iraq’s political development, and called on all Iraqis to exercise their democratic right to vote.

“The peaceful conduct of these elections is of paramount importance and should contribute to national reconciliation in Iraq,” the statement said. “A strong voter mandate will be a powerful message in support of stability and prosperity for all Iraqis and will build on the political progress that has already been achieved.”

On 7 March Iraqis will go to the polls to elect a new Council of Representatives – Iraq’s parliament. Nearly 19 million Iraqis

are registered to vote in the country's 18 governorates.

"It is for Iraq a very decisive moment. I think it's actually the most decisive moment since 2003, the invasion that of course turned the country upside down," the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Ad Melkert, said today.

"Now is the chance, against the backdrop of the withdrawal of the American troops in the next few years, that Iraqis really define by themselves their own way forward, their own destiny," added Mr. Melkert, who heads the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). "And the election is of course not the only thing, but it's very vital to bring all Iraqis on board that process towards the future."

With support from the UN Mission, the country's Independent High Electoral Commission has launched a massive operation to prepare for the vote. Nearly 50,000 polling stations will open across Iraq and out-of-country Iraqis will be able to vote in 16 nations.

This week the Commission opened a new data entry centre in Baghdad where votes will be tallied under tight security.

"We have done everything possible to make sure to provide all conditions to facilitate polling, counting and data tabulation," Panto Letic of the UN's electoral assistance unit told reporters in Baghdad. He stressed that state-of-the-art measures are in place to prevent fraud.

In the last two years, the UN has also coordinated an update of voter registration around the country in which voters were able to check that their information on the electoral list was accurate.

The UN is advising the Independent High Electoral Commission and has been providing training to election officials, including polling station workers and lawyers who will handle potential complaints about the vote from the public.

UN sets up human rights group to look into situation of Haiti's disabled

5 March - A working group comprising United Nations experts has been created to look into the situation of Haitians with disabilities, who have been disproportionately affected by January's catastrophic earthquake.

Today's announcement comes after a group of UN human rights experts last month appealed for the needs of the disabled in Haiti to be included in the relief, recovery and reconstruction processes following the magnitude-7.0 earthquake.

The 12 January quake killed up to 200,000 people, injured many others and left one third of the country's nine million people in need of aid.

The decision to set up the new working group was made by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities during its recent meeting in Geneva from 22 to 26 February.

It underscored that under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, "States are to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and natural disaster like the occurrence of this earthquake."

The new body will also look into the situation of people with disabilities in other countries affected by devastating natural disasters, including Chile, where it is estimated that 2 million people were impacted by last Saturday's magnitude-8.8 quake.

Early last month, the Committee stressed in a news release that persons with disabilities must not become "the forgotten ones" during the emergency response and the reconstruction of Haiti.



An elderly wheelchair-bound woman collects a bottle of water distributed by UN peacekeepers, in Port-au-Prince

Its current chairperson, Mohammed Al-Tarawneh, said that “while relief workers are struggling to provide aid to the people of Haiti and while the situation remains difficult for everyone, persons with disabilities are particularly affected by the crisis,” especially if their caregivers have been killed or injured.

The 12-member Committee, tasked with monitoring the Convention, urged Haiti to ensure that persons with disabilities fully participate in the decision-making process regarding social and economic reconstruction and that their long-term development needs be taken into account.

The Convention, which entered into force in May 2008 and has so far been endorsed by 144 countries, is the culmination of years of global efforts to ensure that the rights of the world’s estimated 650 million persons with disabilities are guaranteed and protected.

It asserts the rights to education, health, work, adequate living conditions, freedom of movement, freedom from exploitation and equal recognition before the law for persons with disabilities.

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) reported today that its partners are handing out coupons for the next round of food distribution – including rice, beans and salt – for some 2 million people, set to kick off tomorrow in the capital, Port-au-Prince. The agency and its partners have already provided food for some 4.3 million people since the earthquake.

Although Haiti’s rainy season typically starts in April and peaks in May, early floods have already hit the country’s south, affecting 4,000 families and killing 7,100 heads of cattle, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said.

