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Sudan: UN strongly condemns looting and burning of town of Abyei

23 May - The United Nations peacekeeping operation in Sudan has strongly condemned today's looting and burning of the town of Abyei by armed men, which has forced large numbers of civilians to flee to the south of the disputed area.

The mission (UNMIS) reported that looting and burning began this morning in Abyei, two days after the wider area – disputed by north and south – was taken over by Sudanese Government forces.

That move was condemned by the Security Council, which described it as a serious breach of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended the long-running north-south civil war in Sudan.

In a press statement UNMIS said “armed elements” had carried out the looting and burning and noted that the Sudanese armed forces are responsible for maintaining law and order in the areas they control

“UNMIS calls upon the Government of Sudan to urgently ensure that the Sudan Armed Forces fulfil their responsibility and intervene to stop these criminal acts.”

Kouider Zerrouk, a spokesperson for UNMIS, said most of the residents have fled towards the town of Agok in Southern



Homes set on fire by armed elements in Abyei following the seizure of the town by Northern Sudanese troops

Sudan.

“We can’t ascertain the exact number,” he said, but added that hundreds of thousands of people may have been displaced by today’s attacks and the recent clashes in the wider Abyei area.

Mr. Zerrouk said the identity of the armed groups conducting the looting and burning was not clear, but they were likely to be pro-northern.

“We don’t know who they are in terms of whether they are organized militias or just a group of civilians taking the opportunity of having an empty town and looting and burning the place.”

He stressed that it was the responsibility of the Sudanese armed forces to ensure law and order in Abyei.

The recent violence and deteriorating security in Abyei has also sparked concern from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who has urged all sides to cease military operations, withdraw their forces and refrain from acts of antagonism.

Deadly clashes have claimed dozens of lives since the start of the year, when a referendum on Abyei’s status that was supposed to have been held never took place amid disagreement on voter eligibility. Southern Sudan will formally secede from the rest of the country on 9 July as a result of a separate referendum.

Nepal: Ban urges end to stalemate, days before deadline for new constitution



Cantonment in Surkhet, Nepal, provides temporary shelter for People’s Liberation Army (Maoist combatants)

23 May - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today voiced concern that despite the fast-approaching deadline for Nepal’s Constituent Assembly to complete its work, there is still no agreement on the contentious issues of the integration and rehabilitation of former Maoist combatants and the key elements of a new constitution.

A constitution is supposed to be adopted by Nepal’s parliamentarians by 28 May as part of the peace process introduced after the civil war between Government forces and Maoists ended in 2007 and the monarchy was abolished.

Mr. Ban recently discussed the situation in Nepal with Prime Minister Jhala Nath Khanal, while the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, B. Lynn Pascoe, spoke by telephone with the leaders of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal–Maoist (UCPN-M) and the Nepali Congress (NC) to urge the Nepalese leaders to act effectively.

“The Secretary-General underlines that it is now more than ever incumbent upon the key political actors to show leadership and carry out the necessary compromises to preserve the peace process and complete the drafting of the new constitution,” said a statement issued by his spokesperson.

UN drafts plan to improve maternal and child health through better nutrition

23 May - The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) has drafted a plan committing Member States and development partners to implement priority nutrition interventions and policies on health care, education and agriculture to improve the health of mothers and their children.

The measures, which will be included in a WHO report to be entitled *Maternal, infant and young child nutrition: implementation plan*, were discussed today at WHO’s ongoing 64th World Health Assembly (WHA) in Geneva.



The draft plan outlines priorities to confront child under-nutrition, low birth weight, growing rates of child overweight, both maternal under-nutrition and overweight, and the consequences of vitamin and mineral deficiencies for mothers and children.

More than 100 million children under the age of five were underweight in 2010, and at least 170 million were stunted, according to WHO figures. Micronutrient deficiencies, including anaemia and vitamin A, are of increasing concern worldwide.

Some 43 million children were estimated to be overweight and obese in 2010. More mothers are becoming overweight, increasing the risk of birth complications.

Countries need help to scale up effective actions to combat nutrition problems, said Francesco Branca, the director of WHO's Nutrition for Health and Development department, at a news conference in Geneva.

Malnutrition, in all its forms, impairs health, cognitive and physical development, reproductive health and immune systems. It threatens child and infant survival, according to WHO, which also noted that with growing rates of overweight in many middle- and low-income countries, non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, compromise health and are very difficult to treat with limited resources.