The Office warned that with the main planting season set to kick off this month, only 12 per cent of the agricultural funds appealed for have been provided. It cautioned that progress made in improving food security since the string of hurricanes in 2008 could be reversed without immediate financial support for the purchase of seeds, tools and other supplies.

The Government has reported that 1.3 million people are still living in spontaneous settlements, while over 600,000 others have fled the hard-hit capital for other regions.

OCHA said that the security situation remains stable in Haiti, and that emergency shelter, sanitation and food continue to be among the top needs.

Ban marks 40th anniversary of landmark global pact on nuclear weapons control



Spent nuclear fuel

5 March - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today marked the 40th anniversary of the entry into force of the United Nations-backed Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which forms the foundation of the world’s nuclear non-proliferation regime.

The pact opened for signature in 1968 and went into force 40 years ago today. Since then, Mr. Ban said in a statement, the NPT has remained the cornerstone “for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament,” as well as “a framework for promoting the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.”

Comprehensive safeguards agreements with the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) are in place for 163 of the 190 non-nuclear-weapon States which have signed onto the Treaty.

Under these agreements, the IAEA can verify that a State is fulfilling its international commitments not to use nuclear programmes to develop nuclear weapons.

In addition, 94 States parties have brought the IAEA Additional Protocol – which boosts the agency’s ability to ensure that a State does not have undeclared nuclear material – into force.

That Protocol, the Secretary-General said, “contributes to increased transparency and serves a confidence-building role in regional and international security.”

The NPT also commits nations with nuclear weapons to nuclear disarmament, he pointed out, noting increasing support from both governments and civil society towards this goal.

Several nuclear-weapon States have taken important steps, and Mr. Ban highlighted the move by Russia and the United States to conclude a successor pact to the Treaty on the Limitation and Reduction of Strategic Offensive Arms, or START.

This May, parties to the NPT will meet in New York to review its operation and how to further its full implementation and its universality. Under the provisions of the Treaty, review conferences are held every five years.

The Secretary-General has characterized the last review meeting, held in New York in 2005, as “disappointing.”

At the end of the month-long meeting, Sergio Duarte, the President of the 2005 Review Conference and currently UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, said the gathering ended having accomplished “very little” amid widely diverging views on nuclear arms and their spread. It wrapped up without any substantive agreement having been reached by nations.

Mr. Ban today emphasized the need for a successful outcome at this year’s gathering “to achieve the long-held and widely shared goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.”

In 2008, he put forward a five-point action plan to reinvigorate the international push towards disarmament.

It begins with a call for the parties to the NPT to pursue negotiations on nuclear disarmament, either through a new convention or through a series of mutually reinforcing instruments backed by a credible system of verification.

In addition, it is based on the following key principles: that disarmament must enhance security; be reliably verified; be rooted in legal obligations; be visible to the public; and must anticipate emerging dangers from other weapons.

In January, the Secretary-General voiced optimism that 2010 will be a “historic year” for progress on disarmament and non-proliferation goals, vowing to press ahead with efforts to rid the world of weapons of mass destruction.

“My hope is based, not on wishful thinking, but on real opportunities for concrete action,” he told this year’s first plenary session of the Conference on Disarmament, the world’s sole multilateral forum for disarmament negotiations, in Geneva.

First set of UN troops could leave DR Congo by June, says peacekeeping chief



Alain Le Roy

5 March - The first group of United Nations troops could leave the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) by the end of June, as requested by the Government, the world body’s top peacekeeping official said today following a visit to the country.

Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Alain Le Roy was in the DRC this week as part of a technical assessment mission, during which he also met with President Joseph Kabila and other officials to discuss the future of the UN mission, known as MONUC.

Following a closed-door briefing to the Security Council on his trip, which also included a visit to Chad, Mr. Le Roy told reporters that the Congolese Government has requested that the first drawdown of MONUC take place around June 2010 to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the country’s independence.

“There was clear agreement on the critical tasks to be implemented before MONUC would eventually leave the DRC. But the first troops might be able to leave – those from the west – around 30 June 2010,” Mr. Le Roy stated.