Last year's 63rd World Health Assembly had urged Member States to increase their political commitment to better nutrition and asked WHO to provide countries with support and strategic advice.

The draft implementation plan for maternal, young child and infant nutrition was presented to Member States for their comments at the current Assembly as part of a two-year consultative process to finalize the measures.

The draft plan was unveiled as Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon spotlighted the issue of maternal health during an official visit to Nigeria, touring a hospital and another health-care centre.

Mr. Ban commended the Nigerian Government for its leadership in passing new laws designed to facilitate the provision of basic health care in the West African country.

In a meeting with Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan in the capital, Abuja, Mr. Ban said he hoped other countries would follow the country's example.

At a separate meeting with Nigeria's Presidential Committee on the Status of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Secretary-General stressed that improving women's and children's health is one of the keys to progress.

"Healthy women give birth to healthy children who can grow up to contribute to their healthy country. They are also the best guarantee of healthy, educated and prosperous families. That is why we must tackle the terrible loss of women's and children's lives in Nigeria," said Mr. Ban.

He also praised Nigerian plans to allocate a portion of its oil wealth to support health initiatives for women and children. "This is a ground-breaking initiative where success has far-reaching implications," he added.

The World Health Assembly is the decision-making body of WHO and brings together delegations from all Member States to determine the policies of the Organization and approve its proposed programme budget.

Treatment of ethnic minorities in Myanmar limiting path to democracy – UN expert



Tomás Ojea Quintana, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar

23 May - A United Nations human rights expert on Myanmar said today that the continued treatment and condition of ethnic minority groups in the country's border areas were seriously restricting the Government's intended transition to democracy.

"Violence continues in many of these areas, while systematic militarization contributes to human rights abuses," said Tomás Ojea Quintana, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, in a statement.

"These abuses include land confiscation, forced labour, internal displacement, extrajudicial killings and sexual violence. They are widespread, they continue today, and they remain essentially unaddressed by the authorities."

Mr. Ojea Quintana, who was not able to visit Myanmar, spoke after wrapping up an eight-day visit to neighbouring Thailand.

He said he saw "positive signs" in the elections of new national and regional legislatures earlier, but added that "it is too early for them to function effectively and to manage this important and complex issue that has a direct impact on ongoing human rights abuses and compromises stability."

He said the electoral process excluded several significant ethnic and opposition groups, "so their voices are not being heard in these fora."

Regarding a recently announced release of prisoners, the independent expert said most prisoners of conscience remain in jail. "I would like to see a concrete and time-bound plan announced by the Government for the systematic release of all prisoners of conscience."

Last week Vijay Nambiar, the Secretary-General's Special Adviser for Myanmar, told the Security Council that the prisoner release was short of expectation and insufficient.

Mr. Ojea Quintana said: "Through this mission, I see some positive signs in the developments. In the first and only sitting of the Parliament so far, MPs, despite limitations, were able to raise some important questions from the human rights perspective."

The Special Rapporteur also noted the beginning of discussions about economic, social and cultural rights and some participation by ethnic minority parties in the legislatures.

"The new President's speeches have led to some expectations for positive change. He provides some interesting ideas that could be developed into benchmarks for progress. We will have to watch closely to see how this is translated into action."

President Thein Sein was elected by Parliament in February.

"It is my hope to be able to visit Myanmar as soon as possible to continue discussions with the authorities and other stakeholders about progress being made towards the transition to democracy and concerns about the ongoing serious human rights situation in the country."

Mr. Ojea Quintana, who has served in an unpaid and independent capacity since May 2008, reports to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva



After a bidding frenzy, a hat finds a new home and UNICEF gains valuable funds

23 May - Thousands of anti-malaria mosquito nets, countless school supplies or hundreds of thousands of measles vaccinations can now be bought by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) after a notorious hat sold at auction yesterday.

The pale pink – and very high – hat worn by Princess Beatrice to the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge on 29 April in London drew a frenzy of bids on the eBay website over the past 10 days, with the unknown winner paying £81,100.01 (about \$130,000).



The hat worn by Princess Beatrice

The sum will be divided equally between the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Children in Crisis, a United Kingdom-based charity.

A UNICEF spokesperson said that figure could buy more than 16,200 mosquito nets to protect children and their families from malaria, or at least 210,000 vaccines to protect children against measles or enough textbooks, stationery and school supplies for 8,110 children for a year.

"I am so happy that we have raised the most incredible amount of money and can make an even bigger change in the lives of some of the most vulnerable children across the world," said Princess Beatrice after the end of the auction.

"Every single penny will make a difference to children's lives around the world," said Julie Weston, fundraising director for UNICEF in the UK.

The hat, designed by the London-based milliner Philip Treacy, attracted bids from around the world – less than a month after many fashion observers mocked its debut.

UN forum delegates urge recognition of indigenous communities' right to water



Delegates at the ninth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

23 May - Indigenous communities are often not consulted when decisions are made on the use and management of water sources, despite the fact the access to the resource is vital for their cultural vitality and resilience, delegates attending the United Nation forum on indigenous issues said today.

"Indigenous peoples are either sidelined or marginalized" when authorities legislate on water, which is considered a resources for economic gain, and the right of indigenous peoples to "original ownership" of water is ignored, said Valmaine Toki, a member of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues from New Zealand.

"Policies implemented by governments do not include an indigenous perspectives to water, rather what we see are examples of mismanagement, allocation to intensive agriculture practices and extractive industries... which obviously results in pollution of waterways, ecosystems and livelihoods causing detriment and harm to indigenous people," she said.

"Indigenous voices call strongly for their rights to be recognized not only within management, but also the ownership and governance of water."

Bertie Xavier, a member of the forum from Guyana, called for concerted efforts by States, organisations and UN agencies to draft a development strategy to protect the world's resources, particularly among indigenous communities.

Stressing the importance of conserving water sources for indigenous communities, Tia Oros Peters, a Native American, spoke of the world becoming "dry and barren" as a results of humanity's unsustainable use of water. She described the trend

as “aquacide, the killing of water. We cannot survive if water is dead,” said Ms. Peters.

“If indigenous people are unable to go the springs where our people first emerged from, if they are unable to go to inland lakes, the salt seas, where we give prayers and offering... the people die, the culture dies, the identity, a history, a knowledge that is linked to a place and to a life way, and to a world philosophy that is linked to a water way. That dies.

“That kills the ability of a people to perpetuate their self-determination and to continue to evolve their culture.”

UN health assembly adopts resolutions on child injury and non-communicable diseases

23 May - Delegates at a United Nations health gathering today adopted resolutions on preventing child injury and preparing for the forthcoming General Assembly high-level conference on non-communicable diseases.



The resolution on child injury prevention adopted by the ongoing 64th World Health Assembly (WHA) of the UN World Health Organization (WHO) creates a platform designed to prevent injuries, which are the leading cause of death for children over the age of five. The resolution has to be adopted in the WHA plenary.

Delegates to the WHA said child injuries represented a major child survival issue that required more attention and resources. More than 830,000 children die each year from road traffic crashes, drowning, burns, falls and poisoning.

Effective interventions to prevent such injuries include enforcing speed limits around schools, placing children in child restraints in the back seats of vehicles, removing or covering water hazards, installing smoke alarms, and setting up poison control centres.

The report on child injury prevention shows that at least 558,000 people under the age of 20 in South-East Asia and Africa died from such causes, compared to a global total of 950,366 deaths.

Countries also unanimously endorsed the resolution on preparations for the General Assembly’s high-level meeting on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which will be held in September.

Non-communicable diseases, primarily heart and lung diseases, cancers and diabetes, have become leading causes of death, according to the WHO global status report on NCDs. In 2008, 36.1 million people died from conditions such diseases, including 9 million who died prematurely before the age of 60. Some 8 million of those premature deaths occurred in low- and middle-income countries.

Millions of deaths can be prevented by stronger implementation of measures that exist today, Ala Alwan, WHO’s Assistant Director-General for NCDs and Mental Health, told a news conference in Geneva. The measures include policies that promote government-wide action against NCDs; stronger anti-tobacco controls and promoting healthier diets, physical activity, and reducing harmful use of alcohol; and improving people’s access to essential health care.

The resolution recognized WHO’s leading role as the primary specialized agency for health and reaffirmed its leadership in promoting global action against NCDs.

The World Health Assembly is the decision-making body of WHO and brings together delegations from all WHO Member States to determine the policies of the Organization and its approve proposed programme budget.

Burundi taking some steps forward on human rights, UN expert says

23 May - The United Nations independent expert on human rights in Burundi today welcomed what he said were several positive rights developments in the small African country, but cautioned about the continuing problems of extrajudicial killings and prison conditions.