The 10-year-old MONUC, whose mandate is up for renewal in May, is tasked with protecting civilians in DRC, where over 1.25 million people have been uprooted or re-displaced by violence in the eastern part of the country and the volatile security situation has hampered aid agencies' efforts to provide assistance.

The mission also supports operations by the national armed forces, primarily logistical support limited to Congolese operations that are underway, including such things as fuel, transport and evacuations of wounded personnel.

It is currently supporting Operation Amani Leo, which technically began on 1 January but has moved into an operational phase recently, against the mainly Rwandan Hutu rebel group FDLR in eastern DRC.

There are also operations taking place in the east by Congolese forces against the rebel Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

"In the east, it would take much more time before we can think of withdrawing military forces from there," said Mr. Le Roy.

On Chad, the UN peacekeeping chief said he proposed to the Council that authorize a two-month technical rollover of the mandate of the UN mission in Chad and the Central African Republic, known as MINURCAT, whose mandate expires on 15 March.

The Government of Chad had called for the withdrawal of the military component of MINURCAT, which was set up in 2007 after tensions increased along the border with Sudan's war-torn Darfur region.

Mr. Le Roy said the two-month extension, which was agreed with the Chadian Government, would "give some time to try to find agreement with the Chadian authorities on the future of MINURCAT in Chad," adding that many Council members stressed the importance of keeping the mission on the ground.

Honduras: UNESCO head condemns deadly attacks against journalists



5 March - The head of the United Nations agency tasked with upholding press freedom today spoke out against a recent shooting two journalists in Honduras, resulting in one of their deaths, calling it an attack against all people of the nation.

Joseph Hernandez Ochoa and Karol Cabrera were shot down on 1 March on the way to Ms. Cabrera's home in the capital, Tegucigalpa, according to the non-governmental organization International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX).

Mr. Ochoa, the host of the "Encuentros" programme broadcast on Canal 51 television, was killed in the attack, while Ms. Cabrera, who was involved in youth education programmes for the State-owned Canal 8 television station, was seriously injured.

Police and the Honduran Security Secretariat said that Ms. Cabrera, who also worked for Radio Cadena Voces, was the target of the attack. Having received death threats, she had been under police protection.

The police officer guarding Ms. Cabrera was at her home, where she had asked for protective services to be provided. Her daughter was killed in the same street in December that her mother was attacked on this week.

"The attack that took Mr. Ochoa's life and left Ms. Cabrera seriously injured is an attack against all of the people of Honduras that must not go unpunished," said Irina Bokova, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

"It is an attack against their basic right of freedom of expression, an attempt to silence the open debate that underpins democratic society," she emphasized, calling Honduran authorities to bring the perpetrators to justice.

UN establishes expert group on role of women in peace and security



5 March - The United Nations has appointed a group of independent experts to advise on ways to better protect women in conflict situations, and to ensure that their voices are heard in peace processes and that they are included in post-conflict reconstruction and governance structures.

The establishment of the group comes as the landmark Security Council resolution 1325 on the role of women in peace and security marks its tenth anniversary in 2010.

Among other things, the group – which will be co-chaired by former Irish President and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, and Executive Director of Femmes Africa Solidarité, Bineta Diop – will be tasked with assessing the impact of resolution 1325 on women in the context of armed conflict over the past decade.

Resolution 1325, which was adopted by the Council in 2000, stresses the importance of giving women equal participation and full involvement in peace and security matters and the need to increase their role in decision-making.

“Our advisory group is made up of individuals with long experience in addressing conflict situations,” said Ms. Robinson.

“We will be consulting with civil society organizations around the world and looking at a range of possible ways forward, including scaling up resources dedicated to protecting women in times of conflict as well as involving them more in building lasting and just peace.”

The group will also help identify time-bound goals and targets, along with measurement and accountability mechanisms to inform and guide the work of a UN High-Level Steering Committee set up by Deputy Secretary General Asha-Rose Migiros.