Fatsah Ouguergouz cited the steps taken towards setting up transitional justice mechanisms, the start of investigations into extrajudicial killings, the release of Jean-Claude Kavumbagu – a journalist and human rights defender detained since last July – and the appointment last week of the members of the nascent National Independent Human Rights Commission as positive developments.



Independent Expert of the Human Rights Council on Burundi Fatsah Ouguergouz

Speaking after a five-day visit to Burundi, Mr. Ouguergouz said he had met with members of the new human rights commission and told them that “the people of Burundi and the international community were keen to see this commission play a key role in promoting and protecting human rights in the country.”

The expert also said that he drew the commission’s attention to several cases of extrajudicial executions, torture and politically motivated arrests.

“I stressed my concerns at the recent increase of alleged extrajudicial killings and urged the authorities to investigate all human rights violations without delay.”

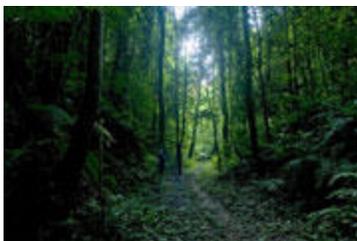
In addition to his meetings with national authorities and representatives of the civil society in the capital, Bujumbura, Mr. Ouguergouz visited prison facilities where he raised his concerns at the prolonged preventive detention for many inmates and what he called the poor prison conditions.

“In spite of a slight improvement in pre-trial detention, more than 55 per cent of detainees are still waiting to be heard by a court,” he said.

“In light of [the] fact that prisons are dramatically overpopulated and that detainees are held in sometimes degrading conditions, I called on the authorities to take all necessary measures to remedy this situation, including avoiding the detention of individuals that do not present a danger to society.”

Mr. Ouguergouz, a judge at the African Court of Human and Peoples’ Rights in Arusha, Tanzania, began his mandate with the Human Rights Council last August. He reports to the Geneva-based body in an independent and unpaid capacity.

UN presents new checklist to manage forest stocks



Ensuring good governance of the world's forest resources is key to combating climate change

23 May - Everyone knows that trees are good for the environment and that well-run forests might become lucrative under emerging climate change mitigation schemes. But how do you know if you have a good forest going, or not?

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Bank today released a checklist that may solve that problem by helping countries assess the governance of their forest resources.

“The ability to demonstrate good governance in forestry is becoming increasingly important for countries wishing to participate in emerging climate change mitigation schemes,” FAO

said.

The new guidance framework “provides countries with a comprehensive checklist they can use to identify and address problems in governance of forest resources. It can also be used to help ensure that efforts to reduce emissions from forests in developing countries are properly managed.”

The Framework for Assessing and Monitoring Forest Governance covers policy, legal, institution and regulatory frameworks; planning and decision-making processes; implementation, enforcement, and compliance. It also grades performance in accountability, effectiveness, efficiency, fairness, participation, and transparency.

“Good governance in forestry determines whether forest resources are used efficiently, sustainably, and equitably,” said Eva Muller of FAO’s Forestry Department. “This framework outlines a systematic approach that countries and forest managers can use to identify areas of weakness, devise and implement suitable responses, and monitor results.”

Under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, developing countries would be offered incentives to reduce emissions from deforestation and to increase carbon sequestration through planting new forests, forest conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

North-South financial flows for greenhouse gas emission reductions from the plan could reach up to \$30 billion a year and provide a considerable boost for rural development, FAO said.

UN and EU jointly call for release of Estonian cyclists abducted in Lebanon



Michael Williams, Special Coordinator for Lebanon

23 May - The United Nations and the European Union have jointly appealed for the release of seven Estonian cyclists abducted in Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley two months ago today, saying no purpose can be served by their continuing detention.

“The bicyclists came to Lebanon as tourists, with no ill intent,” said Michael Williams, the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon, and Angelina Eichhorst, the EU Head of Delegation.

The two envoys said that the UN and EU have been closely following the search undertaken by the Lebanese authorities and have continuously expressed concern over the abduction.

“This criminal act is a reminder of a dark part of Lebanon’s history, which could threaten Lebanon’s standing in the international community,” they said.

Mr. Williams and Ms. Eichhorst commended the Lebanese authorities for their efforts, stressing that “no effort must be spared to bring these men safely back to their country and to their families.”