Other members of the group are: Salim Ahmed Salim (Tanzania), Elisabeth Rehn (Finland), Lahkdar Brahimi (Algeria), Hina Jilani (Pakistan), Sanam Anderlini (Iran/United Kingdom), Thelma Awori (Liberia/Uganda), Swanee Hunt (United States), Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls (Fiji), Susana Villaran De La Puente (Peru), Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda (Zimbabwe), Zainab Salbi (Iraq/US) and Donald Steinberg (US).

Top UN official spotlights plight of Central African refugees in Cameroon



UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres receives gifts from the Mbororo refugees in Bolembé.

5 March - A senior United Nations official this week sought to raise awareness of the “forgotten tragedy” of ethnic Mbororo refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR), as he stopped in Cameroon, where they are seeking refuge.

High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres was warmly received at the Mandjou and Bolembé settlements, which together are home to 3,000 refugees and are situated some 350 kilometres east of Cameroon’s capital, Yaoundé.

The Mbororos are mostly nomadic cattle breeders from the west and northwest of neighbouring CAR. Those who have fled to Cameroon since 2005 said they have been targeted by rebels and others for their cattle, with women and children being kidnapped for ransom.

While at Bolembé, Mr. Guterres met Hadja Adama, 45, who fled CAR five years ago with her 11 children after her husband was killed by cattle rustlers. She is struggling to take care of her children, as well as her brother’s four children after he died suddenly.

“These people have gone through an unimaginable ordeal,” Mr. Guterres said at Bolembe. “And the end of the tunnel is not near because there is no sign that the security situation has improved enough for people to think about returning to the Central African Republic.”

The refugees live in dozens of settlements in eastern Cameroon, making it difficult for staff from the UN refugee agency, known as UNHCR, to monitor their situation, register new arrivals and distribute relief supplies.

Following a registration exercise last October, the agency found that there has been a steady influx of Mbororo refugees, with ever greater numbers crossing the border into Cameroon.

The High Commissioner underscored that “it is a shame that such tragedy goes unnoticed. It is urgent to make the international community face its responsibilities.”

Host communities face their own problems, including shortages of clean water and few classrooms.

“These are problems we are trying to solve with our limited resources,” said Aida Haile Mariam, UNHCR Representative in Cameroon.

Before departing for CAR today, Mr. Guterres held talks with top officials in Cameroon, including President Paul Biya and Prime Minister Philemon Yang.

Large agribusiness hurting small landholders, says UN rights expert



5 March - In an increasingly globalized food sector dominated by large transnational corporations, small landowners are getting a smaller portion of the food dollar, the independent United Nations expert on the right to food warned today.

“Agribusiness can play a key role in realizing the right to food. But States have to give more support to their small producers and push corporations to change their pricing and standards policies,” said Special Rapporteur Olivier De Schutter, presenting his second annual report to the UN Human Rights Council now underway in Geneva.

He noted that smallholders have a very limited number of buyers, and are in a deeply unequal bargaining position in respect of a fair price for their crops.

“This situation partly explains why smallholders in developing countries are the single most important group of those suffering hunger in the world today,” the Special Rapporteur added.

In addition to tax incentives and other tools that States can use to enhance the small producers’ ability to obtain higher prices for their produce, Mr. De Schutter said States should act when foreign suppliers abuse national sellers.

The development of private standards – such as hygiene and food safety – has worked against smallholders, the report noted. Compliance has often required higher levels of capitalization than many small producers could afford, and the high costs of monitoring compliance of a large number of units have been an incentive for export companies to switch from smallholders to larger commercial farms.

The report also highlighted the importance of protecting the rights of agricultural workers to ensure that wages and working conditions are held to standard.

“Agribusiness companies must not contribute, directly or indirectly, to human rights abuses through their relationship with suppliers,” Mr. De Schutter said.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said last month that smallholders and rural producers have a vital role to play in overcoming global hunger and poverty at a time when more than 1 billion people suffer from hunger, the highest number in human history.

“We need to continue creating diverse and innovative partnerships that can help people and communities achieve greater productivity, nutritional health and self-reliance,” he said in a message to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in Rome.

UN and partners seek \$34 million to assist drought-stricken Guatemalans

5 March - The United Nations, together with the Guatemalan Government and aid partners, today launched a \$34 million appeal to counter food shortages affecting 2.7 million people living in the Central American country’s so-called ‘dry corridor,’ which even before last year’s drought had one of the highest rates of chronic malnutrition in the world.