The Estonians were abducted on 23 March after entering Lebanon through Syria on their bicycles.

UN agency gives grant and loan to help farmers in rural Chad

23 May - The United Nations agency tasked with trying to alleviate rural poverty today announced a \$17.4 million loan and grant agreement aimed at helping some 132,000 poor people in southern Chad.

Under the agreement, the Chadian Government and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) will work with the European Union, the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) to improve access to safe water, help manage chronic food security problems, improve access to financial services and



rehabilitate rural roads to link producers to markets in the administrative region of Guéra in southern Chad.

Chad is one of the world's poorest countries with about 80 per cent of the population depending on farming or herding for subsistence, the agency said.

Under the agreement signed in IFAD headquarters in Rome today, Chad will receive an \$8.95 million loan and a grant of \$8.45 million. With this new programme, IFAD will have financed seven projects in Chad for a total investment of \$91 million.

UNESCO to name three Brazilians as Goodwill Ambassadors



23 May - Three Brazilians – a businessman, a designer and an artist – will be formally named Goodwill Ambassadors for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on Friday, the agency announced today.

UNESCO said the new ambassadors, the businessman Nizan Guanaes, the designer Oskar Metsavaht and the artist Vik Muniz, will serve for two years as unpaid ambassadors using their talents and fame to advocate UNESCO ideals on behalf of vulnerable groups in Brazil and elsewhere.

Mr. Guanaes, 52, is the chairman of Grupo ABC de Comunicação, which brings together 18 advertising, marketing, content and entertainment companies. Mr Guanaes is also the President of the Association of Entrepreneurs and Businessmen Friends of UNESCO, which he founded in 2004 with Oskar Metsavaht.

Mr. Metsavaht, born in 1961, trained as an orthopaedist. In 1997 he created the sportswear label Osklen, which promotes a philosophy of living in harmony with the environment. He is also the founder of Instituto-E, a non-profit organization in Rio de Janeiro that promotes sustainable human development through its e-brigades, groups of young people working for sustainable development, environmental protection and social inclusion.

Mr. Muniz, born in São Paulo in 1961, has lived in New York since the late 1980s. He uses photography to immortalize the images he creates with materials as varied as sugar, chocolate, diamonds, dust and recycled objects. He has shown his work in major museums and galleries around the world. His award-winning documentary film *Waste Land* is based on one of his projects.

The new ambassadors will join a roster that also includes former President of South Africa Nelson Mandela, the Cuban ballerina and choreographer Alicia Alonso and Princess Caroline of Hanover.

UN-backed Asia-Pacific forum stresses social protection for poverty reduction



23 May - Basic social protection for all segments of the population is key to protecting people from extreme poverty and economic exclusion, according to views expressed today by government representatives from the Asia-Pacific region attending a United Nations forum in Thailand.

Developing countries can afford to provide universal basic social protection, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) says in an assessment, which formed the basis for discussions at the ESCAP Commission Session for Asia-Pacific governments being held in Bangkok.

According to the ESCAP study, entitled "The Promise of Protection," a universal basic social protection package costs no more than 3 per cent of gross national income (GNI) and is affordable at virtually any stage of economic development.

“Social protection is not a cost,” Noeleen Heyzer, the ESCAP Executive Secretary, told the Ministerial Round Table on the topic. “It is an investment and smart economics.”

In their presentations, governments from Central Asia to the Pacific Island sub-region outlined national social protection policies and programmes tailored to their specific socio-economic conditions.

Summing up the discussions, Ms. Heyzer emphasized that social protection is also a question of entitlement and the State’s social obligation. “It is also a matter of rights. It is a social contract with our people,” she said.

According to ESCAP, social protection should not be seen simply as a “handout,” but as creating conditions which help build a “staircase” for the most vulnerable to graduate out of poverty and exclusion. By reducing their vulnerability, a “social protection floor” provides the poor with the opportunity and confidence to take risks to improve their lives.

Sixty Asia-Pacific countries are attending the annual session, which began last Thursday and will continue until Wednesday.

UN chief commends Nigeria's investment in women's and children's health

22 May - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today commended the Nigerian Government for investing in women's and children's health, saying the United Nations would support efforts to make communities in the West African country healthier.

“Health systems that work for women and children are health systems that work for all,” Mr. Ban said when he visited the Maitama Hospital in the Nigerian capital, Abuja.