In Guatemala, WFP supports 350,000 people in school and preschool feeding, and mother/child care

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said today’s appeal will complement national relief efforts and provide support for food, health, nutrition, agriculture and early recovery, as well as water, sanitation and hygiene projects for six months for some 680,000 people living in departments in the eastern section of the country, including the dry corridor – Jutiapa, Santa Rosa, Zacapa, Chiquimula, El Progreso and Baja Verapaz – and the neighbouring Izabal and Quiché.

Global acute malnutrition among children under the age of five in the dry corridor and the two neighbouring provinces is at 11 per cent, and at 13 per cent among women of child-bearing age. Both figures are above the emergency threshold of 10 per cent.

The dry corridor had faced annual food shortages before, but this year, the situation is exacerbated by a combination of bad weather and bad economics.

El Niño-affected rainfall patterns in the country lead to high losses in hillside and subsistence agricultural production.

Meanwhile, rising food prices brought on by the global economic crisis, a decrease in remittances, cost increases for agricultural inputs and a decrease in employment opportunities for unqualified labour has led poorer people suffering from decreased capacities to access food and basic services.

The situation of Guatemala’s food shortages has received increased international attention. The World Food Programme (WFP) recently held a video competition about the 1 billion people hungry in the world and the two aspiring filmmakers who won the grand prize are heading to Guatemala to highlight the plight of the drought-ridden country’s people.

Window of opportunity for stability in Guinea-Bissau must not be missed – UN envoy



Instability deprives the people of Guinea-Bissau of clean water

5 March - Following the upheaval experienced in 2009 when a series of political assassinations threatened security and stability in Guinea-Bissau, current conditions bode well for progress towards peace and prosperity in the West African nation, a top United Nations official said today.

Joseph Mutaboba, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative in Guinea-Bissau, told the Security Council that 2010 could be a turning point for the country.

“The country is experiencing a relatively stable political environment and growing international attention. This unprecedented window of opportunity for Guinea-Bissau

should not be missed,” said the Special Representative, who also heads the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau, known as UNIOGBIS.

Presenting Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s first report on the Integrated Mission, which is in its third month of operations, Mr. Mutaboba added that there is a lot to be done and the Government has continued to make progress in re-engaging the country’s international partners and pursuing its reform agenda.

He said that with the various fiscal and administrative reforms taking place and the prospect of debt relief, the conditions are in place for political stability and tangible improvements in the lives of the people in the short- to medium-term.

Echoing Mr. Ban’s report, the Special Representative noted that security sector reform remains at the centre of the country’s stabilization and development agenda, and that the Government, with international support, has made some progress in the last few months.

The Security Council has tasked UNIOGBIS with coordinating international efforts on security sector reform. It will also take a lead role in providing support to national authorities in the reform of internal security institutions, focusing on the police.

“UNIOGBIS is committed to collaborating closely with the country’s international partners in a flexible manner to ensure that our collective contributions are responsive to the needs of Guinea-Bissau,” said Mr. Mutaboba.

He added that the country’s journey towards peace, democracy and prosperity takes place in a difficult regional environment. “The political and security situation in West Africa remains highly precarious and we see worrying signs of military coups, of ethnic and inter-religious conflicts and of political intolerance.”

The envoy also cited increasing threats from international crime, illicit drug trafficking, smuggling, the unfair exploration of natural resources and illegal fishing taking hold in West Africa.

“Given the inter-dependence of most countries in the sub-region, this could further threaten Guinea-Bissau’s stability,” he stated. “On the other hand, a successful and peaceful Guinea-Bissau could have a positive influence on the developments in the region.”

The 15-member Council welcomed the progress made by the Government on its stabilization and reform agenda and the launching by the National Assembly of a process for reconciliation and dialogue.

In a statement read out to the press after the meeting by Ambassador Emmanuel Isoze-Ngondet of Gabon, which holds the rotating Council presidency for March, members “stressed the critical importance of the President, Government, political leaders, armed forces and people of Guinea-Bissau continuing to meet their responsibilities to work towards national reconciliation, maintain stability and constitutional order, and respect the rule of law.”

UN reaches 2 million hungry people in Pakistan

5 March - The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has supplied 2 million people in Pakistan with food in February alone, it was reported today.

This latest round of distributions is set to wrap up this week, and will be the last free supplies for many people returning to the northern areas of Swat and Buner, the scene of heavy fighting last year between Government forces and militants, in North West Frontier Province (NWFP).

WFP will introduce several early recovery activities in return areas this month focusing on supporting education and health systems.



WFP supplied 2 million people in Pakistan with food in February 2010 alone

Food distribution for families identified as displaced from South Waziristan, which also witnessed heavy fighting, kicked off

this week.

In the Jalozai camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in NWFP, winterization packages – including tents and sweaters – continue to be handed out.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported today that some 2,000 people in Kohistan, part of NWFP, need humanitarian assistance following a deadly avalanche last month which claimed at least 50 lives.

Some areas remain cut off after the disaster, and access to those in need is possible only by air since heavy rainfall has triggered additional landslides, further blocking roads. Pakistan's Provincial Disaster Management Authority, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and volunteers are providing relief assistance to the affected population.

For its part, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) is providing water to more than 4,200 IDPs sheltering in Kohat, also in NWFP, as well as improving sanitation through the installation of toilets, water tankers and pumps.

OCHA cautioned that funding for this year's humanitarian response plan for Pakistan is low, with resources urgently needed to continue providing assistance in NWFP and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) for the next six months.

Just over 1 per cent of the \$537 million appealed for in the Pakistan Humanitarian Response Plan for 2010, put together by the Government, UN agencies, NGOs and other aid actors, has been funded.

Last month, the top UN humanitarian official in the country called on the international community not to forget the vulnerable civilians displaced in the country's northwest.

UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Pakistan Martin Mogwanja urged the international donor community "to keep up their invaluable contributions to enable the humanitarians to continue assisting the people in need in Pakistan."

A total of 3.1 million people from NWFP and FATA were displaced in 2009 due to conflict. The funds sought for the response plan will not only respond to the needs of the IDPs, but also support those who have returned to their places of origin, those who never left and the families who opened up their homes to host the displaced.

Top UN political official to visit India, Nepal

5 March - The top United Nations political official is heading to India next week, followed by a visit to Nepal to discuss the country's stalled peace process, it was announced today.

Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe will be in India on 9 March for a one-day meeting with Government officials for discussions on a range of regional and international issues related to the UN.

He will then head to Nepal from 10 to 12 March to visit the UN political mission there, known as UNMIN, which was set up at the request of the Government in 2007 to support the peace process, as well as to monitor the management of arms and armed personnel of the former Royal Nepal Army and the Maoists. Its current mandate runs until 15 May.

While in Kathmandu, he will also meet with senior Government officials and political party leaders "to discuss the state of the peace process and encourage forward movement in the period ahead," UN spokesperson Martin Nesirky told reporters in New York.

The visit comes as the peace process that ended the country's 10-year civil war remains largely stalled, threatened by tensions and mistrust between Maoists, the Government and the army.

In his report to the Security-Council in January, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the political positions of these groups has "hardened at the opposing ends of the political spectrum, which has seriously eroded the common middle ground that



Over 50,000 Nepalis still remain displaced despite the end of the armed conflict in 2006

had, from the outset, defined the peace process and remained its driving strength.”

Violence continues to claim lives in Somali capital, UN says

5 March - The ongoing clashes in Somalia’s capital, Mogadishu, continue to spark the concern of the United Nations, which reported today that violence this week claimed some 35 lives.

Dozens more were wounded in the 2 to 3 March fighting between the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and insurgents.

Since 1 February, nearly 26,000 people have been forced to escape violence in the capital, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).