“Unfortunately, around the world, health systems are not working for women and children. One thousand women die every day from complications from pregnancy and childbirth – the kinds of complications that can and should be dealt with in a hospital like this one. Twenty-two thousand children under five die every day too.



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visits Maitama General Hospital in Abuja

“This is truly unacceptable. Especially because most of these deaths can be easily prevented,” said Mr. Ban.

He said the UN had created the Global Strategy on Women's and Children's Health in bid to improve global health, and that all Governments had endorsed it.

He commended the Nigerian authorities for integrating services for maternal, newborn and child health, with programmes on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and nutrition.

“You are strengthening Health Management Information Systems, and increasing the number of service providers, including community health workers and midwives. These efforts are bearing fruit. Let us build on them to build health and wealth throughout Nigeria, for all Nigerians,” said Mr. Ban.

The Secretary-General also met with Attahiru Jega, the chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and commended him and his staff for organizing credible presidential, legislative and gubernatorial elections.

Mr. Ban noted that national and international observers had declared the recent elections a significant improvement on past polls, noting, however, that some observers had raised concerns on a number of issues. He said he was confident that the INEC would look into those matters and address them promptly and transparently.

Sudan: UN demands halt to fighting and troop withdrawal from Abyei



Displaced people fleeing fighting in Abyei, in Agok, Sudan

22 May - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today strongly condemned the continuing escalation of violence in Sudan's disputed area of Abyei, as the Security Council called on the Khartoum-based Government to immediately halt all military operations and withdraw its troops from the territory.

The Security Council said the taking over of Abyei by Government of Sudan troops constituted a serious violation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in 2005 to end two decades of civil war between the north and the south.

The Council said the seizure of Abyei “threatens to undermine the mutual commitment of the parties to avoid a return of to war and resolve all remaining CPA and post-CPA issues peacefully.”

“The members of the Security Council call upon the Government of Sudan to halt its military operations and withdraw immediately from Abyei town and its environs,” the Council said in a press statement.

The Secretary-General said he “remains deeply concerned for the safety of the civilian population of the area, the vast majority of whom has been forcibly displaced due to the fighting,” said a statement issued by the his spokesperson.

Mr. Ban deplored the actions of those responsible for the shelling of the United Nations compound, an assault that wounded two peacekeepers, and demanded that the perpetrators be held accountable for the attack.

The Council deplored the unilateral decision by the Government in Khartoum to dissolve the Abyei administration and called for its immediate reestablishment by mutual agreement.

“The members of the Security Council demand the immediate withdrawal of all military elements from Abyei and the full implementation of the Kadugli Agreement,” according to the statement.

They urged both parties to restore calm, uphold the CPA, and recommit to a negotiated political settlement on the future status of Abyei, including under the auspices of the African Union High Level Implementation plan.

Mr. Ban appealed to both sides in the conflict to ensure the safety and security of UN personnel and reiterated his call for an investigation into the attacks on UN troops in Goli on 10 May and the raid on a UN-escorted convoy on Thursday to bring the perpetrators to justice.

“Members of the Council underscore the responsibility of the parties to protect civilians. They further underscore the need for the parties to respect the mandate of UNMIS [UN Mission in Sudan],” they said, condemning the shelling of the UNMIS compound in Abyei. They noted that UNMIS remains ready to continue facilitating the Kadugli Agreement on deescalating tensions in Abyei.

The Secretary-General also called on both parties to immediately cease their military operations, withdraw all forces and armed elements from Abyei and desist from further acts of hostilities.

“He calls on the parties to uphold their previous commitments to maintain peace and security in the Abyei Area through mechanisms already agreed upon and engage in serious discussions to find a final settlement to the Abyei issue before 9 July.”

Deadly clashes have claimed dozens of lives since the start of the year, when a referendum on Abyei's status that was supposed to have been held never took place amid disagreement on voter eligibility.

Southern Sudan will formally secede from the rest of the country on 9 July as a result of a separate referendum held in January and both north and south claim Abyei.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that most civilians had fled Abyei town, with the majority of those displaced, mainly women and children, thought to have taken refuge in villages south of Abyei town. All non-governmental organisations' personnel in Abyei relocated yesterday to Agok, 40 kilometres south of Abyei town.

Côte d'Ivoire: Ban pledges continued UN support for Ivoirians emerging from conflict



Displaced people in western Côte d'Ivoire queue up for relief items

22 May - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today commiserated with residents of an internally displaced persons' (IDP) camp in a suburb of Côte d'Ivoire's commercial capital, Abidjan, pledging that the United Nations will stand with them as they endeavour to rebuild their lives and restore stability in their country.

"I want you to know that my heart is with you all," Mr. Ban told the IDPs at the Union des Eglises Evangéliques Services et Eouvres (UEESO) camp in the Cocody commune of Abidjan. "That is why I am here ? to express my solidarity with you, to offer help and hope that your lives will soon return to normal," he added.

He assured them that the UN will continue providing basic services, such as water, food, shelter and health care and sanitation, to those displaced and others in need until they are able to return to their homes, stressing that no one will be compelled to return to their places of origin until they are ready to do so.

"This is a fundamental principle of international law. Again, let me say clearly: no one should feel that he or she must return home before he or she is ready. Forced returns are against the law," said the Secretary-General.

He urged the IDPs not to lose hope in the face of the harsh realities of life the camp, telling them that Côte d'Ivoire is making a fresh start.

"You have a new President – a President who takes office by the will of the people, supported by the entire international community. The United Nations stood by your side during the recent crisis. We will continue to stand by you as your country rebuilds," said Mr. Ban.

He said Côte d'Ivoire is rich in resources and in the spirit of its people, assuring the IDPs that the international community will help their country build democracy, create jobs and protect the human rights of all Ivoirians.

"I am confident that Côte d'Ivoire will once again become what it was not long ago – a pillar of strength, prosperity and peace for all of Africa," the Secretary-General added.

Côte d'Ivoire: UN chief attends inauguration of President Alassane Ouattara

21 May - Secretary General Ban Ki-moon today attended the inauguration of Côte d'Ivoire's President Alassane Ouattara in the country's political capital, Yamoussoukro, during which the new leader reiterated his commitment to promoting reconciliation, dialogue and peace following the recent post-election violence.

Côte d'Ivoire's political crisis ended when former president Laurent Gbagbo finally surrendered in mid-April, ending months of violence that erupted in the wake of his refusal to step down after he lost the United Nations-certified presidential run-off election in November last year to Mr. Ouattara.



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with newly inaugurated President Alassane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire

The Secretary-General met with Mr. Ouattara who expressed his gratitude to the world for showing solidarity with Ivorians and helping democracy triumph, according to a press release issued by the UN peacekeeping mission in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI).

Mr. Ouattara paid special tribute to the United Nations for remaining engaged in his country and helping restore democracy and contributing to the establishment of lasting peace.

Mr. Ban was accompanied by the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Alain Le Roy and his Special Representative in the country Y. J. Choi.

Cyprus: UN chief to host meeting with Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot leaders in July



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (centre) meets with Dimitris Christofias (left) and Dervis Eroglu (file photo)

21 May - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will host a joint meeting of the leaders of the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot communities on 7 July in Geneva, his office has announced, stressing the need for both leaders to accelerate the process of negotiations aimed at the reunification of Cyprus.

The July meeting with Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias and his Turkish Cypriot counterpart, Dervis Eroglu, will be a follow up on previous meetings between the Secretary-General and the two leaders in New York on 18 November last year and in Geneva on 26 January this year.

“He expects the leaders to take advantage of this meeting, and the period leading up to it, to work jointly and concretely toward reaching that objective [mutually acceptable and lasting settlement on Cyprus],” said a statement issued by the spokesperson of the Secretary-General last night.

The UN has been facilitating talks between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leadership with a view to the eventual establishment of a Federal Government with a single international personality, consisting of a Turkish Cypriot Constituent State and a Greek Cypriot Constituent State, each of equal status.

The world body has maintained a peacekeeping force on the island – known by its acronym UNFICYP – since 1964, with a current strength of nearly 1,000 uniformed personnel and 150 international and national civilian staff.

Sudan: UN mission concerned over fighting in Abyei, urges civilian protection



UN Mission in Sudan patrols Abyei region

21 May - The United Nations peacekeeping mission in Sudan (UNMIS) today expressed deep concern over troop build-up and reported fighting, including the use of heavy artillery and bombing, in the disputed Abyei area and appealed to both parties in the conflict to protect civilians.

“UNMIS urges all parties to immediately cease hostilities and requests the withdrawal of all unauthorized forces from the area in compliance with the CPA [Comprehensive Peace Agreement] ceasefire [?] and the Kadugli Agreements.”