Violence in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, has forced thousands of people to flee their homes

The agency continues to register new Somali refugees in neighbouring Kenya. Just this week, 900 Somalis were registered as they entered the country, on top of the more than 8,000 who have been registered since the start of the year.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that following six consecutive seasons of below-average rainfall in the Galgaduud region of central Somalia, pastoralists have lost their livestock and are travelling to urban areas in search of assistance. They have little food and cannot sell their remaining livestock, which are in no condition to be sold.

Further, the Office reported, insecurity has thwarted access to those in need of humanitarian aid.

On the health front, the second round of a UN-backed health campaign aiming to reach 430,000 children under the age of five and 480,000 women of child-bearing age began this week in southern Somalia.

The start of the latest Child Health Days – which will also provide nutritional screenings and immunizations against measles and polio – was pushed back by three months due to funding shortages, and there are concerns that insecurity will prevent children from accessing the campaign.

For its part, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and its partners have distributed almost 500 metric tons of food to 61,000 people in the self-declared autonomous region of Somaliland.

Role models, along with laws and policies, vital for empowering women – Ban



5 March - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today repeated his call for ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls, stressing the need for not only effective laws and policies but also women who can serve as examples of empowerment to those around them.

“We can only win freedom from fear and space for women and girls to flourish by strong policies and laws, effective advocacy and the examples of role models,” Mr. Ban said in remarks to an event in New York, co-hosted by the UN human rights office (OHCHR) and the non-governmental group known as Equality Now, to mark the 15th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration.

“Role models such as the growing numbers of women leaders around the world... the women from all sectors of society who refuse to be subjugated... and our own brave women peacekeepers who are showing that they can perform the same roles, to the same standards and under the same difficult conditions as their male counterparts.”

In his remarks, delivered by Rachel Mayanja, the Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement

of Women, Mr. Ban noted that 15 years ago the outcome of the Beijing conference marked a milestone on the road to empowerment for women and girls.

“It emphasized that equality, dignity and opportunity are inalienable rights for all,” he told attendees, which included Academy Award-winning actress Meryl Streep and playwright and activist Sarah Jones.

Adopted at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remains the most comprehensive global policy framework to achieve the goals of gender equality, development and peace.

The Platform called for action on 12 key issues: poverty, education and training, health, violence against women, armed conflict, economy, power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms, human rights, media, environment, and girls.

And yet, he pointed out, violence and discrimination remain perhaps the biggest obstacle to achieving equality, opportunity and progress. “We must put an end to these abuses. We have come a long way, but we still have a long way to go.”

The Commission on the Status of Women is under way in New York to assess progress made since the adoption of the landmark declaration in the Chinese capital 15 years ago.

This provides a “historic opportunity to develop solid evidence-based approaches and policies for women’s advancement and protection of their rights,” a group of independent UN human rights experts underlined in a media statement issued today on the occasion of International Women’s Day, observed on 8 March.

Lessons gleaned from this stock-taking exercise, the nearly 30 experts said, “must guide us towards a new framework that provides for more accountability and a fresh vision on women’s rights, and provides the space for negotiating a new social and gender contract.”

More than a decade on from the Beijing gathering, they underscored the need for women to fully take part in all walks of life and for a “new vision” to protect not just their rights, but also to achieve peace, security and sustainable human development.

At an event in New York today, Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, Executive Director of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), said that people are critical agents of change in all cultures, who must be engaged to promote the rights of women and protect them from violence.

Discriminatory attitudes and harmful practices are deeply rooted and are often stronger than the laws banning them, she said in a keynote speech at “2020 VISION, Mobilizing for Women’s Rights and Eliminating Violence Against Women,” which was organized by the Women’s Learning Partnership and the Social Research journal at The New School for Social Research.

To end these practices, it is necessary to go deeper, to wear a “cultural lens,” and to use “culturally-sensitive approaches” to promote change from within, she told the gathering, which brought together gender and social justice activists from Bahrain, Brazil, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon and Nigeria to share best practices.

“At UNFPA, we have learned that understanding the cultures in which we work and being able to identifying positive elements within them can facilitate lasting change,” said Ms. Obaid.

“This is not to say that violations of human rights should go unchallenged. On the contrary. The advantage of culturally sensitive approaches is that they provide insights on how to align cultural practices and human rights most effectively.”