The mission strongly encouraged all parties in Abyei to resume dialogue towards reaching a lasting political settlement.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and UNMIS yesterday condemned an attack against a convoy of UN vehicles in Abyei, saying the assault constituted a serious breach of previous agreements made between the two parties to the dispute.

The attack took place on Friday in Dokura, an area controlled by the Southern Sudan Police Services (SSPS), about 10 kilometres north of Abyei town.

The convoy that came under attack was transporting 200 troops of Joint Integrated Units (JIU) of the Sudan Armed Forces to their designated post, as part of the deployment plan under the Kadugli Agreements agreed by all parties.

“The attack was not only a serious breach of agreements between the parties, but also a criminal act against the United Nations,” said a statement issued by Mr. Ban's spokesperson. The Secretary-General urged the two parties to immediately investigate the incident and ensure those accountable are brought to justice. UNMIS also demanded an investigation and appropriate action against the perpetrators.

Mr. Ban voiced concern over reports of increased troop movements into Abyei and called on all parties to reduce tensions, implement the Kadugli Agreement and immediately withdraw all unauthorized forces from the Abyei area.

“We remind the parties of their responsibility to protect civilians in the area. UNMIS remains ready to continue to assist the parties in the implementation of the Kadugli Agreement and urge them to do everything possible to stay on course in the implementation of this agreement and avoid any actions that could derail it,” the mission added.

Under the Kadugli and Abyei Agreements, signed in January and March respectively, both the Government of Sudan and the Government of Southern Sudan committed to the total withdrawal of all unauthorized forces from the Abyei area, leaving the maintenance of security to the joint integrated military units and joint integrated police units, which are made up of personnel from both sides.

Earlier this month, the Abyei Joint Technical Committee, which is facilitated by UNMIS, agreed to start the withdrawal of all unauthorized forces and the deployment of the joint integrated units.

Deadly clashes have claimed dozens of lives since the start of the year, when a referendum on Abyei's status that was supposed to have been held never took place amid disagreement on voter eligibility.

Southern Sudan will secede from the rest of the country in July as a result of a separate referendum held in January and both north and south claim Abyei.

Last week, the Security Council voiced deep concern over the situation in Abyei and urged the two sides to reach an



agreement on the area's status as soon as possible.

Peace and solidarity only possible when there is cultural diversity, Ban stresses

21 May - Cultural diversity brings vital spiritual, social and economic benefits, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today, urging people to take steps in their own lives to strengthen the connections they have to each other.

“A world of peace and solidarity can only be accomplished by acknowledging and celebrating our diversity,” he said in a message marking World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, which is celebrated on 21 May each year.



The Secretary-General described the cause of global harmony as remaining “precariously poised. Global economic activity and advances in communications both illustrate humanity's growing inter-connectedness, yet barriers, mistrust and animosity persist between people and cultures.

“Increasing contact has also generated fears – imagined and real – of the loss of cherished customs, languages and identities.”

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have launched a Facebook campaign, with the support of the business community and other groups, to ask everyone to “Do ONE Thing” for cultural diversity and inclusion today.

“New technologies have fundamentally changed the way we communicate and get to know each other,” said Irina Bokova, the UNESCO Director-General. “But, at the same time, we still have to learn how to make the most of the diversity of our societies, by using all means at our disposal, from education to the arts, and including new social tools and networks – especially for young people, driving change today,” she said.

According to Jorge Sampaio, High Representative for UNAOC, “greater personal engagement and responsibility for the future devolve power to the people. Take positive action to change the world for the better. Join us in celebrating the World Day for Cultural Diversity and turn it into everyday activism.”

The Secretary-General said “campaign calls on all people – from youth to policy-makers, from religious leaders to journalists, entrepreneurs and others who shape opinions and trends – to speak up for the spiritual, social and economic wealth we derive from cultural diversity.”

The campaign will work via a dedicated Facebook page, serving as a platform for people around the world to share their experiences through posts and videos.

“On this day, and throughout our lives, let us take steps – small and large, with families and friends, old and new – that will strengthen bonds, deepen our understanding of the value of cultural diversity and help us to live together better,” added Mr. Ban.

UNESCO is also hosting a series of artistic exhibitions at its headquarters in Paris that aim to spotlight the value of cultural diversity, while this week a classical music concert and poetry readings have also been staged.